

## Developing Coaching Networks 2017

In a recent column I talked about a workshop I was due to host and what might come from that session.

Here then is the outcome of the program held 29 January 2017.

### *REPORT*

#### THE NETWORK SESSION FOR FELLOW COACHES AND INTERESTED CLUB EXECUTIVES

Held Sunday 29/1/2017 at the St. Kilda bowls club 66 Fitzroy Street St. Kilda.

Forty bowlers (40) attended for a worthwhile network session complemented by the four speakers on international bowls. St Kilda precinct was blocked off to traffic that day and we feel a colourful group 'rained on our parade' with the clash of engagements. Initially we anticipated (82) attendees from (33) clubs so we are keeping everyone in the loop. Feel free to share this report around as we all benefit from the sharing of better and varied approaches to competitive bowls.

Below is a summary of the responses compiled for the benefit of all who showed interest in the network session. Note there are often conflicting responses / approaches, which simply reflects the range of views on the questions.

Each of our internationals attempted to respond to either of these two questions:

As someone involved at international level, and your experience at that level, what differences / skills / issues would you face at that elite level that us club coaches would not necessarily encounter?

Or, what skills / mindset do elite players have for we coaches to include in our training?

#### QUESTION:

I am head coach at a club. I listen to what other coaches do / don't do. Expectations (from clubs) vary as do our skills. What do you think is your role / responsibility as the club coach?

#### ANSWERS

- Club:
  - Does a coach need accreditation?
  - Job description / KPI's

- Influence culture, attitudes
- Club leadership
- Setting season goals
- Guard the interest of the team
- An employee on a limited tenure
- Selector, or, only participate in selection in an advisory capacity
- Team and player performance appraisal
- Numerous club executives dumbfounded as to what to expect of the coach
  
- **Players:**
  - Understanding skills and a player's role
  - Structuring training drill sessions
  - Providing basic technical ski programs
  - Motivate players
  - Captain of the top side in the club
  - Developing new, hidden talent;
  - Assisting new members
  - Analysing opposition and analysing competition venues
  - Be an amateur psychologist
  - Being approachable to players;
  - Coach for every member
  - Take different approaches to different individuals

#### INTERNATIONAL COACH PERSPECTIVE – Mark Cowan, Australia RESPONSE

- The quality of training is more important than the quantity;
- BA has phone apps. for various skill and fitness appraisals;
- Drills are measurable and forwarded by squad members for review;
- Mental side of the game – fear factor. Elite players are people too so fear and confidence feature in their vocabulary;
- Luck is more obvious in bowls than other sports so the training is geared to minimise the luck effect;
- The squad is more professional in approach than previously – a reflection of modern sport;
- Players in BA squad are primarily full time professional bowlers;
- Mark's role was also on selection with capacity to have the final say on players if not unanimous choice;
- Knowing pennant practice is simply a roll up together the squad members were discouraged from too much of this level of preparation;

- Today's squad members are made more accountable for their overall behaviour in daily life even to the extent of social media cautions.

**QUESTION:**

A game plan applies in all modern sport, yet our sport does not adopt such an approach. As fellow coaches, what game plan model do you think we could have for us to use in pennant (team) bowls?

**ANSWERS**

- One club has a generic plan for each division / side:
  - Mat length is the measure
  - Lead and second draw to mat length
  - 3rds and skips to not lose more than two
  - Divide 21 ends into sections – 4x5; last end
  - Drills based on short and long ends drawing to zones
- Another club states
  - Simple goal – beat the bowl
  - Lead focus on importance of jack rolling
- A third club approach – Land the Mat
  - Front ends role is not to get shot – set the foundation
  - Of the first four bowls – two to finish behind

**Other input included**

- Mat length (ML) as the measure of acceptable draw bowl;
- Front end one or two bowls in the head;
- Back end to keep shots lost per any end 2 or 3 shots maximum;
- Break pennant game into 5 end mini games;
- Last 5 ends at one club is the shoot out mentality;
- Elementary process always play long or short ends;
- Beat the shot bowl;
- Build a head;
- Take what won last week as a base for the next week;
- Consider our home club advantages and play to them; use statistics we keep to decide on selection and the game plan;
- Always be aware of the side scoreboard;
- No rink plans exist at one club;
- Club has a game plan for all 4 rinks and it varies on venue and opposition;
- One club expects top side skip to have their own game plan;
- Employ strategies during the game to negate the opposition;
- If game plan to apply heads whether there is a break halftime, the momentum at the time, the level of communication happening out there;
- Set a target of 23 shots per rink and keep opposition to 21 shots;

- Avoid multiple shots lost;
- Win more ends than the opposition;
- Divide the pennant game into 5 sets and win more sets than opposition;
- Front end has a measurable role of 2 in the head and 2 behind;
- Front end to be at least 2nd shot;
- Lee Schraner was quoted as one who had team practice the plan and Lee was renowned for skill at maximum length;
- One club always starts long as the opposition can only go shorter than that which we know is the response;
- Play opposition lead's hand at opposition venue as they know their preferences;
- Always re-evaluate the game plan at the break, or if no break after 10 ends;
- One club has a series of 4 game plans to use for away games and a different one for home games;
- The club has a measurable target as priority of the game plan;
- Game plan directed by the coach;
- Game plans set by each of the skips;

**INTERNATIONAL COACH PERSPECTIVE – Howard Sandler, Auckland NZ, Norfolk Is., & Israel**

#### **RESPONSE**

- Spoke about structured training;
- Biggest struggle (with younger players) is skills and drills and evaluations;
- Role and value of the assistant coaches;
- Contrast between the professionalism of a successful nation and the old (drinking) school approach in bowls at international level;
- Today there is a greater recognition and importantly acceptance of coaches beyond simply setting up skill sessions;
- High Performance levels do not operate without the use of a competent coach;
- Nowadays performance appraisal and analysis are essentials in coaching;
- Internationally the focus is above the shoulders.

#### **QUESTION:**

I have competed at premier league these past few years; now I want the skills to be a back end team player at that elite level. What are these skills? How do I train for them?

#### **ANSWERS**

Summarised within these skills / attributes of back end personnel

1. Management
2. Tactical
3. Fitness
4. Mental

## 5. Technical

More specific comments included

- Skips can play every shot and perform well under pressure
- Fitness – physically fit, mental strength
- People skills – communication; positive reinforcement
- The skip doesn't need to be the best bowler in the side
- Head reading;
- Psychology;
- Team player;
- Tactician;
- Capacity to convert shot position;
- Coping with pressure;
- Leadership;
- Decisive;
- Confidence;
- Game awareness;
- Percentage player;
- Visualisation skill;
- Draw shot prowess;
- Capable of drawing off centre;
- Mental toughness;
- Lengthy concentration;
- Managing the team emotions and behaviours;
- Game plan knowledge;
- Energiser for the team;
- Situation awareness of us, the opposition, the score; analyses game in progress;
- Firm fair fun and fighter for the team;
- Not necessary to be the best player in that team;

### INTERNATIONAL PLAYER PERSPECTIVE – Chrissie Grimes, Jersey UK RESPONSE

She noted the stark contrast to the BA and NZ examples heard earlier today and at best with one exception, Jersey secures former players to coach; rarely would have supervised structured training; in fact there is peer negativity to modern training; games is all they want; and access to venues to train is hindered by the amount of bowls venues in Jersey; competition standards and opportunities within are high on social level bowls games; being a small nation though she has more chance of international representation than bowls in BA/NZ; when made aware of proper coaching in 2007 was fascinated to witness it; similarly this network session is a first for her as home bowls association

would not see the need to share and expand collective knowledge; CGAJ want a new program of measured skills and drills if they are to fund bowls for the 2018 Games.

#### QUESTION:

As a Division one skip, I feel frustrated that I am not as productive in conversions compared to my opposing skip in playing the big pressure shot; what pressure training for skips do other coaches use?

#### ANSWERS

- Train with intensity
- Have a purpose each session
- Sets up heads to experiment with, in readiness for pennant
- Expectation is for 5 conversions in a pennant game;
- Prepare by competing in singles;
- Is the expectation exceeding the reality;
- Visualise delivery;
- Head reading and pressure training;
- Practice on the task at hand;
- Practice having the distractions;
- Conduct club session on avoiding verbal distractions;
- Session on identifying our sources of being flustered;
- Training to deal with being flustered;
- Learn to energise yourself;
- Learn who and what saps your energy;
- Repeat simulated pressure training;
- Score the training to register your capacity;
- Tangible rewarding the training effort;
- Analyse how and what you are missing in converted shots and replay in training;
- Include training of the mind in sessions;
- Training to acquire mental and delivery skill will result in confidence;
- Self talk the delivery in training then into the game;

#### INTERNATIONAL COACH PERSPECTIVE – David Cameron, Japan & USA RESPONSE

David provided a snapshot of how Japan set expectations and USA had in-house limitations and barriers; USA players provided a range of response as feedback to include- training was highly sought and recognised; Introduced team building and exercises and advised about his NDH policy (no dickheads); sat and set a basis for team values and standards of acceptable behaviour; used coach's eye as a tool available on a phone app; made comment about the stop watch decision making session to force

players to be decisive in calls as skips; the winners & losers game related drills were readily adopted; player appreciation of coach's patience and firmness.

#### QUESTION:

As a coach I also skip in our club top side. I have a number of players who refuse to play in the rink team with me and refuse to explain why. What advice fellow coaches can you give me?

#### ANSWERS

- This is not a bowls issue – this is a human interaction, communication;
- Work place, and a need for mediation;
- Have a mate watch them in pennant and seek the mate's feedback;
- May be a team crisis meeting to resolve;
- For the future sort this out pre-season;
- Good skip would have sorted this before it became quite a personal issue;
- Shows the need for positive behaviour at all times;
- Can we suggest the person look in the mirror first;
- Question on the character of the selectors in allowing players to override their choice;
- Bring the issue out in the open for honest input;
- Is this player intimidating by nature;
- Are the other players simply jealous he has the role;
- Seems it may be the player lacks good communication skill reflected in body language;
- Player may be too stubborn to accept team mates angst;
- Raises a question of the level of trust now and also for the future;
- Has the coach some input in this issue;
- Selectors should demote the players refusing to join in a selected team;
- How can we get all this team to appreciate one another more;
- Try doing a role play with all concerned or even video a pennant game to sight the behaviours of the team.

#### QUESTION:

Measuring performance in pennant bowls: Who in the room keeps personal stats, or, their club has a process for the team keeping stats - please share the process and experience.

#### ANSWERS

- Premier league player – reason for keeping stats was to drive my performance – what level am I at so I know how to improve; feedback received was that if the side

won then he did not play well; first bowls pressure – first bowl within mat width; mat length

- A second premier league player – recording effective bowls for each bowls during the game
- A third premier league player noted – discuss game plan before the game; keeps stats for the whole team during the game and discuss as a team (with red) after the game; re-write the card – examine score cards at the end of a game and looks at ends where losses were reduced to 2
- Division one player – one rink of the four examines and looks at consistency of bowls in the head for lead
- Division one club – invited members to participate in a forum to present ideas for improvements to the club; every skips measures mat length bowls; mat length front end – 2 in the head; head situation after the first 4 bowls; same for 3rds and skips; 42% front end and 38% for back end; after 2 and a half years of stats they have found that if they win 11 ends and win more multiples than lose then they win the game
- Club coach – if front end is holding circle that on the card and assess results at the end of the game
- One club expects 40% effective bowls from our division one pennant players;
- We know a club that won division two by players performing at 38% effective;
- Another club knows they win every time they win the majority of the 21 ends in pennant;
- A premier league side years back knew whenever the front end team players had 2 bowls with a ML of the jack 17/25 ends the rink always won;
- One club records a series of indicators - everyone on a mat length (ML) basis, score on the changeover for the skip, score at completion of the end, number of ends won in a segment of 5 ends, total ends won on the day, multiples either won or lost; players in the rink mark each other and also do the 3.2.1. at pennant for the merit of the selectors; players use a typical score card to mark a tick or X to indicate an effective delivery; the club has printed a specific card for pennant players marking;
- One club has front end expected to achieve 40-45%, third 38% and skip 30% as measured benchmark at division one.

## NEXT TIME ...

Thinking out aloud, wonder if another session on a Sunday in March, or April, might be worthwhile and Hawthorn and Alphington clubs both have registered interest in being 'mine host club'. As with this session the topics should come from you for us as a group to address.



Topics that some of you already have posed to me, even before we walked out today, for a future session include:

Culture in teams/clubs – who sets it, who guides it, who has to adhere to it.

Attitude as the prime ingredient for top side selection.

Winning is a mindset (as is losing).

Measured selection criteria.

Who takes responsibility to inform players being dropped.

Practical pressure training.

**Lachlan Tighe, 2/2/2017**