

Cricket and the MBTI tool

Do personality assessments have a role in the careers of sports professionals? The ECB thinks so. See what they say about personal development and cricket in England and Wales

Behind each professional cricketer and the media coverage and public profile associated with them is a personal story. Like any professional trying to hold together a private life, cricketers often face challenges that have nothing to do with playing, but may have a big impact on their game. For top-flight sportsmen and sportswomen, self esteem is closely tied to personal performance.

The role of professional players is also wider than merely playing cricket. They require the interpersonal skills that will help them cope with other elements of the job, such as PR and interviews. Cricketers are also role models, which carries with it a level of public scrutiny that demands heightened levels of self-awareness.

Kate Green, National Lead Personal Development, ECB, is responsible for the wide range of off-field issues that players face.

"It's all about minimizing the dips," she says. "The more we know about a player, the more support we can give. This includes constructive conflict – an important element of any professional career. When under pressure, how are you going to react? The effects of that pressure are going to be felt both on the field and at home. Feedback of some kind is inevitable, and it is far better coming from colleagues and coaches than from the media."

Business Challenges

- Team building
- Communication skills
- Dealing with change
- Assertiveness and conflict training
- Post-sports career identification

Company Profile

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) is the governing body for all cricket in England and Wales. It was created in 1997 and provides support for the game far beyond the boundaries of international and first-class cricket.

ECB

This makes it vital that ECB colleagues are all 'speaking the same language'.

Solution

The MBTI® instrument is one of the defining elements of that language – it has featured in ECB vocabulary since the early 1980s. Its high profile and popularity in the sport is largely down to keen MBTI advocate Gordon Lord, Head of Elite Coach Development at the ECB.

"It enables players to learn and understand themselves better," says Green, "and to understand and appreciate differences in their team mates. It brings home to people that every person is unique, even if your MBTI type is the same as someone else's."

"We start as early as we can, to supply the building blocks for this journey. The MBTI is not a one-off event – it is part of the language, spoken from day one and reiterated and developed throughout a player's career."

Using the MBTI tool, Green puts together a one-page profile report, with input from the player and the coaches. The instrument is introduced in an initial workshop, covering the basics of type, with one-to-one sessions before and after the event to establish an MBTI best-fit type.

These early sessions enable new players to gauge themselves as individuals and as members of the wider team. MBTI personality preferences are illustrated, and the workshops look at how these influence behaviour. What does a player on his way out to bat require in terms of instruction or feedback, for example? Would he prefer as much information as possible, or would a simple thumbs-up of encouragement be more his style?

Like other professional sports, cricket played at the top level is all about gaining an edge – the small margin of excellence that makes the difference. To achieve this edge the ECB focuses on creating the right personal environment for this level of performance.

Solution

- MBTI training for players and coaches
- Embed MBTI language in the organization

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Kate Green,
National Lead Personal
Development. England and Wales
Cricket Board

ECB

By developing self-awareness and mutual appreciation of others' needs, each cricketer will be in with a better chance of reaching the optimal point in his preparation for a game or a tour.

"It's not only about knowing what type you are, it's acting on it to create the best frame of mind before going out for a game," says Green.

Results

The MBTI tool is culturally embedded at the ECB. It is applied from the very beginning of a young player's career, through to the mature years, helping people on board, and assisting them in the transition to life after professional cricket. It is used to shape a player's approach to life as a cricketer, and to tackle head-on any issues that may arise during their career.

As an example of this, ex-Sussex player and Sussex CCC Club Coach & ECB U19 coach Carl Hopkinson comments:

"With one particular player I seemed to be getting nowhere, and we'd come to a block. When I referred to the MBTI, I realized that we were actually complete type-opposites. I went back and reviewed my style as a coach. A year down the line, it's working well – we've both adapted, having taken the journey together."

"The MBTI is a great tool to get people's buy-in to the environment and culture," says Green. "The MBTI session is one of the first things new starters do, and remains a central part of team-working. Throughout their careers it helps players prepare, grow and deal with change."

"It's important for players to know that this is a career, and that there is more to it than just bowling a ball," adds Hopkinson. "In the old days this MBTI structure wasn't there. I've seen at first hand the change and the massive benefits brought by the tool."

Results

- Common language creates consistency between different players and coaches
- Increased self-awareness and empathy creates the right environment for teams to perform well



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