**Dealing with pressure**

Dealing with pressure in cricket is as important as anything else when it comes to being successful and enjoying the sport. A good start when trying to improve how we deal with these things is to understand where they come from. Are you putting yourself under pressure or do you feel it from elsewhere?

Also, when we link our expectations solely to outcomes there are many variables that we cannot control that influence what happens. A focus on the things we need to do, broken down into small steps that include things we control can go a long way to helping us feel more relaxed when it comes to sport.

Here are six tips to help you in this area

Prepare well

Feelings of doubt can arise when we feel like we aren’t prepared for what we are doing. This is the same at school, work or in cricket. This doubt can then lead to worry and pressure in the situation. However, something that is largely in our control is how we well we have prepared.

New Zealand all rounder Jimmy Neesham spoke in 2019 about the importance of accepting what comes your way after having trained well.

"These days, I try to disconnect the effort I put in from the results I expect out. I turn up at training and do what I feel is appropriate and once I walk out on the field, I accept what comes my way."

Doing the best you can in the lead up builds confidence you are prepared to do your best on the field too.

Reframe your ‘failures’

Individual failures, a run of low scores or a spell with no wickets can make us feel under pressure to do well next time round. However, all players go through this. A lot. For example, the great batters in men’s world cricket- Smith, Kohli, Williamson and Root - get out for less than fifty (their lowest statistical benchmark for success) more than they pass it.

If we accept that not getting what we aim for is a part of the game for all cricketers then it helps to use the experience wisely rather than rashly. Instead of using the statistic of our score or figures as a judgement, look at what you did with your coach to make use of it to continue developing. Seeing it as an opportunity to learn is the key. That way it is isn’t a failure, instead more of a lesson.

Connect with why you play

Is it possible to still enjoy playing cricket even if you aren’t doing well? It should be! As we’ve seen above, everyone has set backs but it is often our love of the game that keeps us wanting to come back for more.

See if you can think about when you first remember loving playing cricket. It probably wasn’t anything to do with the result but instead the experience itself.

Instead of each game being full of pressure, it can be that it is an opportunity to enjoy it. And we play better when we’re doing that…

Find a way to help your focus

In conversation with us, the Northamptonshire bowling coach Chris Liddle spoke of how his team mates when he played at Gloucestershire would prepare to take pressure off them. A group would do some simple mindfulness exercises before watching footage of when they have done well in the past. Then, their mind was set positively to go out and do their best.

Reflecting on a pre game routine can help you work out how to get yourself prepared so you are thinking about what you can do rather than what the problems may be.

Breathe

We can start to feel pressure within a game and a technique used by many is to bring attention to their breathing. This helps us return our focus to the present moment and what we can control rather than what has gone before or is about to come.

Slowing down our heart rate also makes us feel calmer too. It’s no wonder you see players taking a few moments to breathe before their run up as a bowler or in between balls as a batter.

Try the 4-7-8 technique to see how it can help. Breathe in deeply through your nose for four seconds, hold for seven and then breathe out slowly through your mouth for eight. Repeat as many times as you need.

Talk

Everyone goes through difficulties in sport and pressure, or similar feelings, arise in us all from time to time. The benefit of playing a team sport is we have others to learn from. Knowing we’re not alone in dealing with these kinds of things can really help and borrowing ideas to use ourselves is very useful too.

Is there someone you see as being good at dealing with pressure situations that could give some thoughts? Or could you pass on things that have worked for you? Your coach will also have ideas of their own to contribute.