



Increasing Self-awareness in Cricket – Understanding the Importance of Self-Awareness for the Provision of Psychological Skills Training

by Amanda Owens

MSc BASES Accredited Exercise & Sport Psychologist and BOA Advisory Group member:
Director of Total Performance.

*If you know what you are doing you can do what you want”
(Moshe Feldenkrais -An Israeli Sport Scientist)*

In order to be an effective sport psychologist and indeed coach is to enable and increase self-awareness in the cricketer and to understand yourself. This is the key and basis for the effective application of psychological skills training. This is so the cricketer understands the 'how's' and 'what's' of their performance and understands what makes him/her behave the way they do in certain circumstances and pressure situations. This understanding acts to empower the cricketer to understand their belief systems and attitudes so that psychological skills can be taught and applied to the cricketer. The experience of learning new thought patterns and behaviours can then be enhanced and improved.

How can you improve self-awareness in cricket as a coach and as a player?

By asking key questions that have a Humanistic and Gestalt basis, such as 'what' and 'how' questions for example can improve self-awareness e.g.

- 1) What key qualities do you have as a cricketer?
- 2) What qualities do you bring to the team?
- 3) What are your beliefs as a cricketer?
- 4) What does success mean to you?
- 5) What does being the best you can be mean to you?
- 6) How do you perform at your best? What do you do?
- 7) How do you feel when you perform at your best?

Being able to understand and know the player or yourself (such as your beliefs and attitudes) will improve your level of self-awareness, which affects everyday life and indeed sports performance.

The key for changing behaviour is to understand yourself. If a player can understand 'how' and 'where they are as regards' to their underlying motivations and beliefs as to how they perform and what makes them perform or underperform then change can be implemented and can occur. Ravizza (2001) states that 'developing awareness is a critical element of peak performance because it provides athletes with the experiential knowledge to gain control of the performance. Awareness is the first step in raising self-control in sports



Alec Stewart personified the 'professional cricketer'

participation. (p186). Furthermore, Ravizza (2001) states that 'as athletes develop awareness skills they will recognise earlier when they are not focused or aroused appropriately.' (p186).

Increasing and understanding self-awareness albeit mind and body is the 'first step to gaining control of any pressure situation' (Ravizza, 2001 p.179). In order for the cricketer to reach peak performance they need to understand what he/she needs to do to focus more fully or to relax and control his/her emotions from a poor delivery or excessive worry from dropping a catch. This can be achieved via effective communication between your mind and body and understanding how the body functions under pressure and stress situations. Syer and Connolly (1998) suggest that to communicate properly with your body you need to understand what your body is saying to you. Furthermore, Syer & Connolly (1998) state that to be able to educate your body you must know how it functions and learn its language and that educating your physical self involves four key processes. These are learning, training, maintenance and change. From these key processes cricketers can learn breathing exercises to increase awareness as well as kinaesthetic body inventory exercises (Signals and information which allows recognition and recollection of your own movement) and the use of imagery and visualisation to enhance performance.

One of the key areas whereby self-awareness is required is within preparation. For cricketers it is vital that they understand what they need from themselves and from each other within the team, as well as from the coaching staff. Syer & Connolly (1998) state that you need to be responsible for your own performance and have a clear sense of being prepared (refer and see preparation in cricket article). They identify factors, which will be supportive to performance once discovered via discussion with the sport psychologist or writing down in a personal performance journal. By going through this process the cricketer turns his/her attention outwards to the environment, then inwards to the body, thoughts, and feelings and then outwards again to their team

mates, then finally the cricketer's personal goal and tactics. The cricketer needs to be aware of 'How' he or she gets into their best performance state. What they do specifically and to be able to understand what works for them and what does not work for them.

This personal process gives you the best opportunity of performing at your best and understanding what 'you need to do' to perform at your best. In addition, it is vital the cricketer understands what they want to achieve and want from them selves to improve the chances of them performing at their peak.

How can you improve self-awareness?

The following are suggestions to improve self-awareness and improve performance. Keep a Sports Journal and include the following:

- ▶ Concentration (What do I need to focus on? was my concentration as effective as it could have been?)
- ▶ Confidence (how did I feel... was I feeling confident when I played my best shots today and what did I do and how did I do it?) at which point today was I at my most confident? What did I do?
- ▶ How was my arousal regulation today? Was I relaxed or too tense to perform at my best today? What did I do to regulate my arousal levels today? (Be specific)
- ▶ How did I prepare today? Was I thorough? How did it feel? Did I follow my preparation plan?
- ▶ How relaxed was I? Did I do my breathing (5 breath technique) and when?
- ▶ Did I do my imagery/visualisation? How did it feel? Was I happy with the technique? How effective was the technique today?
- ▶ How did I cope with the anxiety or pressure today? What did I do? What does pressure mean to me? And what did I do to cope the anxiety and worry of today's game. Could I have been more effective?
- ▶ Did I enjoy today and what could I do MORE OF to enjoy and look forward to the game? What does enjoyment look like to me (visual image) and how does it feel exactly?

Finally, according to Yontef (1979b: 29) 'Awareness is a form of experiencing. It is the process of being in a vigilant contact with the most important event in the individual/environment field, with full sensorimotor, emotional, cognitive, and energetic support.' Furthermore, Clarkson (1999) adds that it is a meaning-making function which creates fresh Gestalten-new insight into the obvious unity of disparate pieces of self-knowledge or consciousness as if for the first time, of the fruitily perfumed golden spray of breaking a piece of orange skin' (p37).

Thus, to achieve overall better performance and indeed to 'get into' your best performance or ideal state- it is recommended to find meaning in your performances recognised from your own personal experiences. Understanding these experiences and personal meanings can then heighten your self-awareness, which can then be the platform for greater understanding of performance situations. Psychological skills can then be coached and the cricketer will find the individualised and specific psychological skills training toolkit more effective and beneficial.

References:

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TOTAL PERFORMANCE Sport Psychology Consultancy

Amanda Owens MSc is a BASES Accredited Sport Psychologist and BOA Registered

Amanda is the Director of Total Performance and can be contacted for individual and/or team sport psychology coaching/consultations on either (m) 077368 53375 or (office) 0207 733 9833.

Graham Gooch hits out against Australia – he is now Coach of Essex CCC

