

THERE'S NO 'I' IN T-E-A-M

SO FAR in my bowls career, I have been very fortunate to have played with many talented players and in many successful teams. Most recently, I returned from the Atlantic Championships in Cyprus, where our (English) team won both the men's and women's overall team gold. As a player, this title is rather special as every single discipline and every single game contributes to this award. It genuinely is about playing your part in the team and epitomises the saying:

**TOGETHER
EVERYONE
ACHIEVES
MORE.**

Thus, I shall share with you what I believe are the key components to a successful team.

'END GOAL'

Forst and foremost, you MUST agree your end goal as a team. This is because it is vital that you are all bought into and sign up to what you are trying to achieve. This shouldn't be about the end result, i.e. a win or a loss, as you can't always control this - but something which you as a team want to do - it could be something **TECHNICALLY**, **TACTICALLY** or **BEHAVIOURALLY**. Once this has been undertaken, then the next step is to be clear with your team about what you can expect from each other. My list would be as follows:

RESPECT an individual's views, opinions and decisions. Accept that everyone is different. No two people are the same and nor should they be.

ENJOY being in each others' company and what you are there to do. Results tend to be more positive when people are enjoying themselves and a positive environment and atmosphere is created.

APPRECIATE an individual's strengths and qualities and maximise peoples' uniqueness when in the team.

FOCUS on the team's performance and not the outcome. Accept that sometimes the better team will not win and conversely, sometimes you will win games that you really don't deserve to.

COMMIT - some bowlers like to practice a lot in the build up to an event and some less, as they want to keep fresh. The key is to find out what works for you as a player and to communicate this to your team.

COMMUNICATE with others both on and off the green. This involves not only sharing information, but also listening. Body language is a really important part of communication. It is important to be aware of what your actions may be implying, as they could conflict what is coming out of your mouth!

AGREE on the decision making process in your team. As a skip, I personally have no issue with everyone 'chipping in' and saying their piece before we agree on the decision and I then go down to bowl. However, other skips prefer just to discuss with their 3rd player in fours or 2nd player in triples as otherwise they become overloaded with information. Again, there is no right or wrong - the key is just to communicate this and help your team-mates to understand the reasons why.

TRUST the people in your team and the decisions they make. When bowling, I need to know when I am on the mat, that the team is totally behind the shot that I am going to play. If there is doubt in the mind, then this mostly ends in an ineffective bowl.

SUPPORT each other - no one is going to play well all of the time. When someone is struggling, it is important to know how to deal with them. Some people like people to make a joke of it, others go quiet but if someone is down then if not handled quickly and appropriately, it can have an impact on the rest of the team.

BOUNCEBACKABILITY - know how everyone deals with disappointment. Within a tournament or a season, there are bound to be set backs. The most successful team will be the team that can recover from these quickly and effectively.



To conclude, there is no 'I' in team. You win as a team and lose as a team. If there is a blame culture within your team then you are on a hiding to nothing. Remember that no one intentionally plays a bad bowl or has a bad game. And be honest with others when helping them to review their performance - but always ensure that any feedback is constructive and developmental. Regular de-briefs can be an effective tool to make sure this happens.

Finally, be proud to be a member of your team - whether it's your club, county or country - feel that sense of belonging!

Left: Team Extreme! From left to right: Julie Saunders, Natalie Melmore, Ellen Falkner and team Manager Edna Bessall.