

Can I Make A Difference As Coach

What makes me think I can make a difference (to a player / bowler) as the coach?

This year 2020 would have been a chance to gauge my contribution with a handful of players competing for prestigious titles. All of which have been abandoned with this dreaded corona virus that has emerged since January 2020.

Boy does that question about making a difference raise its ugly head in my times of emotional frustration, most especially when I prepare to run what I expect to be a quality training program or edit some video and the player(s) alter the priorities and don't even bother to turn up. I guess from experience all I do is have contingency plans ready to accommodate the unexpected.

What I do to be an agent that might make a difference is first set training standards that I believe operate at elite level. I read a lot about excellence and performance, watch numerous TV programs related to high level performance, bump into others connected with elite sport regularly, think plan and prepare and then get highly excited by what I can do (for the players).

For example in reading tennis great Andre Agassi's comments on a tennis website where he talked about his analysis of (prospective) opponents, the percentages of his success on either forehand or backhand, first serves etc. I raced away speculating on how I could devise methods for the players in my bowls squad (many of whom are deemed elite) to analyse forehand and backhand deliveries, the percentage of success in using either hand, the number of delivered drives (on either hand) and the percentage of success in using either hand and anecdotally with the players forming an inventory of elite opposition players weaknesses and strengths and our own squad members SWOT analysis. Those able to attend training on a regular basis get to apply Agassi's principles.

I previously read the great cricketer Greg Chappell's coaching book and a few lessons worth applying from cricket to bowls include:

- Reflection is a better term he uses instead of game or match analysis as it infers emotional and intellectual reflection of the competition recently won or lost; when I think to I have 'borrowed' that term reflection in my coaching or my writing;

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- Coaching is a creative arena working with people as players who need to nurture and express their creativity, not adhere (only) to a rigid manual of instruction which seems religiously to endorse detection and correction in our two sports, bowls and cricket.
- He trained for the game itself for 20 minutes of each training session because he trained to succeed as if it was 20 minutes of test match conditions.
- He realized his errors (of getting out in cricket) was 90% of his own doing within his control, so he worked to minimize, even delay, that time when he would eventually go out; mental skill training.

Chappell decided, no one else, what had to be done to achieve. When he had the role as the SA state cricket coach he was aghast to learn so few of his state players had any goal or expectation for their training sessions or forthcoming Shield matches. And they go on to be contenders for test selection.

Roll on lawn bowls (coaching), keep our heads in the sand – is that why we have sand at the edges of the green! Ah ha NOW I know!!!

I mention above I watch TV programs related to high level performance to glean insights into coaching and competition. Many of us older brigade as bowlers probably don't even know of this American (Idol) singing contest which is on TV – I do and I occasionally watch it because they are aspiring elite performers (of song), and lessons can be learned.

And the one lesson I twigged to was ‘...I don't talk Tuesdays!’

A contestant named Vonzelle like the other finalists sings on Wednesdays, we are talking mega \$\$\$ for the USA Idol winner. Here is this 20 year-old girl / lady aware that resting her voice the day before the big event is another version of relaxation from the stress of competition.

Boy if I could coach a “wise old 20 year-old” with that insight and degree of commitment and maturity, wouldn't that force up my own required level of coaching commitment. And would I enjoy being able to make a difference.

How difficult it is to get the really talented to ‘move out of club level mindset’ in their approach as they reach to the stars of sport excellence.

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Too often they also are in the 'sandpit' on the edge of the green. Too wary to be different maybe; they should not be wary, their skills are already above average, so why do what the average player / bowlers do.

Making a difference as coach is a challenge when players with the capacity to be elite performers feel uncomfortable being different.

Making a difference makes it all worthwhile.

Lachlan Tighe, 2020.