

MENTAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN TRAINING

Control The Controllables

Distraction control: a form of focus

Examples of Control and Uncontrollable incidents in bowls.

It has been mentioned the mental skill distinguishing the champ from the elite is their ability to adapt and refocus in the face of distraction (Orlick: ch. 10). What are some instances of distractions.

Live TV coverage

Talking to one of the Australian players after the Games 2002, I was intrigued to hear her say that being on live television on consecutive games distracted her. Initially each team was to be televised when they played England. However the Malaysians being such entertainers were on consecutive days because they were media friendly.

Who would expect this to be a hindrance. Well here we are in 2018 and TV coverage is in saturation proportions. I suggest we now know to expect it and to prepare for it accordingly in lead up events.

Parents and players

One player I work with had a fall out with dad and his reaction as a prank was to put the player's bowls shoes in the bath tub of water just prior to that players title final.

Guess what!!! The player lost the game as the shoes this player borrowed at short notice were a size too small.

Who would expect this circumstance to occur and thus be a hindrance!!!

The answer to both is maybe we should have at both times and planned better for such unusual eventualities.

Officials and players

In another example, a national representative was telling me about an umpire telling him that the playing time of his game was far too long, thus illegal (wrong as this specific event had no time limit) and unsportsmanlike (wrong) yet this elite bowler had to continue the next round with this negativity and doubt surrounding him from an unforeseen external source.

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As a coach, I / we need to work harder to have the players I / we coach able to contend with such circumstances.

If you want to perform well consistently in training and major events you must develop the mental skill of distraction control and that is done in practice, at training, integrated and organized by the bowls coach.

The three examples above exemplify how distractions come from unexpected sources and quarters – family, relationships, team members, TV, coaches, equipment, officials, sponsors, etc.

Controllables in Competition

Look at the list below and soak up what it is that you truly have control over in competition (and in training). Why then are you distraught about these factors, you do control them:

- Arousal
- Distractions
- Delivery
- Equipment, apparel,
- Emotions
- Game preparation
- (influence) on teammates
- Mat use to determine playing length
- Mat use as part of routine / ritual
- Mental preparation
- Misconceptions / interpretations
- Monitor / measure skill and performance
- Negatives
- Non verbal behaviour
- Positives
- Plans,
- Pre match routines,
- Standard of play
- Technique
- Thoughts
- Verbal behaviour

Uncontrollables in Competition

Now let's read a list of the factors that you have little or minimal or no influence over in competition (and again maybe even in training).

- Choice of teammate(s)
- Crap bowls that get results for opposition
- Distractions
- Event environment
- Location of competition
- Opponent
- Others' attitude
- Others' verbals and non verbals
- Pace of green
- Weather

What you can do is develop the skill to be able to easily contend with the emergence of these factors at training sessions or introduce them as part of training and instill the coping skill in your competition. The more you cope with them the better your mental skill (development).

Training to Refocus after distractions

One way you may be able to refocus is to recall a 'monstrous distraction' that successfully interfered in your performance at a game (this is good imagery training in itself).

Recall the incident, the undesired reaction from you, the unwanted response or outcome.

Now recall and train to respond more effectively in hindsight. This is another skill – tactical skill via match analysis debrief and review sessions.

You have simulated the hassle and trained to develop the desirable solution in this instance and now use the lesson, apply the skill and that will be the next time something STARTS to go wrong, have your 'red alert' mechanism apply to yourself. It could be a negative comment, a missed execution, a poor decision made, excess thinking rather than intuitive action, game plan flop, all

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signalling a loss of focus – challenge yourself there and then - can you stop and turn it around.

Set a goal, one of those daily / weekly goals to reassess your progress.

An example of refocus training

I remind you I am writing to you about the need to develop, to enhance mental skills.

Bowlers reading this example may well be intrigued by what I am going to write now. It is about a training routine to get a player to focus and forego distractions. Though for many of you who have seen the Malaysians play in Australia since 2005 will have seen this practice in action as recently as the Games 2018 in Broadbeach.

One particular player had a tendency to lapse in concentration – don't we all.

To overcome this concentration lapse, I had the lead and second train to go up the green to the head with and when the third (who I refer to as the vice skip) chose to proceed. The first two players had to focus on their vice skip team mate and be shoulder to shoulder with the third as a trio going to the head.

Whenever I did not see that happening on the training track as part of games sessions, I would intrude and tell both players concerned AND the vice skip to refocus as it was an important tool for concentration, and a display of team harmony.

I wanted them to train to develop self / team confidence too and this was my approach.

Distractions are an ongoing part of sporting life though bowlers beware – you don't lose your performance skills because of distractions: you lose the necessary level of focus that allows you to perform and execute the skills effectively.

Most distractions are of a temporary nature so console yourself and consider these possible solutions to use.

Believe you will perform at full capacity.

Commit yourself to remaining positive.

Expect the unexpected.

Lachlan Tighe, 2018

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