

Decision Making Analysis

I wrote for a web column in September 2004 that the (next) match has now begun, a reference to pre match preparation.

Talent and hard work are the first two ingredients for any finalists and the winners. I would suggest a hunger and thirst for victory is another ingredient.

However, let me look at decision making (or both the mental and tactical skills) as the flaw for all of those players who have not proceeded to the finals, or onto success at elite level standards.

My thoughts refer to decision making for:

i. One end of a game.

Bowlers need to be aware of ways to gauge how to make decisions though remember there are times a specific decision cannot be avoided.

Steps in this decision making may include:

- Gauge the need for different decisions.
- Establish some criteria for the decision, e.g. could drop four shots.
- Develop alternatives, e.g. losing two shots is better.
- Evaluate alternatives, big risk to try and win shot.
- Select the best option, e.g. right now what is most confident.

ii. Game planning

For bowlers the decision making process begins when you determine that a problem exists with the position at the head. The view I hold to is that the process starts earlier when a gap exists between what is, and what should be.

iii Strategies to fulfill season objectives / goals

Given the results of you players, or in my case our squad members, the coach must make a decision in conjunction with players with regards to how to improve each bowlers event performance.

At this time the coach should have a list of criteria that ought to be met for the bowler to improve their performance. The question is to know what this really involves so as to determine those factors that will lead to an improved future performance.

Now that is a level of committed coaching performance that should be expected from the elite bowlers.

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Anything less might hinder the bowlers prospects to outdo their opponents in the future.

From my experience and reading of other good coaches from sport generally, it appears there are some common criteria that have to be met if a player (bowler) is to improve on performance, which include:

- Better competition schedules.
- Improved physical conditioning to perform over a lengthy tournament.
- Better mental skill and preparation.
- Improved mastery of the technical skill of delivery, both bowls and jacks.
- Enhanced skill of tactical strategy and planning.
- Finally, if not most importantly, an increase in the bowlers own level of commitment.

Teach the bowlers how to decide

During 2004, two acknowledged elite player / coaches, Paul Feltham from football and Ric Charlesworth from hockey, were quoted in the newspapers on their approach to coaching.

In roundabout ways, both men implied that the way for coaches to go was to train the players above the shoulders.

Charlesworth is of the view that technical knowledge and sports science together account for a relatively small percentage of the coach's input and that the great gains are made by adding value to the players (bowlers) you are coaching, making them mentally resilient, flexible and capable of displaying leadership.

Feltham talked about the great golf coach, Butch Harmon (Tiger's coach) and a conversation they had where Harmon asked what was the difference to professional golfers.

In effect what stopped a Feltham (a single figure golfer) from winning a professional event. Harmon maintained, as does Feltham with his sport, the difference is the elite player (bowler) plays our best deliveries more often.

It is a relationship between skill and performance.

The most important thing he says for we coaches is you have got to teach players how to think. Once they have been performing their skills for a number of years learning the game, they have developed conditioned performance levels.

You can teach bowlers how to think and about the developing contest as it is in progress.

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Feltham said he did not care if players and teams were cellar dwellers (bottom of the ladder) because he has an absolute belief there is no difference in skill between the top and bottom teams in elite level.

It is in the decision making department that I would pose that these gals **train** to think hard, not hardly thinking, for them to advance to the next step of international elite competition.

Thinking hard, not hardly thinking.

Imagine me as your coach. You say to me you want to win, to be a better bowler. I put all these thoughts before you for consideration in our training sessions. Am I showing you new and better ways of preparation, or is it all a matter of been there done that !!!

Being above the shoulders during the game ('battle')

Out there on the green no one can help you now. How well have we worked in training to have you prepared for these scenarios:

Within this mix of dot points below are approaches on attack, defence, keeping momentum, singles, team formats, etc. In all cases they are planned, prepared and performed at training as a prelude to 'battle'.

Read the dot points and respond for yourself to each of the statements:

- Tactics are the balance to defend / attack, position / pressure, add to count / cover.
- Play 75% defence, 25% attack.
- Be patient: build heads and look for and anticipate opportunities.
- Take time if losing badly, recover mentally/ emotionally (Bryant).
- Don't attack by driving with one bowl in the head.
- Don't attack immediately where opponent has a resting toucher.
- Push bowls plug holes - push up our short bowls and plug holes to disallow opposition entry.
- Subtle move of the mat one mat length forward / back from the prior location may catch opposition and having them falling short or just going through if we are fully alert to our ploy.
- Draw for second shot when the opposition holds shot(s).
- Minimise lapses by concentrating positively and only on the very next delivery.
- Seeing is believing ... a bowl wide or short or long needs adjustment and your eyes tell you the appropriate detail ... register and correct and retain the revised picture.
- If a delivery is short, visualize and physically aim the next one to finish longer.
- Never underestimate your opponent, remind yourself you are in good company.
- When your opponent has bowls beyond the head, cover the shots for insurance.
- Force your opponent to change hands.

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- Losing a sequence of single shots may not require change, if, you always had more shots in the head yet lost a single; the score will turn in your favour.
- When holding shot with your one bowl to play, always add shot (bocce).
- When your opponent wastes a delivery, add another to the head or score to make them pay.
- Pressure the opposition and choose the delivery that gains another shot or forces the opponent into reduced options.
- Don't widen the head when holding.
- Play their shot before they get the opportunity (to convert).
- The first battle is to get the mat and determine / dictate the (length) strategy.
- Change a losing game – thinking hard(ly).
- RISK is driving with only one bowl in the head.
- Calculate the risk prior to you attacking - use a margin for error when you attack.
- Where opponent has first delivery as a resting toucher, simply draw a close second.
- Or, widen the head if opponent holds resting toucher.
- And have remedies to use to get back into the next deliveries and the remaining game; set objectives say for every three ends or every 10 shots to keep up the level of concentration.
- If a poor starter in events, prepare physically and mentally prior to the game and use the ends roll up to be 'in the game before anyone else and set objectives say for the first three ends.
- If too many bowls are short, narrow or wide, create a red alert system or mechanism and use your 'red alert' mechanism when it is two in a row to take action THEN to reduce the number of mistakes.
- Singles: walk to the head after the third bowl every end (good enough for David Bryant then good enough for us).
- When weight / length is poor, focus on shots one yard through and visualise this range.
- When opposition draws closer, focus solely on having more draw shots in the head per end.
- When opposition attacks your shot bowl every time, focus on having a minimum of two bowls in the head to keep up the pressure.
- When mistakes cost you the game, evaluate the reason post match and practice the solutions.
- If your jack delivery is inconsistent, this is a must practice skill with a set standard to establish.
- If losing concentration, watch for talking excess, and remedies to use to get back into the next deliveries and the remaining game; set objectives say for every five ends or every five shots to keep up the level of concentration.
- Don't bowl short (repeatedly).
- Deliver every jack precisely to the required winning length.
- Force your opponent to cope with differing lengths.
- Deprive the opposition the opportunity to deliver / drive easy winners.
- Use a margin for error when you attack.
- Attack when you have an unassailable leading margin.
- Vary the tempo of the game.

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- Drive to dominate the head and opponent.
- If as third you call shots up and the opposition do not contradict this call, there is a possibility their bowlers have added tension because of the call staying in the 'system.'
- Mat positioning is an important strategy to use to defeat an opponent.
- Dominate the head with plenty of bowls in the head.
- When your opponent falls short, plug holes to limit his later attempt for entry into the head.
- Use a smooth delivery and play a safe shot when losing big numbers.

Greed: Commonwealth Games gold medalist - an apparent absence of tactical nous

Malaysia's Syed was losing 3-6 and down 3 shots at the incompleting head; his opponent is the eventual gold medallist from South Africa and Jeremy chooses an unnecessary risky shot that alters the score to only one shot. Whereupon Syed is now 3-7 instead of 3-9 which is slightly less pressure to contend with ... poor tactics.

Jeremy had a rush of blood, chose his option poorly and bashes the head around which fortunately still meant he kept a shot. Syed won this game and it could possibly have been the game to deprive Jeremy of a finals berth, and his subsequent gold medal. He probably does not even remember this game in 2002. I do, because here was a lesson to learn and work to delete from any reoccurrence.

Coaching players to move to the elite level should include all of the comments above and if not I believe the coach has not given you every opportunity to be an elite level player. You take the lesson and retrain the situation on the training ground to develop the bowlers tactical skill.

Lachlan Tighe, 2015