

CONCENTRATION – On What?

Introduction

It is a most popular expectation of players to **CONCENTRATE** on their game.

Very little helpful advice or comments are available to players to assist in this highly desirable state of mind.

This paper discusses the issues of concentration as they apply to our game.

What is Concentration?

In setting about writing this paper, I asked many players what they considered Concentration was all about!

Their answers made it quite evident that there are few players who actually apply the mental processes which may be loosely described as Concentration.

Negative Examples

The answers were mostly expressed in the negative, in that, instead of explaining what concentration was, the answers described events and reactions to issues which upset or hindered them. Some examples are: -

prevailing weather conditions -- rain, wind, sun, heat, cold,

playing conditions -- speed of the green, synthetic or grass, true surface,

Team mates -- critical comments, condescending remarks, body language especially the skipper's,

opposition -- being nasty, aggressive or friendly, speaking or making noises when we are about to play,

movement along our Aiming Line or in our peripheral vision,

skipper not encouraging enough or always critical,

wrong shot being directed,

the list goes on and on but all are in the negative.

These reactions and examples of the negative may be likened to the 'Wally' as described in the book by Peter Belliss. That book is highly recommended to all who have a desire to improve.

A Definition

It became obvious that I had to supply the boundaries of this elusive element by providing an acceptable working definition. In researching the word and its origins, I came across one particular reference by a Llama: -

'an average man's mind is filled with countless thoughts, and therefore each individual one is weak. When, instead of these many useless thoughts, there appears only one, it is a power in itself and has a wide influence.'

Very interesting as shortly after this I consulted the Macquarie dictionary which had a number of definitions, one of which is closely relates to the Llama's quotation: -

'to direct one's thoughts towards one action'

This is the definition that most closely resembles the element of Concentration as it applies to our game. It is the definition which applies to this paper hereafter.

Concentration - Minimum Length of Time

Some scribes state that it takes an approximate average of 30 seconds from the time we receive a direction from the skipper until our subsequent delivery comes to rest.

In a Pennant match of 50 bowls each, that means that we are in the process of receiving the direction and delivering the bowls for less than 30 minutes in a match of some 4 hours duration i.e. we are directly involved in delivering a bowl for 30 minutes and sometimes involved in the match for the remaining 3 1/2 hours depending upon the Role that our club has deemed as appropriate for our selected position.

When Bowling -- approximately 30 minutes

As already discussed in other papers, the player receives a direction from the skipper as to the Desired Finishing Spot i.e. the centre of a desired target zone

From that instruction we are expected to consider both the Line and Weight, then deliver the bowl accordingly.

When we direct our thoughts to these two essential components of the goal, we need only concern ourselves with the memory and application of the information already gathered during the match: -

What is our Aiming Point and what adjustment is required to it and

What Weight in relation to our 'comfortable' action.

Some will agree that this recall and application of the data as being the act of concentration -- the Line and Weight appropriate for the shot at hand!

Others will add items to the process in an endeavour to produce a High Quality delivery, but remember the Llama's quotation -- many thoughts weaken each individual one, whereas a single thought is a power in itself, in this case it is two issues only - Line and Weight.

It is suggested that we confine ourselves to the least number of thoughts in the recall and apply them to the task at hand. After all: -

The right Line plus the right weight equals the right result

When not Bowling -- approximately 3 and 1/2 hours

We are in for a boring afternoon if we are inactive for the remainder of the match so we will consider relevant activities to occupy our attention for the rest of the match

A. The Skipper

We need spend but little time with the activities that are appropriate for a skipper. He directs the play and players as discussed in numerous papers and generally controls the strategy and tactics relative to the Match Plans of the Team for the whole of the match.

As far as concentration is concerned, he has to think of many things therefore there is a danger that all become weaker - as per the Llama's quotation.

Let us examine the issues that could be delegated to the other three players and so lessen the many considerations that are imposed upon our skipper. Not only the eight deliveries of his team but also a close interest in the opposition's eight as well -- 16 deliveries each end for the whole of the match.

B. The Third

The Third is directly involved with his own two deliveries and a high interest level for the Skipper's two deliveries and his opposition's Skippers two as well -- 6 deliveries.

He has a supporting role for the Skipper and could attend to the morale of the team at his playing end of the Rink. This leaves the Skipper with more opportunity to attend to the strategy and tactics appropriate in the game rather than to add the constant motivation aspects for his Team.

Thus the Third will require the same approach to the Match Plan as the Skipper as well as having "People Skills".

C. The Second

As well as bowling, the Second attends to the scorecard and scoreboard which are his Role but it can hardly be regarded as time consuming or mentally demanding in terms of concentration. What other issues can we delegate to him from the Skipper?

As he is obliged to speak to his opposite Second on scorecard/scoreboard duties,

he may also pay attention to the 'enemy's' conversations. He may 'pick up' hints or statements about the opposition's strengths and preferences in shots. This information may be of value to our Skipper, if it is a tight match, e.g. the opposition may say 'our Skipper loves to Drive at targets particularly when he has the back covered'. This information conveyed to our Skipper may have him place a back covering bowl early to discourage a driving opponent and so force him into a lesser preferred shot selection.

On the other hand the opposition may bemoan the fact that their skipper will not Drive at all. Therefore we will not waste a bowl by covering the back unnecessarily.

Similar information about other opposition players, preferred hand (today) or perhaps the true side of the green, changing weather conditions etc.

D. The Leader

Once rolling the Jack and playing the two bowls there is little left for the Leader until the current End has been declared and it is his turn to participate directly.

I know of one Club which required the Leader to report on the process that resulted in a score of 4 or more on any End in the match. It was designed to provide an insight on how the Heads were built and so were a part of his learning process in future advanced positions within the Team and Side.

Statistics show that there are an average of 2 or 3 ends per match which result in scores of 4 or more. The Leader charged with this role would have no prior warning that a big score would happen on any given end only that it will probably happen two or three times a match. He has to pay attention to each delivery so that he could report the events that led up to those scores. He became heavily involved in the tactics and strategy of the games.

Incidentally, he is now in the State Side as a Third and is regarded as being an outstanding talent in Head building!

Perhaps this is too much for the ordinary player with little ambition to further his career and there may be other roles that you can consider for him!

Another Club records the value of each bowl delivered by each player in the team. Some of those Clubs have the Leader follow their second bowl to the Head and record the values thus relieving the Skipper of that task.

D. The Leader - continued

Yet other Clubs suggest that the Leader keep the supply of water up for the team, particularly on hot days.

Generally Clubs will suggest that all players support each other by picking up and polishing our their mates bowls and

making encouraging remarks whenever the opportunity arises.

This is thought to show compatibility - a mute point! Better to do something more constructive and lessen the load of the skipper.

High quality

What we already know from other discussions is that the average 'good' player will achieve a 50% success rate in terms of being within the yardstick on any given delivery.

When it is our turn to deliver our two shots per End any considerations, outside Line and Weight will cause the % rate to drop! So the less number of issues with which we concern ourselves, the more intense will be our concentration and the greater will be our number of high quality deliveries.

Summary

Have a method for Line and a separate one for Weight and apply them to the shot at hand.

Try to confine your thoughts only to these two methods per delivery and

Be prepared to accept delegated roles to relieve the Skippers of some of their large range of responsibilities.