

Coach the Ontario Open Championships

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Ah December, a little snow appears, the holiday season is coming and for those of us who bowl competitively, there is reason to get serious. December is when tournament season really heats up.

December is the qualifying month for the Ontario Open Championships. Throughout this province, the first two weeks of December are reserved for the 20 game qualifier to form Men's, Ladies and Mixed teams in the many zones of the Ontario 5 Pin Bowlers Association. These teams will then compete at the Provincial Championships, in Hamilton on the Easter weekend.

This is the time for Coaches to prepare. Each of these teams will require a certified Level II Coach to guide and encourage their teams. If you are currently a Level I Coach and would like to take on the challenge of coaching this event, make your plans now for getting your courses completed. Contact the Ontario 5 Pin office for more details on courses in your area. You may also want to become an assistant Coach with your current Level I Certificate to gain some insight and experience into the complexities of Coaching this event.

Now before you decide to take the challenge of coaching one of these teams, let's do some self-evaluation. Do you know the time and commitment that is involved in taking one of these assignments? For the O5 event, the Coach is chosen usually by the members of the team. This can sometimes be called a popularity contest, but in my experience, the Coach is usually chosen based on past experiences, their visibility to the bowlers who have qualified and their approach to coaching a team. Don't expect to be chosen by simply providing your name and not appearing at the qualifier. Your interest will certainly play a role in the bowlers' eyes.

For the Open, the Coach is responsible to make hotel arrangements, ordering uniforms for the players, setting up meetings and practices and dealing with the personalities of the players who they will be coaching. This last responsibility is sometimes the most difficult. Players who qualify may not be aware of how important the other bowlers want to compete and win the Open. Coaches should also be aware of this. You may also have two or more players on the team who dislike some of the other players, or maybe are not happy that you were selected as the Coach over their preferred choice.

The best way I know of to deal with this is with open, honest communication. Meet with your team as a group and individually to discuss any issues or concerns that your players may have. This is not easy but in general, people will discuss things in a constructive manner that will not appear to be accusing or make someone out to be a real pain in the neck. Just by giving your players the chance to speak openly about their feelings, and what they would like to see happen, starts you off on having a successful coaching experience. It will also make your players realize that you are trying to make sure everyone is together as a team, the way it should be.

The players must also understand that they have qualified to play on the team together and should put any differences aside or get them out in the open. You get real close in Hamilton, with everyone in the playing area, and a lot of excitement. Don't tell me that you will not be ready to cheer on a teammate while they are on 7 in a row. If you cannot get up for the team then maybe you should not have tried to become part of it. Remember as well, your Coach wants to be part of your success. Make sure that you provide lots of feedback to them before, during and after the competition. Communications work both ways.

Just remember these simple rules. Make sure you talk about the positives as well as the negatives. Remember to raise any concerns in a way that is not an attack on a personal level. If a Coach makes a bad decision, then discuss it, get everyone's opinion and be sure not to make it sound like your Coach just won the "bonehead" award. We are all human and every Coach I know of, myself included, have made decisions that did not work out.

Selection of a Coach should be unbiased, honest and in the best interest of the bowlers on the team. Remember, more teams will lose the event and only one will be declared the winner, so let's make sure the team and their Coach enjoys their experience.

In closing this column I want you wish you all Happy Holidays. Here's hoping you have a safe and wonderful holiday season, and a successful New Year, and I hope to see you all at the 2004 Ontario Open.