

Team: identifying and coping with competition pressure

This is the second article, the first being 'PRESSURE IN SINGLES', which started out saying this.

As you read this 2017, the elite male and female bowlers within Australia were either vying to win the finals for the Bowls Victoria state titles in November, and, 10 players from every bowls nation were representing their country in the world titles over November/ December.

For this article, my focus is on **team members** and those situations where elite players were / are focusing their aims as team members. They will experience a sense of hesitation and uncertainty if only because of the wait and the delay in not knowing how they will go on the day, either as one member or as a team, and to an extent the lengthy period of the championship event. Bit like us in bowls teams at any pennant level.

Now the team game, which all world team members are faced with, is a different challenge to them, and you as a coach, as you are asking 2-4 people in these formats to be as one. More so in this sport of bowls because the selected players in so many state / national sides all skip and still need to learn to concede in a team format that only one of them 'got the gig', skipping, but if they all put in they all 'get the gig' of being... winners.

So, what can these team bowlers expect as support, guidance and training from a coach, say, if they were to be coached by you. Well here is how I might prime and talk to the players for the games ahead, in this column focus being for the team events. I anticipate game scenarios that create doubt, and give them prompts to consider as thinking caps to overcome the doubt. I would pose these type of scenarios / situations and ideas for the team members for consideration in training and pre and post game reinforcement.

Scenario: TEAM competition, any format

After 4 ends the skip gets stuck into you in no uncertain manner

Think

What was my contribution in the game plan, what was expected of me?

- The skip has a role to ensure I strive to fulfill my contribution.

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- This is an important event, the important event.
- Accept the criticism and be attentive when spoken to.
- Use as a spur in a positive manner.
- Disagreement ? - I will discuss that after the game.

Today, you find you are very lethargic

Adding to what I wrote in the article on this statement for singles player with

- Keep busy, talk a lot if it helps.
- Keep working hard do the little team things to support team mates.

You have been playing firm / up shots well but may not be asked for any today

Think

- This is part of the game plan.
- My versatility is appreciated.
- Get in some great shots early in the game to focus.

The first segment of 4 ends of the game is a haze

Think

- Forget those and set a mini goal for the remaining segments.
- Relax, and recall and apply how you do that.
- Get involved in the game with the team mates, energise and talk up our team.

You have a miserable first round of team bowls today, a week still ahead

Think

- Recall the good games, shots to offset this session.
- Focus on things you know make you a good bowler, got you selected.
- Start again mentally – focus.
- Soak up team advice, and criticism, to reconstruct the positive.
- Refer to the goals set straight after the game and strive to meet it

Each bowler in the side is individual

Think how you as a member can assist

- Not everyone needs / wants relaxation techniques.
- Or hyped arousal levels.
- Don't let the loud ones impose their preparation on others.

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- Don't let the nervous ones transfer their agitation on others.
- But we all love compliments, give them to team mates out there in the game.
- And we need consolation when it ain't happening out there in battle.

Make the game preparation as normal as possible

Think

- What do we normally do on winning days.
- Keep the routine familiar.
- Reinforce messages used previously to win.
- Game plan discussions and process.
- Pre delivery routines

Focus on factors other than the importance of this one day in a long event

Think

- Avoid placing pressure on team members.
- Just apply your skill.
- The process provides the result.

Bolster confidences and reduce uncertainty

Think what the coach and we as team do

- Personal discussions of support.
- Assure one another, don't assume it.
- As coach assure the members their contribution is recognized, valued.

Be aware of, and not overly concerned by, anxious behaviours

Think as coach and urge the team to do likewise

- About the bowlers as people with a degree of anxiety.
- Use your eyes / ears to detect unusual emotional anxiety.
- Don't have knee jerk reactions but make a considered action.

Two bowlers combine very well and compliment each others strengths and talents and are worth teaming up in different team formation

Reaction

- What is the observed strengths.
- What makes for two players being regarded as a good team.
- What does a coach do to ensure selectors are privy to this view too.

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And what view do selectors have on what makes for a good team

The team meets pre the game and decides to try different tactics which eventuates them in winning

Reaction

- What was the lesson from the discussion.
- Will the lesson be reinforced for future events.
- What were the initial tactics that needed adjustment.
- And what were the new successful tactics.
- Who was the one initiator within the team for this winning approach.

The team has a training session on various deliveries in readiness for the next day's event

Reaction

- What will be the prime purpose for the session.
- Will simulated games be incorporated into the session to account for mental, positional, tactical, communication skill training.
- And how will the game plan descriptions and agreements be set and practiced.

One opposition team had organized a perfect build up and the best preparation and training to out do the other competing teams

Reaction

- On that basis what did the opposition do to prepare and beat all of us opposition.
- Question ourselves why we are not doing it or not doing it better than them.

The opposing teams simply outclassed us today

Reaction

- Did we compete to our maximum as a team?
- If so then, what is the level of improvement for the team necessary to succeed.
- What is the level of improvement for each player in the team to gain success.

I am going to repeat what I wrote to conclude the Singles article here with minor alteration to emphasise the collective, **Team**:

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As coaches we need to encourage all bowlers, elite or otherwise, to prepare for all scenarios that will occur in team competition, but especially the championships / finals competition pressure. We have to condition the bowlers as a team through relevant training to respond immediately in a positive way whenever confronted by pressure in competition. Pressure is an occupational hazard.

Coaches need to develop a mood or environment to enable bowlers to play at their peak. That requires bowlers in teams to understand and manage their own arousal level. As coach, you could be gauging the level for the players during the season so as to know the levels of the player come the preparation period on the morning of the big day.

Bowls performance is like an investment portfolio...

It has highs / lows you need to ride out.

You need to have a solid foundation (front end), before speculating (back end).

If you fail to plan you, deadest, plan to fail

So set the team goals, and monitor the goals as a team.

Lachlan Tighe, 2017