

‘Play as you train - an attitude’

AFL football (and their elite Australian footballers) represents one example of elite sport and professional standards that other sports look at and aspire to.

Sometimes though we need to be more discerning in our acceptance of that level of elite professional standard. More so, if in bowls we want to extract standards and approaches from football and apply it to elite development for bowls.

Just because we have sport science accompany the players and their program, is in itself no guarantee, or acceptance, that professionalism and elite (read optimal) standards are evident. I must be psychic as I wrote this one Saturday, and on Sunday for our Institute of Sport bowls program we had 6 of 10 squad members absent, some of whom had given higher priority elsewhere – question was raised why are they in the squad!!!

Anyway let me continue. My example: the AFL club Collingwood, watching their training one Wednesday.

In company with young sports people, some as elite athletes from other Olympic sports, I watched, observed and discussed with them the action on the oval from the Collingwood players, the handful of coaches and other support team members.

Involvement is not commitment.

Attendance is not training (at perfecting and or learning proficiency of skill).

No names no pack drill. But, some of the celebrity name players we saw lack a rigorous degree of application. Interestingly my observation was these blokes are ‘pampered’ by the support crew. If these name players were made to really apply themselves, their game performances would be far more consistent.

I recall watching AFL club Richmond train prior to a final match a few years back and they had the same issue with their equivalent celebrity type players.

Guess what, well look at their results over this past decade.

Bit like some of our lawn bowls teams I think.

Too much passenger approach, too little commitment. The small numbers attending that Institute program showed that issue with commitment and especially as other bowlers were on another green and could observe what the elite were doing.

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However the bright side for Collingwood (as it was for Richmond those few years back) is that at the end of the group training session three (3) of the forty two (42) players stayed out on the ground to hone their skills, to ensure their high standards in performance were maintained by extra training.

Oh, guess what, these three blokes are renowned and duly regarded as the best players in the club.

One player repeatedly practiced goal shots, the other was doing 100 metre interval sprint training and the third player practiced reaction techniques to receive and pass the football. All three did their training diligently, despite no audience or fellow teammates.

Why then don't the rest of the team and club stay out too, join the best, witness their commitment and aspire to reach a similar (high) level of excellence.

Why, because the rest of the players may only be involved (in the glamour of the profile of the sport) rather than committed to attain their optimum skill level.

No different to bowls, actually.

For me, I prefer to coach people with that degree of commitment which enables them to seek their maximum level of performance.

Anything less, forget it!

Lachlan Tighe, 2016