

A Skipper's Hell

You get a belting in bowls competition, the finals no less, and you are the team skip for one rink.

Is this you skip?

Tried everything possible yet the team and the side, still get pumped by the opposition.

That is hell. This is the finals.

So what more could you have done as skip and more so if new to skipping at a higher competition level?

I guess most skips dig deep to energize the team albeit they weren't bowling well.

The obvious ploys in such situations as skip being:

- No negative comments
- No negative body language
- 1 %er's (team noise, support everyone, picking bowls up for adjoining rink skip)
- Change length
- Change mat position
- Change lead's hand
- Setting small goals in retrieving the lead they had on my rink.

These are standard tactics employed in the hope that our rink improved their output.

If our rink fights on, the pennant side can address the overall score. In club pennant, even the finals, the state body requires a mid-game break. After the break your team improves to an extent, but still not to a standard to get the margin under 10 or the small goal you set as the rink (win 3/5 ends, get to 10 shots).

And the other three rinks do much the same so no one rink team is setting a new tempo for your side.

Now, it is post game, we lost the final, what do I do as the skip? You ask yourself the question, what else can I do as skip to energize a deflated / defeated team during the game.

You seek other well-regarded skips to react to what you said you did during the game.

They agree with those 7 points above.

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With my background at international level, of premier level anywhere, I may well be asked by skips in hell is there any thought process to positively influence a team to improve when obvious pressure / scoreboard / team results is poor?

To deal with their sense of deflation, their despair about impending defeat?

If I was asked post game to advise the skip in hell, my reaction would be something like this below:

Great the skip had an approach;

Great to seek out credible blokes as skips for their view;

Knowing there is no formula but we try to do things to get a favourable outcome;

Fully agree with the seven points in the approaches;

But, I go one step back as follows:

There has to be a game plan agreed to beforehand, whatever it is;

That game plan has to be tried and reinforced at training in readiness for the competition;

There has to be acknowledged objectives for all four of us in the playing positions;

And our objectives for the front end team, and, the back end team;

And we train to reinforce the skill needed to meet our position objectives;

With all that detail we can have rink meeting (if we have the mat) ends 5, 10 and 15 to assess quickly how we / you are going in accord with what we set out as personal and team objectives.

Simple examples of objectives could be:

The lead has to get his first bowl within Mat Width 10 / 21 ends and Mat Length 17 / 21 ends and contribute a bowl per end 19 / 21 ends as an example of one person's objective;

The front end objective may be two bowls in the head 18 / 21 ends, a back bowl 21 / 21 ends;

The third to finish each end no more than two down any end;

The skip to keep our losses to two shots the ends we lose;

The skip to add with the last bowl every end where we are holding.

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So your rink team meeting may reinforce the objectives or change instructions to get us to meet team objectives next five ends;

Now, if any one of the three teammates is too often short you can emphasize at the rink meeting that person is the one to get the back bowl in for the team, while the other two are drawing or applying tactics;

And you the energetic skip call them that way don't assume they know to do that.

A pet hate of mine: the third up with the skip at the head while the front end competes at the mat.

One observation on a pet hate of mine - thirds up with skips - having watched three days of finals recently and 24 skips operating, MOST skips had the third up the end with them. Watching what these thirds did amounted to their being an occasional vocal supporter otherwise they were just another spectator, looking around watching other rinks play, gazing, chatting.

As thirds, they seem to bring nought to the team spirit, no influence as vice captain from that end with the skip;

Had they remained at the mat end they can emotionally support the front end, they can reinforce the objectives of these two, pump them up when they meet personal and front end objectives as the game progresses.

They can nip in the bud any anxieties they hear or see close up, which you as skip cannot easily do being 30 metres away, as the third now is too; they can get a hold on what the opposition are saying and doing emotionally during the battle.

The myth said to me every time is that the third can see the shot they are to play - good bowlers can see from the other end, what they have to do is respond to what the skip calls. That myth has to be challenged for its absurdity.

And herein is the reason to dispose of the myth, the capable skip who can call - precisely, positively, crisp, instructive - forget that bullshit...be positive...that's not a call (heard too often the no meaning words - be positive - everyone on the mat has to be positive and it gets reinforced by the positivity in the tone and words of the call from the skip).

The team thing from the third (examples above) far outweighs the capacity of a third to deliver one bowl as they are never back up with the

attitude, all about practicing habits

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skip end for the next delivery.

Talking team spirit, at times the third is the one displaying excess anxiety, displeasure so the other two are to be reminded their role in the team is also reinforce a sense of positivity, don't let the third dwell on their own anxiety either; and you use the rink meeting to embrace team, team, team.

If not skip, you are in purgatory heading toward hell.

But, reality is teams have passive people, as do the opposition so no sweat on this point.

Two lessons for me coaching players for state and profile championships and as a coach striving to do it better;

Lesson one - be aware of that apparent sense of 'giving up' that rounded shoulders, hang dog look, the utter silence screaming out from inside when you know you are pushing shit up hill.

My advice to elite bowlers as coach - ram the buggers into the ground when on top.

Lesson to take from finals is never, never let the opposition know they have got you, never. Because they know next time you give up, and, word gets around that this team falters when the heat is applied.

What you want is for all opposition to be saying...shit this mob just don't know when they are beaten, not to be taken lightly.

The skip in hell can see his team and the side tense up as scores get close, then wheels got loosened and a handful of your players react to the heat and thus you lost and that heat is your hell.

As a coach I observe that the spring in the step went, the intensity of routine and process died off. Like vultures good opposition pounces.

To all you skips out there, learn as a team, as selectors how to keep vultures at bay.

Lesson two - wins hide sins. Some of the great coaches I have read about or even shared views had the idea when we lose, let's go off and have a beer and analyse the game some time in the future.

However, when we win right now, lets analyse, see what it is we did well, what sins are hidden by the win, the singular performances within the team win, etc.

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Had this occurred with your team during the season the skip may have addressed some obvious issues with the team and avoided being in hell when the result of the final was known.

Selectors may not do that (analyze the wins during the season) well, if at all.

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