

# Mental Skill Coaching At Training

Again watching professional sport on TV I am hearing how the elite have the technical skill and the success or (temporary) failure is due to a drop in mental skill.

And in teams there are even more influences on an individual to affect their performance and it all relates to their level of mental skill development.

Let's talk about bowls now.

Factors that affect team performance: a brief list:

- Attitude, anxiety
- Behaviour
- Composure, communication, concentration, consistency
- Debrief, decision making, distractions
- Endeavour
- Front end team
- Game plan
- Intensity
- Jack roll
- Leadership
- Negativity
- Preparation, pressure, positivity
- Rituals
- Skip
- Team composition, team spirit, technique difficulty
- Visualization
- Winners mindset

## Coaching the mental skill:

As coach you would conduct training regularly to simulate these factors in drills or game situations. Here are examples of pressure simulations to consider:

- Bowls in draw line,
- Being short,
- Resting toucher, various reactions / responses

Bowling poorly on a hand,  
Drive & draw request or requirement,  
Jack unsighted by bowl in line placed a MW short  
Mental toughness when five down on head set

What you may experience from the players is old habits for you to override at training by:

Positiveness in behaviour  
Specific calls discouraging players coming to head  
Challenge the player to perform not score  
Trained to negate negativity  
Reinforcing positivity to take in competition  
Challenging negativity immediately – at training –  
competition – debriefing.

### **Examples of the issues: raise them at training**

- Skip bemoans...front end gave me nothing- what did they do to remedy issue?
  - Skip yells...you're narrow (again) what could they do?
  - Over anxiety of the skip displayed in verbal / body language
  - Negative component in the calls, or, telling the player what they can see (did incorrectly)
  - A bloody bad mouthed, bad tempered skip ripping shreds off fellow team mates;
  - The sniping, undermining skip snidely making asides to adjacent team skip and getting stuck into the efforts of the players, from a safe distance might I add;
  - Skips off whining to the selectors about fellow team mates in the rink, yet, not 'having the balls' to discuss with these fellow players that performance.
  - Skip wandering off to have a fag (smoke), or sitting on a chair from the bank, directing
  - Skip letting lead set the length - game plan existence, application
- mental skill training

Requires concentration (from skip, singles player), discipline of mind (trained, rehearsed) and a sense of geometry (weight

choice and bowl type); it is an economy of movement above all for forgetting oneself to arrive at a simplicity of expression (confident execution uncluttered by any doubt).

Coach:

A reminder for you to tell players at training, where your mind goes everything else follows. Live up to your own expectations.

You don't rise to the level of your expectations, you fall to the level of training.

### **Competition pressure, pre-game mechanisms**

Coaches need to develop a mood that requires bowlers to manage their own arousal level, to enable bowlers to play at their peak, to be well prepared, conditioned to respond appropriately.

Based on my experiences, examples and anecdotes from others within bowls, my suggested approaches to consider include:

#### **Treat each bowler in the team individually**

Think

- Not everyone needs / wants relaxation techniques
- Or hyped arousal levels
- Don't let the loud ones impose their preparation on others

#### **Make the game preparation as normal as possible**

Think

- What do you / we normally do on winning days  
Keep the routine familiar
- Reinforce messages used previously to win

#### **Focus on factors other than the importance of this one game**

Think

- Avoid the pressure on bowlers
- Application of your skill

**Bolster confidences and reduce uncertainty**

Think

- Of personal discussion
- Assure bowler their contribution is recognised and valued

**Be aware of and not overly concerned by anxious behaviours**

Think

- About the bowlers
- Use your / our eyes / ears to detect unusual emotional anxiety
- Before knee jerk reaction to the observation, but make a considered action

**Ensure bowlers know level(s) of arousal is normal**

Think

- It is natural to be nervous / aroused
- Forget those and set a mini-goal to halfway into the game
- Focus on achieving a percentage in the yardstick / metre / ML as an example
- Relax, and how do you do that
- Get involved in the game with the team mates and talk

**As coach control your anxiety**

Think

- What is expected of me as coach in this situation
- Accept the comments as constructive
- Plan for possible contingencies so as not to be distracted from your role on the day

You / the team succeed when we win the tough ones, most of which are in our mind. The coach has to know there is a level of arousal different for all of the bowlers in the side. Optimum can be referred to as Optimism level of arousal, which differs between bowlers. As coach you should be gauging the level for each player during the season / the event so as to know the levels of the players on the morning of the finals.

## **Competition pressure, Practical scenarios mid-game**

We need to encourage bowlers to prepare for all scenarios that will occur in competition. We have to condition the bowler to respond immediately in a positive way whenever confronted by pressure in competition.

### Anecdotes / examples

Teammate in the rink screams out profanity when the bowl doesn't get the desired result.

Witness the opposition's very wide bowl heading nowhere, then bouncing off another crap bowl to draw shot and take a 5 shot advantage away from you.

## **You draw a name player / team in the next round**

Think

- This is a challenge and I love challenges
- Have a game plan to counter them
- Concentrate for the entire game
- Minimize mistakes and don't drop multiples (scores)
- Be alert and don't mope if he gets ahead

## **Today, you find you are very lethargic**

Think

- I take control over this mood, such as... Hey this is important being here
- Visualize the game, your effort for it
- Be tough, be ready
- Keep busy, talk a lot if it helps
- Keep working hard, do the little team things as others depend on you

**You have been playing firm / up shots well, but will not be asked for any today**

Think

- My versatility is appreciated
- Get in some great shots early in the game

**You had a miserable first session/ day of championship bowls**

Think

- Focus on things you know make you a good bowler
- Start again mentally – focus: recall the good games / deliveries
- Soak up any advice and criticism to reconstruct the positive
- Set a revised goal straight away and meet it

**Your first half of the game having bowled a blinder**

Think

- Enjoying the skill I am showing
- Continue that vein don't accept let off in standard
- Set a goal to maintain the early standard
- Don't expect the standard to be at an exceptional level all day

**The first 4 ends of the game are a haze**

Think

- Forget those and set a mini goal to next 4 ends
- Focus on achieving a percentage in the set zone as an example
- Relax, and how do you do that
- Get involved in the game with the team mates, laugh, cheer and talk

**After 4 ends the skip gets stuck into you in no uncertain manner**

Think

- What is expected of me
- Accept the criticism and be attentive when spoken to
- Use as a spur in a positive manner
- Dispute- reject mentally and tell yourself I will discuss that later, post game

**You played a poor first delivery for no score, now you prepare to bowl again**

Think

- Pre delivery and perfect execution recalled mentally and physically
- Balance, calm, focus, skillful execution
- Been there done this, now finish the job
- Set concern in opponents mind by your persistent skill recovery display

The content of this website column should give you as coach a lead as to what is entailed in conducting a training session for your coaching mental skill.

**Lachlan Tighe, 2022.**