

Lawn Bowls - How to Play the Game

Etiquette, Strategy, Rules, Guidelines

1. BOWLING ETIQUETTE

Etiquette is a code of behaviour whereby individuals treat one another the way they would like to be treated. Breaches of etiquette are sometimes wilful, and sometimes inadvertent. Particularly in the latter case, injured parties should avoid overreacting, or else a breach of etiquette more objectionable than the original could occur.

Etiquette is an important part of Bowls and all clubs and their members should not only practice it, but inform new members what is proper and expected behaviour on the green and in the clubhouse. Thoughtfulness and common sense are the keys to etiquette.

1.1 Rules of etiquette for lawn bowling

Rules of etiquette for lawn bowling include (but are not limited to):

1. Players and spectators at the head end should stand still and keep quiet.
2. When it's your team's turn to bowl it's your mat and head, your opponents should be away from both, if they are not ask them nicely to move.
3. Wait for your skip to tell you which shot you should play, keep up with play at all times.
4. There should be no trespassing into neighbouring rinks; this includes going to or from the clubhouse, moving to better see the jack, and particularly when walking from one end of your green to the other. Please be aware of others playing. If you are helping your teammate aim, do not infringe upon neighbouring rinks.
5. Walk up the centre of the rink with minimum delay, if it is not your team's turn to bowl **DO NOT STOP TO CHAT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE RINK, IT'S NOT YOUR MAT OR HEAD.**
6. After bowling each bowl, step off the mat to the right. As you approach the mat to bowl, do so from the rear left. Though not essential, this is a useful habit of convenience to avoid collisions!
7. Always show good sportsmanship by acknowledging a display of good skill by another bowler.
8. Never applaud lucky shots, never complain about lucky shots, and admit a lucky shot with good grace. Do not say thanks for a bad shot that goes your way.
9. Do not criticize the playing surface.
10. Do not criticize the performance of colleagues. No one plays a bad bowl on purpose.
11. Avoid delaying play by leaving the rink without the knowledge of the other players.
12. Avoid interfering with the head until the results of the end have been agreed upon by the vices.
13. If an Umpire is called, move away, you're done, his/her decision is final.
14. Bowlers should shake hands at the end of a game.

15. Be a gracious winner and a good loser.
16. The plinth area of the green is fragile and should be treated with care. This includes, but is not limited to, wearing proper footwear, not dropping or tossing bowls on the green, and not spitting or pouring liquids (water, coffee, etc.) on the green.
17. Punctuality for all games is a courtesy to the other players.
18. While standing at the head end waiting for the player on the mat to bowl, stand between the markers so the bowler can see and use the markers to aim.
19. Generally, the vice or skip at the head will signal the bowler on the mat the position of bowls in the head using hand signals denoting for and against.
20. Bowlers not raking the bowls after an end should assist by kicking the bowls into an approximate line, thus making raking easier and faster.
21. Players at the head end should be ready to stop deflected bowls from crossing into the adjacent rink and interfering with neighbouring games; likewise, be alert to prevent bowls from adjacent rinks from messing up your own head. Pay attention!
22. No rules prohibit bowlers running after their bowl (enthusiasm nor youthful fitness is discouraged) but you must try to arrive at the head before your bowl stops. Some clubs consider following your bowl up the green poor etiquette.
23. One minute between the time when the opponent's bowl stops and the next bowler delivers his/her bowl should be sufficient. When there is clear violation, an umpire or club official who is notified should take action.
24. All bowlers are urged to have chalk and a measuring tape when bowling so that bowls that touch the jack can be immediately marked and, if necessary at the finish of an end, measuring can be undertaken without delay.
25. All bowlers should remember to clear the equipment from your rink after your game.

No laws governing a sport can cope with every situation. Unusual situations not covered can arise. The Laws of the Sport of Bowls have been drawn up in the spirit of true sportsmanship. Common sense should be used when unusual situations not covered by the Laws arise.

All lawn bowlers should familiarize themselves with “Laws of the Sport of Bowls Crystal Mark 3rd Edition, 2014”.

1.2 BASIC RULES YOU SHOULD KNOW

1. **Mat Placement:** The first to play places the mat on the centre line at least 2 metres from the ditch and up to the hog line if desired.
2. **Foot Faulting:** Before delivery a player must have one foot fully on the mat and at delivery all or part of one foot on or above the mat.
3. **Jack / Bowl Length:** A jack must travel 21 metres to be legal while a bowl must travel 14 metres to be in play.
4. **Jack Delivery:** If the jack is improperly delivered the opposition may reposition the mat and deliver the jack but not play first. If the jack is delivered improperly by both leads the jack is placed at the 2 metre mark and the first to play may reposition the mat.
5. **Touchers:** Only the delivered bowl may be a toucher even if it deflects off other bowls before touching the jack.

6. **Position on Rink:** Players at the mat end who are not delivering a bowl should stand at least 1 metre behind the mat. Players at the head end who are not controlling play should stand behind the jack.
7. **Playing Wrong Bowl:** Replace with correct bowl
8. **Playing out of Turn:** Opposition skip has choice: a) may stop the bowl, b) leave it and have two bowls played to restore proper sequence, c) reset disturbed head and restore proper sequence, d) leave disturbed head and play two bowls or e) declare dead end.
9. **Bowl & Jack Displacement:** Numerous scenarios can arise. The opposition skip and skips have options. The options depend upon the cause and timing of the displacement.
10. **Rink Possession:** Possession of the rink belongs to the player or team whose bowl is being played.
11. **Determining score:** Bowls should not be moved until the number of shots has been agreed upon by the vice or skip.
12. **Objects on the green:** No objects should be placed on the bank, the green or in the ditch to help a player.
13. **Game stoppage:** If a game has been stop for a valid reason and all bowls have not been played, the end is declared dead.

2. BOWLS STRATEGY

AIM: “To secure the greatest possible advantage of shot numbers through low risk tactics, or failing that, to secure the least possible shot disadvantage”.

[SOURCES: **R. T Harrison**, “How To Become A Champion At Bowls”; **Rob Judson**, “Basic Tactics in Lawn Bowling Lawn Bowls International Coaching”]

2.1 Jack and Mat Tactics

There will always be debate as to whether the mat should be taken or given away.

- Taking the mat gives the lead a feel of the green speed.
- Taking the mat allows for control of jack length.
- If winning a certain length, keep that length. If not, change length.
- If you wish to change length then alter mat placement.
- Against an inexperienced player a full-length jack might be an advantage.
- Against an experienced firm shot bowler keep some distance between jack and ditch.
- Observe opposition length preference so you can alter when possible.
- Careless rolling of the jack can nullify strategy

2.2 Head Building Tactics (SWOT)

- Do not overbuild the head, but strategically place bowls.
- Never underestimate your opponent’s ability.
- Do not be greedy.
- Never be afraid to let opponent have one shot rather than risk giving several.

- When holding shots, never be narrow.
- When down shots, never be wide.
- Avoid being short when not shot.

2.3 Singles and Team Tactics

- When being outplayed, try to make opponents change hand that is being played well (e.g. by blocking).
- Movement of mat can upset opponent's rhythm of delivery.
- Be aggressive when a conservative outlook is not working.
- Build each end to your own strength.
- A three quarter length jack gives a good indication of green speed.
- Drives and running shots should be exercised carefully when playing singles.
- Attacking shots are more successful in shorter ends.
- In singles your first and third shots are of greater importance tactically.
- If in doubt you should walk up to examine the head (if permitted) before rolling your bowl.
- Do not hurry delivery.
- If your opponent is a 'niggler' play full length jack.
- Play the shot offering more than one option of attaining your goal.
- Avoid wasting opportunities to add to the score.
- Drives should be played only if you have back bowls.
- Avoid playing "around the clock." Play the favourable side. Offer a player a second attempt if first failed.
- Change foot position on the mat to avoid blocks.
- Never block for a single, where the bowl is accessible.
- Never block a big head.
- Blocks are more effective on slow or medium paced greens.
- Play covering bowls before attempting blocks.
- Be aware of your opponent's tactics, preferences, strengths & weaknesses.
- Play your tactics so they do not suit your opponent.
- In a cross wind the narrow side is kinder.
- Play short ends with the wind and long ends against it.

3. JACK & BOWL LENGTHS

1. The front of the mat must be placed at least 2m from the ditch.
2. Measurements from the mat line are done for:
 - a. Jack length – the distance must be at least 21 m.
 - b. Legal bowl length is 14 m.
 - c. If a jack rebounds from a bowl during play, its distance must be at least 20 m.

4. MEASURING FOR SHOT

1. Measurement for shot shall be made between the nearest points of the Jack and Bowl.
Always measure from the Jack to the Bowl.

2. Use wedges to prevent movement of either bowl or jack.
3. Callipers are used when the space between the Jack and Bowl does not permit the flexible measure being used. Insert callipers from top.
4. A thin paper may be used to determine if a bowl is frozen to the jack. [NB Placing the paper on the playing surface may help to determine if there is a gap.]
5. At the completion of the end the two Vices count the shots. If your team is shot, the opposing Vice removes the shot Bowl or Bowls agreed upon placing those Bowls away from the Head on a towel. If a measure is required for the balance of the shots, this should be done by the opposing Vice who has already removed the shot Bowls.
6. When an end is completed and a measure is immediately required to determine the Shot Bowl, either Vice may measure but **Must** measure to their own Bowl first & then to the opponents Bowl.
7. Where one Bowl of Team 'A' is in contention with two Bowls of team 'B', measure to Team 'A' first, then measure to the other two Bowls.
8. If Bowl and Jack are more than an arm's length apart ask the opposing Vice to assist by holding the measure against the Jack.
9. The opposing Vice is allowed to measure if he/she has any doubt as to the shot Bowl.
10. The Skip is in charge of the game at all times and may question the measure or the count before the Head is raked.
11. If there is continuing doubt call for a neutral party or umpire to measure.
12. **Do not remove any bowls until the count has been agreed upon.**

5. PLAYING THE PART AS TEAM SKIP

The Skip's official duties are described in Laws of the Sport of Lawn Bowls Crystal Mark Edition 3. They include:

- To be in charge of the team, delegate duties and notify opponent when necessary.
- Instruct the team members which shot to play.
- Make decisions with the opponent to comply with the laws of the game and conditions of play.

Important Responsibilities for Skips

- To build a scoring head using the tactical fundamentals of defence, attack and recovery.
- To be ingenious and skilful of design when building the head.
- To know the strengths and weaknesses of his players.
- Should endeavour not to display disappointment if a player performs a bad shot.
- Should commend a player who plays a good shot.
- Have good communication with team members (game plan, appropriate hand signals, positive instructions, short simple directions).
- Be able to read the head (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats).
- Have control over mat placement and jack length.
- Know and employ the tactics of the game.
- Know when to play the opposition hand or shot.
- Counter the tactical moves of the opposition.

- Be able to play any of the shots of the game (draw, on-shots, running & drive shots).
- Strive to improve own and team strengths & weaknesses.
- Do not be a distraction to your team.
- Understand and observe the Etiquette of the Game, Laws of the Game & Conditions of Play.

6. Instructions for Vice Skips

1. It is vital that the vice-skip has a thorough knowledge of the laws of the game, conditions of play and the etiquette of the game.
2. At the beginning of the game, identify and remember the bowls of the players on your team.
3. The vice-skip must be able to act as the director of the head.
4. When arriving at the HEAD, note the position of the JACK and BOWLS and which bowl or bowls are SHOT.
5. Always stand back of the HEAD, behind the JACK. Do not move when bowls are being delivered. When the opposing skip is delivering, stand behind the opposing Vice Skip.
6. Indicate clearly the up or down position after the opposing skip's bowls comes to rest.
7. Always know who holds second and third shot.
8. Be aware of the position of bowls in the head when it is the skip's turn to play.
9. The vice-skip should not attempt to control the skips play but offer advice.
10. Use clear signals to show: Jack High, Distance from JACK, Our BOWL, Opposition BOWL, JACK POSITION, SCORE.
11. Make and or observe all shot measurements and where in doubt recheck. Discourage any interruption by the lead and second when directing or measuring the HEAD.
12. Do not disturb the head until the opposing vice-skip agrees on shot count.
13. When a bowl comes to rest, possession of the MAT reverts to the opposition. Do not step in to examine the HEAD.
14. If it is not your skip's mat, do not stop while changing ends to talk to your skip.