

Preparing for a game

(Contributed by our convenor, Shaun Kennedy, whose favourite saying is “This game is played 80% between the ears, and only 20% between the strings!”)

Ever thought about how you prepare for a game?

Do you ever arrive at the rink allocated and then spend a few minutes simply “observing” the rink? Take a minute and focus on the state of the rink – then ask yourself the following questions about what you are seeing:

- Is it well mowed, or is the grass longer than normal?
- Is the surface consistent in colour, or does it show a lot of colour changes, e.g. white and/or darker coloured areas?
- Maybe the colour at one end of the rink is darker or lighter than at the other end?
- Maybe one side of the rink is lighter or darker than the other side?
- Does the surface feel hard or soft and spongy underfoot?

Consider what this readily available information, is telling you about the green even before the first bowl has been played. Use the trial ends to test your expectations – check on the anticipated speed and line of each side of the rink, then pay attention to the bowls played in the first two or three ends. Does the green play as you anticipated? Does it play wider or narrower than you expected? Does one end of the rink perform differently from the other?

The game of bowls is most certainly more mental than physical, and just like chess, the player who masters the mental side of this game will probably win more than he/she loses.

No matter what position you play in a game, if you pay attention to every bowl being played, both yours and your opposition’s, you will gain a great deal more insight into how your rink is playing, and he who masters the rink first, will more often than not win the game overall.

So don’t just walk onto a rink and start playing – observe, watch, analyse and prepare mentally. You will be surprised at how your game improves once you start doing these simple things.

Graham Mackenzie's Coaching Corner: *Mastering the Drive*

When bowlers want to play a drive shot, they often change their forward swing and extend their step to complete the drive, but all too often this makes the player “push” the bowl hard to gain the extra weight and that action causes the bowl be delivered off line, missing the target.

“The secret to a successful drive shot is actually much simpler than this,” says Graham.

*“Take a normal delivery stance, but make your back-swing **much faster than normal**, before bringing your arm forward at a slower and more normal speed, using a normal step,”* says Graham, who has helped many top players master the drive with this technique.

“The resultant forward speed of the arm tends to be faster than for a drawing shot, but that is merely as a result of the fast back-swing” he continues.

“The forward swing now becomes much more controlled and you can watch your bowl speed on its way down the rink on the right line with far more accuracy and control than you’ve had before!”

Remember: Practice makes perfect, so practise this new technique to master it before you start using it.

Note from the editor: *This article is repeated by popular request.*

“Must” and “must not” don’t belong on the bowling green!

I have been mulling over these ideas for at least ten years so please forgive me for exploring this enigma! When I first started playing bowls I found myself trying to merge the playing of my new-found game with the academic knowledge I had gained over years of studying communication. I was struck by the compulsion of trying to marry the theory with the reality that I experienced on the bowling green! I could not help noticing that players experienced words in different ways on the bowling green and that the use of emotional words often caused emotional responses, sometimes immediately, sometimes later. I also realized that players processed some words quickly and automatically.

You probably remember hearing about the concept of words having two kinds of meaning – the actual meaning and the added meaning whilst still attending school. (Denotation and Connotation) The thing itself was the red “rose” but the added meanings were: “beautiful and perfumed” for some and “thorny” or “prickly” for others. Over time the red rose has become a symbol of Valentine’s Day or love. The red rose no longer has a narrow meaning but a broad or stereotyped meaning. This stereotype now underlies the emotive meaning of the word “rose”. We have seen with the rose example that “rose” no longer has a neutral meaning. For some it has a positive additional meaning (linguists call it **meliorative**). For others it has a negative additional meaning (linguists call it **pejorative**). The word is pejoratively or emotionally loaded whilst the conceptual or denoted meaning is the same for both. Are you still with me? You are probably wondering what roses have to do with bowls! Let’s explore further.

“Pejorative” is an adjective (a describing word as our teachers told us in primary school). It

is a derogatory term because the word it refers to carries overtones with unpleasant additions which make the denoted meaning worse. Psychologists, linguists and psychophysicists explain the workings of the mind and our reactions to words.

When we hear “You must not be short” our first reaction to the “must not” is stress and this blurs our reception of the word “short”. The mind focuses on “short” and so in all probability the player’s bowl will be short! The negative interpretation is emphasized by the use of the word “not” which is negative. Pejorative loading can also result from a word that is not negative (unlike our example of “not” which is). “You must be up” is not expressed negatively but it has negative overtones which pressurize us and make us feel stressed, resulting in tensions which move from the brain to the delivery arm, causing a botched delivery.

It is far more acceptable for a skip to say (and point with his foot): “I need a bowl here”. This is a neutral way of expressing the need for a bowl in a particular place, with a particular line and length. Do not explain how to get there! Credit your players with some intelligence and let them work out the line and length needed as nobody knows their bowls better than they do.

“Must” and “Must not” have no place in a happy team. Don’t spoil somebody’s “tabs in” game or a tournament by using the loaded words “Must” and “Must not” – they should be banned from the bowling green!

Editor

John asked his minister (who also played bowls) if it was a sin to play on a Sunday. His minister replied: “John the way you play it is a sin to play on any day!”

Coaches are you aware of the Bowls Awareness Day on the 27th of April?

The NSCC urges all coaches and District Standing Committees to help our Promotion and Development committees at national, district and club levels to ensure the success of the Bowls Awareness Day on the 27th of April (Freedom Day).

As a result of a Bowls South Africa (Bowls SA) workshop held in Potchefstroom last year with all the Promotion and Development officers of the various districts, it was decided that for Bowls to grow its numbers of participants it was in need of an image makeover.

Cricket has re-branded itself from the five day version of the game to the more vibrant and colourful one day game, a shorter version that has attracted more spectators and changed the way cricket is played. While everyone thought that further improvements were not possible they introduced 20/20 and this again has been embraced and has added to the entertainment value.

Bowls SA with this in mind are holding a Bowls Awareness Day on 27th April 2011. The purpose of this day is to promote the game; increase membership; change the image of bowls and to set a new Guinness World Record during the course of the day.

All bowling clubs are encouraged to get involved by inviting friends, family, club members from other sports, the media and local personalities to participate in the event, and to expose the Sport of bowls to as many people as possible.

Hundreds of People, be it directly or indirectly, are being affected by Cancer and the Executive of Bowls SA have decided that all funds raised on the day will be donated to CANSA and Disability Bowls South Africa.

While raising money for worthy charities we will also introduce the concepts of Barefoot bowls to participants and spectators and by doing this, change the image of bowls as it is today. This is an ideal opportunity to market your club and demonstrate the great game we play. By creating a day of fun and entertainment people will experience a great family outing.

With the clubs offering younger people the chance to play bowls along with a beer and a braai it will become a more attractive brand. Formats are changed to ensure "less waiting around" and include being able to complete the game in an hour (or more if you wish), which can be fitted into most young people's schedules.

**COACHES, WHATEVER YOU DO,
BE PART OF IT!**

Information supplied by Promotion and Development

A NEW BEGINNING

'A new life for the Sport of Bowls'

A poem by Aloma Smith

(Promotion & Development)

**The old is there,
but we're in despair!
Numbers are dwindling,
Red lights flickering.
New life must be sought
Otherwise we'll have nought!
Don't give up in dark despair.
The past we cannot compare.
With pages clean and new;
It depends on you to make anew!
Bowls is at stake!
A new life is all it takes!
Give the joy to others to play
So bowls won't be cast away.
Focus on change to make it right!
We must plan with all our might.
Bowls is at stake!
Bring new life for goodness sake!**

**"If you focus on results, you will never change.
If you focus on change, you will get results!"**

Countdown to new Bowls Reference Book

There has been some confusion about the new book that is in the process of being completed. It is a bowls reference book and not a coaching manual. It is an attempt to give a comprehensive background to bowls, bowls coaching and the Clinic Method. At this stage Level 1 is basically complete, and the material for levels 2 and 3 will be slotted in as they become available.

The course programme and details including presentations is not part of the new reference book! This will be presented at Train-the-Trainer courses after which districts will be empowered to run their own level 1 courses, applying in the usual way to BSA who will pass these requests on to Jill Atkinson (NSCC) who is responsible for all Level 1 courses.

The planned timetable is:

April: Final proofreading, editing, photography, layout and design

May: Printing, BSA circular to districts inviting candidates to one of seven Train-the-Trainer workshops across the country

June / July: Train-the-Trainer courses

June / July / August: Districts may apply to hold level one courses after attending a Train-the-Trainer course

And a final word for our Coaches

We have always said “Coaches need to up their powers of observation”, but the same holds true for our bowling community. They need to apply their own powers of observation when it comes to the rink they will be playing on.

Do you really take the time to understand what you are seeing, and do you really think about what you are going to do before you actually play a shot?

As a coach, when you are watching a player delivering his/her bowls, do you really take time and trouble to actually understand what you are seeing?

A good way to do this is to have a “sequence of observation”, and here’s a plan for doing that:

- Look for where the player prepares for the shot – from behind or on the mat;
- Start with the feet on the mat – check for correct foot position;
- Watch the stepping action, looking for proper weight transfer and follow-through;
- Watch the bowling arm’s position at rest and the position of the non-bowling arm and hand;
- Then watch each part of the back and the forward swing;
- Look for a locked wrist and elbow on both the back and the forward swing;
- Look at the shoulders, checking for level shoulder position throughout;
- Focus on the head position and pay particular attention to the focus and movement of the eyes before and during the delivery, they tell you a lot about the player.

Once you have watched three or four deliveries, you should then be able to make a more accurate assessment of what the player is doing correctly, and what might be affecting his consistency and reliability of delivery.

If you are not sure that you are interpreting everything correctly, use a video camera to shoot the player delivering bowls on both sides of the rink, and then carefully analyse every part of the delivery again.

Usually it is not big things that go wrong in a delivery. The player can quickly fix this himself. What you as a coach are looking for is the smaller, more subtle variations that cause a delivery failure.

Coaching is a science that is based on OBSERVATION FIRST and remedial attention later. Learn to really observe before you start making adjustments to a player’s style or delivery. Look for the subtle things, they are usually there to be seen if you know what to look for.

(Shaun Kennedy, Convenor NSCC)

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