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PRESENTS THE COACHING SERIES...

“A PANE IN THE GLASS”

FAILING TO PLAN IS PLANNING TO FAIL

by Bill Tschirhart

“We’re not in Kansas anymore Toto!” Those prophetic words by Dorothy in “The Wizard of Oz” can certainly be applied to our sport not only at the highest levels, but throughout as teams eye successes and championships never dreamed of by their predecessors (can you say Olympics?).

In my day, four curlers in the curling lounge late in a season, over a libation or two, might talk about forming a team for the next curling season in hopes of getting to the provincial competition and who knows, even “The Brier” or “The Scott”. Hah, what a joke if that conversation were to be heard today! Those four would be dreaming in technicolour! Never one to squash someone’s dream but **a goal without a plan is just a dream!** And, if planning for you means getting your bonspiel calendar in order and assigning a teammate to get the entries in a.s.a.p., you too are dreaming in technicolour!

One of the best contributions a coach can make to his/her team is to get them to plan effectively and execute that training plan!

A Yearly Training Plan (YTP) is now in the realm of sport science with recognized experts in the field. And that’s my first point. **Seek out someone who has been trained in this area.** It may cost you a few dollars but it’s a wise investment in your team’s future. Your YTP needs to become your team’s Bible, to be followed religiously! What I’m going to provide below should not be considered a substitute for that which you will receive from a trained professional.

Training needs to embody several components in my view. Clearly you must provide the best physical environment you can to execute the skills necessary to perform. So, it’s a “no brainer” that **nutrition, physical preparation** (strength, flexibility, muscular power, muscular endurance & cardiovascular conditioning) and **mental preparation** will be key elements in the out-of-season portion of the YTP. This out-of-season time can be useful for **team dynamics** and **game plan preparation**. When ice is available, **skill development** becomes more the focus of attention both from an individual and team perspective (there ARE team technical skills).

But even if your team touched all these bases, the timing of the various components can be such that you don't get the greatest benefits from all your hard work. The common buzzword that you might hear is "periodization". That's where the expert comes into the picture!

When you contact experts in all the areas mentioned above, you will have created a **Performance Enhancement Team** (PET). All the best teams have one and yours needs one as well or we're back to those dreams in technicolour!

MAY-JUNE

What? May & June? Yikes! Yes, the planning must start yesterday but this phase is "**general preparation**" so if you start now, you can get up-to-speed in short order. This is the time of the year to begin that physical preparation programme provided to you by a "strength and conditioning" expert. A sports psychologist needs to be retained so that you and your teammates can begin to develop mental toughness and team dynamic strategies that will be so useful later in the season. It's true, you are what you eat and if maximum performance is the goal you need to be providing your "engine" with the right fuel a.s.a.p. Sports nutrition information is readily available. You've likely heard it before, *"Proper sports nutrition will not make an average athlete superior but poor sports nutrition can and frequently does make a superior athlete average."* The best source is a real live person trained in this area but the internet can help as well. It's also not too early to begin a discussion on the strategic and tactical approach the team will adopt. And, strange as it may seem, there needs to be much thought and some on-ice preparation (yes, there IS summer curling ice available in most provinces if you seek it out [most areas of the country have summer junior curling camps]) around the technical changes that you may wish to make based upon results from the past season. The actual physical changes will take place in the "**specific**" portion of the YTP but it takes time to make a technical change and the key element is that part of your body between the ears as you first need to "wrap your head" around technical changes before you can affect physical change. You need to be convinced that the change is a better way to do it!

Motivation will be key to the "**preparation**" phase of the YTP if you and your team are new to this type of training (especially in the area of strength & conditioning). Placing the training schedule into a daily routine or training with team mates are good ways to "stay on track"!

JULY-AUGUST

No, it's not time to bid a fond adieu to your teammates to hit the summer vacation trail. Sorry! The teams with which you're going to knock heads will not! Now there's a cold bucket of water in the face! This phase of your YTP is "**specific preparation**". Your team discussions will now revolve around topics like a "communication protocol" for example. More specific strategies and routines will also be addressed. Your physical training will now enter the strength & conditioning mode and will be more specific especially in terms of brushing and delivery positions. Just in case you still need some motivation for physical preparation remember, as your physical prowess declines, your mental skills follow in kind (hmm, more cold water).

SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER & NOVEMBER

In this phase you will begin to test those precepts on which you have worked hard over the previous four months. This is the “**pre-competition**” portion of your YTP.* Competitive data (to be a standalone topic in the series later in the season) will be gathered so that as you compete (mostly in super leagues and bonspiels) the team can reflect, measure, evaluate and synthesize those team techniques which promote success. When you leave this phase, the team must be dedicated to a plan which will be fully implemented in the next phase which is where the “rubber meets the road” or as my friend from Saskatchewan, Gene Friesen was once heard to say, “This is where the toboggan meets the tarmac.”

If I can make something of an editorial comment here it would be to make the statement that many elite teams make a critical error in this phase of training. Many still believe that quantity is the paramount ingredient and will literally be “on the bonspiel trail” for ten or eleven consecutive weeks. I would hope you are not counted among those teams because if you are, you run many risks. First, you might simply get really good at doing the wrong things. Second, you will very likely reach the next phase physically and mentally exhausted or stale. Third, that type of competition schedule leaves precious little time for the reflection and altering that is so necessary in this phase. In essence, it’s an old-fashioned, archaic way to train for the next and most critical phase.

Don’t lose the advantages that deliberate and effective post game debriefs can provide. It’s easy when you lose but make sure you also identify those factors that contribute to successful performance. We’re not good at this last part. We tend to talk ad infinitum when we lose but almost dismiss games we win. Wrong, wrong, wrong!!!!

*For elite teams, clearly this Sept.-Nov. time of the year will not be pre-competition as they will be active on the cash circuit. This will be part of their main competition phase!

DECEMBER, JANUARY, FEBRUARY, MARCH & APRIL

This is the “**main competition**” phase. This is why you did all that preparation work in the first place. By now physical preparation and nutrition are clearly in a phase where training is that and not straining. As one expert put it, don’t be like a certain country’s national swim team who wrote the book on how to peak ten days after the start of the competition. “Tapering” is a key component in this phase so that the team can bring its best potential to peak performance to the table. The experts you have secured will ensure that the work that you do in training will include periods of regeneration so that you can get the full benefit from the programme.

We’ve come full circle and we’re back at the month of May where it all begins again! I told you we weren’t in Kansas!

I want to thank Dr. Laura Farres & Bob Comartin who have been “my experts” on so many topics on “the warm side of the glass” and whose advice has been so valuable in learning how to plan effectively.

Enjoy working with your athletes. I’ll see you soon behind “A Pane in the Glass”!