

COACHING CORNER

The blue ribbon event in Pétanque is considered to be the triples game. The open world championships held each year is a triples tournament. It is in this context that we look at the team of Pétanque, and what is necessary to form a winning combination.

TEAM WORK

We have all heard of the expression “A team is greater than its individual parts”, but what does this really mean? The acronym TEAM – Together Everyone Achieve More amounts to the same thing but for a group of individual players to start performing as a team they have to first build the team then bond as a team so that they can “achieve more” as a team. It is very important that each player is familiar; each trusts the other and behaves in a habitual way. Without these basic team attributes, a team of champions at the most critical moment in a tense game will fall apart, whereas a champion team will not!

Remember a Champion Team will always beat a Team of Champions!

TEAM FORMATION

Teams evolve over time and have a clear purpose. Their success is largely due to individuals working as one to achieve a common goal. The individuals genuinely invest in achieving the team goals and are always willing to assist others in the team; above all, they remain loyal.

Henry Ford once said “coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; and working together is success”.

We see all too often in our game of Pétanque many combinations being formed only to be broken up after one or two tournaments when goals have not been achieved. This is a waste of time and achieves nothing more than participation.

One example however of a team forming over time is that of Dirk Winnie, Brian Smith, and Michael Rocks who stuck together for many tournaments over a number of seasons and finally got their just reward by winning a national championship in 2004 and to do so they had to beat a much fancied team of Champions.

There are three phases a team generally goes through before it can operate at its optimum:

FORMING PHASE

This phase is where each player is acquainted and positions within the team are established. Since no two teams behave the same each player is learning how this new team will function and where they fit. There may be some resistance to the new hierarchy as a player who was once a big fish in a small pond may find they are now a small fish in a big pond. Players' talent and abilities are scrutinised and individuals may feel threatened.

STORMING PHASE

This is the transitional phase where challenge is usual. There may be a degree of anxiety from the fear of failure or rejection. There could also be rivalry amongst the players competing for position and authority. During this phase conflict is inevitable, if handled correctly then trust will ensue, if not it will prove to be destructive. Trust takes time to develop but is very easily lost. Once trust has been gained it is important that the team work on maintaining that trust. Unresolved issues will manifest in ways that again will prove destructive. It is important that players feel apart of the team no matter what happens on the terrain. Be aware that there are three players in your team so address team issues as a group not in pairs. Above all, move as a team stand as a team and look like a team.

NORMING PHASE

This is where cohesion begins to develop; the team establishes normal patterns of behaviour no matter what the situation. These patterns of behaviour are always geared towards making the team function effectively. During this phase players must be aware of what is expected of them (i.e., training requirements, dress code, warm up, role & responsibilities etc). Teamwork becomes evident during this phase as players support each other and openly offer feedback. Each player must unselfishly contribute towards the team objectives and continue to work on the team work. This is a continual process.

Having travelled the path of the three phases the team is now able to perform. It is evident when a team has reached this stage as members are committed to the dynamics of the team and realise they are part of something bigger and better and want to see their hard work pay off. They appear to have fun and enjoying what they do.

The clear message is to chose your team combination carefully and not solely on skill. Stick together; support each other and over time the results come. Don't expect too much too soon and don't give up at the first bad result. See failure as an opportunity to improve don't dwell on failure and look for improvement.

I hope to see team formations sticking together for longer and "giving it a go" If you have reached a plateau and want to discuss options for your team development I am happy to assist. david@integratedpm.co.nz .