

Effective Practise

Despite all that has been said and written concerning success in team games, in essence what will really help your team and your Side will come down to the following:

- ▶ Practise
- ▶ Attitude
- ▶ Sacrifice

This will result in our confidence to play that vital shot, which in turn wins premierships. A club striving for success in pennant will have the following aims:

- ▶ Build a team
- ▶ Build a group
- ▶ Build a spirit – that requires (as Denis Pagan puts it) respect of and within the group, and the most positive manner possible.

Grow and enhance through

- ▶ Spirit
- ▶ Morale
- ▶ Camaraderie – togetherness and confidence
- ▶ Not bagging each other or arguing
- ▶ Honesty and acceptance of where you are, and what you need to correct problems

So what is it that makes success?

- ▶ Firstly, talent
- ▶ Hard work,
- ▶ Discipline
- ▶ Team support
- ▶ Club spirit

Firstly, let's look at club practise nights.

It is disturbing to see the attitude of a lot of bowlers in that they think that they don't have to practise to play in a particular division.

Name me any team sport that you don't need to turn up to training on at least one night a week, to still get a game in the highest division. You have all played other team sports. You know you would be dropped if you didn't train. Why should bowls be any different?

Start with team practising as a team. Not, as is common in many clubs with team members playing on various rinks. If it means that a player has to move aside to another rink, so the team can practise together, so be it.

Tips for Effective Practise

- ▶ Practise mental as well as physical skills.
- ▶ Practise must be both meaningful and goal orientated.
- ▶ Set ultimate goal and devise overall plan.
- ▶ Break overall plan into individual sessions – each with minor goals.

Organisation

- ▶ Players to know what is required.
- ▶ Practise to be uninterrupted:

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- ▶ Assistance if needed.
- ▶ Ensure rinks available.
- ▶ Training aids ready.
- ▶ Session information summaries.
- ▶ System records.
- ▶ Result appraisals.
- ▶ Maximise your time (everyone doing something).

Elements to Consider

- ▶ Regular practise.
- ▶ Punctuality.
- ▶ All weather conditions.
- ▶ Ditch weights.
- ▶ All lengths and both hands.
- ▶ Jack rolling (unless preset heads).
- ▶ Off centre jacks.
- ▶ Present practise heads.
- ▶ Team practise and individual practise.
- ▶ Competitive practise.

Training Is the acquisition of skills.

Practise The repeated exercise in an activity requiring the development of a skill.

Concentration The application of mind and body to a particular endeavour to the complete exclusion of everything not relevant to that endeavour.

How Effective is Your Practise

How many of us devote enough time to actually practising to improve our own personal game, or to practise which will improve our team game, as required for pennant?

When you go out on the green for a practise session:

- Do you roll up with a mate, or a few mates, with four bowls each, and just roll up to see who can finish closest to the jack?
- Do you have any particular thoughts in your mind as to what you are achieving?
- Do you come off the green feeling as though you have improved your game?

It would be a reasonable assumption that quite a few of us would answer "Yes" to the first two questions above, and if we really were honest with ourselves, the answer to question three would be "No".

How many times do we see a leader in pennant practising as listed above, with the result that when he comes to put down his third or fourth bowl, he will play an upshot through a cluttered head because it is impossible to draw to the jack.

No matter what position we play in pennant, the draw shot is the most demanded shot to be played in any game, including singles, pairs, triples and fours.

We must all be aware that this should be the basic practise routine. If you consider that all the different shots played in the game of bowls are :

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- Draw
- Yard on
- Trail
- Resting
- Wrestling
- Running
- Position Shot
- Drive

There are similarities with yard on, trail and resting, but even more common in all shots other than Drive, they are all Draw shots.

The only exception to this is the Drive – even this would finish up a draw if the green was long enough. All you are doing is drawing to an imaginary jack instead of the actual jack.

If for instance, you have been asked to put a bowl 2 metres behind and a metre to the side. You are now drawing to a different place, other than the jack.

If on the very next end the jack has been moved to that exact position off the centre line, you are now required to draw to the jack in that self same position.

Practise with a purpose is a much used phrase and is absolutely correct.

You must know the particular type of shot that you are not proficient at performing, therefore this is what you should practise every time you have the opportunity.

Most bowlers keep practising the shot that they play well, without concern to improving their game.

Get your club coach to assist you with practise routines which will be of benefit to improving your game. If you cannot get the opportunity to practise on your own, at least practise with someone who also has a desire to improve, or can assist with any problems you may have with your game.

Once again a club coach would be a good choice.

If a leader in pennant, then practise rolling the jack to a definite length, until you are competent

If on your own, play four bowls alternatively, on forehand and backhand.

You may be pleasantly surprised how much your game will improve.

The other situation that seems to predominate with many bowlers is that they continue to practise their existing faults without consulting the coach.

It may be a simple remedy to eradicate a fault that is holding you back from reaching the standard to which you aspire.

The big problem we all have is that we do not really know what fault, or faults, we have unless we are prepared to approach the coach for advice.

No matter how well we think we are bowling, there is always room for improvement, and the only way to improve is to be a little more "fair dinkum" about how we approach and execute our practise.

Some bowlers seem to be of the opinion that because they play competitively three or four times a week, they are getting enough practise.

They certainly are putting down plenty of bowls, but what they do not realise is that essentially they are honing the skills they already possess without improving the skills they lack.

Practising with a purpose and/or supervision, will have the desired result.

Improvement in our overall capabilities which is, to what we all should aspire, for personal and club benefit.

The potential of Practise

The term practise applies not only to bowling movements, but also to development of mental and physical capabilities. Research suggests that it takes about 1 million repetitions of a sporting skill to attain a high level in performing it. Systematic practice is the key to achieving sustainable improvements in performing skill, powers of concentration and self-confidence. A small improvement in the performance of each player can considerably increase the scoring potential of a team or a side. The outcome of many games is not so much which team played the better, as which team wasted fewer shots.

Progressive Stages of Skill Learning

The objective of skill practise vary according to the learning stage of bowlers. Beginners may have some difficulty in delivering bowls using recommended techniques. Their movements may lack fluency and consistency. At the beginning stage, they are trying to develop motor programs for bowl delivery and this is the objective of initial practise. They may exhibit learning errors or performance errors. Learning errors indicate uncertainty about the nature or sequence of movements that constitute delivery of a bowl. Performance errors are execution faults (for example, limb misalignment, instability, etc) and are not the result of uncertainty about the required movements. Learning by trial and error has some merit. However, it entails the risk of practising and imprinting inefficient or inadvisable technique. Bowlers should eliminate any errors at the earliest possible stage.

After a few hours of coaching and practise, most beginners advance to an intermediate stage of skill acquisition. They are then able to deliver bowls in a reasonable approximation of sound technique. Occasional errors still occur, but bowlers improve in accuracy, consistency, timing, and self-confidence. Deliveries appear more fluent. At this stage, the objective of practise is refinement of their motor programs.

Months or years later, as bowlers approach mastery of their performing skills, the final stage of learning begins. Motor programs are so highly imprinted they are automatic. With seeming ease, bowlers are able to deliver with graceful and consistent fluency and obtain very accurate results. The scope for further improvement is more limited, and is usually based on the identification of subtle and seemingly minor imperfections in technique. If the bowlers make corrections, the objective of their practise then becomes the perfecting of the modified motor program.

The mastery of tactical and mental skills involves similar processes of learning, practising, and improvement. Bowlers typically master the process of accurate delivery before they learn complementary skills. They should master accurate draw shot play before they seriously attempt to learn to play attacking shots.

Identifying Practise Needs

For establishing their immediate practise needs, bowlers should review and identify their present performing strengths and weaknesses as a first logical step. Self-testing might pose such questions as:

- ▶ Can I identify any general weaknesses (short bowling, accuracy on long ends, etc)?
- ▶ Can I deliver the jack precisely to the distance I want?
- ▶ Do I have a weakness on either forehand or backhand?
- ▶ Do I have a weakness related to length of end?
- ▶ Do I have a weakness when a short bowl obscures a clear view of the jack?
- ▶ Does a bowl in the draw unduly distract me?
- ▶ Do I have any weakness in any of the shots – particularly shots of moderate speed?
- ▶ Do I have a weakness related to certain paces of green?
- ▶ Do elements of the competition environment upset my concentration?

Defining Practise Tasks

Design of practise tasks involves addressing the practise needs. Partnered practise may be more beneficial than solo practise at the intermediate and advanced stage of skill learning. This form of practise better emulates the tempo and atmosphere of a game. It also offers a competitive element to the activity and the possibility of improvising games from the practise task. This is the "game sense" approach.

There are differences between tactically sound bowling and accurate bowling. If a task requires delivering a bowl so that it comes to rest at a particular point on the rink, the essential demand is accuracy. If a task requires delivering a bowl so that it comes to rest at or slightly beyond a particular point on the rink, the essential objective is tactical soundness, eg avoidance of short bowling. In an accuracy test, bowls similar distance short or long should score equally. The mechanical demands of accurate bowling and tactical bowling are similar, but the objectives are not readily reconcilable and should not be combined. For accuracy, bowlers should aim for the required position. For tactical advantage, bowlers should aim for a spot about a half-metre beyond the "required position".

Where practise tasks involve positioning of bowls or other equipment, a clarifying diagram should support its description. Bowlers can simulate realistic practise tasks by setting heads with spare sets of bowls. Pre-setting of heads requires negligible extra equipment. To allow variety in the configuration of heads, at least four spare bowls are desirable. They need not be from a matched set. Any bowls will do. Coloured stickers or strips of masking tape visible from the mat would distinguish bowls for or against the bowler. Bowlers should participate in setting their own practise heads. They should also set mirror images of heads for practising both hands of play.

Defining Task Performance Conditions

Defined conditions for task performance are closely linked with the task definition and purpose. These might include weather conditions, safety precautions, playing surface speed, presence of actual or simulated distractions or competition pressure, etc.

Condition details should indicate how the task should proceed. That information might include suggestions about how degree of difficulty can be engineered to match it with the ability of the bowler undertaking the task. Alternatively, it might include suggestions about changing task procedure to provide variety. Some examples of suggestions for variety are:

- Draw shot accuracy:** Arrange a practise green with mats set at different distances from the rear ditch and from the jack, with jacks at differing offsets from each rink's centre line and with line of play alternating on successive rinks. This is a form of circuit training.
- Draw shot accuracy:** Arrange games that disallow driving.
- Contested accuracy:** Arrange "consistency singles" games.
- Accuracy over all distances:** Arrange games requiring presetting of the jack - for example, 2 metres for 5 ends, 34 metres for the next 5 ends, 28 metres or random lengths for the last 5 ends.
- Increase in degree of difficulty:** Arrange games that disallow change of hand of play, except at the start of an end.
- Hidden Jack:** Use a spare bowl to hide the jack after centring it.
- Position bowling:** Pin out a cross with 2 ribbons (2 – 3 metres in length) that intersect under the jack to create 4 quadrants for receiving bowls in position bowling practise.
- Versatility & adaptability:** Arrange games requiring teams to rotate positions (for example, lead to 2nd) after a specified number of ends.
- Tactical decision making ability:** Require discussion of team tactics at head after each half end (after 8th and 16th deliveries).

Practising the Drive

The practising of drives demands some precautions. Bowlers should correct any technique problems during practice sessions. Should they encounter difficulty in diagnosing a problem, the best course of action is to go back to the basics and work forward from there? If no coach is available, bowlers can help one another with reciprocal observation and suggestion.

Preset practise heads make good targets for driving practise. Bowlers can mirror their target practise configurations to balance forehand and backhand practise. To balance the challenge and success of practise tasks, they can vary the size of their targets. They can also vary head distances. Further, they can set front bowls to make wide drives wick towards the target.

Bowlers should make the rink for driving practise safe. They should consider using a ditch rink to practise driving. About half of all scattering bowls should thereby come to rest harmlessly in the side ditch. They should avoid a rink behind which people congregate or there are glass panels. Flying jacks can cause harm. They should consider placing the target bowls within 2 metres of the front ditch. Scattering bowls would thereby not travel far before reaching the ditch. They should alert any players on adjacent rinks of potential danger. They should pad the face of the bank to avoid accelerating the wear and tear of the facing material.

Visualisation in Lawn Bowls

When we think about yesterday, today and tomorrow, we are often visualising and we aren't even aware of it.

I often like to think of lawn bowls as "chess on grass".

We often hear lawn bowls called a game of "mind over matter" or "mental" sport. What does this really mean? Does it refer to the types of demands that are psychological in nature that are required of players?

For example, in lawn bowls, high priorities include:-

1. Having a consistent pre-game and pre-bowl routine
2. Making accurate decisions under pressure.
3. Adjusting as required (eg To your opponents play, the pace of the green), and
4. Staying relaxed and focused.

It's more a game about strategy and precision, rather than athletic ability and brute strength. It is a game for the thinker. So we see that what is really needed in bowls is refined skills, along with sound bowling technique. This is where visualisation or imagery comes into play.

Visualisation is a mental technique that is about trying to create or recreate an experience in our minds. Visualisation involves all of the senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Generally speaking the more senses an individual uses in his/her visualisations the richer his/her imagining will be. So essentially whenever we imagine ourselves doing something without actually doing it, we are visualising.

Take a moment to think about these questions.

- What did I do yesterday?
- What happened yesterday?
- What are your plans for tomorrow?

If you took time to answer these questions, you would probably find yourself using visualisation in some way. You'd be surprised to discover how often you use imagery in your day-to-day life without even being aware of it.

So where can bowlers use visualisation? They can use it for rehearsing new skills, practising and sharpening existing skills, preparing for each bowl and getting ready before each game.

Visualisation can help to lower anxiety and improve concentration as well as self confidence.

So how is visualisation done? There is no single answer to this question. What works for one bowler will be different to what works for another. Nevertheless, I'll take you through the process.

On the green, try to picture the shot in your mind before you play it. Take a controlled breath and visualise yourself stepping onto the mat. Take note of things such as the weight of the bowl and how it feels in your hand, the sounds that surround you – passing cars, birds, noise from adjacent rinks, familiar smells – freshly laundered whites, polish on the bowl, the feel of the sun on your back and the light breeze blowing on your face.

Remember.....Use all your senses to make the visualisation feel as "real" as possible and see yourself delivering the perfect bowl. Visualisation is not only used during

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competition, it's used before the competition commences where you visualise yourself at the venue and visualise your preparation routine and bowling successfully. It is also used after competition to evaluate the day's play.

It is important to realise that creating mental images comes more naturally for some than for others. Tips that will help those with difficulty visualising:-

1. Look at pictures or videos prior to imagery
2. Try thinking in picture rather than words
3. Stay in a quiet, relaxed and calm environment to avoid distractions

Some general ways to enhance visualisation:-

1. Use your senses when visualising to make it as realistic as possible.
2. Practise visualisation regularly – at home – at work – in the shower. Only through constant practise will you start noticing any improvement.
3. Maintain a general positive attitude as this can enhance the effects of imagery.
4. Keep a focused yet relaxed attention while using imagery.
5. Visualise yourself actually bowling (from your mind's eye), rather than viewing yourself from the outside looking in, ie Like watching a video of yourself bowl.
6. Visualise perfect deliveries. This will boost your self-confidence.

So ask yourself how much time you spend bowling forehand and backhand deliveries versus developing your mental equipment through techniques such as visualisation. You may find you are under-estimating this important part of your game.

So why not give it a go!

All you need is some imagination and creativity.....and the sky is the limit.

Participant's Notes