

Chapter 6 Attitude in Performance

Introduction

Attitude is by far the most complex aspect of performance and is inextricably bound up with skill and fitness in contributing to good performance. It is relatively easy for any keen and enthusiastic player to attain a high standard of fitness and technical skill with hard work and then, with a sound knowledge and understanding of the tactical moves and experience in competition, proceed to reach a high tactical standard. There are many players who have reached high standards in all these aspects but fail to realise their potential and gain success, solely because of their in-appropriate attitude before and during a game. This problem does not only apply to players who have reached high standards of performance within the framework and operate at high levels of play on the pyramid (see fig. 7). Players at all levels and of all ages can suffer from an attitude which is inappropriate to the game. As spectators, we see many examples of this in those players who stop trying, lose their tempers, sulk, throw the racket around, argue with officials, play wildly and make numerous errors, become tense and play tentatively, lose easily when leading and in sight of victory, play too safe and do not go for the chances. In addition to these public examples of attitude there is also the player's private experience during the game to consider. You may have experienced some of these examples yourself or have been told about them by other players. Typical examples here are the players who experience doubts and fears, think about other things, find their legs feeling weak and jelly-like, cannot get a full breath, don't take that extra step because it will hurt, question the point of trying any more, get embarrassed to be seen chasing the shuttle when caught out of position, worry about what others might say if they lose, worry about winning again, think about what they will do when they have won, feel their side of the court is the size of a desert and the other side looks like a postage stamp. These are all experiences of a negative kind and will obviously affect the quality of performance and reduce the chances of winning. There are also inner experiences of a positive kind during a game. Typical of these are when you 'see' something in the opponent's expression and just 'know' that you have got him; when you are losing and just 'know' that you will win; when your side of the court seems like a postage stamp and the

other side looks like a desert; when the shuttlecock appears like an enormous parachute travelling in slow motion; when you feel in complete harmony within yourself and just cannot make an error; when you feel lost in the moment and everything feels effortless; when you feel that there is nothing that you cannot do. These are all examples of inner experiences of a positive or negative kind which are private to the player. Spectators cannot see these and so really cannot know of them unless the player voices them later.

When the attitude is positive and appropriate to the game we might not give a thought to the player's private experience. We just assume that everything is going well and he is getting on with the game just as he should. But even though we don't know what sort of thoughts or feelings the player is privately experiencing we do 'know' what sort of attitude he is expressing. We will know that it is a positive one and apparently appropriate to the game because we can see that the player is expressing determination, concentration and other features of positive behaviour. It is only when the attitude appears to be negative and inappropriate, which we judge from the way he is playing as compared with how we think he ought to play (as against objective standards within a framework), that we reflect upon his experience. We become curious, to say the least, about why he plays in such a way. We wonder about the cause of such behaviour, in terms of what he is thinking about and what he is actually experiencing. Sometimes the player can tell us and sometimes he doesn't even know himself what he was experiencing to cause the negative inappropriate behaviour which affected his performance. He just knows that something went wrong. If he does know what he was experiencing, e.g. some worry about what others would say if he lost, he may not know why he did or should worry about what others might say. All he knows is that at 12-12 in the final set he began to make mistakes and as always did not know why.

Even in this brief discussion, it will have become apparent that attitude is a complex and difficult area to understand, for it includes the feelings and emotions of the players. One cannot learn and develop attitudes in the same way one can develop physical skills and fitness. What makes it more difficult is that there appear to be several levels of experience which can affect a player's attitude. These are, first, the *private inner experience* of the player in which he feels or thinks in positive or negative ways before and during the game; and second, the *public expression* of those feelings and thoughts seen in positive and negative behaviour. It is possible for a player to have negative thoughts during the game, e.g. fear of losing because of what people might say, and yet to express in his observable behaviour tremendous determination, control and concentration. In such a case we would not even suspect that a player was experiencing fear. If we did we would be amazed and admire his courage in being able to overcome his fear. Of course, the player also has positive private experiences and expresses positive attitudes in his observable behaviour.



We can explain attitude at the inner, private, individual level and at the outer, public, observable behavioural level. Obviously, the desirable state is for a player to have a positive inner experience and to show in his public behaviour the sort of positive attitude which is appropriate to the game, and will contribute to his performance and increase his chances of winning. It would be useful to know how those players who manage to show a positive attitude during play do so when having a negative private experience. What we also need to know and understand is how to help those players who during the game express a negative inappropriate attitude arising from a private negative experience. The main problem here is to discover the reason for the private negative experience.

There is nothing new about these questions for they have been the subject of continual study by sports psychologists. Nevertheless, as attitude plays a crucial part in performance in the game it is important to understand what it is and its place in performance.

The following discussion will consider what attitudes are appropriate, what actually does go on in the game, and how it is possible to promote appropriate attitudes. Finally, I shall discuss the possible causes of an inappropriate attitude and what can be done, either to prevent players developing such attitudes, or to alter them if they are already part of a player's behaviour.

The appropriate attitude to the game

Attitude refers to a player's behaviour. If it comes up to the recognised standard then there should be a good performance. So far I have simply stated that certain attitudes are appropriate and others not. The basis for saying that certain attitudes are appropriate is because they are logically intrinsic to the game. Such attitudes will result in behaviour which is acceptable within the game. For example, if a player adopts an attitude of fairness, he will not try to cheat his opponent. We must examine the game itself to find out what sort of attitude is appropriate to it. Let's see what conclusions we can arrive at.

It seems safe to assume that you have taken up the game voluntarily. You haven't been forced to play it; you play it because you want to. If so, it would seem that you believe that it is a worthwhile game to play and that, primarily, you value it for the enjoyment you get from playing it, solely for its intrinsic value - that is, for what is in the game for its own sake and not for some extrinsic reason such as money, travel, status amongst your friends, or because it will please someone. Later we shall see that playing for these latter

sorts of reasons can lead to all kinds of problems and inappropriate attitudes. The enjoyment can come from the exercise, the hitting of shuttles, general movement about the court, the challenge of the contest and the fact that you find it an absorbing and interesting game to play. And if you are keen and want to become a better player you will work seriously to improve your performance for the added enjoyment that comes from getting further into the game. At that point, it will become *your* game, and then you will begin to care about how you play and take some pride in your performance and the success you achieve. In which case you will be more ready to commit yourself to those standards of excellence within the different aspects of performance in the game, i.e. skill, fitness and attitude. At this stage you could be said to have a love of the game solely for the interest and enjoyment it provides.

As you continue to play and gain experience you will try to improve your skill and fitness and give little thought to your attitude. In all probability, if you play the game for its own sake, then you already have an inherent appropriate attitude; this would arise naturally owing to the nature of the game. For the game is a contest in which you and your opponent compete to win; winning is the point of the game. It is because you both try to win that the game becomes interesting, for then you can test your performance against another player. That takes time, for badminton is a game that goes on for a period of time and calls for a certain degree of skill to defeat the opponent. You will find that the game becomes absorbing as you struggle to find ways to overcome your opponent and win the contest. We might presume, therefore, that you are interested in and committed to the task of winning. To do this requires a certain degree of persistence in your efforts until the game is over. At the same time, being committed, you will try seriously to win, and will show some determination to do so. Such a commitment will demand your full concentration as you give all your attention to the task of defeating your opponent. We might conclude, at this point, that certain attitudes are expected from you if you really can claim to play the game as a contest.

There is a further source of attitudes which arises from the fact that you are playing the game with another person. The implications of this are most important, for they also determine the manner in which you play. These are the moral attitudes which arise because badminton is a game which belongs within the world of sport. Man has devised various sports throughout his history and has done so, with few exceptions, for the purpose of his enjoyment and to enhance the quality of his life in some way. In sport we enjoy many things: the competition, the challenge, the test of skill and courage, the physical movement and so on. All the different activities within sport have some point to them. The point of mountain climbing may be to 'get to the top' or to test skill and courage on a new, difficult route; of archery, to hit the target accurately; and of games, to win. The enjoyment

comes from taking part, in competing against self, others or some natural challenge to succeed in the aim of that particular sport. Fundamentally, the main point of sport is enjoyment and consequently one should not try to win at the expense of the enjoyment. Any behaviour that lessens the enjoyment of sport in any way is undesirable and should, if possible, be avoided. We therefore need to know just what sort of attitudes would be appropriate in this respect.

We can start by recognising that sport is a part of the life of man and the game of badminton, a sport which involves playing against other persons. Hence social relationships with others occur and these presuppose certain *moral* considerations governing the behaviour of players towards each other and anyone else involved in the game. Morality is essentially concerned with how people behave towards each other in all aspects of life. It determines what sort of attitude is appropriate to others in the game. Hence it would be expected that a player should show some respect for the opponent, fairness, honesty and consideration for his interests in the game. When people make requests for 'sportsmanship', and the game to be played in the right spirit, they are making an appeal that morality shall prevail. And rightly so, for in such a context moral attitudes are as much a part of behaviour in the game as determination, concentration, courage and so on. Badminton is a part of the world of sport and has something to do with enhancing the quality of some part of our lives. If not, the game would hardly seem to be worth playing.

This part of the discussion can be summarised by concluding that certain attitudes are logically inherent in the game and act as the appropriate standards which a player should try to attain in order to improve the 'attitude' aspect of his performance in the game. They are care, pride in performance, a love of the game, commitment to the standards, concentration, perseverance, determination, respect and consideration for the opponent, fairness and honesty. These are central to the game and the basis of all other positive attitudes which may be expressed in the game.

I do not think that anyone could dispute the benefits that a commitment to such standards of attitude would have on performance in the game. If you play the game for the right reasons (which, I suggest, is 'for its own sake') then there should be no deviation from these standards. Unfortunately, this ideal is not always followed in practice and some players do play for reasons other than enjoyment and enhancement of quality of life. Many players play for extrinsic reasons which are often the underlying cause of the players' inner negative private feelings and thoughts about the game, and which can result in inappropriate attitudes reflected in their behaviour during the game.

Before looking at the possible causes for an inappropriate attitude and negative thoughts and feelings, it will be helpful to examine what actually occurs in the game, including behaviour in the knock-up period, during and between rallies and at the end of the game. In a way the game can be thought

of as a ritual which begins with the pre-contest 'knock-up', continues to the contest, and ends with the shaking of hands when the game is over. How the player behaves during the different phases of the ritual gives us some indication of his attitude.

1. The period

knock-up

Immediately prior to the game is the time when a player makes his final preparation for the work in that game. The knock-up should be purposeful in that it should be used to familiarise yourself with the hall conditions, i.e. lighting, temperature and shuttle speed, space above and so on. Hence, care and concentration should be apparent as the player gets himself ready for a good standard of performance from the first serve. A state of physical and mental readiness is essential. As the game is not at the contest level at this stage, and the opponent is also preparing himself, some consideration must also be given to his interests. You cannot just use the 'knock-up' period as a means to prepare yourself but must be fair and help your opponent to get ready too, if only to the extent of returning the shuttle to him so that he is able to rally and prepare himself for work. The player who simply hits the shuttle all over the court without regard for the opponent shows a lack of moral concern and certainly lessens the enjoyment of the contest at that stage of the proceedings. Such behaviour could be considered to be in poor taste.

Personally, I believe that much could be done to avoid this situation if there were an accepted form of customary behaviour which all players learnt when they began to play the game. For example, some dignity would be brought to the proceedings if the contest began with the players shaking hands as a formal acknowledgement of each other and the occasion. During the knock-up it should be common practice for players to inform each other what type of stroke-move each wishes to practise. Many young players have no idea how to begin a contest or practise in the knock-up period. It would seem that they do not receive any guidance in this area, and consequently the start of a contest is often vague and lacking in purpose. With guidance, there would be some sort of policy to adopt with the unthinking, insensitive players and even with those intentionally upsetting players who knock-up in a purely selfish way. It would become common practice to insist on receiving a proper knock-up, according to the custom. Indeed, it is most unlikely that once such a custom became an established unwritten rule, any players would break it.

2. The contest

Attitudes during the contest can be studied with respect to behaviour during the rally and behaviour between each rally.

a. During the rally

During the rally, an appropriate attitude should be positive with a full commitment to the standards inherent in the game. This is most important in order to make progress in the game. A player should make an honest effort

to gain a true measure of his performance; nothing is learnt by holding back. With a full commitment, the player learns about his strengths and weaknesses, i.e. what he can and cannot do; he also learns the same about the opponent, for example, how both behave under pressure when the contest is fiercely fought. You can then do something about what you learn. If a player doesn't make an honest effort, he will never know and always be in doubt about what he can or cannot do. Inevitably, this could lead to defeat in a vital match. So we would expect to see in the player's behaviour signs of care, concentration, determination and so on. Yet even here, some players adopt almost a borderline attitude between what is appropriate and inappropriate with respect to the sort of positive attitude required to win the game. Usually they do so against a weaker opponent and express only a partial commitment to the standards. The result is a performance which for them is mediocre, half-hearted and with attempts to win the rally without too much care and effort, well below their usual standards.

An inappropriate attitude here would be extremely negative, reflecting little commitment to the game. This would be shown in behaviour described as weak, ineffectual, lacking interest, bored and so on. Though here we might be curious why this was so if the player was supposed to be playing the game for his enjoyment. It could be that he was not really in the mood to play or had other things on his mind, but was obliged to take part in this contest. Then perhaps we might show some sympathy for him, for it is some-thing that we all experience at times. Alternatively, it could be that he plays the game for extrinsic reasons and was deliberately not trying for some reason. Then it becomes an entirely different matter and raises problems which will be discussed later (see pages 93-101).

It would seem that there are several possible patterns that attitudes can take during the rally, as shown in the model below.

<i>Genera/attitude</i>		<i>Commitment</i>	<i>Behavioural attitude</i>
Appropriate	positive-up to standard	full	concentration, care, determination, perseverance, fair, sporting etc.
	positive-below standard	partial	half-hearted,lazy, lack of care
Inappropriate	negative-well below standard	none	not trying, no care, thoughtless, aimless, no interest

b. Between the rallies

In between the rallies, players who have shown a negative attitude during the rally will continue in the same vein unless they are deliberately trying to deceive others and also, perhaps, themselves - for example, when a player doesn't bother at all during a rally and is totally negative and then puts on an act that it is all a big joke and fools around in between the rallies. This type of player is a special problem. At this point, however, it is more useful to us to assume that the result is still important to the player and that he wants to win. Behaviour between rallies varies according to whether or not the player is winning or losing. Positive behaviour can occur when the player is winning or losing. Negative behaviour usually occurs only when the player is losing.

An appropriate attitude is positive in two ways. These are:

1. Active purposeful, which is shown in such general behavioural attitudes as brash, cocky, joking, noisy, chatty, bouncy and exuding confidence. These all reflect a player of an extrovert nature.
2. Passive purposeful, which is seen in the player who is calm, quiet, non-committal, serious and unresponsive. This is usually the player of an introvert nature.

An inappropriate attitude would be reflected in negative behaviour of a destructive type in that it can completely destroy the performance and enjoyment of the game as a game in sport. This also takes two forms:

1. Active destructive of an extrovert nature reflected in rudeness, abuse, anger, shouting and arguing, racket throwing, time wasting etc. You can be certain this player cares about winning though he has certainly lost control of how he goes about it. This behaviour should be distinguished from the solitary outburst which is not directed at anyone in particular and can help rather than damage a player's performance. Sometimes the odd outburst can motivate one to try hard.

In active destructive behaviour, the player usually over-steps the moral boundaries, so acting in poor taste and bringing both himself and the game into disrepute. There does exist the odd player who sometimes manages to ride the fine line between comedy and poor taste in his behaviour.

Here there is always the possibility that such behaviour could become 'active purposeful' whilst it is still outgoing and of an extrovert nature. This cannot be said of:

2. Negative destructive behaviour of an inward nature which is to be seen in depression, dejection, misery, lack of confidence, slumping posture, lack of purpose and complete resignation. Once again, such behaviour would indicate a grave concern about winning and for some reason a very negative attitude about the way things are going. Unlike a destructive attitude of the positive type it is most unlikely that the player can get out of this state of mind. Usually it worsens and he is only released from

	<i>Attitude between rallies</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>
Positive	active purposeful	confident, bouncy, brash, joking, cocky
	passive purposeful	calm, quiet, serious, non- committal
Negative	active destructive	racket throwing, rude, angry, abusive
	passive destructive	dejected, miserable, sad, resigned, no confidence

These two models simply classify categories of behaviour expressive of the attitudes of different players at different times in the game. They should enable you to identify the behaviour of different players and provide some further insight about what actually goes on in the game and what sort of attitude is most desirable with respect to successful performance and enjoyment.

Attitude at the end of the

No matter how the contest was played, at the end one player will have won and the other lost. How does one behave as the victor? This is difficult to say, particularly if the opponent has adopted a negative, active destructive attitude in between rallies. Perhaps it should end just as it began, with a handshake as a formal acknowledgement of the other player and signifying that the contest is at an end. Indeed, this is the normal custom but it would seem that many young players are not fully aware of the point of the custom and allow the handshake to reflect their negative attitude. A weak handshake or a brushing of hands as they go through the motions hardly indicates a genuine acknowledgement of the opponent and an appreciation of the game. At the least, there should be a neutral firm handshake.

Does one do more? Are comments called for on this occasion? I would suggest that custom should require that a quiet 'congratulations' to the winner after a hard fought game would be in the right spirit. One loses little by commenting, 'Well played' or 'Well done' to the winner and from the winner, a return comment or a thanks for the game. It makes the game that much more meaningful and worthwhile, and enhances the quality of the occasion.

The point here is that some conventional customary behaviour is a necessary part of the game, for it places it firmly in a social context, played for the enjoyment of all. It is important that the game is made significant and worthwhile in this respect to indicate that all players actually do show that

they care about this game. The attitude of care can only be shown by the way we behave as we take part in the game. To learn and adopt such social customs will help to promote positive appropriate standards of behaviour during a contest. Young players should be taught and expected to conform to these conventional standards, from the start. I am convinced that it will help them with their attitudes later.

So far I have discussed the complexity of attitude with examples of experience and behaviour that are appropriate or inappropriate to the game. The list of appropriate attitudes which derive from the logical nature of the game are central to the game and provide the basis for other appropriate attitudes. For example, 'determination' provides the basis for 'adventurousness'. Only if a player is determined to win will he be prepared to be adventurous. Similarly, 'care' and 'perseverance' provide the basis for 'patience', for only if the player is prepared to maintain his effort over time and take care about how he does things can he be described as patient. Most of the positive attitudes shown by a player are interrelated and connected with these basic ones. Most players do adopt such attitudes in their play, but I think that this is because most players play for the intrinsic enjoyment of the game. They will try hard to win, for they accept that that is the point of the game, but do so knowing that nothing hangs upon the result, or ignoring anything that does. There is also the fact that, if they are keen to improve, they will learn from the experience and then try to eliminate weaknesses from their game.

Furthermore, because they do not think about the outcome, and can concentrate solely on how to defeat the opponent, they become absorbed and lost in a moment. Time seems to stand still for as they concentrate in that moment there is no future and no past. And in this respect the fundamental value of games and sport for man is realised. The activity becomes purely recreational and therapeutic, away from the stress of work. It is pure play and man is better for it.

Inappropriate attitudes: examples, cause, prevention, cure

There are many players who adopt attitudes which are inappropriate in certain respects. In these cases I believe that it is because they also play the game for extrinsic reasons; consequently, a lot hangs upon the result, and winning becomes an important issue. This can cause problems and result in forms of behaviour which are not only socially and morally undesirable but detrimental to performance. It is important to understand this problem to prevent such attitudes from forming, and to alter them if already formed. One way is to consider for what reasons a player might take part in the game, if not for its own sake. To what end is the game a means? And how can such ends cause him to adopt an attitude which is inappropriate in the game?

The answer lies in how the player 'sees' the result with respect to its consequences, and how he assesses the events that occur during play with respect to how they affect the result. So let us try to imagine how a player who uses the game as a means to some end actually 'sees' it. In most cases the 'end' will depend on his success in the game. He must win. There is one exception to this, seen in the player who doesn't want to win because it brings with it further expectations and responsibilities and demands on him. Such a player could actually experience fear at the possibility of winning which might be shown in negative destructive behaviour, dejection etc. There are numerous 'ends' to which success in the game can be a 'means'. These vary in several respects. For example, young teenage tournament players will have different ends to the senior tournament player who wants to become a professional, and both will differ from the professional player.

It would seem a simple matter to ask such players to what extrinsic 'ends' they see the games as a 'means'. We might expect the professional to answer that he sees the game as his work and means of livelihood, and from his success he can earn prize money as well as obtain large contracts from his sponsor; all this enables him to raise his standard of living for himself and his family. In addition he enjoys the social prestige and status that such success brings. It is important to him that he is able to perform well in competition and that nothing, therefore, should happen that is beyond his control, and will affect his chances of winning, e.g. poor court conditions, bad line calls, unfair behaviour from the opponent or a poorly organised tournament.

The tournament player might say that he wants to get into the national team so that he can travel, develop his game and gain some of the 'perks' of top-class players, or become a professional.

The young player may play because he gets the chance to travel, or meet friends and have a good social life, get a break from school, relieve the boredom in holidays and evenings (it's something to do), and it makes him a somebody with his friends and the other kids at school. It is important to be good at something. Finally, as I have suggested, all types of player might genuinely say that fundamentally they play the game because they enjoy it. If this were so, there would be no problems, for although, ideally, it would be good if everyone played solely for the intrinsic value, in practice this is not always the case. You start to play that way but with success there come side benefits which are not always directly related to the game. These are the different 'ends' that success can bring. But as long as the game itself retains its importance and is still the main reason for playing, then the standards within the game will be maintained and performance unaffected by inappropriate attitudes.

However, it is all too easy for the 'ends' to become more important than the game and for too much to hang upon winning. In this case, anything which can affect winning can affect the player's attitude. Thus all these

players could become very angry with the cheat who, by cheating, denies them their rights. For the cheat is unfair and it is normal human behaviour to become indignant when someone is unfair. Likewise a 'wrong' line call by the opponent or a line judge can affect the result and prevent a player gaining his 'important' ends. So frustration and anger can develop and be directed at the cheat or the line judge.

Such behaviour could be reasonable and justified, and we might consider it appropriate though rather strong. Unfortunately, even justified attitudes may be inappropriate to performance. If a player sees a situation as 'angry-making' because he believes that the cheat or the line judge has been unfair, even though each could have made a genuine judgement, then his attitude could cause him to lose concentration and may affect his standard of performance. That is why the player who cheats deliberately, to provoke such an attitude, is particularly distasteful in the game. Players must be on their guard that one attitude does not spark off another one which is detrimental to good performance. Some degree of control can be maintained just as long as the 'ends' do not become more important than the 'means' (the game itself). Then a player can resort to the rules of the game for guidance and remain firmly objective with the cheat or the 'unfair' line call. There are procedures that can be followed to cover most incidents that occur in the game in this respect. Once again it is important that all players are taught from the beginning how to apply the rules of the game in games with or without officials, i.e. what rule applies and what to say, to whom to say it and how to say it.

In fact those players now committed to professionalism in the game do give a sound performance on most occasions. The game is their craft and if they want to master their craft and succeed in it they have little alternative but to adopt the right attitude. Competition is so strong that they must either conform to the standards or fail. Those that do fail may either lack the discipline to conform to do the work necessary to reach high standards of technical/tactical and physical competence, or fail because they are unable, for some reason, to adopt an appropriate attitude to the game.

In general, it is not the player who consciously enjoys the game, both as a game and as a means to other ends, who is affected seriously by attitude problems. Such players are conscious of why they play and thus can be realistic about it and maintain some degree of control over how they play and behave in the game. Nor does attitude affect the player who plays solely for extrinsic ends, for in his case anything goes so long as he wins. He might be extremely fair and maintain all the standards appropriate to the game but he plays cold-bloodedly for the benefits success brings. There need be no enjoyment in the game for him: he must simply produce an efficient piece of work. Alternatively, he might cheat, bend the rules, upset people and devise all sorts of tactics to gain his success and the benefits that he wants from the game. Such players can act intentionally, either within or outside the

boundaries of what is appropriate to the game. It doesn't really matter either way to them, for the game doesn't really matter. All that matters are the ends the game can be used to bring about.

The serious problem lies with the player who is not consciously aware, or won't admit, that he plays either for or to avoid those extrinsic ends which affect his self-image. It is this problem I shall now consider.

Attitude and the self-image

Winning or losing has important consequences for the type of player we have been discussing, with respect to his self-image. I would suggest that even though such players may play for specific objectives, failure does not simply result in disappointment at not reaching the objective but results in damage to the self-image. And the threat of that occurring once the player begins a contest can cause a very negative attitude.

Even the successful player who doesn't want to win because of the responsibility and success it brings, feels this way because that much more will be expected from him and so greater will be the damage to his self-image when he does fail to win. It is quite true in this sense that 'the bigger they come the harder they fall' and such a player may try to avoid the hard fall by trying to avoid getting bigger. In fact he is in a predicament, for he cannot avoid playing unless he gives up the game, which for some reason he is unable to do. So he must continually face up to the possibility of getting bigger in status and prestige and with it the increasing fear of failure. The more successful he is, the greater will appear the risk he takes each time he steps onto the court. And should he fail, greater will be the damage, in his eyes, to his self-image.

I think that problems of self-image happen today particularly with young players, even though I have known experienced internationals to feel fear on the court at the thought of losing. Consider the example of the player who is expected to win against an inferior opponent and who, having lost the first set, is 11-8 up in the second. Suddenly, he begins to snatch at his strokes, plays tentatively, doesn't recover to cover the replies quickly enough and so loses the match. He has suffered, apparently, from 'nerves' and his performance has been affected. One possible reason is that he had doubts and thought he might lose. What would the consequences of losing be? To lose to such a player when everyone expects him to win; what would others think of him, and what a fool or failure he would appear to his fellow players. This is something he couldn't cope with. He 'sees' the result as having social consequences affecting his status in the eyes of others, and with it the damage he would experience to his self-image. So he experiences the emotion of fear and his behaviour on the court is affected. He tenses up and fails to perform with his normal expertise.

Another example is the player who adopts the wrong attitude before or

during the game, not solely because he might lose but because he believes he will lose. Losing will have disastrous consequences for his self-image and social status. So he doesn't bother to try to win and instead attempts ridiculous shots, makes appeals to the heavens and fools around, all with a 'couldn't care less' attitude. When he does lose he has his excuses ready and avoids the harm to his image. Wasn't it obvious to all that he hadn't tried and how can you be said to have failed unless you have tried? He has separated losing from failing as a person, for he can always argue that if he had really tried then he would have won. But to try to win he would have had to commit himself fully to the task and that would have required an honest effort which would have exposed him to the critical eyes of others. And as he believes that failure in the game is synonymous with failure as a person, losing becomes a blow to his self-esteem. The consequences of losing are too important to risk an honest performance. In trying to deceive his audience he deceives only himself.

The pressure of expectations

The expectations of other people, e.g. parents, friends, other players, coaches and officials, can have a disastrous effect on some players. In this respect young players are particularly vulnerable. In sport in general, and in badminton in particular, there is a tremendous promotion of youth participation in organised competition. The desire to promote badminton among the young also includes the desire to produce champions. Nowadays, we have organised tournament play and squad systems from the under tens upwards. Children are coached, selected for squad training and then pushed into tournament play and competitive match play at all levels (including national level). They are expected to attend training and practice sessions or else their interest is questioned. Proud, well-intentioned parents, coaches and officials now take a ride 'on the backs of children', bask in their success and feel dismayed if they lose. The adult lives through the child and the child has to meet the adult's expectations. The pressures are on the children to do well. The ten- and twelve-year olds compare notes about whom one should expect to beat and not to beat; for haven't the knowledgeable adults made their authoritative judgements, and aren't John and Mary being coached by Mr Goldracket and hasn't the county official selected them for the team. They *must* be good! How can either be beaten or not expect to win? Neither can they be expected to lose against someone who is an unheard-of nobody.

So here we are on court.

"I can't lose against her. She's a nobody and everyone expects me to beat her. But what if I should lose?"

"How could you lose to her? Look at all the work you have done and all the

coaching and training you have had. Why didn't you try? What went wrong? Fancy losing to her!"

"How can I be winning against him? He is a somebody. He has won this and that and is seeded and plays for the region and the schools side and everyone knows he is good. I'm just a nobody and I can't beat a somebody. He is going to start trying in a minute and then I can't win."

"Well, you gave him a good run. A pity you couldn't keep it up. Better luck next time!"

I know of two young players who had the misfortune to be talented in towns where the adults organising the game had forgotten that the game is for the enjoyment of the individuals who play it. One, a natural games player, suddenly found that some success had led to his whole season being completely organised for him, including when he had his days off. Furthermore, he was expected to comply with this programme if he wanted to be selected for the county junior team. Selection on merit was suddenly forgotten and a condition of any further play had to be his complete conformity to the system. Fortunately, he was a sensible lad and had non-interfering parents. He got out quickly and returned to play his beloved football which he had risked losing in order to attend the 'voluntary' Saturday morning badminton squad sessions. He was fourteen years old.

The other, a girl, was expected to attend all sorts of organised commitments and was severely criticised and subjected to threats about her future in the game if she did not attend. When she looked unhappy at sessions or spoke up she was castigated for her bad attitude and made to feel that she was ungrateful for everything that was being done for her and the time that others were putting in on her behalf. After suffering a completely miserable period on the court and many sleepless nights which resulted in being prescribed sleeping pills and tranquillisers from her doctor, she was advised to withdraw from the various squads. This she did with support from her parents, and officials with imagination and the right values in the game. She began to play the game for herself again rather than for the ambitious, demanding organisers, and recovered her health and her enjoyment of the game. She was sixteen.

It is unfortunate that too many well-intentioned adults have organised the game at too insistent a level for many young players. As a result, there are many sensitive young adolescent players who suffer unnecessarily and opt out as soon as they can. It is one thing to organise badminton for young players and encourage them in their play. It is another to place too much pressure on youngsters with unrealistic expectations whilst they are still learning and improving their performance in the game. Children have many interests and pressures which arise from school. The game is for their recreation and enjoyment from organised competition. Not everyone wants to or will become a champion, even though at that time he or she may be the

greatest junior player the world has ever seen. Those who want to become champions at the adult level may do so in spite of the system and suddenly appear from nowhere.

Too many expectations can be placed upon the youngsters; and when results become all-important and the emphasis isn't on whether the young player enjoys the game or is developing certain aspects of skill, but whether or not he or she wins, then there is a danger of causing psychological damage. Prestige and social status, attention and respect from friends and players, officials, coaches and parents are often gained by successful performance. Winners become somebodies. They get spoken to and watched when they play. Success is everything and standards of performance in skill and attitude are allowed to fall as long as the player is the winner.

Children suffer in this syndrome, for they are still acquiring beliefs and values about their social reality and what is and is not important in it. To make winning more important than it is and to equate success in a game with value as a person in a social group, is to teach the wrong values and to present an undesirable picture of reality. In fact, the idea of wanting to win because it makes one important is really totally irrelevant to the game. It may motivate you to try harder sometimes and initially foster interest in the game, but it can just as easily cause the opposite effect and result in the unnecessary suffering of the young player.

I have deliberately discussed the problem of the young player, mainly to draw attention to a matter of grave concern in the development of players in the game. The promotion of appropriate attitudes comes from encouraging players in general, and children in particular, to play the game for its own sake. By all means let the authorities organise formal competition for young players; trying to win is the point of the game and provides the challenge and the enjoyment - but do not create a situation in which self-image and social status hang upon the result. It cannot be totally avoided, but its importance can be considerably reduced by emphasising those features of the game which genuinely matter - those features that you experience by playing the game for its own sake. The benefit of such emphasis is to see players who are free from fear and able to commit themselves fully to attaining a good level of performance and success in the game.

The value of this discussion is that it draws attention to why players behave in different ways. What we learn from it is that we must know something about the players' beliefs and values to understand their attitudes. My concern has been mainly with the negative inner experiences and inappropriate attitudes, for they are the type that badly affect the standards of performance. What I have said about children also applies to adults. It is most likely that what many suffer as adults is because of how they experienced the game as children. We can prevent the development of inappropriate attitudes in children in the way we teach and organise the game for them, by being realistic about children's badminton and teaching them

to play the game for its own sake. There will, of course, still be some who give up the game as other interests take priority; others will continue in clubs and some will become champions and professional players. But perhaps all will do so with an attitude that reflects a positive inner experience of the game as one which has been worthwhile and rewarding.

There still remains the problem of those players who do possess a negative attitude to the game. What can we do about them? It would seem that if certain beliefs and values cause inner experiences which result in particular attitudes, then we must examine those beliefs and values and assess their validity. For example, do other people really think that you are a failure as a person in some way if you fail to win? Are you really stupid if you make a silly shot? I very much doubt that the facts support the player's beliefs about what he thinks others think about his performance.

Should a player go on court and expect to win? Yes, if it is Rudi Hartono playing a beginner. He would be silly not to. But if it is two equal opponents or an unknown opponent, then one has to wait and see. The same applies about going on court and expecting to lose. You cannot, unless you know that the gap between you and the other player is very wide, i.e. you know that you both play on entirely different levels and you can make a realistic assessment of your standards. But when the gap is unknown or known to be close then you cannot predict the outcome. It is unrealistic to do so. That would be more a sign of stupidity than anything else. Those people - parents, coaches, officials, friends and the like - who predict the outcome prior to a game simply place an unwanted extra burden on the player. It is called 'the pressure of expectations'. And if placed on those players who are subject to an inappropriate attitude, then it will certainly cause one. Comments about the possible result will not affect the supremely confident player who has a full commitment to the game, for it is most unlikely that such a player will take much notice. He will have made his own assessment of the contest and isn't dependent on others for the attitude he adopts. It is a pity that the problem ever arises, for there is enough to work on in the game without getting involved with the status of 'self'. I am sure that many youngsters would not do so if they were not pressurised by unrealistic adult expectations and beliefs about the value of success. Young players brought up with an objective approach to the game would learn to be objective in their appraisals and realistic about winning and losing. If they could place the result in perspective then, as adults, they would not suffer the results of inappropriate attitudes developed in their formative years. It would certainly result in a richer game for all.

One way to ensure this and prevent or cure the problem is to encourage players to think critically: to question the comments and statements of coaches and others; to ask, 'How do they know?' and 'Are they right?'; to examine the facts and make a realistic assessment of their chances in a game. To do this it is necessary to learn about the game and what counts as 'good' in

the game with regard to the standards of skill and fitness and the attitude appropriate to it. And finally, just make sure that in learning the game, you play for the right reasons - the game itself.

By looking at things in this way players may find that they hold irrational beliefs and the wrong values. However, if they are able to change their beliefs and values in the light of the facts, they should come to 'see' the game differently. They will have different experiences and attitudes in the game. You can change your attitude by changing your beliefs and your values. There is the odd exception, when a player accepts that his beliefs are invalid and yet continues to see the game in the same way. He knows that he is wrong but just cannot change his emotional response to the result and its consequences. In such a case it is sometimes possible to overcome an inappropriate attitude with a stronger appropriate attitude. For example, fear can be overcome by courage and doubt by determination. In such instances the player requires 'character' and the 'will' to overcome his feelings and adopt attitudes more appropriate to successful performance.

Discipline in performance

It is often a matter of some debate whether all players possess sufficient character and the ability to control feelings with stronger attitudes. Some would argue that character and strength of will are inherited - you either have such qualities or you don't. I would doubt this and argue that they are qualities that are developed in and through the work people do and are achieved by discipline. This conveys the idea of submission to rules or some kind of order. In badminton, the discipline is to submit yourself to the work required to attain the standards of excellence within the different aspects of performance. The attitudes adopted in work are most important, for the work demands some degree of sacrifice to attain skill and fitness. At the highest levels the player must submit himself to practice and much physical work. Practice entails continuous work on the technical/tactical aspects of skill to achieve control and accuracy at speed in the tactical situations in the game. Anything detrimental to achieving that standard is ruled out. A player cannot miss his practice; he must make time and sacrifice his other interests to do it. Similarly with fitness, which involves a balance of training, diet and rest. The highest standard is his potential maximum fitness. The rigours of training required to reach this standard rule out anything detrimental to it. Players who do not maintain regular training sessions; who do not work hard in training; who overeat, smoke or drink too much alcohol, and fail to get their necessary sleep, will find it difficult to attain the standard. The penalty for any neglect is a lower standard of fitness and consequently a lower standard of performance in the game. The responsibility for attaining these standards rests with the player. If he wants to do well he must submit himself to the standards required. Those that do so, naturally acquire the

discipline to maintain them in competition and thus adopt appropriate attitudes. Too much work has been done and too many sacrifices made not to use these attitudes when the chance to perform arises. Through the work the player has learned to lift himself when tired or bored and frustrated. In preparation, he has overloaded the work to ensure that there is nothing in the game that he cannot contend with. The disciplined player is trained like the good actor. No matter how tired, upset or fearful he feels, 'the show must go on', and accordingly he submits himself to the discipline of his craft and gives a good performance. In this way the years of training and sacrifice, in striving for standards, pay off.

Attitudes and experiences in training

Even though discipline develops in the work and from doing the work to learn the craft, this doesn't imply that a player *must* suffer pain and hardship in training, particularly in the areas which require much physical work. Technical and fitness standards can be attained with a minimum of hardship if they are approached with the right sort of attitude. There are different approaches to physical work, particularly in fitness training.

This can be seen as a demanding, challenging business requiring hard slog, sweat, and punishing yourself as you push through the mythical 'pain barrier'. Here it is seen as necessary to *suffer* the experience as though this was the only evidence that you had worked hard. So the athlete is motivated to work and drive himself to the point of exhaustion in the belief that he has only worked hard if he has reached such a state. Such an approach may achieve the desired physical results but is amazingly crude and negative in its approach. Training here is seen as something one suffers and endures rather than as an experience that one can enjoy and look forward to. In training, a player must work in accordance with the principle of overload and progression simply to achieve a training effect and get fitter (see page 83). Yet it doesn't follow that he must add the principle of 'suffering' to prove that he has overloaded his body to make progress. In fact the training experience can be enjoyable and rewarding if you approach it with a different attitude.

An approach to training

In training you should get to know your body and 'inside' it to some extent. Then you experience your body as a total unified organism with all the parts operating in harmony. In most forms of exercising, particularly running, rhythm is an essential factor in experiencing the joy of exercise. For example, when running, it is possible to concentrate on the rhythm of breathing and the step pattern until both are synchronised and one begins to get lost in the rhythm. Here, good technique in terms of carriage, posture and balance as the trunk settles on the legs, with relaxed loose arms swinging

freely from the shoulders without strain, and easy light steps, all contribute to easy rhythmic running. Running is then effortless and involves tension without strain. In this way you become free from your body. But, if there is strain and unnecessary tension caused by poor technique, your body is in internal conflict and struggling to do the work, and this is very noticeable.

Children possess this freedom, for they run with feet which fly across the ground 'defying' gravity. Man naturally possesses a quality of movement but loses it unless he persists with his running from childhood and continues to enjoy the experience. With good technique and rhythm it is possible to become lost in the rhythm. As one gets 'inside' the body, it is but a small step to get 'outside' the body and free from it. Then you run with a quality akin to floating - completely effortless. Here there is work without strain and the experience is totally enjoyable. When the body is in harmony then you forget it. It seems not to exist and you become free to focus thought on other matters beyond the self or achieve a state of no thought. Time now stands still, for you become part of the moment and absorbed in the experience. Much depends on the strength of the body and its capacity to diminish hard work. It is difficult to achieve this state unless the body is fit. And to achieve fitness does not require punishing training sessions.

There is a technique which requires the application of a particular attitude towards physical work in training and practice. It is not only applicable to running but to all forms of exercise, requiring an act of concentration which involves conscious thought or a process of conscious 'no thought'. An example will make this clear. Sometimes you receive an injury which results in a nagging, throbbing pain. It hurts. If you fight the pain it tends to hurt even more and can cause you to grit your teeth to bear the pain. This is what happens when you suffer pain in training from hard exercise. You fight harder to overcome it and it hurts even more; so more fight is called for. The fact that the injury nags and throbs would indicate that it has its own rhythm. To lose the pain is quite easy, for the answer is to concentrate on the rhythm of the pain. Instead of experiencing the pain as something foreign to the body you accept it totally and concentrate on it. You become the pain by getting into the rhythm of the pain. As you do so the pain disappears. That is one way.

Another way is not to consciously think about the pain; to think about something else or to think nothing, an act of meditation which results in your 'leaving' the body, for in meditating you lose conscious awareness of it. You step outside your own body and in so doing the physical pain disappears along with the body. This technique can be used to develop a similar sort of attitude to body training, e.g. press-ups and sit-ups. You simply concentrate on the rhythm of the exercise and lose yourself in the rhythm. The body then works without strain and in complete harmony and you enjoy your body working; very much conscious of it but unaffected by it. A simple case of this is something most players experience when they are skipping in training.

Skip without music and the work can be quite tedious. Skip with pop music, concentrate on the rhythm, and the skipping becomes effortless and the work without strain. Of course with concentration you could also skip without music and immerse yourself in the rhythm of the body movement to achieve the same effect.

This doesn't mean, however, that you can go on indefinitely. The body is a chemical organism and work will use up the fuel which produces the energy and produce waste deposits which build up in the muscles. When the energy supply has been used up completely or when too much waste deposit has built up then the muscles will cease to function. The work stops, either to remove waste deposits or take in more fuel. During that period you must rest. However, this doesn't alter the point that even severe training, relative to the fitness of the athlete, can be enjoyable as an experience in which one can lose itself in the activity.

If this state is achieved in competition then you can lose yourself and be free to focus attention on the opponent totally. Your body functions as the instrument through which you express your thoughts intuitively in the stroke-moves you use to defeat your opponent.

Attitude in competition

I have discussed at length what counts as an appropriate attitude in competition by analysing the game to sort out those attitudes fundamental to it. The competition is the test of attitude. However, when the contest is a close one and skill, fitness and attitude are equal then a player must call on something extra. In some way he must intensify his efforts. This is where the discipline developed in preparation gains its rewards. For through the work the player has disciplined himself to attain the high standards necessary to performance and thus knows that he is capable of performing well. He knows that he is up to the task. Inevitably this will result in confidence in his own ability. In this way doubts are prevented or removed and he can concentrate on the task of winning. But something more is needed, if all things are equal. That is character and the will to win which, though it comes through and from the work, is also unique to each individual. It is the combination of mental toughness and spirit that enables a player to intensify his resolution and lift himself to that extra dimension of human endeavour. He raises his standards. Thus we see, and the opponent feels, that total commitment, cold determination, absolute concentration, rigid control, continual perseverance, complete care and adventurousness as chances are taken fearlessly. Now that player is totally lost in the moment in single-minded pursuit of his victory and under such relentless pressure the opponent must eventually succumb. Even this ability can be helped to merge, although it is something unique to an individual. In practice and training it is possible to set very high

standards of performance. A player, therefore, could develop a level of technical skill and fitness which is far higher than any other player's. Then his 'basic standard' performance would be equal to any other player's highest standard. Consequently, if another player managed to raise his standard of performance in a contest, our player could simply raise his beyond his basic standard. In this way he appears to play at a much higher level than anyone else.

To achieve this in practice and training requires a total commitment to the work and a very disciplined attitude. Attitude is developed to high levels along with the skill and fitness. Such a player does not see his attitude and level of performance as being anything special and on court it takes little extra effort to behave in such a way. Only to the opponent and the spectators does he appear to be superhuman.

Another way this can be achieved is to take a particular approach to the importance of certain events in the game. For example, if the player has trained to perform at very high standards and considers this to be quite normal then for him there will be nothing special about what he considers to be normal things. He would kill a shuttle from just above net height as a routine matter, not as the adventurous risky move most players would judge it to be. And because each stroke-move had a purpose there would be nothing special about a winning smash. It would be no more special than the 'clear' three moves back which created the situation for the smash. In such play there are no highlights. Everything is of equal importance. If this was not so then the winning smash could cause a lapse in concentration and sense of purpose. There may be inner excitement or satisfaction at that stage of the contest and he may inwardly rest on his laurels and relax for a moment. But, if no one move is more special or important than any other, then all require equal concentration and commitment and care in their execution. At this point, the player cannot even share the applause of the audience when they see the kill as a highlight, for to him it is quite normal and there is much hard work to be done. Only when the contest is over can he enjoy his victory for a short period before he prepares for the next match.

The player, in his act of concentration, can still be adventurous in taking his chances, but this is to be expected, for adventurousness is only an expression of his concentration and intuition. If his concentration lapses, then the intuition that there is a chance to make a move may result in action that fails to achieve its purpose.

To play in this way demands a greater sense of purpose from the player. He must be clear about the outcome once he steps onto the court, and then work single-mindedly towards achieving it. As nothing is special and there is no relaxation until the job is completed then the player works calmly towards that end. And if he can achieve this state of calm, undisturbed by irrelevant emotions and unnecessary passion he should perform well and enhance his chances of success.

The exploitation of attitude

If attitude is a part of performance then one could argue that it is a fair target for tactical exploitation. Just as we try to find weaknesses in the opponent's skill and fitness then we should also try to find weaknesses in his attitude.

This is the area where gamesmanship arises. The danger is that one can go too far and overstep the moral boundaries which underpin the rules of the game. The principles of fairness, respect and consideration for the opponent still apply. Nevertheless, within these boundaries there is scope to test out the opponent's attitude. You could try to upset his concentration by playing a game which is not in keeping with his style. You could take a player who likes to play a quick game and slow the game down, thus making him impatient and frustrated and, perhaps, force errors. Alternatively, you could play a fast game against a slow player. To upset a player's attitude within the area of tactics and fitness seems right and proper and good strategy. As such you should seriously consider how this can be achieved. It is questionable how far this can be taken in between rallies, for then it is all too easy to go too far. It is acceptable perhaps to 'stare' at the opponent just prior to the serve; to announce the score calmly and deliberately as though you intended to take a complete grip on the game and turn on a special performance. It is acceptable to keep the pressure on by wasting no time between rallies, purposefully picking up the shuttle and getting on with the game. It might be acceptable to take one's time between the rallies as if preparing oneself for a more determined effort (but it would not be acceptable to waste time deliberately, though obviously this is difficult to prove). It would not be acceptable to pause and stop just as the opponent is about ready to serve or to receive. Once or twice for good reason, but not frequently, for then it becomes obvious that the action is deliberately designed to upset the other. Some players try to upset others by talking, making comments and fooling around. Others question line decisions, forget the score or even claim the wrong score, in their favour. When this reaches the stage of deliberate cheating then it must be condemned strongly. What is acceptable is a matter of judgement and opinion in many cases, but in others, there are the laws of the game which stipulate how players should behave, and recommend procedure when these rules are broken. It is up to every player to learn the rules of the game just as he learns the skills of the game, and to formulate his policy when opponents try to exploit his attitude unfairly. Fair attempts should not bother the player who is committed to the job at hand and has adopted an appropriate attitude towards it, for little should disturb him in this respect.

Conclusion

I have discussed attitude in some depth in order to provide some insight into its importance and place in the game. It connects with inner experiences, emotions and feelings and public behaviour on the court. It is a central area in sports psychology simply because it is so complex and yet so essential in the performance of any player. I know that this discussion raises questions which are left unanswered. This should not cause any undue concern, for the sole intention has been to examine attitude, its many facets and its connection with skill and fitness.