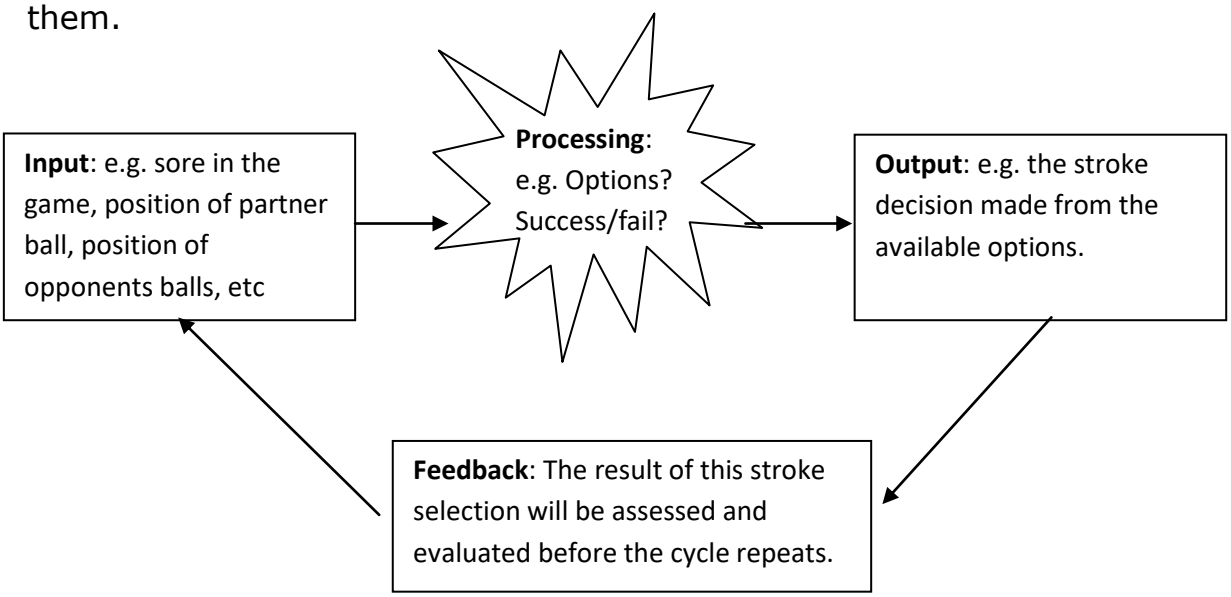
Decision Making Skills

By Ivor Brand

I suspect that we have all at some point walked off the lawn and asked ourselves did I make the right decisions, especially if we have just lost the game. I would also venture that we have all stood on the lawn and asked the same question after playing a particularly thought provoking stroke. The answer will of course depend on the '*perceived*' result of that particular stroke, i.e. its success or failure in achieving its intended aim.

In basic terms this process which we all go through can be referred to as the '*information processing model' (G.Miller 1956).* This is where the player will before their stroke; gather as much information as needed to enable them to make a decision from a variety of options available to them.



At this point there are two questions to consider, firstly why bother writing this and secondly why bother reading this?

I can answer the first question by referring back to me reading the February 2020 edition of the SWAN where Klim Seabright sparked my interest with his insightful and poignant article on 'So why did you lose'? My fuse was really burning in the following April 2020 edition where David Kibble wrote a fascinating article on 'The mental approach'. Well that was it, both articles rang true for me and with this present 'lockdown' I thought I would add my humble perspective from nearly 40 years of navigating my way through the highs and lows of this most enjoyable and yet at times most frustrating game. The answer to the second question is of course down to you and your decision making skills that have been at work since you started reading! That is, you are processing the information you have available to you and asking the question, what's in it for me? (wiifm) e.g. does this article have any knowledge for me or

does it interest me enough to continue, etc. Once considered, your outcome will be to read on or not?

Understanding the Decisions you make

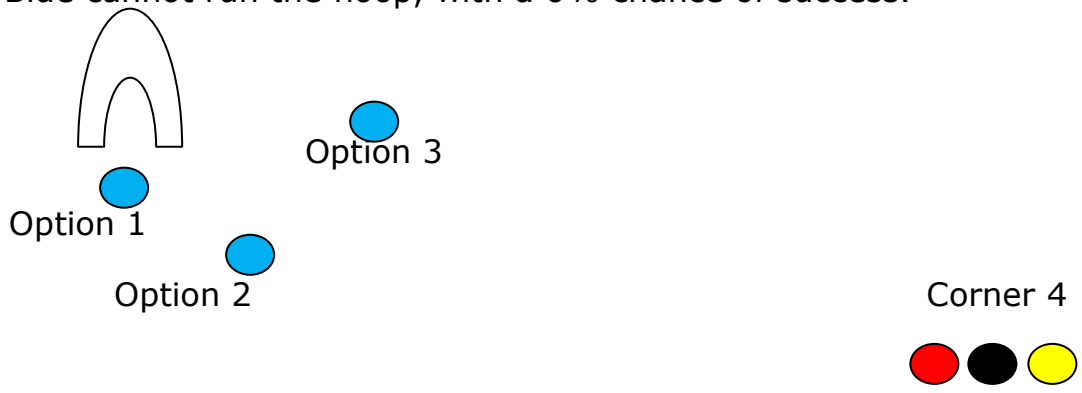
Sports psychologists often refer to getting in '*the zone'* that mind set where you are able to switch off from all the outside potential influences, but instead just '*focus'* on yourself and your *perceived 'perfect game'.* That is, to play as if you are in a *'trance'* and cannot lose! Although, I do recognise that this perceived state can exist, albeit rarely for most of us. I feel that it could be seen as a little too robotic, especially in the AC version where it is possible to win a game without too much interference from the opposition. Clearly, both AC and GC have similarities, but are also very unique in the way they can offer opportunities to make decisions. So as to avoid writing a book on this potentially vast subject, I will ask you to join me on the four opening strokes of a GC game in an attempt to get you to embrace the joys of decision making or at least make you think about it.

Firstly, I will make some assumptions about real life that you and your opponent are both in a neutral state. That is, that your minds are free of any 'baggage' e.g. previous night's sleep, journey to the club, personal relationships or health etc.

Recognising your variable factor (VF) and its % value

Setting aside the decision as to who tosses and who calls, which in itself can be agonising. I will assume you have won the toss and have decided after your warm up to play **Blue** at your perceived strength and angle towards hoop 1 (not a difficult decision). The outcome will be basically one of three positions each with own VF and its perceived % value:

1. Blue should run the hoop, with a 90% chance of success.
2. Blue could run the hoop, with a 50% chance of success.
3. Blue cannot run the hoop, with a 0% chance of success.



Clearly, there could a wide range of other % which could be considered, but for ease of time I will focus on these three.

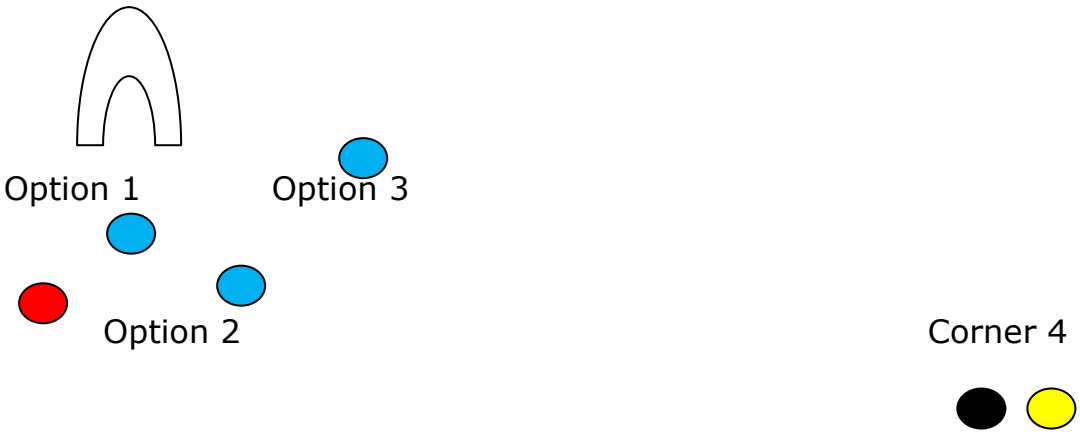
Red's response and difficult decision will depend on their perception of their *'variable factor'* (VF) that is, what % value they put on their rate of success of their stroke selection after considering all the information. The first bit of information is of course, which of the 3 above positions did Blue achieve?

If position 1, then Red should shoot at Blue in an attempt to try and remove it, having considered its VF % chance of success.

If position 2, then Red could still shoot at Blue or it may decide that its VF % is higher with an alternative stroke. For example, Red could try to set up either in front or behind the Blue. (In front could be a block, but means you could be sent into the lawn in the next round of play. Whereas, behind means you can only go as far as the boundary, but you risk leaving the hoop open).

If position 3, then Red will undoubtedly set up, but the decision as to where will involve considering the Blue's actual position.

Black now has even more information which has to be processed, which will all depend on what happened with the initial Blue stroke and subsequent Red stroke? However, the outcome is generally to set up. The position will depend on largely on what happened with the two previous ball's strokes? If Red did decide to shoot at Blue to try and remove it from position 1, whether it hits or misses will have little impact on Black's decision. As this will allow Black to have a relatively easy decision with a high VF % to set up. (See examples A & B below). However, if Red decides on the tactic of setting up because it has a higher VF %, then both balls are in contention for the hoop. The Black will now have a more difficult VF % decision to make e.g. block Red from the hoop or protect Blue from Yellow's turn, especially if Blue is in position 1?



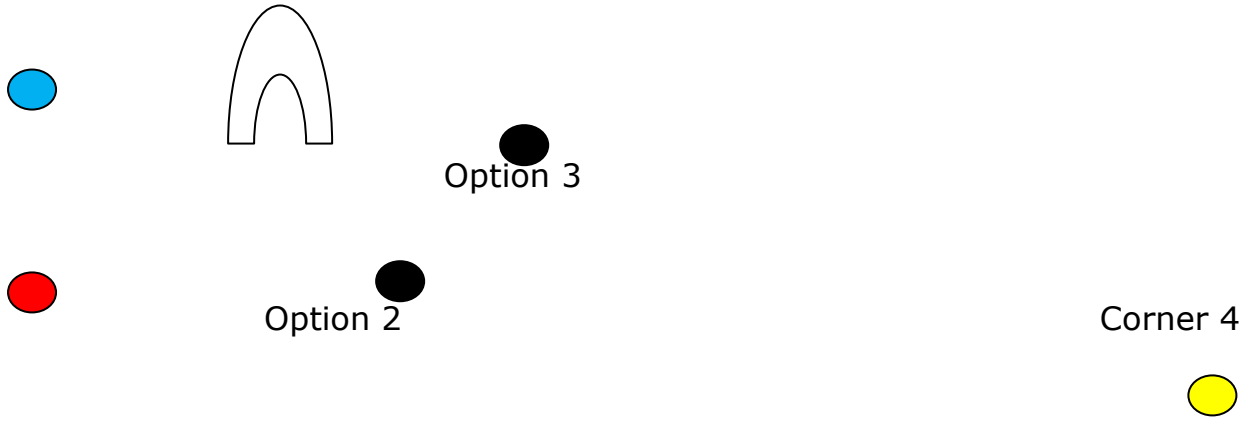
The **Yellow** of course has by now been busy processing all that has gone before and is now calculating its own VF % value for all of its potential outcomes from its chosen stroke selection.

Example A

If we follow the play that Blue was indeed hit by Red and that Black has now set up as expected in one of the original 3 positions that were available to Blue at the beginning of the game.

If Black is in position 1, then Yellow will consider its VF % and either shoot to remove it or set up and rely on Red's next play to remove it instead. This will of course depend on the VF % value that Red has given to that stroke. However, this value could change and will of course depend on what Blue has decided to do when it has had its second turn?

If Black is in position 2 or 3, then Yellow will set up having wade up the pros and cons of where the other balls are?

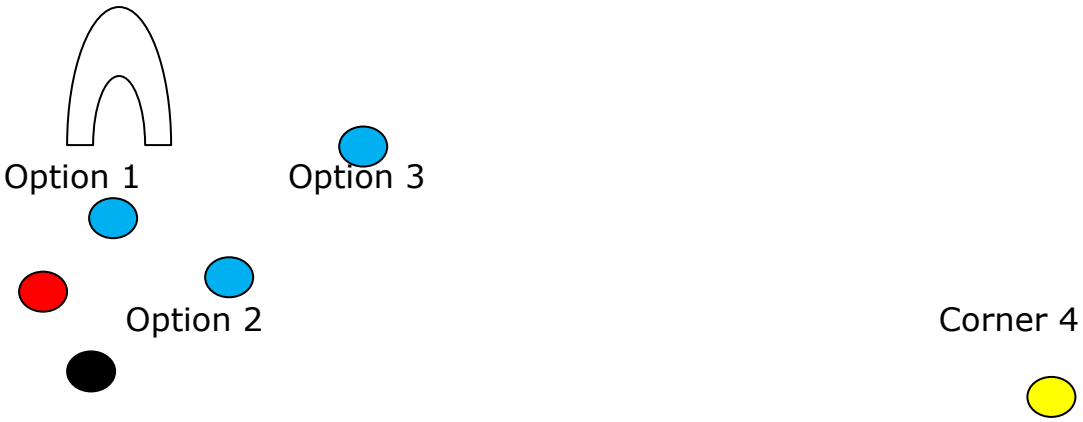


Example B

However, if we go back to the start where Blue is still in position 1, after Red has missed and Black has enviably set up. The Yellow has a relatively easy decision to make despite the VF %, which is to shoot at Blue or risk losing the hoop to Blue on the very next turn.

Example C

This is where the real *'fun'* begins, if at the start Blue is in position 1, 2 or 3 and subsequently Red and Black have decided that their best VF % is to join in by setting up. Then Yellow will have a multitude of decisions to make each with its own VF % value which in turn will result in their eventual stroke selection. This will also of course be influenced by the VF % value that Yellow is anticipating that Blue has to consider in its next turn? For example, if Blue is in position 1, it is likely that Yellow has an easy decision to make despite the VF %, which is to attempt to clear Blue, because the hoop will be lost in Blue's next turn. If however, Blue is in position 2 or 3 then Yellow will have a great number of VF % to think through before making its final stroke selection.



The whole process will of course continue until the hoop is won and eventually the game is finished and you are walking off for a well earned drink and a rest, asking yourself and no doubt others; did I make the right decisions? Points of view will differ, but you will inevitably judge

your *'decision making skills'* on the success of the outcome of your stroke or game.

Finally, please don't over think this article too much. I believe we are not robots and therefore, the VF % will be constantly moving along the scale stroke by stroke and game by game. Remember, the game is here to be taking part in mentally and physically, but most of all to be enjoyed. After all, lets spare a thought for your opponent who will also be going through these decisions and without which there would be no game at all.