Building a competitive team that can be at its best when it matters most requires a holistic approach to program design. Such an all-inclusive approach requires evaluation as well as reflection on all aspects of the program. In this month’s Slowinski at-large, I share with readers three areas in which a coach or player can enhance the performance quality of their team.

First, I discuss the formal utilization of individual skill sets in competition. With a skill set evaluation, a coach or a player can formally evaluate and articulate what each player can do. These skills shape what the individual and the team can do in actual competition. The objective of the evaluation is to produce a formal document that can be used in tournament play. With this, a coach can more accurately ask team members to engage in competent and confident execution in the heat of competition.

Second, I share research on the relationship between the collective perception of team members and the performance of the team. From the research, it is clear that the team’s perception of team unity as well as the perceived value of the team lane play philosophy and training methods is linked with performance. When team members perceive unity in team goals, teams are higher performing. Moreover, if an individual player believes in the team’s performance philosophy and sees value in its training methods, teams are higher performing.

Finally, I review the importance of individual social support and the link with enhanced individual competition performance. Research on social support clearly illustrates that when an individual player feels support from family, friends, and coaches, tournament performance increases.

After reading this article, I want team coaches and team players to have some additional focus points to improve their team’s performance and be at their best when it matters most.

Joe Slowinski, a USBC Gold Coach, is a Master Teaching Professional at the Kegel Training Center. He also serves as the Administrative Head Coach and Men’s Head Coach of the Webber International University bowling program. The Portland Maine native is the former Director of Coaching and Coach Certification for the National Sports Council of Malaysia. Email: joe.slowinski@kegel.net or go to www.bowlingknowledge.info
Skill set evaluation

The first fundamental domain of a holistic program is continual skill evaluation. I have discussed it in several Slowinski at-Large articles. This month’s discussion is intended to formalize this knowledge and utilize it more productively in competition.

A skill set evaluation is simply a periodic review of each player’s current performance abilities (e.g., ball speed change, axis of rotation change, etc.). After review, the collection of team skills can be formalized into a document that can be utilized in tournament play to make better decisions throughout the event.

Can this player change ball speed? If so, how consistent are the speed changes and how confident is he in making these changes? Which axis of rotation is he competent in and how confident is he in executing it in a tournament setting? As a coach or a team member, it is vital that each member of the team truly understand the complete skill set each possesses. Specifically, who can do what and how well they can execute these skills? In competition, players should not attempt something in which they are unable to perform. Good
Shotmaking requires belief in one's skills. With an evaluation of skill, a coach or teammate will have a firm understanding about the appropriateness of asking a player to make a specific shot.

Once each player's skill set evaluation document is completed, the data would be formalized into a tournament skill set document (example at right.) From such a document, a coach can quickly recall the depth of skill of a player and choose an appropriate skill for the specific lane play moment.

Shared team goals and perceived value

Research of collegiate team performance demonstrates that the perception of unified shared team performance goals as well as individual team member's satisfaction of team play and training is correlated positively to team performance. Zajraješka et al. (2007) studied team cohesion and performance in a study of 18 NCAA Division I, II and III teams (i.e., baseball, men's and women's basketball, women's volleyball, men's and women's soccer, men's and women's swimming, softball, women's gymnastics, women's tennis, women's rowing, women's track and field, and wrestling). A total of 355 athletes were surveyed (154 males and 201 females).

In the study, the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) was used to measure four domains:
- Individual Attraction to Group Task
- Individual Attraction to Group Social
- Group Integration Task
- Group Integration Social

For the purposes of this article, it is important to understand that the Group Integration Task is a measure of how strongly the team perceived that it is united in trying to reach its performance goals. Individual Attraction to Group Task measures how strongly the individual values the style of play and training. Both of these were correlated positively with team performance while the social elements measured by the GEQ were not (i.e., Individual Attraction to Group Social and Group Integration Social). Group Integration Task had the strongest correlation to team performance followed closely by Individual Attraction to Group Task.

In short, higher performing teams had players who both believed that their teammates were united in reaching the team's goals and they, as individuals, appreciated the team's style of play and training. There was no significant correlation between strong friendships (Individual Attraction to Group Social) and outside social cohesion (Group Integration Social - team members hanging out together outside of practice, for example) and a team's performance.

In an effort to help you gauge your team's level of satisfaction with the collective team goal as well as their individual perception about the program and team play, I have modified/adapted questions from the Group Environmental Questionnaire to be bowling specific.
Questions to determine a player’s Group Integration Task orientation

1. Our team members are collectively united in reaching our team’s performance goals.
   Very True (-2)  True (-1)  Neutral (0)  False (+1)  Very False (+2)

2. Everyone on the team takes responsibility for poor tournament performances.
   Very True (-2)  True (-1)  Neutral (0)  False (+1)  Very False (+2)

3. There are conflicting aspirations for our team’s performances.
   Very True (-2)  True (-1)  Neutral (0)  False (+1)  Very False (+2)

4. Our entire team communicates openly about everyone’s responsibilities during practice as well as in competition.
   Very True (-2)  True (-1)  Neutral (0)  False (+1)  Very False (+2)

5. Our entire team has very high goals for this team.
   Very True (-2)  True (-1)  Neutral (0)  False (+1)  Very False (+2)

TOTAL SCORE:
+10  High Perceived Unity of Goals
– 10  Low Perceived Unity of Goals

Questions to determine a player’s Individual Attraction to Group Task orientation

1. I am satisfied with the number of tournaments that I bowl with the team.
   Very True (-2)  True (-1)  Neutral (0)  False (+1)  Very False (+2)

2. I feel that I am given adequate opportunities to demonstrate that I can contribute to the team.
   Very True (-2)  True (-1)  Neutral (0)  False (+1)  Very False (+2)

3. The team’s training program provides me with the opportunity to improve my game.
   Very True (-2)  True (-1)  Neutral (0)  False (+1)  Very False (+2)

4. The way we break down the lanes and move as a team unit in competition helps us score the highest possible throughout the tournament.
   Very True (-2)  True (-1)  Neutral (0)  False (+1)  Very False (+2)

5. The coach makes recommendations for adjustments on the lane that are good for the team most of the time.
   Very True (-2)  True (-1)  Neutral (0)  False (+1)  Very False (+2)

TOTAL SCORE:
+10  High Perceived Unity of Goals
– 10  Low Perceived Unity of Goals
Scoring directions:

The goal is to have a score for individuals as well as an average for the entire team. Place an x in the box that represents where the individual scored on both assessments. This can be coded for individuals as well as the average for the team. A score in the red illustrates lower scores on both assessments and should raise major concerns for you and your team. Scores in the yellow zone represent a potential concern and an opportunity to move your team toward the green zone with reflection and discussion. (A copy of this chart can also be found at www.bowlingthismonth.com/extras under the file name “Perception.”)

Measure the social support among individual team members

Are your coaching actions consistent with supporting your athletes in competition? Are you taking care of things such as lodging and travel in order to eliminate potential distractions? The answers to these questions can directly impact the performance of your team.

Research illustrates that social support among athletes has a direct impact on performance. Higher social support leads to increases in performance. Researchers at the University of Exeter studied the impact of anxiety on 197 male British high performing amateur golfers with handicaps ranging from +2 to +4. Players who had higher perceived social support from family and friends performed better when researchers introduced variables that increased stress and anxiety in the golfers. Specifically, those golfers with higher perceived social support scored approximately one stroke lower than those with less perceived social support.

In an additional study, the importance of social support was confirmed by the University of Exeter research team. Specifically, the researchers aided the golfers with travel arrangements as well as offering encouragement, discussing potential problem areas, and providing reassurance before competitions.

How are you doing? How much support do your team members have?

Social Support Evaluation

1. How many friends and family members support you?
   (+2) Many (+1) Some (-1) Few (-2) None

2. Does the coach take care of all travel related logistics?
   (+2) Always (+1) Sometimes (-1) Rarely (-2) Never

3. My coach always offers words of encouragement when I need it.
   (+2) Always (+1) Sometimes (-1) Rarely (-2) Never

4. My coach is available and willing to talk when I have a problem.
   (+2) Always (+1) Sometimes (-1) Rarely (-2) Never

References

