

Unconventional – What leaders can learn from the English Cricket Team



WEEKLY LEARNINGS 2023

Weekly Learnings 7 / 2023

The English cricket team is playing a different type of cricket – aggressive unconventional, entertaining, and fun. They beat Pakistan in Pakistan 3-0; they just beat New Zealand in the first test yesterday. There is a lot leaders can learn from their methods.

1. The mindset of the captain Ben Stokes and the coach Brendon McCullum. Sto-Cullum are passionate positive and want to win from any situation and will try unconventional methods. Sto-Cullum are a unique combination of Attitude and Approach.
2. Cricket is a game of strategy and fine-tuning tactics from time to time. In the old days, strategy was set, and tactics were few and far between. This English team strategy is to play aggressive, take the game by the throat, play their game irrespective of what the other team does. Very rarely do they slow down.
3. The past is the past. England test cricket was in shambles 11 test matches ago, with a poor Ashes series. England lost the maximum tests in a year, they had the most ducks in 2021 with 54 ducks, and extras was the third highest scorer for England in 2021. The England openers accounted for 14 of the ducks in 2021, vs 27 ducks by English openers in the decade before that. Debating the past, living in the past, using the past as a measure for anything is irrelevant for the current English team. They have the ex-captain Joe Root in the current team, and they value him for what he is. Many leaders tend to change the old members for the sake of change and having a clean slate.
4. In the last one year, England has scored 22 centuries, more than any other team, hit more sixers than any other team. They hit 500 runs in a day in Pakistan with four centurions. Here's a staggering statistic- England had a runs per over rate of 4.13 in test cricket in 2022, a number not seen for 112 years. It is the second highest rate for a year since test cricket started in 1877. The Australia cricket team of 1910 achieved 4.47 runs per over in 2 tests, the Australian cricket team of 2003 did 4.08 runs per over in 12 tests while England did this over 15 tests.
5. One setback doesn't define a new way to the game. Sto-Cullum had a disaster vs South Africa, but they learnt from it and stayed the new course. Many leaders desert the new course at the first sign of trouble.

6. Ben Stokes has seen the lowest of depths (the T20 final over vs Braithwaite) and the highest of highs – World Cup ODI and the T20 world cup win. He has a great career and is happy to help his colleagues shine in the spotlight. Many leaders are shy of this- they don't give enough opportunities for their team members to be applauded. The coverage in any media should be more than the CEO soundbites.
7. A lot of critics have called this new English type of cricket somewhere on the edge between selfless and reckless. This new brand of playing is attributed to Eoin Morgan after their 2015 loss in Australia. The English team believes it better to stay true to what they believe in. They declared their first innings at 325 for 9 with an hour to go and got 3 New Zealand wickets as a result on day 1 of a test match. No team in world cricket would have done that. They declared and set Pakistan a gettable target. As stokes said – “I would rather go for a win than a draw, if I lose that's ok.”
8. Sto-Cullum are merit based – they give their players enough chances to succeed but recognize when a player isn't performing, and they need a change. Since they give people opportunities, everyone knows they must play to strategy.

So, transformations can happen, but you need to have the right attitude, give people chances and be bold with your strategy. Play to win don't go for average.

Shiv

www.shivshivakumar.com

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