

November Cup Day Squad Training

Brendan Murray, AFL Collingwood Observing

Observations

Those nine of us able to train today, Cup day, had the pleasure of an elite professional sports coach from a profile sport observe us train, and afterward provided his insights on our session.

Brendan Murray played AFL football for Collingwood and currently is on the coaching staff at Collingwood. For those of you not from Australia, Collingwood is purportedly the largest sporting club in Australia, certainly in football, with about 100,000 members.

Brendan's input on the bowls squad training session was so valuable I try and recall what he said that I may have gained from it;

- There was a collegiate atmosphere out on the green,
- There was sequential progression in the coaching, which he found an ideal model,
- Positivity was reinforced, negativity rejected immediately,
- Everyone was encouraged to provide a view on game plans, on how to compete, on what to emphasise in the session,
- Then that view was applied in a simulated competitive environment,
- Standards were stated, were exacting, were reinforced,
- There was intensity combined with levity throughout the session,
- That final 15 minutes was a game competition and he noted a few of the squad got social and talked a bit so as to give him an impression their intensity had dropped,
- He talked about those few champions at Collingwood, Jonny Wilkinson the English rugby player, who spend extra time on the track to be the best of the best and I cited the AFL Kangaroos of years ago, who had a BAT award 'best at training', a mindset which Neil (Barras) used to share with me.

When we adjourned to the local pizza place for another period of time and talks we had the insights of a national diving champion (Abby, chicken's daughter) talk about the hours per week she puts into training and

importantly the role to play in synchronised diving and the need to compromise as a member, and the need to balance all her life and she is all of 18, great stuff Abby.

Incidentally, Chicken & Abby did a round trip in excess of 300 km to come to training and that is why he is an Elbows squad member, proud of that man.

LACH

Further Comments from others in attendance-

Hi

In my past life as an English classroom teacher I was often bemused when we paid big dollars to bring in some educational guru who essentially said exactly the same as what we always said, but because it was coming from a new voice, the students were usually riveted, which led to excellent outcomes.

Very occasionally, we were visited by the lateral thinker, as we were all yesterday with Brendan, who not only provided the new voice, and the excellent outcomes, but made us THINK.

Being able to adapt a game plan in the heat of battle, and to be far more inclusive when forming game plans in team events especially resonated for me.

One little anecdote from yesterday that took my fancy was from the Melbourne Cup. From the outset, I have next to zero knowledge of horse racing, and even less interest. However, I was surprised when the winning trainer said that he provided NO instructions (game plan) to the jockey, on how the race was won, and the jockey for his part, if he had a game plan, had to constantly adapt to how the race was being run.

Clearly being flexible, and adapting quickly to mid game scenarios worked well for him in this instance, as it can for us in bowls. I do note also that this was his 16th attempt at winning the great race! If at first we don't succeed...

Nick

Hi all.

Player buy-in to skill drill development was noted by Brendan, something he said would change at Collingwood by tomorrow. The idea that players take on board some of the responsibility and ownership of developing skills and game plan training has been a feature of ELBOWS and now pBus squads.

It helps to challenge conventions and opens the door to so many exciting and novel ways of doing things. Lach, remember the time at Kew Heights many years ago when we were out on the green wearing cardboard head masks. Everyone else laughed but we were not deterred.

I found the recent development of coaches at Collingwood taking less of an on-field presence at training very interesting and encouraging.

With the evolution of the game, greater responsibility and control of on field performance is now under the domain of the playing group so they need to be able to take command and execute the right decisions given game day circumstances.

The coaches can only watch from the stands and hope that the playing group gets it right. By the time they are able to get the message out the horse has bolted.

If the coaching panel continues to control and manipulate the game plan on-field at training the playing group will not develop the necessary skills to implement quickly enough what is required to prevent a momentum shift.

Brendan mentioned the need to maintain intensity.

The pendulum shift towards greater emphasis on the mental and thought processes across sporting codes was apparent.

Attention to developing leadership, decision making, communication skills etc. is now foremost in training programs.

Brendan talked about the need to have a playing group who were able to be in control of and responsible for their own destiny supported by the overarching network of coaches and the club.

The Richmond Football Club plays a brand of football which the pundits call “Chaos” football. There is seemingly no game plan, but there is a plan which is Chaos. It is unpredictable, exciting and challenges the structured systems. It is built upon the playing group knowing and

understanding their role, accepting their role and playing their role. It is built upon believing in each other, trusting each other and knowing that if you back yourself you will have the backing of everyone else.

As Brendan pointed out, clubs will select a player in the draft because they exhibit special and exciting qualities.

What some clubs then do is clone the player to fit into their game plan system. Those special and exciting qualities that attracted attention in the first place are put on the back burner.

The smart (bowls included) club allows the player to excel with what they have to offer, to break open the predictable to the more unpredictable chaos but you have to trust, believe and take some risks.

DENO

Hi all:

Certainly what struck me as I relayed the day to my wife Jocelyn, on returning home, was what a unique group as a bowls squad we are and despite many of us only knowing each other for a short period of time, it is such an inclusive environment.

But perhaps most of all it is such a 'safe environment' where you can air your views and speak your mind knowing you will not be judged or belittled for it. That is a rare thing in my experience.

I love Aussie humour and the fact we 'take the piss', but it often oversteps the mark whereby to say what you really think can be dangerous and put yourself up for ridicule or, even worse, negative judgement that stays with you.

But in our squad you can be yourself and in fact encouraged to be so as that truly adds to the group dynamic.

I have a deep love of AFL and huge respect for it, but also a frustration with it as such a massive enterprise can at times be so amateur.

So Brendan's insights into that world and comparing it to our broader bowls world and then our group were fascinating, insightful and incredibly useful.

As well as uplifting to realise how special what we have is. To hear from Brendan that something he had gained from our practice would be implemented the coming week into an organisation like Collingwood was quite uplifting and just proves we are doing a lot of things 'right'.

Simon

Hi Lach:

Thank you for your invite to attend training yesterday and to then join you for pizza, wine and further discussion.

I was certainly in a privileged position where you generously shared your training and thoughts with me.

You have captured my feedback summary accurately. I would only add, unashamedly, that it was a masterclass in coaching *with* (I can't emphasise this co-design/strengths-based approach enough) elite athletes. I will provide improved support for high performance coaches as a direct result of my experience yesterday. Thank you.

And, thank you to all involved in the training and discussion yesterday for being so open, honest, inclusive and motivated to improve.

You have a very special high performance environment and culture.

I wish you all the best as you strive to improve performance, together.

Brendan

Hi All:

Like everyone who attended yesterday's session at MCC, I was very impressed with what Brendan had to say. I took home with me a feeling of what a great group this squad is and an even greater appreciation of our Coach.

A number of the salient points have already been mentioned, but the discussion regarding his observations re our communication with each other during the game was extremely pertinent for me.

How do we get each other up?

What enthusiasm and uplifting talk can we help each other with during the game?

He mentioned coaching each other to help, not sure if coaching is the correct word, but certainly helpful encouragement when a teammate is struggling.

My partner during the session apologised to me for their bad bowls, Brendan heard this and suggested that instead of saying sorry perhaps it would be better for them to say, come on Alison I know you can do it.

I spoke to him about my peers in the game and said the majority don't say much and certainly don't offer much encouragement either out loud or privately, no matter how good or bad you are going!

More team spirit, more equality in decisions, more faith in your teammates is what needs to happen. My partner and I discussed this and will work it into our game.

All the lights in the team will be turned on and shining brightly at all times to show the way.

ALISON

Hi to all:

The one thing that resonated with me that Brendan mentioned was the importance of maintaining the mental intensity all the way through.

I've always figured that once you lose your physical capacity then your mental capacity, or ability to concentrate, soon follows.

Even though lawn bowls is a sedentary game in comparison to other active sports, you still stand up for hours which takes a toll.

Interesting to note that when playing in the BV Open there are potentially five games in one day for each round of competition.

That's a lot of bowls.

Something to be said for survival of the fittest!

Samantha

History lesson worth recording way back in 2019.

Lachlan Tighe 18/11/2022