

THINK ABOUT IT - PART 5

THE INDIRECT APPROACH As a long-time outdoor and indoor bowler, when I came to short mat bowling, one of the major differences that was immediately apparent to me were the “tight” or closely packed heads. This has been reinforced recently by watching lots of YouTube bowls videos during this enforced break. Even at the outdoor world championships it is not uncommon for a bowl 2 feet from the jack to win the end and the area of the head to be a circle of 2- or 3-yard radius. The closely packed nature of short mat heads means that there is often no direct path to the jack. That allows you to get creative with indirect shots. This article contains a number of shot types for you to consider when the obvious draw isn’t available.

PUSH SHOTS If your path to the jack is blocked by a bowl 1-2 feet short, you could get a positive result by pushing that bowl into the head. If the bowl belongs to you or a teammate, then it’s an obvious choice. However, don’t ignore what can be achieved by pushing an opposition bowl. For instance, playing the bowl with enough weight to disturb a head which is against you. Another example is where the holding shot is touching the jack. Pushing your opponent’s bowl onto that shot bowl will move the jack just the same as your own would do. The amount of weight required for the push shot depends on the relative sizes of the two bowls and the short bowl’s attitude. I don’t mean “is it behaving like a nasty teenager?” but is it upright, lying down or something in between? For a push shot with bowls of similar size and with the short bowl upright, a rough guide to gauge the weight required is to double the distance you want the object bowl to move. For example, if the bowl is 2 feet short, to push it jack high will need 4 feet of weight, i.e. if you miss the bowl completely, your bowl will come to rest 4 feet beyond the short bowl. I am sure that the physicists and engineers amongst you could get a more accurate rule using Newton’s second law of motion, Conservation of Momentum, but my 2 times guideline works for me.

RUN THROUGH The run through shot is simply a heavier version of the push shot. The objective is to punch the short bowl right through and for your own bowl’s remaining momentum to carry it the desired distance. This follow through technique is often overlooked as a deliberate shot selection and players are pleasantly surprised when they play a weighted shot and their bowl continues on its path, albeit at a much-reduced speed to gently make its way to a scoring position. I have tried to come up with a formula for the weight required but it’s too difficult for me. Just give it a few tries and see how hard you need to deliver your bowl to get an effective run through.

PLANTS Snooker fans and gardeners will be very familiar with plants but it’s the snooker version that we should look out for. If there are 2 bowls touching each other and the one furthest from you is pointing in a direction that would give you a positive result, contacting the nearer bowl will push the other onward. You need similar weight to the standard push shot because the momentum will transfer almost completely through the pair of bowls. A bit like those Newton’s Cradle executive toys. That guy Newton would have made a formidable short mat bowler. A plant is much more reliable than the earlier push shot because you don’t need to be exact about the contact point on the first bowl. The further bowl will go in a predictable direction even if you don’t hit the target full on. It is not uncommon in short mat to see 3, 4, or even 5 bowl plants. Always look out for them as they can come in very handy. And boy do they look good on the highlights reel. When the bowls are touching that is a natural plant. If they are not touching, you need to “make” the plant. The further the bowls are apart, the harder it is to achieve the desired result because the angle at which they come together will determine the path the furthest bowl will take. The 2 times rule works again with a made plant but you need to take into account that there is more than one collision. I hope you are ready for this but I will give you a “simple” example. The bowls are 6 inches apart and you want the second bowl to move 2 feet. That bowl needs to be hit with 4 feet of weight (that’s the simple bit). Because the first bowl has to travel 6 inches to make contact it needs to be played with enough weight to move it 4 ft 6 inches. So, you need to strike that bowl with 9 feet of weight. Phew, they said this home schooling was difficult.

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