

Switched On Skips

Skips and Situation Awareness (SA)

Situation Awareness as a facet of mental toughness – an ability of the skip to understand what is happening, like a WIP to be ready to quickly anticipate and decide.

Situation awareness for skips in bowls as a prime example is reading the head. Does your skip instantly call your teammate to take certain action; or do you have the skip who stands stone like, stunned like a mullet, mulling over the head and its implications for decisions he will make.

A reason for that skip's indecision could be an absence of a game plan and its capacity to affect decision making. Because a game plan enables the skip to call deliveries based around the plan objectives.

For example, our lead delivers two fabulous forehand deliveries from one end. Fifteen minutes later, with no significant change when back at that end, the skip forgets or ignores that experience and asks the lead to deliver backhand for maybe a less favourable outcome. What situation awareness existed, mental recall, mental toughness. And I bet the lead gets the blame.

Not good enough skipper. Worse, selectors don't understand that either. Maybe too busy playing our sport, bowls, rather than observing as selectors.

Skips can be the best and the worst at SA. Daily at any bowls venue you and I will hear / overhear skips grizzling about the sub performances of their teammates. Pity, in all my years in bowls, nothing has changed up to 2020 regarding the attitude of skips.

Let me provide an example of how to train a skip in SA. I shall assume we have a 15-end contest, which we will play as a fours at training. With skip I invite them to look at the contest in this manner:

1. Team doing well: 5 ends where our skip can add shot, defend winning head and expect to win 4/5 of these;

2. Either team can win: 5 ends where either skip can affect the result; our skip trained to enjoy the challenge and set out to win a minimum 2/5 of these ends.

3. Opposition dominant: 5 ends where their skip and opponents are too good; our skip to learn to remain calm and set realistic outcomes such as reducing losses or win at least 1/5 of the ends.

Outcome – what do we have for our Skip; a PLAN to aim to get as a minimum 7 ends. If we can add another end from any one of the three SA scenarios we have the majority ends won, and hopefully the score in our favour. And we have a better understanding of what to expect emotionally and allow the Skip and the rink team to cope better.

What causes the skip of your team to fail to pick up the situation (awareness) SA?

- No supervised training in reading heads,
- Capacity in reading heads has come from poor examples, questionable experience,
- Narrow attention in the game,
- When playing poorly themselves, totally immersed in their current sub-standard form rather than switched onto all goings on in the competition,
- Total unwillingness, or inability, for a skip to have team input, which may be due to poor choice of skips by selectors (blame then shifts to selectors, where at times it should rest.)
- Poor or limited communication - a reflection of that skill limitation of the skip,
- Not picking up on an opponents' readiness and capacity to react either,
- Not having a game plan to give a sense of focus,
- Not developing a task / role for each team player,
- Presuming bowlers can do what they have not achieved in deliveries the previous 15-20 ends; I think it is called ...expecting miracles,
- Poor emotional responses when others in the team are having a shocker. The lead gave me nothing refrain.
- Giving up the contest, basically.

Oh, if only come the new decade we had clubs willing to train the skips rather than just accept these guys and gals can bowl, can skip.

And guess where our prospective elite bowlers come from, clubs, that haven of mediocrity.

Tell me another one!

Lachlan Tighe. 2020