

THE SHOOTERS' STANCE.

Have you realised that bowls is a target sport? That's all the more reason to switch to the 'Shooters' Stance' on the mat. Rifle shooting and archery, even billiards and snooker can point us in a better direction.

Stance:

Try standing on one side of the mat as if to aim a rifle or arrow at the rink number at the other end. Notice how your feet are placed – apart at a usual standing distance and at an angle of about 45 degrees to the rink's centre line. This is the ideal position for rolling the jack. Now adjust your feet to aim at your aiming point on the far bank for a forehand bowl, i.e. along your bowling line. Now do the same for a backhand bowl. Notice how in each case your feet are never pointing at your aiming point and your feet are never together nor pointing along your bowling line. This position allows a more natural pendulum swing of your bowl (i.e. arm and bowl swinging in a perpendicular plane) and avoids twisting your body during your delivery action from square-on to side-on and back again. This twisting motion means that, unless you release your bowl at the exact split second, your bowl may miss its intended bowling line.

The other important feature of the 'Shooters' Stance' is that it enables you to have your shoulder and sighting eye over your bowling line when you take up your position on the mat as do the rifle shooter and archer. Also, it gets your hip out of the way of your back and forward swing of your bowl.

What is recommended here obeys the principles of biomechanics – an easy, relaxed, uncomplicated delivery with movements reduced to a minimum to avoid the risk of fault(s). Use a rhythmic count in your mind such as 'Step and swing' or count '1, 2, 3' which will prevent your inner voice giving last split-second instructions which will interfere negatively with your delivery.

Author's note: While I regard at least 90% of what R T Harrison of 'How to Become a Champion at Bowls' fame wrote to be still relevant today, I regard the 'Shooters' Stance' as an improvement on the 'square to the bowling line' stance that originated in the teachings of Harrison. These became accepted as the commandments of bowls coaching through his regular bowls column in a Sydney newspaper for as many as twenty years from 1923 onwards. Harrison's work was all done before biomechanics had even been heard of and was based largely on the military attitudes and training he experienced in the Boer War – you know, physical fitness, marching, parade ground drills, discipline, acceptance of authority, combativeness etc.

In 1994 in an article on improvement in bowls performance through changes to a mental approach, John Snell prefaced it with the comment that bowlers had been doing the same action for nearly a hundred years so it must be right. What a pity Harrison didn't transfer firing a rifle to his bowling methods but then firing a rifle in the army is done from a prostrate position.