

Another great article from Brian McGivern. I think we will all need a lot of coaching once we are back playing bowls. Thank you Brian.

## **THINK ABOUT IT – PART 2 SHOT SELECTION CONSIDERATIONS**

If you ever read the bowls magazines, you may see the occasional picture or diagram of a head of bowls where you are asked “What would you do next?”. My answer is always the same. “I would look at the scoreboard”. The score is a major factor in deciding which shot to play. But it is not the only consideration. In the last article on match tactics we looked at the big picture. In this one, we start to look in more detail by focussing on the things you should think about when you are deciding what shot to play.

**1. THE CURRENT SCORE** Are you winning or losing? How many ends are left to play? Both of these factors will affect your choice of shot. The previous article in this series touched on the differences between attacking and defensive play. If you are winning comfortably with few ends left you should probably look to play covering bowls to avoid the danger of losing a big count. If you are trailing and the ends are running out, you may want to take a risk on a shot that just might get you back in with a chance. Don't forget, in team games the aggregate score may be important. Think about that before you risk all to try to win your individual game.

**2. THE MAT CONDITIONS** A lot of competitive matches are now played mat-on-mat, i.e. at an indoor bowls club. With the short mats laid on top of what is a reasonably consistent flat surface, the pace and swing should be roughly the same on all four hands. But they do vary, so watch for subtle differences.

At more traditional venues, e.g. Elm Court, or at our clubs, the mats may all play slightly differently. Is the mat playing faster in one direction than the other? Do the bowls swing more on one side than the other? On some hands it may not be possible to play a draw shot with much chance of success. The ability to read a mat is a major factor in winning bowls matches.

If you have trial ends, use them to find out as much about the mat as you can. Of course, you will want to get a feel for the pace of the mat but you don't score any points for getting close to the jack. Use some trial bowls to see what happens when you play a wide or tight line. Try a weighted shot to see if the bowl bends much.

Fewer games these days start with trial ends. If you are unfamiliar with the mat you need to pick up its characteristics quickly. Watch every bowl that is played and, if you are away from home, pay particular attention to the home team's shot selection. They will know better than you what shots to play and (possibly more importantly) what shots NOT to play.

**3. YOUR BOWLS** Do your bowls swing? If so, is it with a late hook? Bowls with a lot of bias allow you to play around shorter bowls but, if the mat has a big swinging hand, require more precision when drawing to the centre line. If you are bowling with bowls that take a tighter line you are probably playing at the front end where there is a greater likelihood of a clear draw. You can play the swinging hands more readily than your partners with wide drawing bowls.

**4. YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES** If you are a consistently accurate draw bowler then that should be your preferred shot selection. If you are confident that you can play a weighted bowl with a good chance of success, this gives you another option. Is your forehand more reliable than your backhand? When considering which shot to play, try to give each option a percentage chance of achieving your objective. If you rate your chances as less than 50%, perhaps look for an alternative shot to play.