

## Distraction Control

### Introduction

Once you have clearly identified your goals and objectives, put a plan in place to get you there, the main danger is getting distracted. The one mental skill that distinguishes top performers who remain at the top of their sport would be their ability to adapt and refocus in the face of distractions. If you want to umpire consistently near your best, you must develop the critical skill of distraction control through regular practice.

### What distractions can affect performance?

Distractions for cricket umpires can come from a variety of sources. Things like the expectations of others, past experiences with teams or players, your own expectations or anxiety, family members, relationships, colleagues, media, administrators, financial concerns, fatigue, illness, changes to preparation routines and more importantly, your own thinking before, during and after the game.

The important message here is that YOU decide whether you let these things distract, upset you, lower your self confidence, put you in a negative frame of mind, take you out of your best focus, or interfere with your concentration. You can choose to be distracted or not to be distracted, dwell on it or let it go. This is one of the most vital components to mental toughness that all cricket umpires need to understand and master in order to be successful and have a long representative career.

We have all worked hard and umpired many games to build skills and benefit from experience and the teachings of others. Distractions don't cause us to lose those skills, what happens is you lose focus which means you lose the ability to execute those skills properly.

Parts of your umpiring may not go as smoothly as you wish on a certain day and yes, it is disappointing and frustrating – that is a normal emotional response – but you don't have to put yourself down, give up or question your own abilities. You can simply remind yourself (having developed good mental tools) to focus in a way that will allow you to umpire your best given the situation.

### How to not let distractions affect you and your game

You can always find a way around, over or through most obstacles and distractions by committing yourself to remaining positive – turning negatives into positives, by drawing out lessons and regaining your focus on what's important as quickly as possible. Stop here! This all sounds great but how can I do this? How can I practice this type of mental skill? The truth is, it is hard and as a result not many people master the skill – as a result we have a select number of champions in sport, only a select number of 1<sup>st</sup> class umpires and even fewer Test cricket umpires.

We all have good umpiring skills to be contracted with the ICC and our Home Boards but one of the main elements that separates umpires is the ability to focus at the right time by not getting distracted – distracted on the field in making a decision or distracted from your goals and training (stepping stones). It is hard for me to tell you how to make better LBW decisions as it is a judgement call on the day – sure there are factors to consider that lead to increased accuracy and consistency, but the best way I can help you improve your decisions is to give you the mental strength to avoid your focus being distracted at critical times.

Here are some tips to help you stay on track and maintain your focus, or regain your focus on what's important....

- **Commit yourself to remaining positive**
- **Focus on doing what will help you stay positive and in control of your thoughts.** A strong positive focus protects from distractions.
- **Get yourself into a positive frame of mind before a game.** Recall your previous good performances, good decisions, and positive comments you have received and the fact that the selectors believe you are good enough to be umpiring this game.
- **Look for advantages in every situation** – learn something from every experience. This will make you a better umpire if you take something out of the experience – it will make you stronger and confident.
- **Be rational and practical about the distraction** – you can choose not to be emotional about it and get caught up in it – you can let these thoughts go.
- **Expect distractions and negative thoughts** – that is a natural occurrence. Prepare yourself to face potential distractions like crowd noise, getting a decision wrong, an upset player, etc by not reacting to them and letting them bounce off you. You can deal with these issues later when your focus can be relaxed.
- **Know that you can enjoy the game and perform well regardless of the circumstances.** Sometimes we have to consciously remind ourselves to enjoy the game and have a laugh in the face of anxiety and worry.
- **Turn bad moods into good moods.** Make a real effort to be positive and happy. Remind yourself repeatedly that you have the ability to control and change your perspective.
- **Do what you can do and learn from it** – then move on and focus on the things within your control. No point focussing on what other people think.
- After a good day or not so good day, **be proud of your efforts and what you have done well.** Draw out the positive lessons and then start the new day fresh – no baggage, no distractions!

## Conclusion

Focussing through distractions is probably the most important skill of all for consistently performing at your potential. It is easier said than done, but like most good skills, it requires dedication and practice and you will master it. If something is important enough to do, then it is worth giving it your full attention and focus – not to be distracted from it – it's your choice.