

Concentration

Introduction

Peak performance is all about your ability to focus your concentration on the important things within sport.

If you have put in the hard work, the training, worked on your skills and done the homework, then often success on the day depends upon how well you can focus your concentration. Focusing your concentration is a skill that you can work on and control.

Consistent performance in sport is all about being in control of yourself. You need to acknowledge that there will be things that happen on the day outside of your control, people around you, the environment / venue – they can all potentially upset your performance, however, you can use these as triggers to increase your concentration.

If something happens that is unexpected, you need to be able to react to it in a positive way to get the best out of that situation, which is a key skill of focusing – not to have your concentration and focus distracted.

Improving Your Focus

One of the most important aspects of being able to improve focusing your concentration is to practice by simulating game situations. What are the different types and times of concentration required in cricket umpiring? Things like:

- The start of the match or a session
- When an error or a mistake is made
- When you are distracted by something outside the game or ground
- Starting a new over from your end
- After a wicket has fallen
- After a break in play – interruption, ball change, batsman injured

Match Simulation Exercises

Yes, visualisation is an important component here, but more work can be done when you attend practice sessions in the nets for example, so pretend that events in front of you are happening in a match. If that did happen in a match, *what would I do?*

Put yourself under some pressure at training to be able to make training as close as possible to match conditions, that way you'll find that your performance in a match will come automatically, because a match to you is nothing different from what you have done at practice.

- How can you work with your coach to make the events at practice more like a match experience?
- How can we make more decision making exercises more match simulated?

Perhaps get the bowlers to appeal like it's the last hour of the match with three wickets to get. Perhaps create a scenario where the batting side require 30 runs in the last 20 mins and the fielding side require two wickets – put your decisions and concentration under pressure and practice focusing your concentration. The key here is to answer appeals and make decisions as you would in a game – the same goes for how you talk to players and respond to appeals.

How can you work with your coach to put your knowledge of playing conditions and Laws to the test under match simulated conditions?

Most of us attend practice sessions at major cricket grounds – perhaps you could create a match situation from a domestic one day game where there was a rain interruption and you left the field with your partner and entered the room and had to recalculate the match parameters under a possible start in 30 minutes?

What about practicing the judgement and procedure of offering the batsmen the light as your training session comes to a close around sunset? Get a light meter and have the coach play the role of the fielding captain who doesn't want to come off?

Practice working with your partner and drawing out your knowledge of Laws and playing conditions under simulated pressure so that doing it in a real game comes automatically.

In doing these exercises, don't be afraid to make mistakes. In fact, it is probably a good thing that you do make plenty of mistakes at practice – this is precisely the place to make them. What you will find is that you learn more from making mistakes and that once that bad emotion of making a mistake is realised, you'll never forget what the right answer or course of action was.

As cricket umpires, we can all remember our major mistakes in terms of decisions, Laws or playing conditions.

- Why do we remember these events so vividly and why do we know that we'll get it right next time that same situation happens?
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Because emotion is the key to memory – good and bad emotions. So, by putting ourselves under pressure at training and making a mistake at training is a good thing as we'll remember our errors and ensures that we get the right answer when it is really important...in a game.

Routines

Another way to improve focusing is through routines – pre match routines and routines during the match.

One of the keys to being able to perform and focus your concentration under pressure is to know exactly what you are going to do and exactly how you are going to handle certain events. So, think about what your pre match routines are and whether they are putting you in the right frame of mind to be able to focus your concentration – use your coach to test your theories. Remember that routines give you a structure or framework with which to work when you are under pressure which is important.

Preparation

Are your concentration efforts and performances in matches consistent? Is the level of your concentration consistent for all types and levels of cricket that you umpire – 1st grade to 1st class?

If not, then think about your preparation for these games. Are your preparation routines consistent? If your preparation routine is not consistent, then chances are, your concentration and performances are not.

Part of the preparation for cricket umpiring needs to include planning for “what ifs” or having “plan B's”:

- What happens if I make a mistake early in the game – what am I going to do to get my focus and concentration back?
- What if it rains – do I know how to confidently recalculate the match parameters?
- What if I get stuck in traffic – is there enough time to still get to the ground and prepare?
- What if that captain or player gives me a hard time – how will I react and what will I do?

All these things allow you to have a chance at being mentally “right” before the game.

Conclusion

The key to being able to properly focus your concentration is to be able to control your own reactions to your environment (the things around you). It's got a lot to do with the plans that you have for controlling the environment, how you are going to react to situations that occur, how you segment up your performance, what goals that you set and it's got a lot to do with what your concentration is like at training.

Practice does not make perfect. Practice makes permanent. Perfect practice makes perfect.

If you really want to change, you have to practice perfectly – that is, with attention and intention. Attention is keeping your mind on what you are doing while you are doing it, and intention is having a definite purpose that will give meaning to all your effort.

Acknowledgement – This information for cricket umpires was put together with material sourced from the South Australian Institute of Sport.