

Lachlan Tighe.....Talking tactically

Lawnbowls com.au/weeklycolumn

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'Winning Gold: a measure of coaching performance')

CHAPTER SEVEN TACTICAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN TRAINING

Storytime

A talented young Australian squad player was expressing his frustration toward his unheralded singles opponent in a prestigious event.

For six ends the youngster stood on the bank whingeing about the 'luck' of his opponent who continued to wrest out the young man's shot bowl. Howls of 'not another lucky shot' or 'he is not that good' were repeated nearly every end by our talented youngster.

Me, grinning there on the sidelines, watched in amazement the obvious absence of any tactical skill or nous of our young elite player. More often than not it was his (poor) placement of bowls that enabled the opponent the opportunity to wrest out shot, all because of poor, or non existent, decision making by the youngster.

The young player lost. I was inwardly delighted as it showed me that technical talent is only the basis for ultimate success. Tactical and mental skills are the other ingredients and tools needed to make the menu taste successful.

Playing lengths: Minimum and maximum Length

The competitive playing distances (length) for lawn bowls ranges from the minimum, 21metres, to the maximum, 40 metres.

Yet most bowlers, regardless of their skill level hurl the jack, and subsequent bowls, down in practice and competition around the medium length (say 27 – 30 metres) without any intention or tactic.

Hell the next time I hear a skip say to a lead ...play your length...I shall walk out, grab the skip and replace him and the lead as the bloody lead is skipping de facto if that is the degree of tactical logic used by a skip.

I propose that mediocre (thinking) bowlers play medium length.

The elite bowler is the one able to easily perform at all lengths but more so the two extreme lengths, minimum and maximum distance.

At minimum length on a fast green, the player without the full control of rhythm will not consistently draw close, or the slightest irregularity of their delivery rhythm will see a lousy bowl result.

And at maximum length the elite bowler can not only draw four bowls within the opponents mat length or yardstick shot, zone or range, the choice of this length has the added advantage of escalating the error factors in judgement of distances and choice of delivery.

Hence we see a higher number of drives chosen simply because of the doubt that has crept into the lesser skilled bowler.

You doubt my logic ? Sit and watch a game sometime !

Lachlan Tighe.....Talking tactically
Lawnbowls com.au/weeklycolumn

One opponent is playing well (be it singles or teams) at a set length and finally the opposition wins the end and immediately reacts by going to the extreme opposite length to that being played. So why not anticipate this reaction by training the skills for the two extreme lengths.

I say lets ensure as aspiring bowlers, and definitely as coaches, that all our practice in training is at the two extreme lengths.

When coaching Malaysia, I conducted a loosely based scientific experiment with their Institute of Sport biomechanist where we used two groups of bowlers – social level bowlers and the national squad bowlers.

We allowed all bowlers to bowl 20 bowls each at the 3 distances of minimum , medium and maximum length, a total of 60 deliveries.

What we found is that the average range difference between the social and elite bowler was lowest at the medium length , i.e. the social bowler has a greater degree of consistency and success at this length / range than the other two extreme lengths.

The experiment was done twice – once on a 15 second synthetic surface, the second time on a 12 second grass green.

Surprisingly the short length highlighted the biggest discrepancy in consistency between the two skill groups of bowlers and we assumed this was because it required greater control of weight and body transfer in the delivery.

Games senses simulation

Games Sense in application to bowls is all about using games as a learning tool with the emphasis being on bowlers making decisions. This alters a coaches role to that of a facilitator, creating situations where players have to find the solutions for themselves.

One style I tried in Malaysia was for two skips (Lina versus. Haslah) in fours at Bukit Kiara with all of us on the bank describing what we would opt for with a bowl each to play.

The two skips Haslah and Lina had a simulated game where Haslah started at the score line of 11-8 with four ends to play and the idea was for the skips to manage a team plan to a) retain the winning position for the next 4 ends; b) turn a losing position into a winning position or to minimise the loss (both meaning a change of trend over those 4 ends).

Interestingly Haslah's team dropped a 3 the very first end for the score to quickly go to 11-11 with 3 ends to be played – I think they ended up drawing 14-14 – with one bowl to play Lina was leading 14-12 though Haslah held 2 shots with Lina to still bowl one delivery so here is the scene:

Twelve players, three coaches are all on a bank invited by me to offer an opinion on what delivery Lina should choose with that last bowl and it came down to an agreement that there were six options with equal spread on backhand and forehand

Readers interested in the Games Sense approach to training and coaching can refer to either the Ausport website or the (Australian) Sports Coach journals for other views and approaches.

(i) Modifying the Game as an approach

In Malaysia my prime emphasis for modifying the game was to get the players and coaches to experience tactical skill strategies and enhance their mental skill strength and development.

Lachlan Tighe.....Talking tactically
Lawnbowls com.au/weeklycolumn

Example: Going to a slow green and or a synthetic surface there were only two distances I provided them with. First draw within mat length at lengths at the 14m and again at 21m length so the players had to literally forget the expected visual kinesthetic feel and allow themselves to bodily feel the weight required, on either surface, to reach the desired target zone.

The intention was to get them to understand through experiment all about pendulum, weight transfer and body weight, lowering the body for reduced lengths etc.

And trying this on a slow green of eleven seconds then on a fast synthetic surface of sixteen seconds made them fully aware (once seen you better believe) of the necessity to prepare tactically and technically.

Example: certainly over the final week prior to heading to the UK, the squad training was played diagonally on the green (I) so as to play from 45-65m and to reach those distances.

Again the composure to think about how you use your body height, weight and levers(arms and legs) to reach those longer distances and (2) by going diagonally we deleted the traditional reference points of a rink and a green and the usual numbers, chalk lines and pegs so forcing the players to be aware of two constants for them to deliver

Knowledge of the body and technique
Knowledge of their bowl and grass line.

Example: compressing so many players together on the green to simulate distraction and train their own personal control factors so

Either we lined up players on pegs and rink numbers and had them training in a patterned direction together, or

While these formats were set from the minimum line to the 2m mark behind or beyond the players were more players going shall I say horizontal in a different direction which enabled four to six more players on mats to operate to fully utilise a green and have them apply mental skill in a new fun and novel learning session.

Example: simulating pressure in two sessions - first in singles where one had 4 deliveries the other had 2 deliveries to accustom one of them to 'pressure' in a position of reduced choice and a focus on performance from fewer deliveries; secondly, simulate a head per my computerized diagrams 4.01, 4.21, 4.24, and 4.37 for various players to learn how to cope.

Example: tactics in triangles where two versus one and when all players have had 3 deliveries the trio go to the head to assess what will best be played and to learn and train to read heads while in the game.

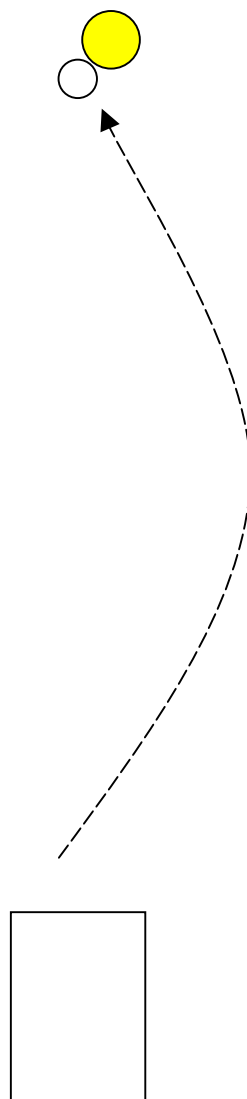
Other alterations and modification introduced to achieve tactical outcomes included:

- made the playing distance 14 m and 65 m (required diagonal direction across the green)
- have programs going concurrently east/ west and north/ south thus using all the green
- restrict the number of allocated shots for one player so to have 2 to our 4 deliveries
- a triangles set up where 2 people oppose one with double the deliveries
- scoring system in triangles so as to serve or set the score beforehand e.g. 5 ends to play in a team losing 10-13 then reverse roles;
- set the head to be up or down for a specified player
- specific roles, head set to some ones advantage for example the opposition always has a resting toucher placed against the jack to start the final 5 ends of play with scores level, or must play a set hand for a limited time

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Training Diagram 4.04 pressure singles attack and defend

head set so one bowler has already a toucher;
play the end as a singles match with one player attempting to keep score the other to
try and change the position;
simulate another game where game is 6-6 in sets play and player with toucher on
verge of winning the set
in both formats re set the head from same end, repeat and change roles



Performance appraisal

Performance is gauged against a plan.

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Each time a training program was conducted, whether it is an actual game or a modified games sense program, there were to be some guideline plans agreed to by the skip and their team with the coaches having knowledge of these agreed plans.

Example may have been

- All ends to be played at minimum length
- Win 3 of the 5 ends
- Not to concede more than 2 shots if and when losing an end.

During 2002, I experimented with performance analysis and a sample from that period appears below including

1. The number of deliveries played (the lead will add jack based on ends won)
2. lead -Number of ends where the did not set the jack at minimum or maximum length
3. lead -number of times where DID NOT have a bowl in the head (mat length)
4. lead -number of times where DID NOT have 2 bowls in head (mat length)
5. lead/ second in team events-number of times where DID NOT have 2 bowls in head (mat length)
6. (for 2nd / skip) number of too heavy / ditch bowls (when not asked for a full drive)
7. (for 2nd /skip) number of bowls beyond 3 feet of specific request
8. skip -Number of ends that the team lost more than 2 shots
9. skip -Number of times had to add a shot to count with last bowl, and did not do it
10. skip –during game did call team together? Once/ twice/ three times/ not at all (circle)
11. (for each player) number of short bowls
12. (for each player) number of narrow bowls
13. ends played at minimum length
14. number of these ends won
15. ends played at maximum length
16. number of these ends won
17. number of ends where bowler had every bowl within mat length- this is most applicable to a lead/ second/ singles player

Developing games

The coach may pose these questions to enable the answers to come out in game sense activities

- what are the tactics and skills you are trying to develop
- what will be the main challenge for bowlers to solve
- how to score
- starting or restarting this game
- questions to ask of bowlers
- progression to increase complexity
- does game lead to added communication

Match analysis

You can call these Performance debrief sessions, games analysis session, or any other name that we see in sport. Whatever they are called it seems not to occur in (elite) bowls and yet it should be the starting point of all our development as players and coaches.

Look at the list below and see if you agree to the merit of the questions, then ask yourself why am I / we not doing this (analysis) ?

- Where are your winners
- Can you play them even more effectively
- Can you play them more

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- Are you taking every opportunity to win ends
- Where are your mistakes
- Can these be minimised
- How
- What is the reason for them
- Where are your recent opponents winners
- How was the opponent getting the opportunity to use these deliveries
- Can you change your game to eliminate their winning options
- Where is your opponent making mistakes
- Can you pressure him into adding more mistakes
- Are you playing a hand well
- Are you playing a length well
- Are you playing a shot well
- Are you observing your standard of play
- Are you observing your concentration
- Are you observing your opponent

Victory & Analysis : Champion of Champions

Here is a sample of my brief responses to one squad member after her (winning and losing) games in the State Champion of Champions semi finals

(1)

DATE: Friday 20/2/2004

Good morning Anna

Congrats on a big week for you in winning the Champion of champions and invited into the Institute of Sport;

Here is my observation and review of your game for your reference:

Overall result – 25/23 winner

Strengths

- Your jack throwing to specific lengths
- You had 3 of 4 bowls constantly in the head which gives you confidence and places pressure on the opponent
- Walked up to the head nearly every end regardless of whether you had shot or not
- Projected a sense of composure and remained like that throughout even that end where she trailed and picked up the 4
- You gave an impression that this was FUN, like that very important
- And your behaviour and composure was unsettling Edith as she did not have the same level of mental skill (training) to contend with a tight and tough 3.5 hour event
- Your little weight shots were rippers and showed good choice and a confidence in the training drills
- Delivery consistent : could count the 009 after nearly all deliveries which meant you were down and through
- The ‘bocce’ principle of get that first one real close and when you have the last bowl add was very well adopted in the game
- Likewise the ‘caterpillar’ as many times that was the next shot you did
- Believing you are in the ‘big league’ and good enough to roll quality opponents
- That final end decision as you explained to me to go medium length was well thought out

Lessons and knowledge to learn from this event

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- Firstly know what your strengths are (what I wrote above is only my view, what is your view) so continue training them to be (easily) able to resort to them even in tough games
- You have a capacity to focus for a long time so trust it
- You may recall me saying that in singles when you have 5 deliveries when you have the mat and the opponent has 4 that is an 11% advantage so ensure you gain more ends than them as 25/23 is about an 11% difference and that is the advantage, use it wisely in choosing playing length
- How well do you judge distances of the bowls in a head when you are standing on the mat
- How do you ensure you do not get off to a slow start in important games
- Are you up to speed with fluid intake levels in competition
- What is your identifiable game plan (at least I should have an idea in watching you compete)
- Do you know having played for 3 hrs 25 mins how many ends were played, how many you won, how many were won at certain lengths
- Finally as I am all about attitude is practising habits might I note that when we play (no we don't play, we compete – kids play games) a maximum length I mean maximum and that is putting the mat on the 2m mark and hurling that white thing all the way up the other end rather than placing the mat somewhere near the 2m mark (Jess as your world/ global/ universe champion pairs partner to note too on this one)

I am rapt for you as was your mum in watching, on behalf of all of us 'elbows' mob

Well done

Lach

(2) Champion of Champions - Bentleigh

DATE: Thursday 4/3/2004

Hi Anna

Bad luck about finishing the Champion of champions. Again here is my observation of your game that I observed:

Overall result – 22/ 25

STRENGTHS

- Your jack throwing today was good at maximum length
- Projected a sense of composure and remained like that throughout even that end where she picked up the 4
- Delivery consistent : could count the 009 after all your good deliveries which meant you were down and through
- The 'bocce' principle of get that first one real close and when you have the last bowl add was very well adopted in the game

LESSONS

- When you won last time you had 3 of 4 bowls constantly in the head which places pressure on the opponent, not so consistent today
- When you won last time you walked up to the head nearly every end regardless of whether you had shot or not, not so obvious today
- You did not give as strong an impression today compared to last time that this was FUN
- You were over weight with many deliveries today, interesting on Sunday you were too, and most trouble was at medium length which seemed to bother your results

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- in singles you have 5 deliveries when you have the mat and the opponent has 4 that is an 11% advantage so gain more ends than them as 25/22 is about an 11% difference and that is the advantage, doesn't that jack throwing show up the importance of the control of length
- the 'caterpillar' principle is OK
- Believe you are good enough despite the loss (today)
- do you judge distances of the bowls in a head well when you are standing on the mat
- Are you having the right levels of fluid intake in competition
- You need a game plan to use most when in trouble (I have limited idea in watching you compete)

Again I am rapt for you as was your mum and Daryl in watching, so on behalf of all of us 'elbows' mob

Well done

Lach

Another example was the analysis of the Victorian State pairs finals in 2004 below

Victorian State Pairs Final – March 23/24 2004

GOAL win the State title
Game one Young & Todd, Ararat
Game two quarter final, Mitchell & Youdan, Glen Waverley
Game three semi final, O'Donnell & Jardine, Sunbury (eventual state champions)

STRATEGY

Train regularly for this format

Enter similar format competitions as lead up

Win each preliminary event for the final

OBJECTIVES(13), Analysis and summary of each Objective (A)

1. win 9 of the 18 ends

A game one 10/18, score 16-15
 Game two 10/18, score 21-14
 Game three 8/18, score 12-14
 Summary 28/54 ave 9/18 and scores 49-43, ave 16- 14

2. win half ends per segment (2 of every 4 ends and one end of final two ends)

A game one met goal in all 4 segments, no wins in final two ends
 Game two met goal in all 4 segments, one win in final two ends
 Game three met goal in all 3/4 segments, no wins in final two ends
 Summary met goal in 15/16 segments, only one end won in final six ends

3. aim to have 50% acceptable ML shots/ (or fully effective result bowl) deliveries each player

A game one leader 26/76 deliveries (34%) and skip 24/76, (32%)
 Game two leader 34/76 deliveries (44%) and skip 35/76, (46%)
 Game three leader 30/72 deliveries (42%) and skip 36/72, (50%)
 Summary leader had 90/224 acceptable (ave 40%) with a 'pb' of 44%
 skip had 95/224 acceptable (ave 42%) with a 'pb' of 50%

4. aim to have a minimum of 2 bowls within ML in the head for 10 of the 18 ends after the pairs team of bowlers had delivered their first 4 bowls,

A game one 6/19 ends
 Game two 11/19 ends
 Game three 10/18 ends
 Summary goal was 10/18 or for 3 games 30/54 ends, and only secured a tally of 27/56 ends contested an average of 9/18 ends normally played

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5.ensure a minimum of 2 bowls are ML in the head for 14/18 ends after the delivery of the pairs team first 6 bowls

A game one 14/19 ends
Game two 16/19 ends
Game three 15/18 ends
Summary total was 45/56 ends an ave 15/19 ends

6.minimize losses by keeping the losing score on any end to a maximum of 2 scoring shots

A game one one end lost 3 shots
Game two two end lost 7 shots
Game three did not lose an end in excess of 2 shots
Summary three ends cost 10 shots which ave one end = 3 shots per game

7.jack to be thrown within a metre for the two specific lengths, minimum or maximum

A game one 9/10 times succeeded
Game two 10/11 times succeeded
Game three 8/10 times succeeded
Summary averaged 9/10 times succeeded

8.bocce – skip to add in the few options provided with last bowl

A Summary did not keep a record of this as the circumstances were too important to use as the recording is new and trial and error

9.conversion –skip to reduce the deficit / or convert result 50% of times opportunity exists

A game one 3 of 8, 48%
Game two 7 of 10, 70%
Game three 5 of 11, 45%
Summary total 15 of 29 opportunities, 51% with skip knowing his 'pb' is 70%

10.decision making: avoid greed and decide on tactics to ensure no turnovers from a + to a -are provided by our decisions

A game one no turnovers (opposition did 3 turnovers)
Game two no turnovers (opposition did 2 turnovers)
Game three no turnovers (opposition also had no turnovers)
Summary no turnovers ; interested to witness the state winning skip was also decisive in avoiding easy turnovers to give opposition unnecessary shots

11.composure: be positive, happy, confident with knowledge of training and preparation, ensure body / verbal language is fun and supportive

A summary at ALL times we displayed and enjoyed a sense of fun throughout

12.driving – whether best effect is to use the drive for deliveries 5-7, or on last, 8.

A summary did not keep a record of this as it requires a delayed and detailed analysis and would distract from on field performance

13.team meeting each segment (4 ends) to assess progress of the above objectives

A summary this segmentation and team meeting process is vital to ensure the process continues despite the scoreboard. All of the above was recorded on pre-coded score cards and the full analysis of the game(s) was conducted well after the game for the day.

ASSESSING your Performance

Using the information above, consider these questions to pose to the two players prior to making recommendation on training are:

what did you do well compared to goals / plans

What aspects of the strategy objectives did you fall down on, need strengthening

How would you rate your performance

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How could we improve on the performance you gave at the recent games?
What was the best aspect of your performance at the recent games ?
What was the best part of your (team) game plan ?
What strategy worked well
What was planned for and not done and why
What was your strength & weakness
Why did you win / lose
What tactical and mental approaches were successful, and, which were inadequate
How well did you concentrate and how can you improve on it
Was your pre competition routine of benefit and how did it benefit
Explain what placed you under pressure ?

Behaviour analysis

My style of coaching emphasizes what I as a layman call player behaviour patterns. I look to see and listen to hear if players apply themselves in training at a standard that displays a level of commitment that will carry on over into the contest.

I use other coaches and good players to assist bowlers with technical coaching because there are numerous good people in the technical side of coaching.

My training might focus on the following and the drills and repetition sessions are

Deception	forcing options or reducing options, e.g, block
Risk	one in head, choice to either draw or place as a back bowl
Shot selection	head with you having last bowl, or the opponent to play after your last bowl
Game stage	one end to play and you are +1 or -1, or -2 for all for game formats
Space	length choice
Decision making	part of risk / anticipation / maximising angles
Anticipation	reading your opponent and offsetting him
Regaining control	mat placement and playing length, how / where and jack delivery
Maximising angles	widen head options, or keeping the head view narrow
Attacking	scoring by pushing out opposition, or adding numbers in head

As an interviewee for the Australian national bowls coaching position in late 2004, I was made privy to the 2004 world bowls report for the Australian sides. I was astonished to read the players discarded further thought of a games analysis early in the event having no result success early on. The reasoning was they viewed a debrief post game was adding to their pressure.

Elite athletes and coaches from other sport would see that as sheer nonsense !!! It is a necessity and benefit of performance to have a daily informed debrief.

How else can we in bowls improve our approach if there is no comparative information to use.

Refer to Chapter 14 (Innovation versus Tradition) where I make a crude attempt to assess and review player behaviour based solely on what I see, think and feel.

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Decision Making

‘ A decision making thought process’

I wrote for a web column in September 2004 that the (next) match has now begun, a reference to pre match preparation.

Talent and hard work are the first two ingredients for any finalists and the winners. I would suggest a hunger and thirst for victory is another ingredient.

However let me look at decision making (or both the mental and tactical skills) as the flaw for all of those players who have not proceeded to the finals, or onto success at elite level standards

My thoughts refer to decision making for

i. One end of a game

Bowlers need to be aware of ways to gauge how to make decisions though remember there are times a specific decision cannot be avoided.

Steps in this decision making may include

- Gauge the need for different decisions
- Establish some criteria for the decision, e.g. could drop 4 shots
- Develop alternatives, e.g. losing 2 shots is better
- Evaluate alternatives, big risk to try and win shot
- Select the best option, e.g. right now what is most confident

ii. Game planning

For bowlers the decision making process begins when you determine that a problem exists with the position at the head. The view I hold to is that the process starts earlier when a gap exists between what is, and what should be.

iii Strategies to fulfill season objectives

Given the results of you players, or in my case our squad members, the coach must make a decision in conjunction with players with regards to how to improve each bowlers event performance.

At this time the coach should have a list of criteria that ought to be met for the bowler to improve their performance. The question is to know what this really involves so as to determine those factors will lead to an improved future performance.

Now that is a level of committed coaching performance that should be expected from the elite bowlers.

Anything less might hinder the bowlers prospects to outdo their opponents in the future.

From my experience and reading of other good coaches from sport generally, it appears there are some common criteria that has to be met if a player (bowler) is to improve on performance, which include:

Better competition schedules

Improved physical conditioning to perform over a lengthy tournament

Better mental skill and preparation

Lachlan Tighe.....Talking tactically
Lawnbowls com.au/weeklycolumn

Improved mastery of the technical skill of delivery, both bowls and jacks
Enhanced skill of tactical strategy and planning
Finally, if not most importantly, an increase in the bowlers own level of commitment.

‘Teach the bowlers how to Decide’

During 2004, two acknowledged elite player / coaches, Paul Feltham from football and Ric Charlesworth from hockey, were quoted in the newspapers on their approach to coaching.

In roundabout ways both men implied that the way for coaches to go was to train the players above the shoulders.

I choose to say that in bowls we seem to have a lack of understanding or commitment to go down that track. Or perhaps I should suggest the elite bowlers have an unwillingness to move in that direction.

If I can recap, I previously said that if you asked an elite bowler (as I did in 1996 and again in 2000 and 2004) what is involved in shot / delivery selection, their response may well be.....what do you mean.... I just roll the bowl closer to jack than the other guy !

Charlesworth is of the view that technical knowledge and sports science together account for a relatively small percentage of the coach’s input and that the great gains are made by adding value to the players (bowlers) you are coaching, making them mentally resilient, flexible and capable of displaying leadership.

My last session in July 2004 with one of the ladies in our squad reinforced that comment to me as she is still learning the mentality mindset as it has to apply in training.

Her exposure to elite sport is bowls oriented and it lacks the breadth of sporting experience at the moment for her to be mentally strong.

Feltham talked about the great golf coach, Butch Harmon (Tiger’s coach) and a conversation they had where Harmon asked what was the difference to professional golfers.

In effect what stopped a Feltham (a single figure golfer) from winning a professional event. Harmon maintained, as does Feltham with his sport, the difference is the elite player (bowler) plays our best deliveries more often.

It is a relationship between skill and performance.

The most important thing he says for we coaches is you have got to teach players how to think. Once they have been performing their skills for a number of years learning the game, they have developed conditioned performance levels.

You can teach bowlers how to think and about the developing contest as it is in progress.

Feltham said he did not care if players and teams were cellar dwellers (bottom of the ladder) because he has an absolute belief there is no difference in skill between the top and bottom teams in elite level.

Must admit that was an approach I had for the Malaysians in 2002 and for the current ‘Elbows’ members since I formed the squad in 2004.

Lachlan Tighe.....Talking tactically
Lawnbowls.com.au/weeklycolumn

It's all above the shoulders that we develop our standards once we are in that league.

‘... Thinking hard or hardly thinking’

Over a few weekends in 2003 as coach, I have watched the three gals (Anna, Jessie and Victoria) perform to their best in the state under 25 titles with Jessie coming runner up, Victoria losing the semi to the champion (Claire) and Anna losing in the quarters. In 2004 all three have made the Australian squad.

All of us had a training session immediately after the final with three senior squad ladies joining us; the session focus was solely on discipline in decision making.

It is in the decision making department that I would pose that these gals **train** to think hard, not hardly thinking, for them to advance to the next step of international elite competition.

Thinking hard, not hardly thinking

Imagine me as your coach. You say to me you want to win, to be a better bowler. I put all these thoughts before you for consideration in our training sessions. Am I showing you new and better ways of preparation, or is it all a matter of been there done that !!!

being above the shoulders during the game (‘battle’)

Out there on the green no one can help you now. How well have we worked in training to have you prepared for these scenarios:

Within this mix of dot points below are approaches on attack, defence, keeping momentum, singles, team formats, etc. In all cases they are planned, prepared and performed at training as a prelude to ‘battle’.

Read the dot points and respond for yourself to each of the statements:

- tactics are the balance to defend/ attack, position / pressure, add to count / cover
- play 75% defence, 25% attack
- be patient: build heads and look for and anticipate opportunities
- take time if losing badly, recover mentally/ emotionally (Bryant)
- don't attack by driving with one bowl in the head
- don't attack immediately where opponent has a resting toucher
- Push bowls plug holes- push up our short bowls and plug holes to disallow opposition entry
- Subtle move of the mat one mat length forward/ back from the prior location may catch opposition and having them falling short or just going through if we are fully alert to our ploy
- draw for second shot when the opposition holds shot(s)
- minimise lapses by concentrating positively and only on the very next delivery
- Seeing is believing.....a bowl wide or short or long needs adjustment and your eyes tell you the appropriate detail....register and correct and retain the revised picture
- if a delivery is short, visualize and physically aim the next one to finish longer
- never underestimate your opponent, remind yourself you are in good company
- when your opponent has bowls beyond the head, cover the shots for insurance
- force your opponent to change hands

Lachlan Tighe.....Talking tactically
Lawnbowls com.au/weeklycolumn

- losing a sequence of single shots may not require change, if, you always had more shots in the head yet lost a single; the score will turn in your favour
- when holding shot with your one bowl to play, always add shot (bocce)
- when your opponent wastes a delivery, add another to the head or score to make them pay
- pressure the opposition and choose the delivery that gains another shot or forces the opponent into reduced options
- don't widen the head when holding
- play their shot before they get the opportunity (to convert)
- the first battle is to get the mat and determine/ dictate the (length) strategy
- change a losing game – thinking hard(ly)
- RISK is driving with only one bowl in the head
- calculate the risk prior to you attacking- use a margin for error when you attack
- where opponent has first delivery as a resting toucher, simply draw a close second shot
- or, widen the head if opponent holds resting toucher
- and have remedies to use to get back into the next deliveries and the remaining game; set objectives say for every 3 ends or every 10 shots to keep up the level of concentration
- if a poor starter in events, prepare physically and mentally prior to the game and use the ends roll up to be 'in the game before anyone else and set objectives say for the first 3 ends
- if too many bowls are short, narrow or wide, create a red alert system or mechanism and use your 'red alert' mechanism when it is two in a row to take action THEN to reduce the number of mistakes
- singles: walk to the head after the third bowl every end (good enough for David Bryant then good enough for us)
- when weight / length is poor, focus on shots one yard through and visualise this range
- when opposition draws closer, focus solely on having more draw shots in the head per end
- when opposition attacks your shot bowl every time, focus on having a minimum of 2 bowls in the head to keep up the pressure
- when mistakes cost you the game, evaluate the reason post match and practice the solutions
- if your jack delivery is inconsistent, this is a must practice skill with a set standard to establish
- if losing concentration, watch for talking excess, and remedies to use to get back into the next deliveries and the remaining game; set objectives say for every 5 ends or every 5 shots to keep up the level of concentration
- don't bowl short (repeatedly)
- deliver every jack precisely to the required winning length
- force your opponent to cope with differing lengths
- deprive the opposition the opportunity to deliver/ drive easy winners
- use a margin for error when you attack
- attack when you have an unassailable leading margin
- vary the tempo of the game
- drive to dominate the head and opponent
- If as third you call shots up and the opposition do not contradict this call, there is a possibility their bowlers have added tension because of the call staying in the 'system'
- Mat positioning is an important strategy to use to defeat an opponent
- dominate the head with plenty of bowls in the head
- when your opponent falls short, plug holes to limit his later attempt for entry into the head
- use a smooth delivery and play a safe shot when losing big numbers

Greed : Commonwealth Games gold medallist- an apparent absence of tactical nous

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Malaysia's Syed was losing 3-6 and down 3 shots at the incompleting head ; his opponent is the eventual gold medallist from South Africa and Jeremy chooses an unnecessary risky shot that alters the score to only a one shot. Whereupon Syed is now 3-7 instead of 3-9 which is slightly less pressure to contend with...poor tactics

Jeremy had a rush of blood, chose his option poorly and bashes the head around which fortunately still meant he kept a shot. Syed won this game and it could possibly have been the game to deprive Jeremy of a finals berth, and his subsequent gold medal. He probably does not even remember this game in 2002. I do. Because here was a lesson to learn and work to delete from an reoccurrence.

Coaching players to move to the elite level should include all of the comments above and if not I believe the coach has not given you every opportunity to be an elite level player. You take the lesson and retrain the situation on the training ground to develop the bowlers tactical skill.

Video analysis

In the three years since I experimented with video analysis in Malaysia, the programs and equipment has advanced noticeably.

In 2002 I was using the biomechanical analysis video systems from the Malaysian Institute of Sport, which was no more than a very sophisticated video camera.

In 2003 the Dartfish program was provided to me as a coach and was used minimally with the national, state bowls and Victorian Institute of Sport sessions.

From late 2004 Bowls Australia is providing their national coaches with the Dartfish computer assisted video equipment to enable players to be filmed and have the tape burnt onto a CD for their personal viewing wherever the player lives within Australia.

Coincidentally at the same time a club in Victoria, Richmond Union club, invited me to join their club with the inducement they would purchase the Swinger program (the alternate system to Dartfish) for me to use as a tool for my coaching.

Bowls coaching has moved to this level of modernisation which we all need to keep to as part of professional development.

It is no good players developing their skill further, if we coaches are also not moving forward in our own skill development.

If not, there is no way we can be of assistance to current elite players.

One other advantage of the combination of sports science and computerised analysis is the capacity to use both words and images to reinforce to the elite player the preferred or proficient technique to enable them to perform and win at elite level.

For instance with Bob Middleton and Natalie Clark from the VIS we described the technical delivery competency in this way

Biomechanics of the lawn bowl Delivery

Preparation Phase:

Begins as the bowler approaches the mat and finished when the bowling arm begins to swing backwards.

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1. Upon approach to mat the feet should be pointing in the direction of the line the bowler wants to bowl, this increases accuracy as the bowl will follow the line of the feet when released.
2. The bowlers centre of mass is directly over the balls of the feet with slightly more weight placed on the anchor foot. This allows the lead foot to be brought forward without disturbing the athletes balance, also allowing for greater accuracy as the foot will be more inclined to step forward not across the athletes body during the swing phase of the bowl.
3. Knees begin bending before the swing phase begins, this will increase the bowlers base of support and prepare the bowler for a more controlled and smooth delivery.
4. The bowling arm should have the shoulder, elbow and hand in a vertical line for increased accuracy during delivery.

Swing Phase:

Begins as the bowling arm initiates the swing backwards, ends as the bowling arm begins its descent through the pendulum action prior to delivery.

1. As the lead foot extends and the bowlers weight is shifted forward the knees should continue to bend as centre of mass continues to increase, this will allow the bowler to achieve a controlled and smooth bowl.
2. As the swing arm continues backwards to achieve momentum the arm should follow a direct path to minimise deviation to the left or the right. Deviation laterally will decrease the accuracy of the bowl and cause twisting of the upper body. This twisting of the upper body will then be followed through to the delivery phase, which will in turn create more inaccuracy of the delivery.
3. Shoulders should be kept square in order to minimise twisting of the body which would in turn decrease the accuracy and allow the bowl to move off from the path which the bowler wants it to go.
4. On a larger shot the pendulum size of the swing arm may vary, one way to increase the force applied to the bowl is to increase the pendulum size.

Delivery Phase

Begins as the bowling arm initiates the downwards pendulum motion and ends once the bowl is released from the hand.

1. The lead foot finishes its descent just before the bowl leaves the bowlers hand, with the bowlers weight still travelling forward with the bowl. The lead foot should also be placed directly forward from where it started, not crossing the body or extending out away from the body to allow the bowl to follow the line.
2. Shoulders should stay square during delivery phase to stop any twisting of the upper body, however if the shoulders are twisted from the swing phase they will most likely still be twisted during the delivery phase.
3. The bowl should be released approximately 3 inches in front of the foot, as the bowl should be released at the bottom of the pendulum to increase accuracy of the bowl. If the bowl is released before the bottom of the pendulum or as the pendulum begins its ascent the bowl will drop onto the green rather than being placed onto the green. The step length will vary with each bowler, however consistency of a bowlers step length will increase their consistency of their bowls.
4. At release point the bowlers shoulders and upper torso should be over the front foot, if its not then the bowl is not being released at the bottom of the pendulum, therefore accuracy has been jeopardised.

Lachlan Tighe.....Talking tactically
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Follow Through Phase

Begins once the bowl has been released from the hand, the end of the release phase will vary with each bowler however should last at least a few seconds after the bowl has been released to allow for the factors below to be followed through.

1. After release of the bowl the drive arm should continue to follow through in a forward motion to ensure that the drive arm is not being de-accelerated by the bowler just prior to release.
2. Bowler should stay down after the bowl has been released, this ensures that the full delivery process has been finished and the bowler is not rising too early.
3. The rear foot should be brought forward after release has been finished, to continue the follow through phase.

POSTSCRIPT 2006

With exactly 5 weeks to the Commonwealth Games 2006 I re read these notes and can honestly say that my preparation for the Malaysians for 2006, the current Victorian state side and my own squad, in principle, has not changed, solely the improved (we hope) applications gleaned from these past 4 years of experimentation.