

Cricket Coaching

Captaincy

Management/captaincy is about today Leadership/coaching is about today and tomorrow.

The role of a cricket captain

In these days of multiple support people around cricket teams the role of a cricket captain has altered significantly from days gone by and is now one of being more of a manager than a leader.

Managers manage and leaders lead.

A coach selects squads and teams (with others on occasions), then is responsible for the education/coaching and performance of those players (squad/team) in both the short term and long term.

The coach is also responsible for involving other expertise if and when required to assist with any components of the education/coaching of the squad and team members. These components can range from sports psychology, sports nutrition, batting coach, bowling coach, fielding coach, physical trainer, physiotherapist, doctor, video/IT manager, video/IT analyst and more.

The coach is responsible for leading the team into the future and must have plans and processes of operation to achieve the potential of the chosen squad and meet the outcomes of the sporting organisation that employs the coach.

The coach is responsible for technical issues for each player. This may not include radical improving of technique rather for some it may mean identifying with the player what they believe are their key issues and monitoring them on behalf of the player. This should be the case the higher the level of cricket a coach is involved in however if a coach at the highest level believes significant improvements are required then those should be presented to the player and if agreed by the player be monitored by the coach. A coach should make very clear to all players they will ultimately be judged on all the components of what makes up a cricketers performance.

Part of leading a team is to be clear on the roles of coaches and captains and if these roles are clear and all are working together for the betterment of cricket then the best possible results will be achieved.

The role of a cricket captain is to manage on the field the agreed strategies that have been accepted by the coach from the inputs of all involved other people.

Leaders/coaches are responsible for the overall performance and the future of the team while management/captains are responsible for the on the field day-to-day functions of the members within the team.

The coach has to be the central person through whom all strategies and actions are communicated therefore maximising the cohesion and purpose achieved from all actions off the field which can then result in more focused and purposeful actions on the field.

Therefore a captain is responsible for implementation of the pre agreed strategies and tactics that are used on the field and for attempting to maintain the required focus and attitudes of players when on the field of play. Once a cricket captain crosses the white line and leaves the field of play the coach takes over all of those responsibilities as well as the other additional coaching roles.

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Therefore the role of a captain is to manage on the field the strategies/tactics that have been accepted by the coach. The captain is a manager who reports directly to the coach.

Most mature captains are welcoming of this structure as a cricket captain makes many more on the field decisions than any other sporting captain as well as being expected to retain their place in the team as a player.

To allow the captain to be overloaded with too many unnecessary roles and responsibilities will only ensure the potential of the team is not achieved. The captain is generally much younger than the coach and has seen less cricket and life and therefore comes generally from a much more limited perspective.

If coaches allow captains to have too much input then the level of performance will always be limited by what a captain doesn't know.

Relationship between Captain and Coach

The relationship between a captain and a coach is a very important component in the overall performance of any cricket team.

With all the technology available these days most of what happens on the cricket field can be preplanned and the actioning of the plans is a result of the relationship of the coach and captain.

Good coaches will involve captains in a wide range of the components of the plan and work with captains to ensure the final plan will be executed satisfactorily on the field. For example a coach and captain need to agree to what to do if they win the toss, who should open the bowling, bowling change options, field placing for certain batsman when facing certain bowlers, who should bowl to certain batsmen, who should field where, reminding bowlers of potential delivery variations, how to keep the players on the field focused and functioning as best they can and some coaches may even involve captains to a minimal degree in the selection of teams.

All sport is moving closer to American Football in most aspects but one especially, the involvement of the coach in the actual playing of the game. American Football have been aware of the potential of getting coaches involved in the playing of the game for many decades yet other sports are only starting to understand how this can raise the quality of the product which in turn increases the potential for more spectator enjoyment, therefore more funders/advertisers, therefore more media of all types, increased enjoyment for the players in fact everything that sport requires.

The relationship between a cricket coach and a captain can raise the quality of the cricketing product and therefore provide more enjoyment for players and all those components listed above.

If the coach (who is generally older and therefore more experienced) can manage a relationship with the captain where the captain is learning yet feels they are leading the team on the field yet managing what everyone has deemed to be best for the team then most employers and captains will benefit from this relationship.

Qualities of a Captain

To be a good cricket captain the following qualities have varying degrees of importance

- A sound knowledge of cricket's strategies and techniques
- A sound understanding of the ethics and attitudes of cricket – an honest reliable person who can encourage and cope with team mates successes
- A captain needs to be someone who wants to learn and therefore work well with a coach
- Well organised and provides a good example to team mates
- A person who can read play (opposition players) and understand what is actually happening therefore be proactive rather than reactive
- A Captain needs to be someone who people will listen to
- A Captain needs to be able to communicate well with other people
- A person who understands other people, what is required of them and how they as a captain might assist
- A person who doesn't play favourites
- A person who can speak well to the media or groups of people
- It is preferable for the captain to be able to maintain their place in the team through their own performance.

Fielding strategies

The role of captaining a team while fielding is easily the biggest responsibility a cricket captain (or any captain) has.

Plans should be developed and known by the captain well before the start of play and yet another example of sport getting closer and closer to American Football where the Quarter Back, the accepted main captain of an American Football team, has a play book he has to memorise before the season starts. This play book has every play they might use all laid out. In each play is every player's role clearly identified so whoever is playing in a position is aware of their role. Each player therefore must memorise their roles within each play (their own playbook) and when pre season practice and training arrives all the players spend their time practicing the moves rather than being educated as to what they are. From these play books the coach and coaching assistants devise game plans for each opposition team taking into account their strengths and weaknesses of each opposing player.

In most other sports these are called 'set plays' or strategies and most sport has them but few to the degree of American Football.

Cricket is very like American Football as far as the mechanics of how the games are played. Both games are stop start games and rely on plays or strategies and out thinking the opposition. It could be argued that cricket has 'play books' as well except in a lot of cases the captain is left to make up the play book for the day out on the field.

This of course need not be the case and over the years cricket will move closer to how American Football is played.

We are starting to see in the Ashes series of 2013 in England a greater involvement in the actual playing of the game of other people through technology and this input being relayed through signals to the captain on the field or relayed by water carriers. One example is the Australian coach clearly listening to the TV commentators and if any good comments are made signals being sent to the captain and strategies (plays) are implemented. Also you see signals being relayed to the captain on the field relating to DRS outcomes when no review was requested. How long will it be before the captain turns to the pavilion to get a signal as to whether they should review or not, or who to ball next and where to place fielders? How long will it be before there is a time limit between overs and a certain time limit for an over which of course will vary depending on the type of bowler? This is getting closer and closer to American Football functions and will only increase in cricket over the next few years.

The potential for a team to have their own cricketing 'play book' appears obvious which will include batting, bowling and fielding.

Supporting the coach

At all times the captain should support the coach when in public or in front of the team or members of the organisation.

It is important to always show a united front remembering most plans will work (sometimes even plans based on poor logic and limited technical knowledge) as long as everyone that is part of the plan are committed to the plan.

Any areas that need clarifying or discussion between the coach and the captain should be done privately and will be part of an evolving relationship between a captain and a coach.

The coach should invite the captain to speak to the team or whomever when appropriate but most of the speaking off the field should be done by the coach.

Most of the discussion between a coach and a captain should revolve around the Play Book.

Daily discussions on playing days at the end of play should focus on what Plays worked and what Plays didn't and what the Play Book should be for the next days play which will revolve around which Plays to which batsman.