

SINGLES for BEGINNERS (and others).

The game of singles provides the ultimate test in the game of bowls. It is a great way to find out just how well you can play under pressure. It's also a good test of your technique, tactics, temperament and mental processes as you have no one else to blame for the final result.

SOME 'Dos and Don'ts:

Possession of the Rink:

Rule 36 states possession of the rink belongs to the player whose bowl is about to be bowled. As soon as each bowl comes to rest, possession of the rink transfers to his opponent.

The player in possession shall not be interfered with, annoyed or be distracted in any way by his opponent. This means when your opponent is preparing to bowl

- a) Don't make any noise;
- b) Don't allow your shadow to fall across the mat or green in front of the mat;
- c) Stand still if at the mat end.

When you have possession, only you can ask the marker for information or go to the head to inspect it. Only if you invite your opponent to go to the head, can he go too. He must wait till he has possession of the rink.

Position of the bowlers (Rule 37):

When not in the act of bowling, you must stand a minimum of 1m. behind the mat or behind the jack if at the head end.

After bowling your bowl, you must retire behind the mat by the time your bowl comes to rest.

If you follow your bowl to the head, you must reach it before your bowls comes to rest (driving excepted). You may only follow your third or last bowl to the head.

Use of the Marker:

The marker's task is to expedite the game by aligning the jack, mark touchers as they happen, remove dead bowls from the ditch or out of bounds and record the score.

Don't hesitate to ask the marker for information. If asked by the bowler about to bowl, he may answer questions about the state of the head – whether you are up or down, the position any bowls in relation to the jack or other bowls etc. The marker should be able to answer your question with "Yes" or "No". Be aware that the marker's answers may be helpful to your opponent too so that is a reason to follow your third bowl to the head to see for yourself. Your opponent must wait till it's his turn to bowl to ask a question(s).

The marker does not decide the result of an end – he waits for the players' decision. If asked by the players to measure, his decision is final. If he is undecided, only he can call an umpire.

If the marker cannot decide during an end which bowl is shot when asked, inspect the head yourself. This will help you better to appreciate the position and hopefully decide your next shot. If the marker makes a mistake in his information, then think hard about relying on his judgment.

Advice on Playing Singles:

- Ignore adverse conditions – they are the same for both players.
- The draw shot is the basis for singles. Consistency is the key to success – make every bowl count. Play it tight. If you cannot score, settle for second shot. He can't go far on ones.
- Always appear to be patient, calm, confident, courteous and full of concentration.
- Play the game at your pace. Don't be in a hurry to step on the mat or to play your bowl.
- Don't under estimate your opponent and take needless risks. Play safe with position bowls.
- Don't relax if you are ahead. That's the time to lift your game and apply pressure to your opponent. He will be trying doubly hard to lift his game.

Some Tips on Tactics:

- The best first bowl on an end you can bowl is one that hides the jack. From the mat, it looks closer and often induces an overweight response.
- No bowler can manage a toucher every end. Be content if one of your bowls is closer than your opponent's. Don't pressure yourself too much by expecting the perfect bowl every time.
- experiment for the first two or three ends on both hands and then decide which side of the rink suits you. Only change it when it suits you and not because your opponent is trying to put you off it.
- Sometimes it pays to change your hand to consolidate or play a position bowl.
- If your opponent puts a bowl short and on your draw line, don't change you hand. Use the mat to draw round it or inside it. It is better to play the hand you know.
- Don't play pace shots until the draw shot is under control.
- If your opponent gets a bowl on the jack with his first bowl, don't poke at it. Get in a good second while you have some ammunition left. Remember that your first and second bowls are the most important ones. Two good bowls gives you confidence for the next two.
- A bowl 15 to 25 cm jack high is a dangerous one. It may look good but it is a good bowl for your opponent to beat, wrest it, wick in off it or drive it out. Move it yourself if he doesn't.
- Don't pack a head against a good driver. Try to get your counters on both sides of the jack and leave some holes.
- Play your faster shots on the hand that takes your bowl away from your bowl(s) in the head. Most bowls are played narrower than is intended.
- Never vary a length when winning but do so if your opponent is starting to pick up. Then, vary it for a couple of ends. Revert to your length strength later.
- Watch out for the mat being moved and the length the jack is rolled. Is it the same length of end as you have been playing well?
- If you are being outplayed, move the mat to upset his length and aiming line.
- If you are being outplayed, try to put him off by playing his hand – a bowl short in his draw may disconcert him.
- If a conservative approach is not paying off, try a little aggression.
- Try to dictate which way the game is being played. If he is quick on the mat, be slower and more deliberate and let him worry. Inspect the head occasionally – it gives you time to work out your tactics.
- When holding shot, play a little wider than you think you need to; when down, never be wide.
- If you have a dead end, you have the right to replay the end the same way if you prefer it. Take that option if you feel more confident playing that way.

Practice for Singles:

- A splendid way to learn the art of the singles game is to play one set of bowls against another. You can learn to visualise the conversion shots and practise them. Each alternate shot is either a consolidation shot or a conversion one. You don't have the worry of competing against an opponent so each shot can be regarded positively. If unsuccessful, the bowl can be retrieved and replayed several times till you get it right.
- Specialise in a particular length, say, end to end or minimum length to the 2m mark. No one else practices unusual lengths so that should give you an advantage. However, don't neglect the other lengths.