

The Mental Game - The Annual Training Plan

Elite athletes usually have a well developed annual training plan. The annual plan for my shooting year defined the competition periods, peak training periods, rest periods, fitness training periods, experimenting periods and other key events during the year. It also included annual goals, and goals specifically for individual competitions and training. Goals should be both score based & technique or performance based. It is easy to say you want to win everything you enter, but that is not always practical. For example swimmers usually have periods of highly intensive training after which they taper for competitions that are important to them. It would generally be unrealistic to expect a swimmer of equal ability who was in intensive training to win against a swimmer who has tapered for competition.

If we consider the annual bridge calendar, we note that it is quite busy with competitions, and there are many national events during the year beginning with the Summer Festival in January, and concluding with the GNOT in late November. For our international level players there are important national events, whilst for those players who participate in club events, there are key events such as club championships. Each player is different and each will have events they consider to be the most important. Hence to prepare an effective training plan, a few key steps are required. Get a one year calendar (either electronic or paper) and mark up the following on it.

1. Identify the key competitions that are most important to you in the year(s) ahead. Try and pick 2 or 3 events you really want to do well at.
2. Identify the periods in the year when you will have breaks (holidays, family commitments, Christmas, etc).
3. Identify the periods that you may wish to use to experiment with new conventions or system changes, or to play with a different partner (note that experimenting should occur well in advance of key competitions to allow time to ensure the changes are going to be effective).
4. For the key competitions, mark out any lead-up events you wish to use to gain competition practice. Identify dates/times that you and your partner will set aside to do bidding/play practice. BBO's partnership bidding facility is a super resource to use.

At the end of every year, reviewing how well your training plan worked allows you to measure how successful you were when compared to the goals you set yourself, and to identify any changes you might wish to make for the following year.