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COMMUNICATION IN SPORTS

Today we are going to be looking at another vital component, which is called communication. We all know the importance of communication. So if you look at this beautiful image which is coming up on the screen, what do you see? Does one really need to explain what is happening over there? So when we talk of communication, what does it really mean? So to communicate is to convey information that could be via thoughts, feelings without hurting another, right? So it is not necessarily verbal all the time right? If you look at these three images here, you can see three images on the screen and let us just ponder on each for a fraction of a second, yeah? What do you make of the first image? What do you feel? And again I have been talking in the previous section as well.

Look into and get conscious about what happens to me as I listen, as I see, as I probably reflect a little. We hope that is what you all are doing and notice what is happening to me. So how do you feel when someone is fully closed and turned away? So I am practically awake. So let us say there is another person in front of you and they are away, they are at the opposite direction.

So what does that mean? So there is practically no communication happening here, right? And then what do you think about the second? So this guy has his hands on his hips and there is another person. So without knowing the context, it might be a little difficult to actually gauge it. It could be that “oh is that what you think” or “hmm let me think about it”, right? So depending on the context, this could be something which is leading towards a more, let us say positive communication, right?

And then the last one if you look at it, the two people are actually facing each other and the distance is not huge, right? So if you look at the second image on top, the distance with the guy on his waist with his hands on the waist, there is quite a bit of distance, right? So these are the things we keep in mind as we talk about communication and I want you to recall what is your space, you know? How comfortable are you, right? When you are communicating with let us say a loved one, or with a new person. Sometimes I am not really sure about this person, right?

Then how is it, right? So keep these things in mind. Now when we talk about communication right, most often we think, oh I am communicating means I am talking. But is talking really the only way? Is it only verbal? Nowadays we also have what is called texting, right? So it is via written form. So there is a lot which is being communicated with words, verbally, without words, right?

But what are some of the key characteristics that are essential for a communication to take place? The first and foremost is clear speech. I am talking here. My speech needs to be clear. I need to be clear as to, what is it that I am saying, correct? I cannot keep jumbling and saying a hundred things in one sentence, right?

Which does happen to us, let us say when someone is very stressed or they are going way too fast. We see this happen a lot with athletes, you know? So usually someone who says stress, they are going on and on and on. And sometimes I just have to say okay let us just pause a minute, take a couple of deep breaths, come into our self and really go, am I actually talking or it is just gibberish, right? And I think that the next which follows is attuning.

Sometimes let us say I could be talking and for example, let us say an athlete has just been injured and they are still coming to terms with the what is what. So they are not going to be looking at you, they are not making eye contact, they are zoned out. What we say zoned out. So, you are in your head when people say get out of your head, do not be so much in your head. And if I talk or if I am trying to communicate and I realize that I am not getting a response or sometimes let us say a very introverted person likes to zone in, their focus is they go within themselves. That is how they prepare and that is how then they will go and perform, right? So that person again is probably looking down and preparing.

Now if I go on talking in that point or let us say anyone in the team for that matter, it is actually not serving a purpose there, okay? I will give you an example, this was one of the young cricketers and I think he was at 60 he was on the crease, he is playing exceptionally well and then during the break, water break the message came from the dressing room. Do not play off-spin and it came once, and then it came twice, and then it came the third time. And he actually said Ma'am I lost my focus and got out.

So what is the communication here? So you gave the message. It is vital to understand what kind of communication would this person like? When would he like it right? So after giving it once maybe it was more than enough but they went on and on and then what happened from being in a zone state, his mind started going okay be careful, do not play off-spin do not play off-spin, right? And that is what we need to work. So then I said okay this happens, it was in the very right intention. Of course the captain and the management, the team obviously sent the instruction to help the player and the team.

So he said I did not say anything that time but later I told the captain that, do not go on repeating an instruction. So in this case attunement so really knowing where this person is, is this person listening? If they are not listening, why are they not listening right? Is it because they are focused or is it because they are stressed? That becomes important, right? Active listening, a lot of times we see people talking. There is a competition to talk or it is just to give a response, right? For example maybe, not that I do not ever do it. You hear an athlete and then you try to go, okay fine I know what is to be done.

In Jungian terms, we call it hold the tension and let the athlete come to the reflection. So and sometimes when you just wait for maybe a couple of more seconds or minutes something very important may come, right? So it becomes very important and of course sometimes also to know that, okay this is actually just venting so give them a round. I have this rule that I give 10-15 minutes to vent because they need to get it out of the system. So it is really about gauging, okay when to say what. It is called the right action. And I think lastly the other very important aspect is to really value another's opinion, think of the time when probably it was a difficult conversation you were having, right?

I may not agree but it becomes very important to listen without judging without jumping to defend, right? So and I think that is why if you go back right, that is why, how do I

communicate? It is very easy to say things but then how is it being said becomes very very important, because then that is going to determine how is this other person going to take it and of course that is also very dependent on where they are but we try to be in the best as possible. It is not possible all the time, right? So with verbal also something which is very important is what we call prosody.

It is called the rhythm or the melody. So how is my tone right? Think when you are happy, how is your tone and think about it when you are not happy or let us say you are stressed or you are angry how is your tone? So when you have one tone like which is, let us say our predominant tone. So start paying attention. And is my pitch low or high? Is it energetic? When on a pumped up day, we are very energetic, on another day we go like hello, right?

So just notice and what impact does it have on the other. So even before we get into session or therapy, we always say we find our centre because if I, let us say I have come from somewhere and I am really rushed, then what happens is I myself are in a little rush space. So taking that little bit of time, come into my space then I can maneuver what is needed with my athlete, right? So with non-verbal, one is body language.

I remember there was this young badminton player and he would sit like this like literally he slouched in the chair. I am not kidding and he is like oh it is ok oh man oh. So I remember he had come through the parents, so the parents also I have actually wondered, is this player really interested in the session or not and then we realized that, what we call the arousal level. His arousal was a little on the lower side, as in it would take time to come up.

So I need to hold that, this guy is a little like this but that may not mean he is not interested but that was also a very important cue because what actually happened was he would take time to come back even into the match. So when he is one down he would get charged up or he would get pumped up. So we had to work a strategy where we went, okay you are already one down so that he gets in sooner, right? Facial expressions, we all know that, right? Let us go to this, we can see what is the expression of the people, the gentleman here.

Eye contact, very very very vital you know, is someone just like this? Someone seeing you, someone nodding, that is your expression. Smiling, whining, tight, right? And also objects used, I can very playfully let us say pick up this or I can go and I am really angry. I am going to do this or I am going to do this, right? So what are the objects used? So everything

is really communicating something or the other, right?

I want to bring in this example of this young golfer to explain the need, to understand what is the need that is being communicated. So this was a young girl, from a winning position she would go on to lose and the coach made one very interesting comment, he said she does not like attention Chaitanya and he also mentioned that she has had a tough childhood. I do not know if it was the same day or the same context. I guess I tied it together and then a very introverted girl and it was difficult to like get things out but she wanted someone to connect to. So when we looked into it and this was a very young girl so also you kind of know like okay how much do you actually go into a depth session like can this child actually handle it or this teenager actually handle it. So when we went down, what we actually got to know was that she would get pulled up by one of the parents and beaten up so, physical abuse, and this happened a lot.

So this young child, attention meant being pulled up and punished and now no amount of cognitive talking is going to shift that for you, right? So we need to really work with how do I work with this inner child, what we call and the little older adult or teenager and shift, right? So there was a negative pattern and then we had to bring in a more positive pattern over there. We need her to start getting accustomed to it So it did take a bit of time, she was extremely cooperative, the mother was extremely supportive as well and also the coach.

I have to mention because the coach, I told him that if you could maybe be a little more, I know there is a lot on your plate but a little more supportive and give her that support and that little attention in the right way, a little more than you would probably give the other players just for some time so that she starts seeing that. So then she started actually, once we worked of course in the sessions we worked with that aspect and the coach was working in training and then she started performing and now she is doing really well.

So why did I bring in this example here? Because it is not just about what you can do, it is really about understanding what my athlete is telling me here. When you would speak to her she would go I just do not know I was doing perfectly well and then I do not know what happened. Remember when we were talking of the zone and flow state, I do not know. So the I do not know, for us is the part we need to know we need to get to know ok. So and here, I had the support and some feedback from the coach which became very paramount right, if

not we do not necessarily go into what is happening in the background or what is happening and I think that is where, when you kind of know that repeatedly after you have done some work and that there is really no impact then you need to see where is this coming from? Is this something deeper and how do I handle it?

So I thought this was a very good example to explain what is the need being communicated, right? Now why is communication important in sport, right? I will give you this example and which will help us tie up to this entire section on the importance. It was one of the national teams and it was a mega event, the Asian Games and Olympics and there were factions and there were two of the key senior players who were at loggerheads.

So the team was also divided and it was a very new coach also from a very different culture so there was just so much which was happening but the thing was the coach was open and what we decided was, let us mix mingle the players at least in training when we are doing sessions, when we are having fun activities because when people come together right, something starts opening, right?

Of course it is important to also sit them down and have what we call the tough talks. Also what is important is how do we bring them together because we had to bring them together for the team to perform. Now let us take for example hypothetically, the coach had not done this and we just sat them down it may work it may not work right, because I do not think consciously anyone does not want to perform right, but they have been at loggerheads so just sitting them down may or may not work but when you involve them in fun, in play, in games, in situation divide up the groups together then they slowly start coming together.

So here, that is where effective communication really is essential to build trust among the players, the coach and support staff. Because if you do not have that it is very difficult to go and play. You will play but then in tough situations who do I look at, who can I support, what is that one word that is going to help another player?

These are all things right, which comes together when the team is really bonded, right? And when does that happen, when we provide that environment players feel seen, they feel held, they feel supported, safe. That okay, just because there is a difference because we are not going to get dropped and that is what aids team cohesion and you want to go really, for the team remember the movie Chak De, I think it is one of the brilliant examples and that was as far as my knowledge goes, it was with one of the hockey teams. I mean of course some

chunks over there was added for the sake of the movie but there was this one incident which was cut which I want to bring which was, the girl I forget her name one of the key players over there. Gul, right? So and then I think she had her family name and the father, the parent would keep saying, it is to make the family proud you should score. Why didn't you score?

And there is this conversation before I think one of the key matches that, listen we won, I am also part of the team and the coach then gives the t-shirt with her name. So he says why do you have another name when you are called Gul and then he gives her that and it is her choice, do you want to wear this what resonates with you and then she goes on and she really performs and then in the ending scene she tells her parent that please do not do comparison, let them live their life like for the younger ones.

So what did the coach do here? Really tap into what was the need of this individual to allow her to breathe, allow her to be herself and go out and perform than having that you should score, you should make the family proud and all these are restrictive, right? So but it was also important for the coach to understand and that's where getting to know your players really really become helpful and once that happens and the team has bonded, you've taken off a lot of pressure and that's when you see problems are solved, decision making is better you know?

Everyone steps up it's not just the leader right, like each one is becoming their inner leader and let's say the leadership group in themselves, the senior ones will go on to guide the team so that is where you see coaches, management everyone speaking about how a positive team environment is extremely important to build performance, right? You can have the best of the players in the team but the thing is have they come together? Have they understood what the communication is? What's the vision? All these factors play a very very important role.

Of course constructive criticism. I call it the sandwich approach. I remember I'll give you an example of myself, it was when I was doing my PhD and my supervisor I remember, my guide right, there was this one time I had given him something and he had so many red marks in it and I went oh my god what is this? Is it so bad and he's like no no, this is really good if you just get this bit then it's all good and we're on the right track. So what did he do?

He sandwiched the important critical comment in the center but he also eased me going, this is essential and you're on track and trust me the next time I think I had a lot less red marks. So constructive criticism is extremely helpful and is needed, you don't just keep praising the

team or you don't just keep berating the team. It has to be a combination of the two. What's going well, what needs to get better and the way forward right? So I always tell what's the message and request being asked over here? Especially in stress. There was an advertisement I wonder how many of you will remember, a couple of young cricket boys are in the car and they're actually they finished their match okay and one of the guys is quite cranky and what they show is an actress and then they give him I think one of the chocolates or something you know carbohydrate and he calms down.

So I thought that was a really creative idea because that boy was getting cranky because he was hungry and it is true, to understand what's the message, right? So I thought I'd begin with that.

So when I see an athlete go you know the minute they meet me, this is happening, what is my athlete saying? Oh my god I'm stressed please calm me down, right? So I don't sit for half an hour or let them go on for 45 minutes. My job, my role would really help to come there, catch their breath and come into my scent, right?

I want to give this example of, there was one of the wicket keeper, very senior wicket keeper and he said I am telling him do not put the ball here, he's not listening. So then I was telling him, right he's not listening because he's stressed he's not able to figure where to put it you're saying don't put it here so instead say put it on the center wicket for example, in this direction.

So give him direction and of course this introverted batter not wanting to be disturbed, remember? That was one of the examples I gave in the previous slide. And this the last one is very very crucial again it comes to eating, which seems so basic but it's very fundamental so you know this was a team group of athletes who were traveling out of India for a competition.

Very very young female athlete and what happened was she was vegetarian and she was very quiet, it would take me also quite some time to actually get her to speak up and she was unable to communicate to the coach because you know it's also a lot on your upbringing right?

What happened was she's not eaten well right, the diet has not suited, she ended up falling sick but before that she ended up underperforming. You can't survive on biscuits and tea and go and perform, right? I remember when the coach was like I just don't get it, why didn't she

tell me you know and and she just does this okay you know, she just nods ahead and then I said but coach that's how she is you know, it becomes paramount to understand her and this was a coach from a totally different culture and that's where it becomes, what was my athlete communicating here and when I know that maybe if she doesn't talk to me, is there someone else in the group who could have communicated? Who could have given the message. So these things right, become very very important because we think of the vision, we think of the height, we think of the outcome but remember it's that journey where everything has to come together and that's why communication is just so so paramount right?

Now how do we build effective communication, right? So before we build communication, we need to ask what it is that I have communicated? I have established; be it with my team, be it at home? What are my expectations? So especially now we're talking of sport here so you're talking of your athlete, you're talking of also your team right, and if the expectations are not clear, we've not set, what is the boundary, then you can't blame the team, right?

So you lead by example. I am the coach for example or let's say I'm a psychologist, what is it that I require, right? What is it that I am okay with you know? What am I trying to build? I'll give an example so it was a very young cricketer very very nice but he would use a lot of the efforts and it would be like in a sentence there would be fine. So after a while I literally had to go you know, I said listen this could be how you are but please this is not acceptable here. So I had to set the boundary also you know? How do I communicate what I'm communicating and also it's not just like listen this is what I want right but we say for something to build, for us to build a relationship for us to come together and perform for me to support you, it has to be beyond me and it has to come to a we, right? So the channels even if let's say someone's bunk practice or really messed up a match it's understandable for the coach to be angry but then the channels are open you know maybe after a point of time I can go and talk. So it has to be open and safe and I said the sandwich approach, constructive feedback is essential. And also knowing who takes how much, right?

Sometimes you know someone let's say after a not so good performance is very very emotional. The coach or the team then goes, this is not probably the right time, wait till this person has calmed down and then I bring it up, right? Something that we do in sessions is also role play. You use fun, you use puzzles, you use quizzes and look at how I will handle tough situations that become very important. Because remember, where the team and in sport you're on a pressure cooker. So how do we find ways to bond, to innovate, to play and bring

in empathy for the team to bond and our communication to get effective, right? That's very very important.

So, one of the things that I do, I like working with age group because I think that that's where you can really sow the seed and whether it's age group or a very elite senior team something that I do is you know open it up with maybe a little reflection, a little fun. It could be a video, it could be get a little movement you've opened, you freed you know there awake they're curious and then put in your message.

Yesterday I was giving an interview with one of the sports ex who's just coming into the profession and he was asking me what do you do, how do you do, when do you have the session? So I was saying listen it's really about gauging the team, the temperament. Where are they? How are they and then going like how much can I give? You might have prepared brilliantly but if your team is tired right and I remember like there was a group of us who went and you know, this was a cycling team and it was just before, it was this the group was, training was in high load.

And I remember thankfully it was assessment okay and we had to do the assessment and there was a group of us. And one of my colleagues was also struggling a little bit with Hindi and these guys are so tired right, so you might be brilliant but you have to realize okay get this. Then when they relaxed then you also have to gauge with okay, let's finish this how much we can to their best and then let's schedule a session at another point so it's really about the field gauging because if not, there's really no communication there.

They might be polite, they might really want to listen but the body is giving you another cue right? We'll talk about the body in another section. The cues that the body is giving.

So I finally want to bring this section to a close by asking you what's your communication style? Have you reflected on your communication pattern? And I think one of the best ways would be to really recall a challenging discussion you had but it was effective, right?

So what was my tone, what was my intent, how did I communicate. put that down on paper right?

And then look into another discussion which was probably very heavy and didn't go anywhere, so what probably happened there it's not necessarily our mistake all the time right but then what did I learn from it and also what did I bring in? Was I open? Was I curious to

the other or was I defensive? Did I need to get the job done? I was in a rush? What was happening? So and look at the difference between the two and going forward it's like what are some of the action points that I can put in to become an effective communicator, right?

And I want to like you know, this is improv remember improv theater so I use a little bit of it. When just to open up the sessions and there's this philosophy called yes and so let's see I tell you something and we're having a discussion and then you say something, I'm probably not so okay but if I just pause and go hmm yes and it could also be this, so your defenses haven't come up. But instead if I say no but right, then what happens you're there I'm here and then we're talking to each other's worlds so, the philosophy that is told here is, oh yes so I hear you right and what okay so stay with this.

I'd like to end this section with this and we look into a little more on the non-verbal and body and tactile in the next section. Thank you.