

## **Last End Championship, Keep Mat?**

### **REACTIONS**

#### **Alison**

A question for our team.

Today, Trish and I played in an Open Pairs Competition at Heathmont. The format was three games x 11 ends 2x2x2x2 Pairs with three game, winners to play off over one end finals to find 1st, 2nd and 3rd. Trish and I won our 3 games and were one of 7/42 who did.

We discussed what we would do if we won the toss and decided to keep the mat and throw our length.

On the first final we were given a roll up end, we won the toss and Trish suggested we roll-up long, but then play the real end short, which we did.

We managed to win our first final, but in the second final they won the toss and gave us the mat. Unfortunately Trish threw the jack too short, so now they had the advantage of the jack as well as the last bowl and yes we were holding shot until the last bowl, which was a weighted shot that managed to do the business.

The play-off for third, again we won the toss, kept the mat, but the kitty was too short again so we played their length (not much longer than we wanted), but in the end we did not win. So out of the money.

So team, what would you have done if you had won the toss?

Thanks to all those who responded to the question, "to keep the mat or not." In my past life I most certainly would have given the mat away and had the last bowl, but on thinking back at those times more often than not I won without having to play the last bowl!!

In the situation I described at Heathmont, we had not played any of the teams in the one end play-off, so no knowledge of their strength and weaknesses or preferences on length, but Trish and I decided to just back ourselves. So going forward, (and after much contemplation) I will continue to make that my plan "back yourself," "back your team mate" take the mat, roll it extreme, be confident, be in control, apply pressure.

**TC**

I would always keep the mat.

If, throughout the day, you have dominated on extreme lengths then you should keep the jack and roll your preferred length.

However, given most people roll medium jacks, you may prefer to hand the mat to your opponent knowing this might happen. Then you have the obvious benefit of last bowl.

**Max**

One end playoffs are such a wonderful thing that always seems to spark discussion!!

I have always been of the belief that I would much rather have the last bowl.

Reason being that I would much rather be able to win the game off my own bat then to hope that the opposition misses.

Another thing that I have witnessed is the opposition often getting lucky with their last bowl, which having the last bowl also provides me with an opportunity to reverse their fortune.

I also see the value of owning the length, but if I had to make the choice I would much rather play any length, but have the ability to play the last bowl so that I can have the final say on the end.

**Terry**

I would definitely take the mat and play to either my length or their weakness.

Given that we spend endless hours perfecting our craft and grooving the perfect delivery to a specific target and range, why would you give the opposition the opportunity to set the parameters for the deciding end?

Take command and place the pressure upon the other team.

I do not think there is a definitive study on who won when they made either decision, but I would rather set the table.

### **Harry**

In my coaching last year we practised a scenario where it was 14 all with one end to go in the gold medal match.

One plan, which was a bit of fun, but did seem to have some merit was to take the mat up, roll the jack to the tee and attempt to drive it in the ditch with the first bowl. If we miss, draw the second. The shock tactic seems to unsettle the opposition, and they don't know whether to draw or drive. But I think the real value comes in having a plan (any plan) that you have discussed, agreed, and most importantly, trained for. When you have a plan you are comfortable with it takes away the doubt, and the chances of a successful outcome are far greater when you know what's coming.

### **Jamie**

I love the jack to the tee then drive it to the ditch.

Whatever you do, take the initiative and attack. If you go down, go down attacking, not defending. Maybe give them the mat, try to outdraw their first shot or get a close second, then look to remove their shot bowl.

Attacking puts additional pressure on your opponent. Try to win it, not wait for them to lose it.

### **Joanne**

My personal opinion on the last end would always be to have last bowl. I back my ability to be able to play any length better than my opponent and thus having the last bowl to impact the head gives me the advantage if I need to use it.

### **Danny**

At the end of a long day the player's confidence in understanding the speed of the green may be a lot better than at the start, and therefore feel confident in giving the mat away.

However, it could also mean that they aren't confident in drawing a front tougher with their first bowl, and instead feel they have more chance when there are lots of bowls in the head and can play weight with their last.

But for those who understand the relationship between the rolling of the jack and the rolling of their first bowl it's a huge advantage to keep the mat and nail the first bowl.

Geoff Maskell used to deliver his first bowl while the marker was still positioning the jack, (because he could remember what rolling the jack felt like and didn't want to lose that feeling before delivering his bowl).

There was a time, in the not too distant past, where the team who won the end could give the mat away. Traditionally players would give the mat away and back their skills with the last bowl. At the very elite level this proved to be a big advantage and the rule was changed to the current law of winner keeps the mat.

Having last bowl didn't always work however.

Rowan and I had the pleasure and challenge of playing Steve Glasson and a Queensland state player in the first round of the 2012 Australian Open at Darebin.

It was sets play back then.

Three times we tossed the coin, once at the start of the game, once at the start of the tiebreaker and again at the start of the extra end. The green was running at 12 seconds and Rowan and I had been practising our plan of ditch to ditch. Three times we tossed, three times Steve's team won the toss, three times they gave us the mat and three times we won the end.

We of course didn't win every end we owned the mat, but I remember it as an interesting lesson none the less.

## **Simon**

I draw on experience from sport in general and my gut is to back myself / my team and take the lead. I understand the idea behind wanting the last bowl, but I also respect my opponents and their skill and shot execution is good enough. Us having last bowl will be irrelevant as they will have constructed their head such that we cannot get at it or make the changes we need even though we have last bowl.

Leaving it to last bowl feels a little 'desperate' to me and doesn't back your skill enough to set the head up to satisfaction.

I would rather pile the pressure on and back myself / team to get it right and leave / heap the pressure on them.

Own the mat and pile the pressure on with your shots so they are chasing you all end. They may want / love last bowl, but if we have put ours in the right positions then at best it is all or nothing on their last shot

when nerves have to occur and errors become more likely even, IF they have an opportunity (which the plan is to deny them anyway).

### **Terry**

Just of interest I was watching a pairs match at the World Bowls Championship PBA and the scenario we have talked about came up.

After split sets, Marshall and Foster have the choice of mat or jack for the first end of the three-end playoff. They opt for last bowl and lose the end.

Up one end, Brett and Harlow choose to have last bowl and lose the end when Marshall draws a blinder.

Marshall and Foster opt for last bowl in the deciding third end and lose the game and are eliminated.

Instead of setting the table and handing off the pressure they chose last bowl and succumb to the pressure in part, and the lack of options left to the final bowl.

Just saying.

### **Chicken**

Interesting conundrum having experimented both options.

Over the years option last bowl, but how good are your nerves under extreme pressure and can you get to the shot bowl to get shot. If you're down you also have the vagrancies of the green to add to the pressure if you're down and you need to presume you're going to be down in good company you're going to be down playing a length your opponent plays well and likely a length you haven't been playing so well good luck.

Option 2: Keep the mat and roll the length you play well or playing well, therefore bowl confidently, increase percentages of getting good bowls and shot, you put the pressure back on the opposition. You then play mind games, talk about vagrancies of the green, how well you're set up to your partner so the opposition can hear stand at the head as group added pressure in opposition with their last bowl to come .

Option 2 every time for me.

**Pat**

Choice of mat or last bowl in a tiebreak end. I don't think there is any one answer.

What gives us the best chance to win the match?

If over the last few ends we have been going long, the opposing front end hasn't dealt with it well, and the opposing skip is constantly looking at difficult shots, and when they do get the mat they play a different length and are all over it, then I think you should take the mat regardless of that desire to have last bowl and your fate in your hands.

I give you two choices:

a) We are holding - they have last bowl with a 25 percent chance to convert;

b) They are holding - we have last bowl with a 50 percent chance to convert.

We win 75 percent of the time under option a) and 50 percent of the time under option b).

I know many competent players who will take option b) ALWAYS as they control their own destiny.

However, option a) is clearly the right choice in this particular case if you want the best chance to win the game.

It just depends on context.

**Lach**

As we read from the reactions there are two schools of approach, one either side of the issue.

Either way it assumes a player has elite skill to execute the deliveries under (extreme) pressure.

As you all have the skills audit table from me, to be elite in my mind you need to be able to draw within ML or drive at any length at a rating of 7/10, or better.

And jack throwing any length has to be an 8/10 to be elite level.

*do we keep the mat?*

As coach what I propose as action at forthcoming training sessions: We will do what has been said within each of your reaction statements for a seven end contest to aid Robbie in relevant format for his world preparation.

Just note, regardless of who won the end the format for all seven ends is you either went last every end (one approach) or, you always go first (the other approach) every end even if you lost the previous end.

I once played in the BA AO singles against a state player from SA who gave me the mat to start the game and then the few times he had that choice.

For me it was a Xmas present as I rolled the jack to my length and met my game plan objectives.

I won by the length of the straight maybe seven of the nine ends each set.

I spoke to him afterwards and asked him why he chose to give me the mat five times - response, he believed he could win with his last bowl. Seeing is believing and he did not see what was going on right there in front of him.

I played that one minimum length 18 consecutive ends regardless of who had won the previous end.

My tires were pumped up, he did not know to even find where the pump was to do something to his tires to get in the race.

I have worked with five successful sports psychologists worldwide over these past years and exchanged views on this very matter Alison raises.

I would show all these professionals the format in training or events wherever I was coaching and all were united and strong on the view as easily expressed by Simon in his reply.

They concur, you go to the effort of having a game plan, training to have small objectives and to make all the choices so as not to have others make choices for you (the opponent).

I was able to convince the best of the Malaysians to see the merit of dictating the game by first use, as these people (psychologists and international medal winners) saw it as I do, it is about being so assertive in setting the pace for them to chase.

Never let ego get in the way of effort and intense skill application.

[www.lachlantighebowls.com](http://www.lachlantighebowls.com)

*do we keep the mat?*

Remember there is no one way, however see what works for you and remember, the skill set has to be at elite level if you want to do either approach of mat use.

Go back and have another look at how you rated yourself in self appraisal since 2019 and even as part of goals for 2022. See what can be improved in all those skills.

**lachlantighebowls.com 06/01/2023**