

**Taken, with permission, from Mike Weston's Coaching article in Oxfordshire's SMBA newsletter. Sent in by Alan Spicer.**

This month I thought that I would concentrate of a few coaching points.

Point 1, One of your biggest assets in delivering a good bowl is the ability to envisage the path that you want the bowl to follow. It's important that before you deliver your bowl you should take time before you get on the mat to imagine the path that you want to bowl to take, with this clear in your mind step on the mat and deliver it, finishing with a good follow through with the arm pointing in the direction that you imagined. Now I could spend a lot of time on the mechanics of a perfect delivery but if you are happy with your delivery and it works for you, I'm not going to suggest that you change it. But I would spend more time with a new bowler trying to get it right at the start, the law of primacy is important and trying to unlearn something is harder than learning it correctly the first time.

It is interesting watching the delivery action of National level bowlers though (both outdoor and short mat), not many have an action that reflects what is in the coaching manual, but it obviously works for them. I think that younger bowlers using modern coaching methods will be more consistent and their style will reflect the coaching manual.

Point 2. So, point 1 is using your imagination to help you bowl the perfect bowl, point 2 is about using your feet. Start with your feet slightly apart, take a step forward and try to make sure that your feet are pointing in the direction that you want the bowl to take, if they are not, then you are using your arm to compensate which can lead to inconsistency. A good balanced stance with a consistent delivery action will improve your bowling. You really don't have to tie yourself in knots to achieve this!

Always stay on the mat to watch your delivery and learn from it for your next bowl.

Point 3 is practice. If you want to improve, have an objective each time you turn up to a practice session, don't just play a roll up, you won't learn anything new. Practice different scenarios, drawing to the jack in different positions on the mat, set up an end where using other bowls on the mat to deflect off would be advantageous, drawing to the ditch and forcing shots are examples of different scenarios to try.

Make it interesting and maybe a little competitive by having a scoring system to show improvement, maybe have a small reward for the winner like a bar of chocolate. Practice needs to be fun but focussed on improvement. You may need your lead to put the jack in the ditch, so practice this as well.

Point 4. Tactical play is a big part of any game and teams generally rely on the skip to make all the decisions. I'll spend a bit more time on this in the next newsletter but do suggest that you try to learn a little more about the tactics. When the skip asks you to place a bowl in a certain position, it's usually for a good reason, the skip will have taken into account things like: -

- a) Observing weaknesses and strengths of the opposition.
- b) Deciding on options to take advantage of their weaknesses.
- c) Working out what the opponents may do next?
- d) What shots are available to me?
- e) Can my bowler deliver what I want?
- f) We are going to be down this end; how can I minimise it?
- g) What could go wrong if the shot doesn't come off?
- h) Where are we vulnerable? i) Can we make use of a toucher?
- j) Taking into account the vagaries of the mat.

The skip may also need to make decisions such as: -

- a) Playing the same hand as the opposing lead to stop them dominating one hand.
- b) Changing the length of the jack to make use of your team's abilities or to capitalise on an opposing player's inability to draw.

Set up a few heads and discuss what the next action should be, this doesn't have to be bowled, I use a set of cards detailing options that may happen and build the head from the result. This really is a useful exercise and I would be happy to run this if your club would find it useful.

**NB I don't think Mike will travel to Herts to do this but maybe our enterprising coaches could consider this? Thanks Alan.**

I thought you'd like to know the book "Understanding Women" is now out in paperback.. Jill

