

points made earlier and probably the most important of these is the number of bowls to be played. In singles and 2-wood pairs you might put the jack where your lead likes it. In other disciplines, it is probably better to place it where your back-end partners' strengths come into play.

The longer the jack the easier it is to play an effective weighted shot. So, if your team includes good weight bowlers a longer jack may be preferable. However, that may also be a strong point for the opposition. If they are better than you with a heavy bowl, think about a shorter jack length. Another factor to consider is that a long jack leaves less room to draw to if the jack gets moved. Are you confident you can draw into the reduced area if required?

Placement of the jack is likely to be a compromise. I hope I'm not giving away my secrets when I tell you that my default jack setting is 4 inches over half way. For those who can't visualise 4 inches (ooh, er mis-sus!) it is about the width of a hand or clenched fist.

**WE'RE NOT FINISHED WITH THE JACK YET** Oh no, not more jack talk! It seems such a simple thing but it is important and there are just 2 more things I would like you to think about.

Firstly, to all leads out there. If your opponent places a minimum length jack, don't draw to it with your first bowl. It is amazing how often you will be short. Try bowling to a centre length. That way, if you fall slightly short, you will be within 18 inches of the jack and in a good position if the jack gets trailed through. If you are long, your bowl is likely to come into its own later in the end.

Finally, you may occasionally come up against an international standard lead. They get coached to run the jack into the ditch with their first bowl. If your opposite number tries to do so and misses, play your first bowl as close to the ditch line as you can. That makes a repeat of their first attempt much less inviting.

**LET'S PLAY BOWLS** Now we can move on from all that jack stuff and take a look at the earliest bowls of an end. This section is mainly for leads but applies equally to singles games.

If you have had trial ends or you are playing on a mat your team knows well, agree with your partners the best hand to start on. You might have a preferred hand but the mat characteristics may suggest that the other hand is more reliable. If you are away from home and your opponent has first bowl, you should follow their lead and bowl the same hand. They know the mat better than you.

Also, matching their bowl is a good defensive strategy. Even if you are a bit short you may force them to change to their less favoured hand with their second bowl.

You often hear leads commenting (moaning?) that they keep drawing close to the jack but their bowl doesn't stay there or the jack gets moved. My answer usually is "well don't bowl it there if it never finishes as shot". Against good players on good mats a front toucher with your first bowl is probably wasted. Why not play your opening bowl to a foot through the jack. This will be in a good receiving position if/when the jack gets moved. If you are a foot short of your objective, you will be very close to the jack. If you are a foot heavy, you will be in a spot which will come into play if the jack moves 2 or 3 feet. Having opened with a good positional bowl, then play your front toucher to make it even better.

Sometimes your opposite number plays a short bowl which looks in your way. If you want to change your hand always ask your skip first. They may want you to stick to the original plan because of the way they want to build the head. If you make contact with either side of the short bowl, you will move it out of the way for following bowls. If you hit it full on, you may push it in for shot but that is not always a bad thing. If the promoted bowl finishes jack high, it can be used by your colleagues to wrest the shot later in the end.