

## **Bowls tactics**

The purpose of this session is to help you understand the tactics and have an appreciation of what your skip is wanting to achieve

### **Trial ends**

The placement of the jack is a distraction. The first thing you need to know is how does the pace of this green compare to the usual pace of the greens at Burnside. Bowl to a 3m mark if your bowl goes past it or short of it you can then make the adjustment. Note weather conditions, especially wind direction or a cross wind making one hand wider or a head wind making one direction slower.

### **Watch the track of every bowl**

Every bowl tells a story especially during trial ends and the first couple of ends. Watch your bowls, your teammates, and all the opposition bowls. Skips especially need to see what is happening, if any bowl is far too wide, lock it in the memory as you may have to draw a positional shot or draw to a displaced jack.

## **Purpose of the game**

The purpose of the game is to place you bowls in a way that applies pressure on the opposition.

### **Building a head**

This is often talked about but what does it mean?

Irrespective of whether you hold the shot or not your skip wants a number of things;

- A couple of bowls within a 1 metre radius of the jack
- A bowl right out the back to ensure the third or skip can play a weighed shot with confidence.  
**You may have the shot early on but things can change**
- Bowls that have come to rest at 45° about 2m behind the head to cover movement of the jack
- Cover bowls among groups of opposition bowls

What does the skip not want?

- you are not playing a game of singles with your opposition lead. If you do that you will end up dropping short or narrow or wide jack level. These are all out of position bowls and are unlikely to play a meaningful role in the end.
- A bowl shorter than a metre is no good as it's very unlikely to be knocked into the head and invariably makes the skips job much harder. A good skip will give you a wee clap and say good effort while muttering under their breath.
- Skips need to communicate with their players, but too often, after a poor bowl, the player turns from their skip. Players about to bowl should stand back from the mat await visual or verbal instructions from their skip before commencing their pre-shot routine.

- Players must watch their bowls until it comes to rest, no matter how poor it is. As one skip quipped "if I have to stand here and watch this crap, so do you". Also the skip may wish to convey a message to the player before they deliver the next bowl.

#### Avoiding short bowls and changing hands

- A lead should never ever change hands after their first bowl on their own accord. Nor should they change hands from one end to another without the skips direction.
- If you have just played your first bowl then you already know what adjustment to make to avoid your or the opposition bowls. Refer to building the head (above). Give your skip a bowl 1m from the jack
- Avoiding a bowl you believe is in the way can be done a number of way, the obvious one is by keeping the same line but applying some extra weight to give an excellent positional bowl.
- If you need to get close you can avoid the bowl by adjusting your delivery position on the mat, the mat is 15 inches wide the obstructing bowl is 4 inches wide. You can move to one side or the other or forward or back. Keep your same marker point
- Other factors not so obvious

#### Playing the same hand

The lead and second should stay on the same hands throughout the course of a game ignoring the locality of both yours and the opposition bowls. Chopping and changing hands does not help any bowler. Unless you have a perfect identical bowling action on both forehand and backhand you will find it difficult working out the correct weight when you swap

#### Playing the same side of the rink

Inconsistent weed covering, prevalent wind direction and general wear will mean that very rarely will both sides of the rink have identical speed and shape of turn. Characteristically you will have a wider and narrower hand. That will mean that the distance from mat to jack on a wide hand is 2 metres further than a narrower hand, you need to make allowance for this. I was taught to add on a Metre of weight when I change hands, better to be over the head than short.

Sticking to the same side, forehand one direction backhand coming back means than the shape of turn and speed will be the same

#### Dominating the kinder hand

When you have a strong cross wind you will have a straighter hand where your bowls will end up around about the jack and a wide swinging hand where bowls will be scattered. Whoever dominates the

straighter hand will dominate the end. A Skip may ask you to play the straighter hand even if their opposition bowls in your way in order to wrest control from the opposition

Your skip does not expect you to draw 2 touches every end what they want is 2 effective bowls but what does effective mean.

An effective bowls is one that

- Causes the opposition to reconsider the bowl they were going to play or
- Creates pressure or
- Creates potential danger if they do not execute their later bowls well

Everyone is trying to apply pressure on their opposite. When a player is playing really well its often a result of the opposition being unable to apply any pressure to them.

## **Lead**

Delivery of the jack accurately and consistently can give you a tremendous advantage. If you deliver both the jack and the bowl consistently then there must be a correlation between them, I found that I needed to put a wee bit more into the delivery of the bowl than the jack enabling me to deliver the 1<sup>st</sup> bowl killer.

Another tip is when you lay the mat bring your bowl with you and place it beside the mat as you deliver the jack.

One on, one behind or two handy bowls. If a lead draws a toucher or very close to it your next bowl must be behind by a metre or on the lip of the ditch. You are looking to create danger, they may attack the head and make things much worse for themselves. Having played an excellent 1<sup>st</sup> bowl you don't want to create a target with your 2<sup>nd</sup>.

If the opposition has drawn this bowl your first bowl needs to be over the head to counter the threat that is developing and turning the tables on them. This also allows your later players to play positive shots

## **Second**

The second player is never short, your "dead draw" is 1m over and .5m narrow you are always giving your bowl a chance. If things are not developing well on the head this sort of weight will allow changes on the head

One of the lead and seconds bowls must be right over the head, bowls on the 2m mark proves invaluable. If the leads first bowl is a short shocker they should go for the back bowl to ensure the next bowl provides good tactical value

### **Third**

A full range of shots and is in sync with the skip. In very successful teams you will find the skip and the 3<sup>rd</sup> (or 2<sup>nd</sup> in triples) will trust each others calls without question. They will back up the skip if the front players are having a grumble keeping harmony in the team.

A team under pressure goes quiet so the 3<sup>rd</sup> needs to keep the front players involved and creating a positive relaxed atmosphere and needs to keep the Skip up.

### **Skip**

Give your players clear concise directions, standing on the head with both arms outstretched telling them to do what they want is no instruction and doesn't help your player. You should have already noticed if they have a preference or are bowling closer on one hand. Play to their strength they will love you for it.

A full range of shots building a plan to gain best outcomes and thwarting the opposition

Body language and demeanour are extremely important. Sitting down, folding arms or double tea pot may be comfortable for the skip but it does nothing to instil confidence in the team. It's also great to talk to the opposition skip, I'm sure you've got something riveting to say, but when your team member is about to bowl you are giving them and their bowls your full attention.

Capitalizing on bonus shot opportunities can be the winning of a game. Too often a skip is relieved or content that they have the shots and they are too tentative in their attempt to gain another shot. It's all about taking the correct green because if you are too heavy you will pass down the outside, too light and you drop short. Skips need to apply the same intent as they do when they are down on the head.

Self doubt is the beginning of end, self confidence is the winning edge.

Rhythm of the game

Sometimes you may feel that things are not going so well but you're still in touch with the opposition. You may be getting a hiding from your opposite lead and you want to change things around but your bowls, although nowhere near the jack are proving to be a nuisance, you're inadvertently creating pressure. There is going to be far more to be gained by keeping your lead and second doing what they've been doing.

The flip side of this situation is when things are going against you need to change things. This can be done in some subtle ways that can be missed by the opposition, shifting the position of the mat 2 meters up the green but roll the jack to the same place you have been playing. Getting your lead to follow the opposition often results in getting in their way or changing hands.

Displaced Jacks

When a jack has been moved off the Centre line you need to make an adjustment to your line. The general rule is to adjust your aiming point by 1/3 the distance the jack has moved. If it has moved 1.5m off centre move your aiming point .5m.

As a game progresses the wear on the green around the bank and 2m mark means that it will be flattened out and will be quicker and swing more. When drawing to a displaced jack you will be going through an area that has had no foot traffic, it will be slightly slower and won't draw as much

### Skip decisions

Every time you instruct a player you need to assess

- the benefit for you
- what could go wrong
- what shot is the opposition likely to play
- have I got that covered

The number one rule is to play towards your bowls and away from the opposition bowls. That will mean your player can play their shot with confidence because any contact with the jack will push it towards another of your bowls. Make sure you tell your player that.

If the opposition has a resting toucher your job is to get a handy second shot

Forcing shots are played when

- You want to remove a bowl to gain a shot
- Reduce the count against you
- When you want to remove a danger
- When you need to disrupt a head when you're down

When should you play a forcing shot

- Too often it's left too late and is a last resort. A 2-3m on shot from with your seconds 2<sup>nd</sup> bowl or your 3<sup>rd</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> bowl will give you the opportunity to recover. Driving with the skips last bowl has to be done with care, if things turn sour you have got no opportunity to recover. If you are contemplating a drive do it with the skips 1<sup>st</sup> bowl.
- Having your 2<sup>nd</sup> playing 2m through the head is far more preferable than being short. Using that weight will result in your bowl remaining in the head if it makes contact.
- The really big losses dropping 5, 6, or more are often caused by a skip driving 2 or 3 of your own bowls out of the head. Before you call a drive you need to look at every scenario especially what would happen if the drive is wayward and the angle it will come back into the head. I find it useful to look go around and look from the front.
- A jack trailed to within a metre of the ditch will rarely stay and it's very difficult to defend even if you have the shot. Positive intent is required.

What speed and other considerations

- You need to develop a pressing shot 2 or 3 metres, a run shot ditch weight and full weighted drive. You need to understand how your bowl will react, different makes will react differently. Can you go around a short bowl or are you underneath.
- you may be down on the head but have only 1 of your bowls there, you may be 3 down and removing your only bowl will increase the number further. Aim directly at your bowl or so that your drive is always moving away from your only bowl. Even the fastest of drives will move enough to ensure you won't hit your own.
- Using short bowls to protect your bowl is another way to play a forcing shot with safety. Again understanding how much your bowl will swing at different weights is critical
- Playing through opposition bowls. If you are faced with a difficult open hand draw but there are opposition bowls on the other hand an option is to play down onto these bowls with a view to disrupt the head or open a path for a later shot. It is an aggressive shot designed to remove an early bowl, a half bowl contact will send it left or right out of the head. If you hit the opposition bowl flush you want it to travel through the head with sufficient weight to be destructive, hitting an existing shot out of the head or hitting the jack. Your bowl when it hits another bowl flush will travel around a metre forward often coming to rest in the head.

#### Protecting your shots / Increasing the size of the target

- If you have a very close bowl directly in front or behind the jack a bowl coming to rest around .5m short and wide is valuable for the team that is down it presents many in-off opportunities and has increased the target size. For the team holding the shot you must not leave a wing bowl, from the mat the target looks small and you don't want to give the opposition something to come off or rest onto. Look to gain additional shots through the maze of bowls on the other hand
- Playing a block can be effective but it needs to be played short enough so that it doesn't create an in off opportunity. You need to decide what shot played by the opposition will cause you the greatest damage and where you want it to stop, the closer to the mat the better. If the attack is coming on the forehand play your block on the back hand, creating the widest possible obstruction.

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#### Accepting 1 down

Losing 1 shot on any end is a good outcome, you can bowl a great end and the opposing skip draws a great shot with their last, that happens. Similarly trying to get shot when it's inaccessible can result in a number of your bowls getting out of position and you dropping a number. Focusing on second shot limits the damage and may present opportunities because you have a number of bowls in close proximity. Driving off the 2<sup>nd</sup> shot is also a good tactic.

Playing the oppositions shot can be risky but effective way to eliminate a dangerous situation. They may have a heap of catching bowls where a trail of 1m will net them a big number. By playing their shot with 4m of weight will scatter their catching bowls or move the jack a long way if you make contact.