

*Website menu- Tactical skills*  
*Situation awareness during competition*

## **Situation Awareness (SA) in competition**

Situation Awareness (SA) during competition is a skill sadly absent in bowlers and to my knowledge rarely coached by anyone.

I wrote an article on this topic in 2015 for this website and mid 2017 again on the website have responded to Questions about Situation Awareness (SA).

SA is both a tactical and mental skill though I shall explore it here more as a facet of Tactical skill rather than mental toughness skill – an ability to understand what is happening, being aware, like a WIP to be ready to quickly anticipate and decide.

An example of the mental skill might well be borrowed from any one of the four Golfing Majors. Any of these great golfers can have a shocker performance say day three of a golfing Major event. They would go home that night and practice specifics and go about their proper rehearsal in readiness for the situation the following day. That toughness is the capacity and willingness to do all that the same night he experiences a dreadful day. Day four those champion golfers burn and win the big event. Again.

Situation awareness (SA) as a tactical skill in bowls as a prime example is reading the head. Reading the behaviours of the team and the opposition.

Does your skip instantly call your team mate to take certain action; or do you have the skip who stands stone like, stunned like a mullet, mulling over the head and its implications for decisions he will make.

A reason for that skip indecision could be an absence of a game plan and its capacity to affect decision making because it enables the skip to call deliveries based around the plan objectives.

Or it can be a skip remaining annoyed and anxious after an earlier mishap.

Here we are 2017 and a skip on the next rink for our club felt disconsolate having dropped 6 shots 3 ends back. I went over to him and bolstered him, nah probably challenged him, saying energise your team as he had allowed 20 odd minutes to poorly influence the mood of the team rink.

Another example of SA is when our lead delivers two fabulous forehand deliveries from one end; fifteen minutes later with no significant change when back at that end, the skip forgets or ignores that experience and asks the lead to deliver backhand and maybe less favourable outcome of the delivery.

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What tactical SA existed, let alone mental recall, mental toughness. And I bet the lead gets the blame for the aberrant delivery.

Not good enough skipper. Worse, selectors don't understand that either. Maybe too busy playing our sport, bowls, rather than observing as selectors. Or, maybe also, because skips and selectors do all the conversing about the previous performance of the team. Yuk!

SA affects your performance. Situation awareness can be practised in our sport. I did it with the Bowls Victoria Group squad, and did it with Jersey, UK and to an extent with the Canadians when over there in 2012 and again last year, 2016.

Simply it is a matter of setting up heads, experiment and train.

After some experimenting over the years, SA seems to have four things:

- Perception, what do we see, hear or feel (if anything)
- Limited memory, forgetting what we trained for; bit like oh gosh that's right we did that last week, too late!
- Goal (ego) driven, maybe something like having to prove yourself in front of everyone, bit of vanity really
- Expectation, false, high, realistic, or no can do.

### **Skill deficiency in Situation Awareness (SA)**

What causes we bowlers to fail to pick up the situation (awareness) SA

- No pre training or experience in reading heads or being conscious of other cues
- Narrow attention from us in the game; this may best be seen when you are playing 'like a dog' and totally immersed in your current sub standard form rather than switched onto all goings on in the competition
- No report process during the game between the team members to overcome such a predicament
- Total unwillingness, or inability, for a skip to have team input
- Which may be due to poor choice of skips by selectors (blame then shifts to selectors where I think at times it should truly rest).
- Poor or limited communication - a reflection of that skill limitation of the skip.
- Player readiness to react to what is sought from them
- And not picking up on an opponents readiness and capacity to react either

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- A basic failure to comprehend the progressive situation (as more bowls keep coming into the game and head)
- Not having a game plan to give a sense of focus
- Not developing a task / role for each team player
- Presuming bowlers can do what they have not achieved in deliveries the previous 15-20 ends; I think it is called ...expecting miracles
- Poor emotional responses within the team. Given up basically.

**Skips and Situation Awareness (SA)**

Skips are the players needed to be the best of the team (four) with regards to SA skill. Skips can be the best and the worst at SA in the four. Daily at any bowls venue you and I will hear / overhear skips grizzling about the sub performances of their team mates.

‘Front end gave me nothing’ is like a biblical refrain.

Pity in all my years in bowls nothing has changed re the attitude of skips. Or their collective level of skill beyond their technical prowess.

Let’s attempt a solution for the ‘poor old skip,’ which I shall experiment with and modify at training as I get our squads to apply it in battle.

Assume - pennant bowls in Victoria is of 21 ends each Saturday

Plan – Skips acknowledge these three scenarios, SA

- 1: Our team doing well: 7 ends where our skip can add shot, defend winning head and expect to win 5/7 of these;
- 2: Either team can win: 7 ends where either skip can affect the result; our skip trained to enjoy the challenge and set out to win a minimum 3/7 of these ends
- 3: Opposition team has a dominant phase: 7 ends where their skip and opponents are too good; our skip to learn to remain calm and set realistic outcomes such as reducing losses or win at least 2/7 of the ends.

Outcome – what do we have for our Skip; a PLAN to aim to get as a minimum 10 ends; if we can add another end from any one of the three SA scenarios we have the majority ends won, and hopefully the score in our favour. And we have a better understanding of what to expect emotionally and allow the Skip and the rink team to cope better.

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**Teams and Situation Awareness (SA)**

Too often we find a rink differs from the side / team in its approach to the game. I have no real problem there as that rink has to work out its approach based on the four players in the rink and the approach of that rink Skip.

    Their game plan.

    However the team / squad / side can have an overall TEAM plan and within that rinks and their skips can adhere to the TEAM plan, SA again. Why would any team not have a plan along such lines as these outcome- win the pennant game today.

Team plan for all rinks/ skips -

    2/4 rinks must win each game

    Every rink to win a minimum of 8/21 ends = guarantees 32 winning ends

    The team to win 43/84 ends

    Every rink to keep shots lost per end to a max. of 2

    Losing rinks to keep losing score to <10

    Every end to have 2 bowls in the head at conclusion of deliveries for the end

    Front end rink members to have 2/4 bowls in the head 11/21 ends

All of the above are measurable and valid for debrief discussion.

All of the above keep us aware of the situation as we progress in the pennant competition.

How simple to see, how simple to apply, yet how simple we are as bowlers in not taking SA on board for better prospects of successful performance.

**Lachlan Tighe 2017**