

DECISION MAKING

Umpires are encouraged to be unhurried in their decision making. Those who tend to objectively consider before making a decision will often have greater respect from players. Taking a bit of extra time to weigh up the facts in front of you can lead to a higher percentage of correct decisions being given.



Decision-making occurs on every ball, not just when an appeal is made. Consistent decision-making is essential to the effective conduct of the game. Consistent judgment of wides, no balls, leg byes will have a bearing on how well your performance is rated by the Captains. Umpires who regularly make incorrect decisions on matters such as byes, leg byes or if the ball came off the bat will soon lose respect of the players. It is important umpires are “up” for every ball – there is something to do on every ball, whether you are at the bowler’s end or striker’s end.

How can you stay “up” for every ball? Ian Healy believed that good wicket-keepers never switched off their concentration, rather he believed they switched up and then switched down in between deliveries. It is impossible to concentrate at 100% optimum for the entire day’s play. Umpires need strategies so that their focus is at its peak when it counts the most.

When does it count the most?

The next ball!

And while the ball is in play.

An umpire has to be in the present – your mind has to be where your body is. A poor decision often indicates you weren’t mentally in the right space. Poor decisions can come about through a loss of focus – not being in the here and now – or because that particular delivery was just too good for you, there is no embarrassment if the ball is too good for you, as long as your routines, processes and focus were there for that particular delivery you give yourself the best chance of making the correct decision.

To help me focus, and based on advice from experienced umpires, I have developed mental triggers. As the bowler starts his run-up I say to myself:

- “Open the over well” for the first ball of the over
- “This ball” for the second, third, fourth and fifth balls of the over
- “Close the over well” for the final ball of the over

Using such triggers doesn’t mean you’ll get every decision correct, but it does help your mind to be where it needs to be for those crucial few seconds.

Mistakes will occur – we are human after all. The most successful umpires minimise mistakes. The capacity to put things in perspective and move on is crucial. It is important not to lose control of our emotions during a match – an ability to objectively analyse will go a long way to building resilience and this is a key trait of a successful umpire. Handling disappointment and errors in a rational, rather than emotional, manner is always best.

“Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour not a dead-end street.”

Bits & Pieces magazine

Simon Taufel once wrote that, “Worse than making one mistake is making two.” Umpires may follow up one error with another because they haven’t put the first mistake behind them. If you compound that error by making more errors, then you will have a bad game.

Over the years I have developed a simple coping strategy, “Name it, claim it, tame it”, to help me recover from decision making errors.

Name it – stop for a moment (when appropriate) and acknowledge in a detached way that you performed incorrectly.

Claim it – take responsibility for what occurred – no blame game.

Tame it – put it behind you by reminding yourself you deserve to be here, remind yourself of some good decisions you have previously given, remind yourself that the very best umpires make mistakes, then remind yourself that the only thing that can hurt you is the next ball and say to yourself, “I am going to be ready for the next ball.” Your mistake can then be reviewed in the process of self-assessment and you are able to move on with the match.

Employing this strategy allows me to recover quickly from a mistake, get back on the horse so to speak, and prepare for the next ball. Reflecting on the mistake can come later – in the process of self-assessment. The field of play is not the time to be worrying about a mistake. After making a mistake it is so important to focus on making sure that the next ball, the next over, the next session is a good ball, over, session.....and this comes from hard work ensuring your focus is at its peak when it needs to be so you are in the right frame of mind to enter the decision making process – you never know when you’ll be called on to make one.

Top athletes have an ability to be able to refocus their concentration quickly after an error or setback. What about you? If something has distracted you (a thought, a noise, an event) or something has gone wrong, how well can you get your focus and concentration back? Top athletes do this well because they have worked hard over months and years to use opportunities at training and in matches to practice getting their concentration back quickly.

One way to do this is through focussed breathing during a small break in play. It’s a form of “centering” – take a deep breath, realise where you are and what you need to focus your concentration on. When you take a deep breath, try not to lift up and raise your shoulders, but rather breathe in through the nose and let the air fill up your lower abdomen – this is more unobtrusive to others around you and gives a greater sense of relaxation. As you relax, the key is to find something to refocus back on to – e.g. the ball, the pitch, the stumps, whatever.

So if you find yourself getting distracted or losing concentration, take the breath and have something in mind to be able to focus your concentration back on to. Practice it!

Simon Taufel has previously referred to “Sandbagging yourself from scrutiny” – when you concentrate fully on the task at hand the task itself gets large and other distractions recede.

Below are some specific decision making tips from the NSWCUA Technique Manual for you to consider:

- *LBW*: Always have the basics in mind. In judging the height it is a good idea to have doubts about any ball (except a full toss) that hits a batsman above the roll on the pad. When a left hand batsman is on strike to a right arm over the wicket bowler, you would like a short of a length ball to straighten either in the air or off the pitch to give earnest consideration for an out decision. The same principles apply for a right hand batsman facing a left arm over the wicket bowler. Always take into account how far the ball has to travel after impact before it would reach the stumps. Always try to pay attention as to whether the batsman is making a genuine effort to play at the ball with the bat. Take your time to weigh up all the possibilities and give your decision confidently. If a ball deviates off the pitch in order to hit the pad, and still has four feet or more to travel before reaching the line of the wicket, there is a good chance it will miss the stumps if it has hit the batsman in line.
- *Caught behind, bat/pad catches*: Consider your decision from where you are standing. Do not move away from the stumps before or after giving your decision. This gives the impression that you are unsure or have not given the decision due thought.
- Wait a moment or two for the appeal to finish and make eye contact with the batsman if you give him out. If he turns his back, make sure you hold your hand up until he looks at you. Similarly, unless there is a need to follow the ball further, make eye contact with the bowler when giving a not out decision. Always be confident and certain when giving decisions.
- *Wides*: Adopt a consistent approach throughout the match. Ideally you should discuss your views with your colleague before the match. In limited overs matches it is preferable to keep the game moving and not be too harsh on the offside. Set the standard early bearing in mind if you do not call the borderline offside wide, the batsmen will not let balls go expecting the call. Subsequently the game will flow quickly. Be sure to call and signal wide ball when the ball passes the striker's wicket, then move into position at the bowler's end if necessary, and repeat the signal of wide to the scorers when the ball is finally settled. Never signal to the scorers while the ball is in play!
- *Front Foot No Balls*: Keep your head still and only move your eyes from the foot to pick up the ball in flight. Establish a consistent approach to each consideration for no balls. For example if the bowler has been okay with his foot placement and he then lands right on the edge of the line, rather than

trying to judge a no ball by a millimeter, ask the bowler to come back. If the foot lands clearly over the line, even if it is the first time, no ball must be called.

- *Runs or Leg Byes:* Invoke established signal with your partner, but remember, at all times take responsibility for your own decision. If you receive a signal that is in conflict with your opinion, always go with your own view. When judging whether to allow leg byes, consider the position of the bat in relation to the pad. If the bat is well behind the pad, leg byes should be disallowed. Remember the batsman should not be allowed to just “show” the bat. Look for the bat either beside or in front of the pad.
- *Short Run or Boundary:* Stand side on to watch both the ball and the running batsmen with quick glances either way. If the ball is close to the boundary and a batsman is about to touch down for a run, watching for the boundary takes precedence, as does a catch.
- Should a close fielder be positioned so that your view of the crease, stumps and flight of the ball to the wicketkeeper or slips could be obscured in any way, move to the off side. You must put yourself in the best possible position at all times to see the ball.
- Always watch for hit wicket and never be in a big hurry to follow the ball into the outfield. The time taken to ensure the wicket has not been broken will not impinge on what you need to see in the outfield and can save an embarrassing moment if there is an appeal. A good adage to remember is: When the striker plays forward – look for a stumping. When playing back look for hit wicket.
- Watch the crease, not the bat or the stumps in the case of a close run outs or stumpings. Your peripheral vision will show you the wicket being broken. In the case of the quick single and a direct hit, again focus on the crease. You will hear the wicket being struck. If in any doubt about the wicket being put down fairly, you must consult with your colleague.

Below are some general considerations with regards to your decision making:

- Make your decision on what you see and hear – Greg Davidson, a member of the Cricket Australia National Umpire Panel and the 79th first class umpire from NSWCUA, refers to every delivery as a contest between bat and ball and umpires shouldn't care who the batsman is or who the bowler is.
- Stick to your routines.
- Go with your gut instinct.
- Don't second-guess or doubt yourself – once you're not using sound judgment criteria to make decisions you're in trouble.

- There has to be a large amount of self-belief and confidence in your ability to perform – this can only come about through strong and substantial preparation.
- Be positive about having to make decisions – want to be challenged and want the next decision to be yours!

The new season is just around the corner and your preparation is the key to having an enjoyable and successful season in the middle.

“It’s better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and regret.”
Jackie Joyner-Kersey.

Best wishes,

Darren Goodger.
State Director of Umpiring (Cricket NSW).