

Sudden Death One End Play-offs

Giving The Mat Away

Ever wonder what the merit is of doing just that, handing the mat to an opponent with one end to play, sudden death in set play singles or when scores are level in other competition formats.

I was asked this very question last week:

Question - Anne mentioned that with just a one end tiebreaker that everyone competing at the world indoor thought it best to give away the mat and have the opportunity to win with the last bowl. What say you?

I put that question to a network of elite coaches around the world this week and here are some insights:

You read and choose which one suits your approach to bowls

Answers/ responses:

1.) There is no one answer.

Personally I foster the mental toughness concept to grab the mat, set to your length and do a Lief Selby and deliver that first bowl onto the jack so as to say in effect, now pal what are you going to do.

Tony Alcock was a legend of the game and espoused the notion that singles are won with the first two bowls, so why not do it without any other bowl to contend with.

At elite level many bowlers believe they are good enough to take over the game with their last bowl, hence giving away the mat.

For me you better be bowling brilliantly to hand off the mat as your opponent is not there as a dud bowler.

A bit of the old male testosterone involved in the decision making. Guess it is thinking hard or hardly, who knows.

2.) We have discussed this at club, regional and national level and have always reached the same conclusion. We relish the opportunity to start a game on our terms. Without question you take the mat, dictate the length and transfer the pressure from the word go.

A good lead will relish the opportunity. Transferring pressure is so important throughout a game, so why not do it at the start?

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At every level I coach at, we take the mat if we win the toss and dictate terms immediately.

3.) Deciding to take the mat is a big advantage if the lead can feel the relationship between the jack and their bowl.

If they can connect with this feeling, then it's like they have had an extra bowl and only have to caterpillar with their first bowl.

I have a number of bowlers who just look at me blankly and can't understand the association between the jack and the bowl.

Now that is at club level of course, but I do wonder how many leads at elite level use this feeling to their advantage??

4.) My opinion differs a little and it is based on what game is being played.

For singles I can go either way and feel it should be based on game dynamics from the second set, i.e. if you are dominating at the first or second bowl keep the mat, otherwise give it away.

If you have played your singles game smartly and have the last bowl you should have set up so you have two available shots to play anyway, draw or weighted.

In a game like three bowl pairs, I advocate having the last bowl. This is based purely on statistics. As an example the data I am using is from the last BPL held at Moama.

These are elite level players, so the data should be good.

I have used data from power play ends as an example, as these are generally called when a team has the last bowl (78% of the time).

From the results there was no single team from the 10 playing over 18 games that could get a better than even chance by playing first.

First bowl win rate for all teams ranged 40~49% averaging 42%, whereas last bowl win rate was 51~62% averaging 58%.

Not a huge difference, but I prefer the extra % on my side.

I managed to find three of my old stats books from BPL games (40 games played) and looked at all Tie break results. Twenty seven tie breaks were played of these having the mat results four wins from eight. Playing second results 14 wins from 19. Hence in BPL games the team I coach will always give the mat away.

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5). As everyone has said so far there is no right or wrong when it comes to this.

My opinion: I give (when playing) and instruct my teams / sides to give away the mat at every opportunity. This is based purely on percentages. Given that we train our elite bowlers to play minimum / maximum, the thought of allowing the opposition to dictate the length shouldn't worry our athlete in the slightest.

Therefore unless the opposition plays a front or back toucher with their first bowl (and this doesn't happen all that often), then that bowl can be beaten. Therefore you are basically playing four bowls against three and if your first bowl beats the opposition first bowl, then they are playing catch up. Plus this gives you the last bowl to change the head if you haven't done so with your first three bowls.

When you could give the mat away every end (before the law was changed back to normal) there were some enormous wins by elite bowlers / teams (even against quality opposition) as the percentages were with the bowler bowling last.

Whatever you do, readers, practice such a one end situation (sudden death) back at your home club with a mate and experiment.

Club coaches try applying the one end situation as some variation on team training.

Enjoy.

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