

Watching Film

Nope, this time I am not talking about watching Netflix.

'I looked so pale as if I just saw a ghost!' were the exact words my teammate exclaimed when we reviewed our Semifinals match. The year was 1987 and I was Vice-Captain of the school's basketball team. By this time we had trained for more than 15 months together - countless sprints on the court, two intensive bootcamps, and developed much needed camaraderie. Watching films together was another regular practice.

During film watching we dissected professional teams' plays, analyzed our individual positions on court and reviewed our own plays in practice and how we fared during competitive matches as they were captured on film. 'I know I was nervous but I didn't realize that I looked terrified', remarked my teammate. 'Maybe that's why your number wasn't called!', another teammate jokes, 'How could Coach trust you in our Semifinals when you looked afraid?' All of us had a good laugh and I learnt another precious lesson through sports - the importance of using film, videos, and external pairs of eyes to assess how we are performing.

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I benefited extensively from this practice when I was a young banker - several of my senior colleagues would observe me conduct meetings, facilitate discussions and deliver presentations, and share their observations and critique. As much as possible, I include this in my coaching today.

Professional sports persons understand the unique role that watching film plays and its benefits. In a recent interview, Steve Kerr, Head Coach of the Golden State Warriors credited watching film as part of the reason for the monumental improvement Jordan Poole, his third-year player made. 'Early in the season, he drove me crazy with how much he was dribbling and how often he would over dribble at the expense of our rhythm and our ball movement,' Kerr said. Poole, whose growth was so astonishing, is now on track competing for the league's Most Improved Player Award. The change according to Kerr, was Poole was open and coachable, putting in work in the film room - 'It's been a process of watching a lot of film and just continuing to talk to him and more than anything, his own willingness to embrace the things we're teaching him...'

I recently benefited from film watching too, this time on the badminton court.

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A month ago I started my quest finding better badminton players to play against (more on this in my future article) and I found a group of players who were a couple of notches better than me. My first outing with them was passable but I was a complete embarrassment subsequently. It was a painful and bewildering two hours as I made unforced errors over and over again, all the time hitting the frame of my racket. I just could not discern the problem and suspected that my eagerness to improve might have caused me to be tense and hence my reflexes slower. Or was I simply too slow for these better players? Ouch!

Fortunately, one of the guys had one of the games captured on his phone and upon review he texted me the next day, 'I thought it was strange for you to be hitting the frame so often for two hours so I looked at the video. You were right in position to take the shuttle and your hand was also raised at the right timing. Your racket was there and ready. My suspicion is that your racket moved faster or slower than you thought it should, or it could simply be one of those bad days'. Ah, this is a highly possible explanation as lately I switched to a super light head racket as I wanted to avoid straining my wrist and I was going for faster swing speeds and sharper attack angles. The 7 grams of difference between my new and old racket made a big difference! (My wife will say I wasted money for nothing...)

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As the saying goes, 'The devil lies in the details', and sometimes these details are easily overlooked when we are too closely involved in the action. Having an external pair of eyes, getting 360-degree feedback, and/or watching ourselves in action captured on film provides additional and valuable sets of data points. After all, a lot of us are already on Zoom / Google / Microsoft / Webex meetings these days and the recording function is readily available. My badminton game? It has gotten better but this is based on a small sample size.

Have you tried watching yourself in action? How often do you get honest feedback? Let's work together to improve!

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