

## **WHAT MAKES A GOOD PENNANT TEAM?**

When players reach the top level of their sport, the difference in their ability and skill levels is so minimal that results may hinge on physical fitness but more probably on mental factors.

Winning or losing then becomes the result of who has developed both a more positive attitude and better thought control of temperament, both of which are possible to learn.

In a team game, these factors become so much more complex. Simply put, it means 'compatibility' which means the team that understands, accepts and works to create team unity will be more successful than those who just hope it will happen, or worse, deny its importance.

Particularly important to be a successful team is to have players with a team-oriented attitude. They must understand that the team's best interests comes first before any thought of individual accomplishment and selfish gratification.

A team-oriented player must have the knowledge and awareness to act his role even if his deep-down conviction for the task is not 100%. He must learn that the ability to follow instructions and to perform his part of the team plan is critical to the team structure and performance.

A sense of discipline is also important. Discipline is the willingness to make personal sacrifices for a cause because we accept the rightness of that cause. Everyone needs discipline to remind us that we act not only for ourselves but for others who are affected by our actions as well.

On-green performances are there for all to see but to really assess a player's contribution, his attitude plays just as important a role as his performance and both have to be taken into account. As Peter Bethune, a sports psychologist, once wrote, "The best player in a team is not necessarily the best player. He's the one who best understands his role in the team".

All players must understand what is required of each other so that they are supportive of, and sympathetic to each other. As soon as criticism (even unspoken) and/or disagreement arise, those negative attitudes will have an adverse effect on a player's own performance. Worse still, coveting a team mate's position and hence generally being critical of his performance can have the greatest negative effect on one's own or even all the team's performance. What is required is having a belief in one's self and the team and the feeling of confidence that you won't be 'stabbed in the back'.

The greatest burden falls on the skip to create this atmosphere in the team but the other team members also the responsibility by being wholeheartedly co-operative and supportive.

### **In a game of bowls, what does this mean?**

Leads and seconds must accept the fact that their job is build a sound basis for their team, hopefully each end. They are the 'foot soldiers' who just slog away putting bowls in the head where they can be of advantage to their team. If they have done their job well, then they have paved the way for the three and skip to play 'big' bowls that produce good results for the team.

.....2.

2.

Threes and skips should be chosen for their flair – the ability to see, and skill to play, the occasional brilliant bowl. A skip may only get the chance to play five or six ‘big’ bowls during a pennant Game. They are more likely to play those telling shots if they feel comfortable with, and supported by their team. They must not feel that a failed shot is fatal nor that they must restrict themselves to a cautious approach for fear of criticism or negative body language from the team.

An ideal team consists of two solid, dependable players up front and two in close understanding and harmony who can play with flair, individuality and brilliance at appropriate times. This makes the difference between a good team and a great team. However, if the front end fails on an end, then it's back to plan A for the back end, i.e. bowls in the head to cut down.

Remember, in a team's performance, its co-operative action can and should result in a greater effect than the sum of the ability of its individual members. That's why a team of good mates can often do better than a team of champions.

---

**Here are some views on this topic from Peter Bellis, a former world singles champion:**

1. It's vital for all members of a fours team to be compatible, each member playing in their position and most importantly having respect for their teammates' ability while in return deserving theirs.
2. If you accept that attitude is the most important factor in performance, it follows that a team with four mutually enthusiastic players thinking positively, happy in their positions and respecting each other, has a huge advantage over a less compatible team.
3. Most teams are often made up of bowlers out of their natural positions (**what's yours?**), often harbouring petty jealousies and critical of the way other members play. Such teams can still perform well when the game's going their way, but put them under pressure and their cohesion, vital in any game will turn out to be fragile.
4. Teams that enjoy some degree of fellowship and is of a single mind about team goals will generally be supportive and encourage each other and not be critical when one is having a day off. The message is then, "Don't worry. We'll support you till you pick up your game".
5. Teams like this are good to watch as they are to play in and are a success before they deliver a single bowl because at least they're getting enjoyment out of the game. It's no accident that success and a team's compatibility go hand in hand. By contrast, there are endless examples of disappointing results from stacked teams in which everyone in the team thinks he should be skip. Such teams can look good on paper but what can follow, apart from overly high expectations of success, is on-green rifts between players, especially between the front-end ones and the skip.
6. Respect goes out the window and the rink is reduced to three individuals who each thinks they could do a better skipping job than the skip, plus a skip who can't get the players to realize their individual potential. Inevitably, the cracks appear when cohesion is needed – when the pressure goes on.

Doug Cole/Jun 18.