

Lachlan Tighe...Talking Tactically

Website bowls coaching column

(December 2009 column)

Situation Awareness (SA)

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

Tiger Woods has a shocker performance day three of the recent 2009 Australian Masters golf event. He goes home that night and practices specifics and goes about his proper rehearsal in readiness for the situation the following day. His toughness is his capacity and willingness to do all that the same night he experiences a dreadful day. Day four he burns and wins the big event. Again.

Situation awareness in bowls as a prime example is reading the head. Does your skip instantly call your team mate 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 indecision could be an absence of a game plan and its capacity to affect decision making because it 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 and maybe 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.

Situation awareness affects your performance. Situation awareness can be practised in our sport. I do it with the RVBA Group 13 squad, and did it with Jersey, UK when over there last month. Simply it is a matter of setting up heads, experiment and train. We do it every Friday with the players that come to my weekly coaching session. I think I will call them 'Wellbows' as they are the nearest thing willing to replicate the *Elbows* squad approach.

- After some experimenting, situation awareness SA seems to have four things
- perception, what do we see, hear or feel (if anything)
 - limited memory, forgetting what we trained for; bit like oh gosh that's right we did that last week, too late!
 - goal driven, maybe something like having to prove yourself in front of everyone, bit of vanity really
 - expectation, false, high, realistic, or no can do.

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What causes we bowlers to fail to pick up the situation (awareness) SA

- no pre training or experience in reading heads or being conscious of other cues
- narrow attention from us in the game; this may best be seen when you are playing 'like a dog' and totally immersed in your current sub standard form rather than switched onto all goings on in the competition
- no report process during the game between the team members to overcome such a flaw
- 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
- player readiness to react especially applies to those of you in singles events
- and not picking up on an opponents readiness and capacity to react either
- a basic failure to comprehend the progressive situation (as more bowls keep coming into the game and head)
- 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 within the team. Given up basically.

Skips and Situation Awareness (SA)

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 team mates. Pity in all my years in bowls nothing has changed re the attitude of skips.

Let's attempt a solution for the 'poor old skip' which I shall experiment with and modify at training as I get our squads to apply it in battle

assume- 15 end contest

plan – Skips acknowledge these three scenarios, SA

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.

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Teams and Situation Awareness (SA)

Too often we find a rink differs from the side/ team in its approach to the game. I have no real problem there as that rink has to work out its approach based on the four players in the rink and the approach of that rink Skip. Their game plan.

However the team/ squad/ side can have an overall TEAM plan and within that rinks and their skips can adhere to the TEAM plan, SA again.

Example, our RVBA Group 13 Team made up of four rink teams preparing for the State Group Championships in January next month - an approach we might take, subject to input from all this Group Team members this month:

outcome- win the event

strategy – win prelim rounds to get to semi finals

Team plan for all rinks/ skips -

2/4 rinks must win each game

every rink to win a minimum of 6/15 ends = guarantees 24 winning ends

the team to win 30/60 ends

every rink to keep shots lost per end to a max.of 2

losing rinks to keep losing score to <10

every end to have 2 bowls in the head at conclusion of head

front end rink members to have 2/4 bowls in the head 11/15 ends

All of the above are measurable and valid for debrief discussion.

Our emotional contributions of SA as team members can be described in the following article submitted to me by Joan from Drumcondra who shared this years back in a column and it translates easily to our teams in Bowls

:

'... The Geese and the Gander'

The five (5) lessons from Geese are

- when you see geese heading back north from the summer flying along in “V” formation, you might reflect on what scientists have discovered about why they fly that way. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in “V” formation, the whole flock adds at least 71 % greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own (**Team work principle** – a team of bowlers sharing a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and easily because they travel on the thrust of one another);
- if a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front (**teamwork principle** – there is strength , power and safety in numbers when travelling in the same direction as others with

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whom we share a common goal; worth looking at your team mates in that context especially in bowls fours where the skip is only as good as his third who precedes him, his second likewise, his lead as the first among equals);

- when the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back in the wing and another goose flies point (**teamwork principle** – it pays to take turns doing hard jobs, we bowlers in teams should look at pursuit cycling to see the application of the principle);
- the geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed (**teamwork principle** – those who exercise leadership need to be remembered with our active support and praise, and in the team game environment that is the one percenters (1%) so often referred to by coaches in other sports: this is a major area for improvement in training bowlers for the future);
- if a goose gets sick or is wounded by gunshot and falls out, two geese fall out of formation and follow him down to help and protect him; they stay until he is either able to fly or until he is dead. Then they launch out on their own or join another with another formation to catch up with their original group (**teamwork principle** – we must stand by those among us in their times of need, or in sporting parlance hang tough beside those bowls team mates who are experiencing a form lapse).

Take that great stuff from Joan and see who in our squads and bowls Teams understand it well enough to want to make a difference within the Team and their rink team by applying it as their personal indicator of improved SA.

Herein lies YOU, the team mate seen by others as the goose, or, the gander.

The extent of situation awareness SA I sight and hear in competition from club to international level, is limited to these totally senseless comments

- ‘...what’s the situation (the score is called)’
- ‘...who’s holding shot’
- ‘...how far is shot bowl away’.

We have a long way to go within bowls to reach a level of SA that other sports would recognise as acceptable practices. Maybe our new national Australian coach will foster a better approach to SA if not too tied to the old ways of coaching the sport.

Here’s hoping.

P.s... ..as usual each month, I have submitted a separate practical training diagram onto Henselite’s website for this new month – go to www.henselite.com.au (enter Hints & Tips, then Performance technique) for a read and maybe application at your home club.

Regards,
Lachlan Tighe.