

Staying at the Top, Tips and Advice – Simon Taufel

1 INTRODUCTION

When I was first appointed to the ICC Emirates Elite Panel, one of the real challenges to be addressed was how to keep improving and keep justifying selection. I have just completed reading a book called 'Staying at the Top' written by Rick Charlesworth (well respected Australian Women's Hockey coach and perhaps one of the most successful coaches of Australian sport).

At the risk of only sharing the contents of the book with you, I found it extremely helpful in identifying ways to prevent complacency and to provide motivation to develop new plans to improve performance. The points listed below come directly from the book and as such no personal credit is taken from developing this paper. The idea behind the paper was to ask you, as an umpire, to think about the concepts and identify ways that you could improve all aspects of your game so that you could retain selection and push for greater honours.

If you continue to do what you have always done, then you will get what you've always got. (But don't be surprised if other people overtake you along the way!).

The 5 Principles of Being the Best

1. Quality
2. Teamwork
3. Learning and Training
4. Resilience
5. Depth and Flexibility

1. Quality

- Thoroughness ensures attention to detail, a pursuit of excellence and an obsession with getting things right.
- Every team should take the time to clarify and identify its core values.
- Without the challenge of non stop learning, team members stagnate and are often without direction.
- Through rewarding, reprimanding and redirecting appropriately and consistently, you establish the habit of quality performance.
- The important work occurs in preparation and training, and then in providing support and feedback.

The most important thing to remember here is that if you practice quality in everything you do then the outcome will take care on itself – a quality approach to training, match preparation, skill development and performance.

2. Teamwork

- One's personal aims need not be different from those of the team.
- Our values underpin the correct actions – never expect something for nothing, share the load, work hard and never give in.
- Only by sharing the load, sharing all the responsibility, and sharing the rewards can teams work best.
- Cooperation is fostered by a sense of shared goals and shared rewards.
- Good preparation and awareness of contingencies assist in the cooperative process.
- Showing trust lifts people's self esteem, increases their sense of belonging and requires them to perform.

The ideals on teamwork above centre on gaining strength and improvement as a group (e.g., through your coaching squads) and supporting the other members of the team (e.g. Playing Control Team).

3. Learning and Training

- Humility is a state of being objective about yourself and your performance and is entirely consistent with being optimistic and determined about the future. It provides a good platform for training and development.
- Training is the rehearsal for performance.
- We are what we continually do, excellence is not an act, it is a habit.
- The best athletes are keen to learn more about their sport, themselves, the sport's nuances, their team mates and opponents.
- The best training simulates the pressures and stresses of competition as well as providing the appropriate opportunity for skill acquisition that, initially, occurs best without the intensity of a competitive environment.
- Make training physically and mentally more difficult than the game.
- Keep lifting the bar.
- One learns most when one risks failing, when one risks going beyond what is comfortable – leads to rapid growth and learning.
- The challenge to improve simulates investigation, analysis, education and innovation.

The message here on self development and training principles is a good one. It focuses on the importance of training in the continuous improvement cycle. What separates the top

performers from everyone else is how training and learning is approached, its value, and the measurable outcomes that are produced. I think the first quote relating to humility is a good one as it highlights having continued respect for the game and avoiding complacency by the NEED to keep improving.

4. Resilience

- Any task that is challenging and worth completing will not be finished without some disappointments.
- Mistakes can make us stronger and more determined or they can leave us disillusioned and defeated.
- The ability to identify the problems and provide solutions gives us a way forward, a reason to continue and hope for better.
- Resilience is the ability to handle setbacks – to see your way through them, to persist in the face of doubt and uncertainty.
- The outcome looks after itself once you get the processes right.

In cricket umpiring we often face setbacks and feel that we could have performed better. In order to go forward and look for ways to improve we need to look at the personal quality of resilience. If we realize that in order to “get to the top” there will be some disappointments and setbacks then the way we deal with “failure” might be different. That is, if we use mistakes and setbacks in a constructive and positive way, we can become stronger and more resilient. So, the focus needs to be on getting the processes right and not on the failure itself – put in the hard work and give yourself every opportunity of succeeding.

5. Building Depth and Flexibility

- Expect change and anticipate it.
- The best preparation for sudden change is to practice adapting to change.
- Being inclusive to your approach by providing real opportunities builds depth in your team / organization.

This chapter and topic was more directed at coaches and managers of teams rather than individuals in terms of planning for change and succession. However, what we can learn from some of the key concepts is better preparation for unusual events or possibilities. For example, being able to adapt and be flexible in different conditions in different locations at different grounds. Expecting and preparing for a substitute runner for an injured striker, expecting rain and preparing for recalculations are other examples of being flexible and anticipating change.

Summary

- Those who have the capacity to stay at the top are driven not by reaching one particular goal but by satisfaction and pleasure that comes from doing things well.
- The secret of success in sport is not to be distracted by the expectations and ambitions of others and be able to stay on track.
- Two of the keys to staying at the top are an ability to keep an eye on what it is that made us good in the first place, and the need for coaches and managers to keep coaching and take nothing for granted.
- The challenge of staying at the top is to continue with the core principles and values and to continue to keep being coached once you reach the top.
- It's no body else's turn to be the best unless you let your standards slip, lose focus on the values that made you great and stop learning and growing as an athlete.
- Complacency is:
 - “acceptance” that it's someone else's turn to succeed.
 - an “expectation” that it will be okay on the day.

- You must prepare diligently for the contests ahead and have strategies for handling every possibility.
- Doubts can be positive, by making us acutely aware of the need to work hard and follow our first 5 principles, but they can act negatively by eroding our confidence and dragging us into lethargy and inactivity.
- The optimal state of doubt is one in which the task or opposition is respected, but not feared. An appropriate respect can stimulate us to be vigilant, sharp and prepare fully.
- Those who practice excellence prepare thoroughly, learn from every source, work cooperatively and are resilient and flexible, will be able to manage doubt and fear.

Most, if not all, of these ideals contained in the summary are self explanatory. There is no doubt that what we do as cricket umpires is incredibly challenging when there is an automatic expectation that every time we walk out on the field, that there will be a faultless performance with no errors. The reality is that we do make mistakes, however, the concept of “staying at the top” demands that we treat preparation and making mistakes differently from the rest.

For quality outcomes in terms of performance, there needs to be quality inputs and processes. If you practice quality in everything that you do, then the quality outcomes will take care of themselves.

You will not get to the top and stay at the top on your own. Only by being a cooperative member of your team with your fellow umpires, coaches and managers will help you achieve. This means that support for each other in the team and upholding the values of the group and profession of cricket umpiring is paramount.

There is no way that you can stay at the top without ongoing training and learning. You need to develop good habits and routines that centre around the skills that got you to where you are and create new ones that will improve them. Avoiding complacency and practicing humility is another key that will prevent you from stagnating and having the expectations of the game or others passing you by.

These are all good values and principles that can help you PLAN to stay at the top. So, where to from here? If you are one of those people who wants to stay at the top with a cricket umpiring contract with your National Board, or the ICC, then you need to go back to Rick’s 5 principles and use them to IMPROVE your performance. My recommendation is that you take at least one element from each of the 5 principles and do something extra in terms of preparation, training or learning above what you did last year.

Feedback – Training Module

Introduction

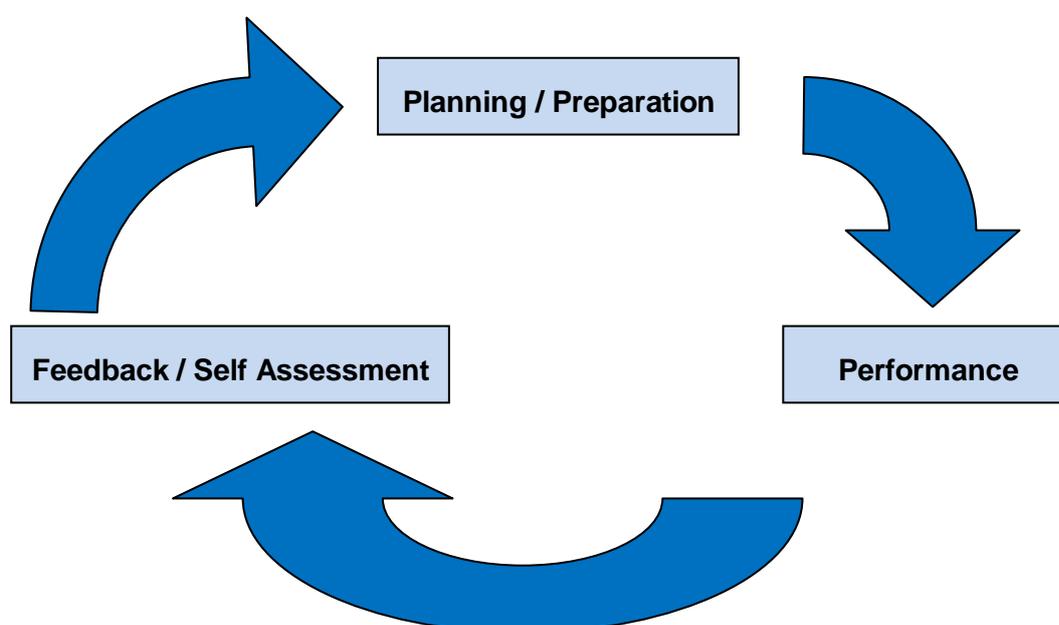
Feedback is an important ingredient in the continuous improvement cycle, however many cricket umpires, it would seem, do not make the most of it. This training paper deals with the various sources of feedback, the importance of the timing, how to digest the information and use it in a constructive way to improve your umpiring.

It is assumed that all cricket umpires want to get feedback on their performance and ability. Having said this, you need to be prepared to accept the negative feedback with the positive – **don't fall into the trap of focussing on the messenger rather than the message** as you may miss an opportunity to improve. I would encourage you to really think about the content of this paper as it may be the key that unlocks the door to your future success as a professional cricket umpire with ICC.

1. Role of Feedback

Feedback is often sought by umpires to better understand what others perceive about their performance or standing in the “pecking order”. Seeking feedback is not about wanting to feel good about yourself – you should only seek feedback if you have clear goals and objectives to be achieved. Why? Because the role of feedback should be to provide you with information related to areas of specific performance that you are working on.

Your questions relating to getting feedback should be as direct as the answers that you seek – that is, if you desire specific feedback about an area of you game, then ask a specific question, do not generalise. Feedback in its various forms then should be used to formulate plans to overcome weaknesses and consolidate strengths in your game or preparation. Be wary of ignoring all feedback, chose your source of feedback carefully and use the information in a constructive and objective way within your continuous improvement cycle.



2. Sources of Feedback

There are a variety of sources for obtaining feedback, however some are more credible than others. The following credible sources of feedback should provide you with constructive information tailored to your specific needs, these include: -

- Your State/Zone/ National Board Umpiring Coach
- Your Umpiring Manager
- On-Field Partner
- 3rd Umpire
- Chosen Mentor
- Trusted Colleagues
- Home Board Umpiring Selector/s

Other sources of feedback that should be used with extreme caution as their motives for providing information can either be biased or self-centred. These sources include: -

- Media (Newspapers, television, radio, etc)
- Players
- Captains
- Coaches
- Spectators

I would recommend only using sources of feedback that you trust for their independence and quality of information, otherwise it is quite possible that you will get mixed messages. Credible sources of feedback should also have your best interests and the interests of cricket umpiring at heart – so choose very, very carefully!

3. Timing of Feedback

Depending upon your goals / objectives and needs, the timing of obtaining constructive feedback can be critical. In order to achieve short term goals, I would recommend getting feedback as soon as possible after performances – ideally a 48 to 72 hours after the match (and preferably before your next match). You should know through your self-assessment process (and post match meetings) how you have performed, but it can be helpful to test your opinions through obtaining feedback from credible sources. Short term goals require more timely feedback so that there are faster outcomes and you can then move on to planning other objectives.

For longer-term goals / objectives, the timing of feedback is not as important as the quality of the information obtained. For example, a season goal such as fitness improvement should have feedback sought at regular intervals such as every two months. It is probably better to plan the seeking of this feedback in order to ensure it is obtained and progress is tracked.

4. What Feedback to Keep or Throw Away

After having identified what sources you want to use to obtain feedback, the other part of the equation that you need to get right is what feedback you accept and work with and what information you choose to throw away. It is fair to say that not all the feedback that you get will be

accurate and beneficial to you – if you have chosen your sources well, then the majority of the feedback will be helpful (if you decide to act on it!).

So, how do you know what to keep and what to throw away? Here are a couple of tips: -

1. **Look at the source** – Is it a trusted, credible source? (I.e. Do they know you, your skills and anything about umpiring?)
2. **What is the message?** – Does the feedback make sense? Look at the message and its content objectively. Does the message really apply to you or your game?
3. **Was the message unsolicited?** – What was the motivation of the source giving you the feedback? Were they really trying to help you or just pretending to know something about umpiring or your game?

If you can answer the questions above in a positive manner, then chances are that the feedback is worth considering and developing a plan to act upon it.

4. How to Use Feedback

Having decided that the feedback is credible, sensible and worthwhile, we then need to use it in a constructive way that will ultimately help our umpiring. I would recommend writing the feedback down and then working on a plan to address the issue. For example, your coach tells you that “you looked really tense and nervous on the field and did not look in control.” After analysing the comment, you could do the following: -

1. Can I get more information to help me better understand the comment or problem? (E.g., video footage, speak to fellow umpire?)
2. What contributed to you feeling this way?
3. How could I remove or overcome these elements? Then write down a plan of action to be carried out.
4. Test your thoughts or plan with your coach (the feedback provider) for their opinion.
5. Make it a short term goal for your next match and have that same source provide you with feedback subsequent.

Remember, not all feedback is good – in fact, as we know most feedback about cricket umpiring is negative. However, we need to recognise that it is only the negative feedback that can provide the real impetus and motivation to keep improving and reach for greater heights. So, do not dismiss negative feedback immediately, think about the issues covered in this paper and decide if you can use the information in a constructive and positive way – it's entirely up to **you!**