

## ***Tiger Tales***

### ***Bowls in Focus column***

(April 12, 2011 submission deadline)

#### ***Poor Performance***

More often than not in my coaching at elite level bowls, some of these bowlers have not met their (own) expectations. Some were gutted, others privately despondent, some dismayed because they thought they were better, some were desperate to work to do better next time, and others, oh well we tried, move on.

All of us bowlers who 'fell short' in our own levels of bowls competition must fall into one of the above player categories.

Let me see if I can reflect how I would guide, coach, support you if I was continuing as your coach with that loss in mind.

In the bold type below are the regular reactions I get from bowlers post game on their event performance. What follows that comment is my comment on their reaction.

#### **...I don't know the reasons for performing poorly in this game**

performance is both comparative and variable. Sometimes the variable we lose control of and hence we lose. But the comparative – that is the measurable of skill. I say to all teams that they need to aspire to a 7/10 rate of success in draw bowls to give yourself a chance of competing at elite level. Are you able to rate your recent performance and if it is below the 7 then winning is verging on the absurd.

Tactically leads and seconds probably have to react to the whims of a skip. However ask yourself did I suggest any change in my approach as lead in those games to help improve both my form and that of the team. And likewise with mental skill – did you know how you were performing in the game to make adjustment, as it is too late to review it all afterwards.

It might be worthwhile to plan for contests: it is suggested that developing and following a plan is the most important factor in performance improvement.

#### **...I did all the training!**

I borrow an expression- involved or committed. That is my difference between one who complies with requests and one wanting to raise intensity and commitment to raise the bar in performance.

Ask yourself, can you identify specifically where your skill actually improved due to that period of training.

I make the point – when you are in a team be it with two or three others do you get together beforehand to plan and train to weld together? And why not?

Training, with relevance and intensity, is such an obvious indicator of prospective success. Training correctly requires knowledge, and discipline, attributes which the ordinary bowler lacks.

#### **...my preparation was OK**

for many of the bowlers I have coached in squads their preparation has been OK; but never enough to be able to say all were truly diligent and worked hard enough for all to be in the winners circle. In the team setting it is the affect of the team mates effort that creates the uncertainty of outcome.

## *Tiger Tales*

### *Bowls in Focus column*

When I had the chance to resume training with all the squads after a period of absence, in all cases their level of advancement had stalled with few having the intensity to work alone until we resumed as a squad.

Fellow team members need to follow the best in the team who invariably have a commitment to excel, or else we are in real trouble.

And it has to be said that with all the squads over nearly a decade I don't think I am surprised by the results as not all are blessed with god given talent. So their preparation was OK, their expectation was seemingly unrealistic.

#### **...others don't work as hard as me, yet they win and I lose**

I have heard this in every squad. You are obviously looking to short cut the effort if at all aware of others not doing the 'hard yards' you are prepared to do, or appear to be doing. And for all team members know certain players might have privately sought me to help them or excuse them from training sessions. What I seek is more effort on factors such as measuring skill, applying game plans, demonstrating discipline and intensity at training. I observe the little things players do that sets them apart, be it at the top or as the weak link in the squad. Over the years I use sports psychologists to observe our sessions and can show to them those who have 'it' and those who work hard in their mind but still flounder to reach the stars.

Factors such as composure, pressure, being positive are often not undertaken by players who think they have trained hard. The really switched on bowlers relish all these facets of training from my experience. Trouble is there are so very few of them even in my experience with elite squads.

Bowls is a sport played above the shoulders and a few squad members are the best performed because unlike their team mates they work above the shoulders as well as on their delivery. And they do so because they want to be better and can appreciate the standard can be pushed higher.

#### **...struggle to find answers for this loss**

It is important to remember that crap games will happen. When other observers tell you why you performed poorly, it is so important to acknowledge this occurrence, it is not an overall criticism, just simply a one off comment meant to assist. Not much different to what CA had to do with the Ashes team that lost.

Part of the struggle to find answers is that bowlers do not wish to set objectives and when they lose have no damn idea.

Yet setting objectives helps no end without guarantee. In Delhi one team missed the mark with their objectives early in the event so we sat, accepted the fact no medal was forthcoming and re set objectives with a new game plan to strive to better each performance. This team worked wonders to reverse the trend. Other teams sat and understandably moped, but chose not to follow what the other team was prepared to do. One team can find answers, the others will go out and perhaps lose again.

What that really says is that a debrief will allow an honest audit of how we went whilst an unwillingness to be in a debrief most probably will see the same pattern of outcomes.

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#### **...that was a substandard showing today**

Players say they felt they were substandard. If only they had a measure of skill and an objective then the players could see ...oops I only had 16% of my bowls effective and I was on the one hand the whole game without considering a change. The plan, the mid game meeting and the debrief would have minimised all that post game angst. Learn a lot, a lot to learn.

#### **...debriefs: why do I need one, I just lost**

I have always wanted player and teams to debrief. I have never forced it as that defeats the purpose of winning people over to the idea. It is a slow learning curve as even now in 2011 only a handful of player I coach will seek the debrief.

If you're not satisfied with either your performance today, or your progress as a bowler, it could help you to follow expert advice from the coach to address either of these concerns. Do remember the skills development for potential elite bowlers goes beyond sheer technical/ delivery skill. As well remember that technical skill is the foundation on which all the other skills are built to achieve goal orientated success.

Yet the simplicity is that all we chat about can be summarised

- what they did
- what they felt
- what they omitted, forgot
- what they learnt

and that is our fuel, me the coach, they the player for our series of training in preparation for the next major event or round if in an event.

#### **...what exercises will ensure my consistent performance in the future**

The VERY first thing I would do is start every session with four ends of the caterpillar routine – walking up to retrieve my short deliveries and to re-deliver those bowls; that will reinforce your consistency.

Others in bowls call this grouping though I view their notion of grouping as a simple average of where the 4 bowls finish. Not my approach.

For some bowlers inherent nerves and tension show they are people who train well yet compete at a lower level. I have introduced these past few years a triples game where players forfeit a delivery if bowl one is not within a mat length. Applying that at training has shown me that for some players they get so intense about not repeating that next end they stop contributing emotionally to the team effort. A wonderful session to gauge the loners and the self centred versus the team oriented players. Too many players in that session immerse themselves in their objective and we lose the 'team'.

So exercises based only on delivery will not bring out these aspects of a bowlers character. We all bowl crap. What we want is players who can forego that and be back in as part of the others contributions.

Much is made of performance analysis – do you measure score and good bowls, or bad bowls, or short bowls, or position bowls, or missed deliveries, or near misses?

My sense of objectivity is always a mat length regardless of your supposed level of skill and competition.

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**...what can I do to maintain or increase my intensity level in a competition?**

Set a series of goals pre game to compare performance against the goals

example

number of mat length deliveries expected

number of mat length deliveries with the first bowl each end

the % of mat length deliveries for the event

the number of ends to win

number of ends conceding losses above 2 shots.

What these do is assist your focus on the process not the result and that inner satisfaction of attaining the goal

Lachlan Tighe.