

## 'PLAY AWAY!'

The Havamal is the Book of Viking Wisdom and the word itself means "sayings of the high one." It is written as one single poem from a collection of poems and offers advice for living, proper conduct, wisdom as well as having both practical and philosophical guidance. There is a phrase in this book that reads:

*"Never walk away from home ahead of your axe and sword. You can't feel a battle in your bones or foresee a fight."*

Essentially, the phrase is explaining for the reader to always be prepared whenever they are travelling. You cannot foresee the events that are going to happen or the dangers that lie ahead but with the right preparation you can reduce the effect that they can have on your plans.

The Vikings were vastly experienced travellers / explorers who never set off on any saga without meticulously planning and preparing beforehand. Their preparations were fluid in nature which allowed them to adapt quickly to any scenarios that would set to derail their original plans.

Over the weekend all teams had to travel to Croke Park, bar Dublin who are due to travel to Omagh this week, in order to play their Round Two game in the Super Eight series. As the Vikings would have done, each team would have left no stone unturned in preparation for their journey. A full itinerary would have been drawn out and a behind the scenes operation would have been executed to perfection to ensure as little disruption to the players as possible.

As a player the operational organisation of any county setup is vital to ensure that they can totally focus on the upcoming game. On a personal level, it is also vital to have your own travelling itinerary within the team constraints. This personal planning can be as specific or as general as you feel comfortable, but must contain what you plan to do with the pockets of free time you will have between meetings, physios, meals etc.

Planning free time gives a form of routine for the time you are spending away from your normal everyday life (work/school/family etc). When you plan like this it ensures that every time that you are travelling away for a game your internal mechanisms become familiar with your travelling routine and as such allows the body to stay in sync.

Humans are creatures of habit and when routine is followed, we function correctly. If and when routine is disrupted, or a routine is not in place then disfunction occurs and performance is affected. As creatures of habit we first define our habits and then our habits define us, so with this in mind be sure to create good habits so as to ensure they have a positive effect on your overall performance.

When travelling away and staying over, it gives the goalkeeper a great opportunity to connect with other players and especially those players whom the goalkeeper will be in direct play with on a constant basis. Speaking with your defence and discussing with them how you expect them to play and how those defenders like to play is very worthwhile. It builds a strong rapport and a cohesive understanding on the field of play. It is far easier to give direction to your defence if you know how they are thinking during games.

Discussing opposition players with your defence can be done as a group or individually, especially if certain defenders have been given marking roles for certain attackers. Discussing what extra help you can supply them during the game will pay dividends for you both.

Goalkeepers can also use this time to speak with the defence and midfield players especially in regard to Restarts. Discuss any routines that the team have rehearsed as well as describing the movement and required level of desire when attacking the ball.

It will also be important to discuss any defensive formations/structures that the team uses and go over each of the roles that players are expected to play. As well as this, any team language or buzz words will also need discussed.

Always ensure that any discussions you complete are noted in your training diary for future reference. Remember “Ink it, don’t think it!”

Although the reason for your travel may be a game, it is also important to remember to not over focus. Always plan some downtime that will allow you to escape from all the preparations etc., which will allow you to disconnect and ensure that your brain stores the discussions you have had into your subconscious mind.

For your downtime you can choose to read a book, walk the grounds of your hotel, hang out with teammates, watch film/TV, light gym/pool session, play computers and if organised play in the games room. All these activities will allow you to disconnect and allow you to unwind so as to alleviate any stresses you may have.

It is also important to eat properly while you are away. Meal times will be set so if you are accustomed to snacking or eating later in the day it will be important for to plan for this either by providing your own food or taking some extras at the set meal times so you can consume them later. As well as eating you must ensure you look after your hydration which can be difficult when staying in hotels. It does require some thought as you will need to ensure you have enough fluids etc. to keep you going through the night.

Whenever players stay away for games it is a disruption from their normal routine. The important thing to remember when travelling away is to try and create a consistent routine that involves the same processes so as to normalise the situation as much as possible. This lessens the effects of the disruption to a minimum and allows your body’s mechanisms to stay in unison with one other. For optimal performance remember that preparation allows you to **‘Play Away!’**