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PRESENTS THE COACHING SERIES...

“A PANE IN THE GLASS”

THE PERFORMANCE FORMULA

by Bill Tschirhart

The formula about which I'm going to deal was the brainchild of one James Waite, Canada's National Men's Team Leader since the inception of the CCA's National Team Leadership Programme many years ago so to you Jim, thank you!

The formula is not sacrosanct in any way and has, over the years, undergone some additions and clarifications and I dare say will continue to do so but as I write this in the fall of 2008, this is its current state.

$$P = SL + E + C - D + / - TD + / - PF \& N + / - L + A$$

Unless you've attended a high performance camp presented by one of the national coaches, perhaps even Jim himself, you will not likely be able to solve the formula but before you read on, give it a try! You'll notice that some components add to performance, some take from it and others have the ability to do either.

P of course is for *performance* (the ability to do what you know you can do when you have to do it)! If you've followed the themes of this coaching series, hopefully one that is crystal clear is the premise that *athletics is not about winning and losing, it's about the quality of performance*. That's why the formula's name does not contain either of those words (“win/lose”) or their derivatives. In fact, with the teams I have the pleasure of working, I make those words “off limits” because you can't control them and in some cases, you may not even have much influence over them but you can and should be able to influence performance and in some cases, you can exert complete control. That's where your focus should be. When it slips to winning and losing, you run the risk of “choking” which is what that word really means even though we hear it misused so frequently.

Although the elements of the formula are generally not in order of importance, the first one in my mind is critical as it's the cornerstone. SL is *skill level*. You need a level of expertise commensurate with the level of competition, full stop! But, what a great sport we have when your recreational team CAN play a game against the reigning world champion. Every shot is there for the making. Your opponent really has no bearing on the success of the shot you are about to attempt. They can up the ante by forcing you to make

shots with a higher degree of difficulty than those you might normally attempt but nonetheless, there's absolutely nothing preventing you and your teammates from making the shot. There are some other comments I'd like to make re. your skills, some of which I've made before but I feel bear repeating.

- *You can never leave your skills at home.*
- *Don't try to achieve a perfect curling delivery. No one would recognize it. You've set yourself up for failure. The time spent searching for it will be at the expense of other areas of preparation.*
- *It's much better to practise often for short periods of time rather than sporadically for long periods of time.*
- *Don't forget to practise team skills as well as individual skills.*
- *Make sure you are aware and practise all the strategies necessary to support and protect your skills.*

The E represents one of the greatest challenges for coaches and teams that reside in more remote areas, **experience**. There's no substitute for it. It's necessary for long term success. It's why the average age at our adult national championships, as with the PGA and LPGA is in the 30's. From a coaching perspective, you can promote it, encourage it, facilitate for it, prepare for it but you can't teach it. Darn (mild expletive but harsher ones heard often)!!!! *The best experience is the experience you have together with your teammates.* That's one of the reasons why I encourage teams to think twice before changing players. You lose that experience you gained together! Don't get me started!!!

- *Experience doesn't eliminate or even reduce errors but does negate their adverse affects and in some cases can render them harmless.*
- *It's where confidence lives (...been there, done that, know what's around the corner and I'm ready for it).*
- *When you lose the game, don't lose the lesson!*

The C in our formula is **confidence**. No athlete performs well without it. But, a question for you and one I've asked before in this series. *Are you confident because you're performing/playing well or are you performing/playing well because you're confident?* It sounds like the old chicken and egg dilemma doesn't it. Perhaps it's somewhere in between for you. It can be the calming influence of a teammate or coach. It can be experience as stated above. It can be the comfort of familiar surroundings and your ability to conjure them up when needed. It can be the knowledge/feeling that you've prepared as thoroughly as you are able. It can be... almost anything just *know what it is and where to get it when you require it!!!*

Thus far in the formula, the elements have been building toward a good performance. Now we come to the first negative, **distractions**. They will have a negative effect; it's only the degree that's in question. But, know this. *Most of the distractions that negatively impact the performance of the team come from within the team itself.* Yikes, what's with that? We inadvertently distract one another because as a team we tend not to take the time and effort to establish a "communications protocol". You need to know who

says what to whom, how they say it, why they say it, when they say and where they say it. I've covered that ground previously, ad nauseam!

Clearly there are other distractions of a more concrete nature; ice, stones, accommodations, travel, event format, officials, opponents etc. Wise is the coach that forestalls at least some of these more tangible distractions through rehearsal (i.e. making a trip to the venue if feasible, using interval timing to simulate the anticipated speed of the ice etc.). I recall one coach of a junior men's team that had qualified for national competition who asked the skips of the men's league in which the team played at its local club to gather around the sheet where his juniors were playing each time the skip was to deliver a critical shot. The reason for this was obvious and the rest of the teams in the league that night co-operated.

An activity you can do with your team to place the potential distractions in some sort of priority sequence, is to take an 8 ½ x 11 blank sheet of paper and draw a very large circle. Inside the circle ask the team to place all the "things" (i.e. distractions) over which the team has complete or reasonable control or influence. Outside the circle, do the opposite. Place the distractions over which the team has little or no control or influence. This exercise will greatly reduce the stress and distraction level of the team as the team will no longer focus on anything outside the circle which is pointless and draining. It can therefore deal effectively with those things that really matter!

Distractions; fail to minimize them and your performance will suffer regardless of the strength of the collective skill set!

The next element in the formula can be either positive or negative and it should be no surprise to regular readers of "A Pane in the Glass" that TD refers to *team dynamics*. Every team has dynamics and I won't go into to all the nuances at this time but I'll make some points about it here.

- *Everyone contributes 25% of the energy to the team & does so 100% of the time.*
- *Every shot is a team shot.*
- *No one player is charged with the responsibility to lead the team all the time.*
- *Take the time to learn how to play together.*
- *Many times the quality of your performance equals the strength of the bond among the members of the team.*
- *Generally (there's trouble for yours truly) the dynamics of a female team differ significantly from those of a male team.*

PF & N refers to *physical fitness & nutrition* and once again, it can promote or detract from performance. Curling has changed dramatically in the last number of years and more so in these two areas than in any other. Just "look" at our best athletes. They're buff my friend (although not so much the coaches and perhaps more of us should follow their lead, ahem)! Their flexibility, muscular strength, muscular endurance, aerobic and anaerobic capacities have improved by leaps and bounds. There was a time in our sport when you might have ignored these areas but you do so now at your own peril!

Most coaches are not the experts in these areas but thankfully, it's not too difficult to find those who are. Find them and follow their advice even if it costs a few dollars!

L represents **luck!** *It's where preparation meets opportunity. The harder you work, the luckier you become.* You're heard them all and they're all true. But it's your reaction to the fortunes both good and bad that occur that makes the difference. *You cannot control what happens by happenstance in a game (or life) but you are always in complete control of your (pl.) reaction!*

In competition, that reaction sends a clear message to your opponent. Perhaps your team needs to think about the messages it sends, both when misfortune and good fortune strike. Is that the message you want to send?

I've saved the best for last. A? If you know me to any extent it won't be a surprise to learn that A is **attitude**. I've worked with so many talented teams who were suffering from performance anxiety and "thought" they needed better curling deliveries etc. when what was really needed was an attitude adjustment.

- *If you think you can, or you think you can't. You're right! – Henry Ford*
- *Do you hope to make the shot or do you expect to make the shot?*

I started this article with the statement that you can't leave your skills at home. That's true but you can leave the right attitude at home and so many teams do exactly that. Then, when that performance anxiety sets in they look for the quick fix in all the wrong places. It's at home. You brought the wrong attitude!

Well, what IS the right attitude? Obviously this is quite subjective but in my experience, a team or an individual athlete will perform well if his/her/their attitude is; **We/I just can't wait to play!** I believe it puts all the components that collectively facilitate a fine performance into proper context.

Why would anyone be that anxious to play if they didn't feel they were fully prepared? And, if they've done everything in their power to prepare, why would they be nervous? It has the perfect mix of *confidence without being overconfident, mental toughness, game plan preparation, team dynamics and a high degree of physical fitness and proper nutrition.* It implies that the team has brought the whole package. Now let's play!

There you have it; the Performance Formula. I hope it works for you and send me an email to let me know.

Enjoy working with your athletes. I'll see you soon behind a pane in the glass.