

The Mental Game – Positive Thinking

Years ago, I was having a particularly good season in shooting competitions winning almost every event I entered. I recall arriving at a competition venue one morning to be greeted by an opponent with the comment "oh you're here, we'll all be competing for second now." With opponents who had an attitude like that, is it any surprise I won the event?

It seems this type of attitude is alive and well in the bridge rooms too. Recently my partner & I sat down to play against a pair and were greeted with a comment like "Oh no - not you! Don't beat us by too much." It is a bit of a self-fulfilling prophesy isn't it? They think they are going to get beaten by us. No surprise when they do.

Whilst there is no substitute for strong technical skills and ability, often success in competition is brought about by confidence, and the mental approach you bring to the game. A confident player with a strong mental approach to the game will be more likely to make the right decisions, and in the long run be more successful, than a player lacking confidence or expressing negative sentiments. Whether the negativity is about the opponents, the system they play, a convention they play, the signalling they use and so on, it doesn't matter whether you verbalise the sentiment, or whether you just think it, the effect will be the same on your confidence.

Clearly not all pairs sit down expecting to get beaten by the opponents or make overtly negative statements. However sometimes subconsciously we develop doubts. For example there are often pairs you play against regularly in competition who you and your partner struggle to do well against. It might be the system they play, their attitude at the table, their demeanour or a host of other factors that just niggle you. Over time the consistently less than optimal performances against a pair add up mentally to the point where you enter your match-up with them with doubt in your mind. In these cases it is important to have some positive statements to enable you to perform well against the pair. A simple thought statement like "We beat pair X, and pair X thrashed these two so we can beat them too" when you sit down to play will help build your confidence and even up the contest.

In sport, as well as in life, we often hear about people talking about the power of positive thinking. This was a critical aspect of mental management in sport, and inherent in this concept is the following: *The more you think about, talk about and write about something happening the more likely it is to come true.* The opponents who sit down to play thinking they are going to get beaten, or remembering the last time a pair beat them, or who are intimidated by the ranking of their opponents, or their system, etc., have entered the match with the wrong mindset. Even if their skill level is sufficient to allow them to win, it is highly unlikely they will be able to succeed if they approach the match with the wrong mental attitude. So next time you sit down to play a more highly ranked pair, or a pair who have been your nemesis in the past, adopt a positive mindset and see how much you can put the opponents to the test.

Kim Frazer is an Olympian, multiple Commonwealth Games gold medallist, and multiple Australian champion in target shooting. In this series of articles, Kim will share some insights from her experiences utilising sports psychology in competition.