
Tactics in Lawn Bowls

A dictionary definition might be :

“The art or skill of employing available means to accomplish an end.”

Much has been written and expressed by many of those who have offered their personal views and experiences on the subject and this is a model endeavour to condense and to correlate those various findings.

Any consideration of tactics must also be related to other factors which may cause you to fall short of your defined objectives and expectations :

- The mechanical skills (practised ability) of yourself or your team members letting you down
- You are under estimating the risks of degree of difficulty
- Your opponent’s skill in countering your tactics or in limiting your options to manoeuvre

Tactics, of course, like any other aspect of our game, cannot stand alone, but tactical opportunities permeate through other areas besides the jack and the head.

Our dictionary definition “employing available means to accomplish an end” must also encompass the wider aspects which might include:

- The individual strengths and weaknesses of your own team members
- The ability of members to function as a team – not as individuals in a team
- The ability of your opposing players

The art of being a good tactician is to contain the opposition to a minimum of shots, always remembering that any tactic employed must embody a legitimate and sportsmanlike approach.

So let us look at some specific areas of play and consider some of the tactics that might be employed.

Singles and Team Tactics

- When being outplayed, try and change your opponent from the hand which is playing well for him. This can be done by changing to your opponent’s hand, dropping short, but only slightly in his draw.
- Try moving the mat to upset his rhythm of delivery rather than his length can be very helpful.
- Sometimes, when a quiet conservative outlook to the game is not paying dividends, become more aggressive. After all, when a game is being lost a change of tactics might unsettle your opponent.
- Build each end to your own particular tactical strength. Do not allow your opponent to dictate the terms of which the game will be played.
- If you win the toss it is a tactical advantage to take the jack. Roll for a three – quarter length and where the jack comes to rest will give you a good indication of the green speed and as a result the amount of draw required.

Tactics in Lawn Bowls - Continued

- It is not wise, tactically, to use a straight drive when playing singles and even with a running shot care should be exercised.
- Your first and third bowls are tactically of greater importance than the second and fourth. Your third is invaluable for consolidating a good position, retrieving an awkward one, or for clearing the head for your last bowl.
- It is very bad tactics to play your third bowl unless you have a clear picture of the head from the mat. If in doubt you should walk up to the head and have a look.
- Be quick to notice whether the opposition lead is a "niggler". If so, it is good tactics to keep the jack on or near to the 2m mark. The persistent niggler will then find many of his bowls in the ditch, much to his and his Skip's chagrin. In an effort to correct this, he will probably start dropping short.
- It is always good tactics to play the shot offering more than one opportunity of attaining your objective. In other words play the shot that gives the easiest and perhaps an extra chance of success if you happen to be slightly astray with grass or pace.
- Fast or running shots should only be played when the position and back bowls are in your favour.
- If the scores are favourable to your team, it can be good tactics to play into danger, eg play your opponent's shot so that if you are successful, even though you may have given the shot away, you have removed the danger of losing numbers.
- After the first two or three ends, choose the side of the rink which is playing evenly in pace and green, and thus gain a tactical advantage over an opponent who bowls around the clock.
- Do not allow your opponent's tactics to change you from this side if you are in charge of the game.
- However, you must be flexible enough to change your hand if needed, to consolidate a head or to improve a score.
- If your opponent places a bowl short and in the draw, it is better tactics to stay on the same hand when trying to draw to save. Better the hand you know than the one you don't.
- Be aware of your opponent's tactics when the length is altered or when the mat is shifted.
- It is good tactics to have two second shots, preferable not together, or at worst, second and fourth, before playing aggressively into the head.
- Tactics means being aware of the ability and attitude of your opponent.
- Plan your tactics so they do not suit your opponent, not necessarily to your own strengths.
- It is poor tactics to pack a head when playing against a good driver. Counters that are at a distance of 30 cms or so are very hard to beat.
- Any tactical advantage can be frittered away by poor delivery of the jack.

Tactics in Lawn Bowls - Continued

- There is no need to always draw to the jack, but do not try to gain the tactical advantage by beating your opponent's bowl.

Your opponent

It is essential in forming your own tactical play, to be aware of your opponent's weaknesses.

Certainly when playing a stranger a number of points should be assessed during the first few ends of the game.

While these may not be 100% correct, they will surely be of benefit to you during the progress of the game.

- Has your opponent a preference for a particular hand. For example, is the forehand or backhand preferred?
- Does any particular length seem to be favoured?
- Is the player showing any particular attitude to the game? For example, a conservative or aggressive approach.
- How does the opponent select the green or aiming line – a mark on the bank, spot on the green, etc? Movement of the mat might disturb the selection of the aiming line.
- Delivery style – is it cramped? Is it a crouch? Will that style cause difficulty at certain lengths?

Psychological Tactics

- When losing concentration, or to disturb an opponent's rhythm it might be tactical to ask for a toilet break and to use that ten minutes to refocus,
- Provided that it does not interfere with one's own game, keeping up a conversation, in a perfectly innocent way, may hamper your opponent's concentration.
- Picking up your opponent's bowl continually, whether wanted or not, might unsettle your opponent.
- Take every opportunity to query short ends, when losing, may disturb your opponent and provide time to refocus your own concentration.

Tactics for Windy Conditions

Becoming proficient in perfect conditions is not enough for the player who really wishes to master the game. Bowling greens can change very quickly and the player striving for good length must always be on the lookout for such changes. One of the factors that can affect the true run of the bowl, and a major one, is wind.

To become expert under these conditions there is no substitute for regular practise on windy days.

Wind can be across the green giving a wide and narrow hand, diagonal giving heavy conditions when delivering into the wind and faster when finishing with it, or straight up and down giving variation of pace. It can be steady or gusty and naturally it is not possible to master the unexpected.

It is therefore essential that you select and play the true hand, whether it is wide or narrow. If you do this you will find these vagaries much easier to overcome.

There is nothing more helpful than to go out and practise on windy days.

Tactics for Head Building

Quite often, during social play, the head is allowed to build without any real thought being given to the necessity of strategic placement of bowls to either maximise the number of shots gained or to reduce the score that one's opponent may achieve.

Obviously you should not take unnecessary risks in directing your teams shots or play into your opponent's hands by underestimating their ability to take advantage of a dangerous situation that you have created by careless head building.

Perhaps a golden rule to bear in mind when building a head is that if you cannot win an end then the main aim is to lose it by the least number of shots. Never be afraid to let your opponent have one shot when your risky "saving" bowl may mean going down four or five. If you are holding shots don't be greedy, but look for adverse positions in the head where a movement of the jack could result in a big score against you and play to cover that possibility with a position bowl.

Remember

- When holding shots never be narrow
- When down never be wide

Once the lead has established the side of the rink that is kindest for that player's delivery then ensure that the lead sticks to that and does not "bowl around the clock" ie bowl on the same hand, be it forehand or backhand for the whole day.

This is one of the first principles of head building and the Skip must insist that the lead conforms. Provided that the green is true the lead should stick to one side of the green. Even if a bowl appears to be in the draw the lead should not change the hand unless the Skip directs. A slight change in foot position will allow you to draw under or around a bowl in your eye.

Tactics for Jack and Mat

- At the first end it is advisable to roll the jack to you or your team's favourite length. It is good tactics to concentrate on and strive to win the first end as this can create early confidence.
- If you have been winning on a certain length you should always place the mat as nearly as possible in the same position as the previous winning end and roll the jack to the same length at which you have been having success.
- There will continue to be controversy over whether the winner of the toss should take the mat. However it is good tactics to take the mat at the first end. It is like having an extra bowl, and gives your lead the feel of the green speed and is certainly

Tactics in Lawn Bowls - Continued

preferable to having the doubtful asset of having the last bowl in a possibly cluttered head.

- However in the event of a tied game which requires an extra end it could be tactical for the Skip to have the last bowl, presupposing that neither team is playing better than the other on any particular length, and that the head will not become hopelessly blocked as can sometimes happen on a slow green.
- Should you wish to change the length it is a good tactic to achieve this by altering the position of the mat because this might pose a problem for an opponent who uses an object on the bank to establish the aiming line.
- When playing against an inexperienced bowler you can gain a tactical advantage by having the jack on the 2m mark and control the length required by moving the mat. Inexperienced bowlers are often afraid of going into the ditch and tend to drop short when this is done.
- If playing against an experienced bowler with a good firm shot or drive it could be tactical to leave plenty of distance between the jack and the ditch so that in the event of the jack being moved there will often be ample room to draw the shot.
- It is good tactics to observe and note the length which your opposition uses when they gain the mat. Often they will reveal where their particular strengths are, and an astute Skip can take advantage when the mat is regained.

Remember that any strategy or tactic that you might employ can be completely nullified by careless rolling of the jack. The simple act of rolling the jack to start a match, or an end, controls much of the game and the correct choice of length is the only foundation for building a head that is favourable to you or your Team.

Participant's Notes