

Heard From The Head (Or Not)

Millions of ends, even friendships have been lost on the green due to poor communication between the mug on the mat and the bowler in charge of the head.

The proposed shot must be understood, by both players, on each delivery. Who better to deliver the right call than the player standing in the midst of that composite mass. Makes sense right?

But as David Bryant is my witness, after near 30 years on the greens, more often than not, the calls I hear, are pathetic attempts at instruction, which confuse rather than aid.

For example, there is the confusing call.

“Are your bowls the ones with the pig on them? Well then we have third shot or maybe first, so you could play weight on the left side, or a yard through on the forehand, but don’t lose your bowl and if you come off these two there, you could move that bowl out.” All said with head down facing the green.

There is the multiple call.

“Dead draw for one. Yard through with a wick for three. Drive these three out for two or put it in your pocket and go with the measure.”

There is the frozen dope.

After circling the head twice. Finger measuring four bowls to the jack with assorted pauses he or she stands back and stares blankly at the mat, with not a word. I didn’t make that up.

Google defines effective communication as verbal speech or other methods of relaying information that get a point across. In bowls that means hand gestures for distance and deliveries, as well as plain concise language.

Half a dozen years ago, then Canadian National Team coach Lachlan Tighe put the squad through his “Stop-watch Decision Making” exercise during fours training.

The deal was, as soon as your side took control of the head, the in charge had to make an effective, clear and concise call to the player on the mat within five seconds or forfeit the bowl.

The change in decision making and calls was remarkable, and if I recall correctly, no one lost a bowl.

According to Coach Tighe, “The Purpose of the exercise was to learn to be quick in call and be switched on about the game rather than just spectating the bowls as they roll up to the head.

“And it gives rise to question why there is the delay in making decisions and do we have the right players in the skip / third positions in that case.”

For the remainder of the training camp I heard confident quick calls even from some of the reluctant players.

A couple of other interactions which could be eliminated from the game would be telling the bowler, who just delivered his bowl, how long or short it is, as they are ever eager to know their result.

First it is bad etiquette, as once the bowl stops you no longer have possession of the rink. I always tell my team when skipping not to ask, as I do not want to give extra information to the opposition on the mat. I will supply the info before any subsequent calls.

Secondly, unless a change of hand is absolutely the only option, don't ask, play the initial hand. Why? Coach Tighe has the stats that say you have a 50% chance of success on the same hand as opposed to 15% with a change of hands.

Just think how many shots could be saved or made with a simple command such as, “Draw here.”

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