

Do You Prefer Thirds At Head With Skip?

There are two ways of approaching bowls -

- *With no consciousness - [the great majority of bowlers]*
- *Infinite consciousness - [a few including those who follow you! In your squads]*

The question posed is what value, or why, do thirds stand at the head with skips in fours teams?

Responses (9) from my squad are as follows for you readers to judge their value to you.

(1) When I first started seeing thirds standing with the skips, I thought that it all looked a bit pretentious and perhaps nothing more than an attempt at intimidation and time wasting.. Nothing I have seen since has changed my mind.

As someone who has played skip for most of my Bowling Career (30 years plus) I have never asked my third to stand next to me. I will call my thirds to the head when, 1. I do not wish to broadcast where I want a position bowl, 2. A closer look at the shot I want them to pl., 3. I need to go to the loo.

I have stood next to opposition Skips and Thirds and seriously have not heard any discussion between them that relates to the game and / or their front end teammates; it is usually social BullShit. I clamp down on undue movement and discussion from oppositions hanging around the head when my teammate is about to bowl and I have never felt intimidated!!!

Sometimes the opposite.

SIDE NOTE; This year I played third for the second half of the season and even when our skip was not at the head (i.e. every end he was off to the side having a cigarette, while our lead and 2nd bowled) I thought it was more important to stay at the mat end and support the Lead & Second. Anyway, some of my thoughts!

Alison

(2) Good Morning all,

I absolutely love this topic more than most and those of us who have been club coaches would agree, thirds accompanying skips is something that is familiar at pennant and other high levels of Victorian bowls and most of us would have probably experimented with the tactic at some stage within the side we coach.

My first question is why? I actually think there is quite a simple answer and it derives from one of my favourite quotes from Picasso: “Good artists copy, Great artists steal.”

Some 'champion' or highly regarded bowls personality decided it was a good idea and as such, fellow good bowlers imitating the champion decided it was a good idea without real thought or reason. 'He's doing it, so it must be the right thing to do!'

Suddenly it becomes the norm.

I love Lachie's examples because it backs up Picasso's quote entirely: “Do we imitate what the best do because that's what you're 'meant' to do or do you steal the idea and with sound logic and reason, improve it to benefit your side. No one would argue good communication between thirds & skip is important, BUT maybe good communication between third & front-end is more so?

I think it appropriate to include my own anecdotes. Early on in my skipping career I had the privilege of playing with Russell Green Sr. as my third and anyone who knows Russell or had heard him speak will realise he is a real student of the game. My bright idea as a young up and coming head coach was to have Sr. up my end to guide me and mentor me, something he refused to do. In fact his input in most of my game was minimal and all advice came at the end of the game over a brew or two (or three or four) where he'd give me feedback on my application. He would even review the way I would use my tone of voice to emphasise a point.

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We had a tremendously successful season and in the final series we won on average each game by 20 shots. Why? We had complete trust in each other's decision making and game. He was experienced enough to allow me room to make decisions based on instinct and I was smart enough, having played with him so often, to trust his judgment and choose shots that I knew he'd support and succeed at.

Which leads me to my first point... practice. If your back-end trains together throughout the week and melds into one, there is absolutely no need to be at the same end together on match day as you become 'in-sync' which translates to match day. If you can't trust each other at practice, being up at the same end won't improve that trust on game day.

I'll never forget the first Grand Final I played as coach at Vermont South and my rink with Sr. as 3rd was up by about 17 and were last on the green and the scores were level overall. I remember wanting to abdicate from all responsibility at about the 4th bowl of the end. I remember thinking, what if I make the wrong decision and we've got someone like Senior who knows exactly what to do. I'm wasting that resource. Our lead had nailed a front hopper and the decision making from the skip with the game as tight as it was is complicated. Do you add a second and risk increasing what is a one bowl target? Do you protect? Do you block? I had no idea. Sr. would have (that's what was going through my mind).

Sr. refused to come up, he wanted me to make the decision, he knew my success or failure would be critical to my development as a back-end player and he was spot on! (out of interest we played the perfect end!

I remember running an open day for club members, where I'd arranged a presentation and at the end opened questions up to the floor. Someone from our 4th side asked; "How do you expect us to succeed when they (selectors) change our side every week?

My answer was, if the selectors change your side...and you lose because you weren't familiar with your team...who's fault is it?

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Anyone who says it's the selectors fault, I couldn't disagree more. It is the skips'. Having a new side, the skip should organise the side to get together throughout the week and on Saturday morning and learn the skills of your team and develop trust. If you have a new side and the first time you see them is at noon on Saturday what right do you have to blame the selectors? You didn't put the effort in and it is not their responsibility to get the team together. It is the skips!

Bit of a tangent there, but the points are still valid; develop trust within your team throughout the week.

If there is one more point I can add, for those of you who have gotten this far, there is another recent craze that has been adopted in fours' play and that is of the leads, seconds and thirds all joining the skip down the same end after they bowl. What are our opinions of this move? I recall one game last year where my second was on the mat playing his second bowl and the entire opposition was down with the skip. Are they combating the problem?

I recall in my early days of Melbourne leading and Sr. playing third. I'd just played a resting toucher and my second one was a goodie. I gave a few steps down the green in momentum. Watched it pop just behind the jack and return to the mat where Senior complimented me on outstanding discipline. Not only by getting the second bowl past, but coming back to the mat end. I never asked him why he praised me for excellent discipline and I probably should.

So to conclude, I think in fairness there are legitimate reasons to get your third to the head throughout the game, particularly to slow the pace down on a rink that is well ahead and you want to get off last to accommodate for another rink that may be hemorrhaging shots. One of the best aspects of pennant play is the added challenge of 16 not just 4. But that should occur after the second plays their final bowl.

I also do believe many of us would have had experiences where we should accompany the skip at the 'head' end as they are losing the plot or being intimidated by opposition tactics and it is impeding team success. We

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all know that person shouldn't be there, but we may not have input into the decision and should just play the hand we've been dealt. But this group is about NO LIMITS as Lachie often says, and we should not consider the bad pennant practices, but rather develop the elite mind-set we must have as a squad.

Trust your back-end partner, develop that trust in practice and above all, the third must be a critical link between the Skip and the front-end, reiterating the decision making by the skip, encouraging and applauding success and being a positive influence in impacting team performance. There is nothing better than playing a bomb and having a teammate offering a high-five and giving you that look of absolute appreciation. I've never seen any do it better than Sr. and that's why I put him at the top of the team game. Probably only matched by Bear.

Regards, Lloyd

(3).Hi.

Not that everyone responded, but boy this is a real example ofNOLIMITS, and for you new to the game, an important consideration. Okay, so let's expand on two fronts.

One, a third at the head; two, some of the statements read in response.

So

one

I am adamant that elite teams, and all of you want to aspire to be in elite teams, such as a pBus team in an event, have the third there with the front end bowlers at the mat.

My anecdotes in support are these:

1. Playing premier league our rink opponents are getting trounced by us; their skip is an Aussie player spitting the dummy; their third as head club coach goes to join the skip to allay the situation; guess what their fragile front end has we three 'feeding' the seeds of team disunity; our rink won 43-7, our pennant side of 4 rinks won by 9 shots; pathetic opposition approach by supposedly elite bowlers.

2. Commonwealth Games Manchester 2002 and Malaysia is an extreme underdog in all events; Australia plays Malaysia guess what,

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Malaysia draws against the medal favourites; the Aussie skip has a dysfunctional team full of egos, not helped by the third being up with him at the head; Malaysia is steered by a skip who I regard to this day, AS THE BEST SKIP I HAVE WITNESSED, in this sport; he was the equal of the third and skip from Australia that's how strong and good a character he was / is.

3. Premier league - the four skips were of such good character. I told them as the coach they were the equal of any third / skip combination we opposed, as that was the new practice starting about 20 years ago; prior to that skips used to say to a third, be up and shut up; great!!!;

4. Commonwealth Games 2010 in Delh i- I asked our sports psychologist to come and observe some games with me, specifically to observe and comment on the third and the skip 'working together' at the head; Jeremy, known to Chrissie who competed, was gobsmacked; He asked did they not understand their contradictory messages??? He wondered why you would deliberately create an environment set to foster the possibility of disunity; He only reinforced my then held views; and that was 2010.

5 Asia Pacific games 2011 and the skip had the third at the head and when I spoke about it he said it did not matter what the third did or did not do he would salvage the game on his own; boy, and he gets to skip???

two

Being better able to visualise the delivery being at the head; on the point of visualising the delivery (shot), how often have I encouraged all of us to work (harder) at judging distances from the mat, because that is where you deliver all bowls;

Bit like me saying...how is it looking... after you deliver;
You should ideally be able to tell me generally where the bowl will finish and over time get it right more often than not;
a sensory skill development; no limits troops;

Other reactions

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Never forego the fact our front end wins games, and when they are performing the third is there to reinforce their value to we the team; slacken off at your peril.

Skips are not there to enjoy the company - actually they are in medium level contests; we in pBus are striving for personal best, not to be medium; steer the ship and if skip, revel in the performances and contributions that you get 23-35m. away.

And a good skip has trained with you as a team and knows what each player needs and how to convey that information to each as singular players in the team; that skip won't be seen that often in pennant; too late to learn what players want on the day.

The real benefit of the third is to reinforce the game plan, the contributions the front end players make to that plan and to provide the emotional support and stability when the poor front end players are having a harrowing time of it (today).

Let's not use domestic pennant experience to extract best practice please. Of the 30 in the squad only we Victorians have this antiquated experience of pennant. The players can bowl, period.

For tactical and team skills after all these years in bowls players are in the remedial class.

Or, maybe a slight advancement of teat level, perhaps.

Lachlan

(4) Hi all,

My view is that, in general, the third remains with the front end.

I think it's important for rink morale that the third is there to acknowledge and support his / her teammates. Also to celebrate (remind) the achievement of the game plan, each end. And to communicate with the front end and skip in a way that demonstrates that all are valued and respected players in the rink. All of these qualities need to be "trained" during the week, so come match day, all four rink members are in sync.

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When that happens, on the odd occasion that the third is called to the head, there is no unsettling impact felt by anyone.

Exceptions to the third remaining with the front end might be:

1. The rink is struggling with Game Plan A, then Plan B is not working either, so Plan C might be to temporarily have the third at the head for a few ends - just to change it up a bit!

2. The opposition Skip and third are always at the head, so your third comes to the head also as a show of support. Note, this shouldn't be necessary unless your Skip is being intimidated (question should they be the Skip??) or as mentioned in 1. above, your rink is struggling.

Having said all this, I think there is real value in "training" potential Skips by having an experienced player mentoring alongside them in practice matches, at training and the like. Also valuable having an experienced third playing with (not alongside) a newer Skip (as Lloyd pointed out re. Russell Green Sr.). This is a great way to provide "support" and to learn on the job.

Cheers, Gavin

(5) Well I would like to add my two cents worth to this conversation. I am usually a lead and personally it really does not worry me or unsettle me where the three is on our team.

I am confident in my own abilities that I do not need my hand held. I know my job and am happy to own it. On the other hand when I see the three of the opposition at the head with the skip it gives me a boost that the skip is not confident to run the ship. Also the extra energy that the three uses up during a game and extra mental energy spent being at the skips end must be an advantage to the opposition during a long day of play. So I would prefer my team's three to stay at the mat.

Cheers Leeane.

(6) Hi team,

Interesting reading through all the comments on this topic of where a third should be.

I'm not one to often give my opinion...but I will share a few thoughts on this topic.

One of the first things I remember about my introduction to Lach here in Canada that made him stand out from the rest was his approach to things. A simple example was around deliveries.

The belief that not everyone had to have the same textbook delivery as long as what you were doing was consistent each time. It didn't mean there wasn't room for improvement, just reinforced we are all different and what works for some, doesn't work for all. I have carried this with me in all aspects of the game and perhaps why I look at this a little differently.

I have never looked at a third being in the head as a sign of lack of trust for the skip, or intimidation / ego of some sort. It was interesting to read these comments. It actually made me wonder how this reflects our mental toughness if these are some thoughts that cross our mind when we see a third at the same end as the skip? I say that not in a judgemental way, I say it because those comments view the situation very negatively. Negativity breeds negativity. I would challenge you to turn that into a positive. Perhaps that view does give you confidence as you see that as the opposition's weakness and it motivates you. If so, that's a good thing. Not so good if it is a distraction or takes your focus off your task at hand.

I really appreciated the comments about knowing your role...the third being the link between the front end and back end...I think that's a great perspective...I've always looked at them as the communicator if you will between the front end and the skip. Each player has an important role to play in the success of a team and 'knowing' your role is key. This is actually an exercise we go through when we're playing with a new combination. It's great for team building, but also awareness.

I also appreciated the options or scenarios presented about when the third might go to the head. This goes back to my very first comment. And why I fit more into the opinion of - we shouldn't be so stringent on things having to be done a certain way. I don't argue with the skip steering the ship, having the confidence to call the shots, etc...but there are different dynamics that a team can face during a game or at some point throughout a

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tournament, that I believe having flexibility, shaking things up, trying something new, etc., should not be looked down upon, or seen as a weakness...rather be recognized as great awareness, a strength - that something needs to change - if only for an end or two...perhaps to get us through a game...or just used as a reset of sorts.

Anyhow, these are just a few thoughts that came to mind as I read through the comments. I don't believe there is a right or a wrong. Just like there is more than one way to play / make a shot - it's about recognizing the one that will work best for you.

Great discussion!

Jackie

(7) Hi everyone

I thought I would add my thoughts on the role of the third:

Every role has two responsibilities; to deliver your bowls (according to the game plan) and to support your teammates (and not necessarily in that order). For me, the third standing at the head shows a lack of a game plan and old school thinking; given the leads and seconds determine who wins the game, and the thirds and skips determine by how much, surely the third can supply a greater level of support to the players that determine the outcome of the match by standing next to them rather than 30 metres away.

On a good day a skip has to deliver five or more telling bowls, while a third has to deliver 10 or so. So if the third and skip only have to deliver 15-20 really good bowls (out of 84!) between them, guess which of their two jobs is more important.

When I skip, beside the fact that we have a plan we practised on Thursday, I explain to my teammates that my job is to get the best out of them, and I don't want to have to pull the rabbit out of the hat on more than a handful of occasions. I invest in them, we have a plan, we take away the surprises, and when we do that I don't need a third down at the head with me holding my hand; because if the third is at the head it means we are not supporting, as best we can, our teammates who are going to determine if we win or not. How silly is that!

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It's the 'take away the surprises' that makes a game plan so valuable. It means we have practised our plan A and B, everyone knows their role, everyone has something to aim for with every bowl, everyone feels valued and that they have made a contribution ; all of this takes away the pressure and puts it in our opponents lap, after all they are the ones having to decide what shot to play with every bowl.

All for now

Danny

Hi danny:

I add one other thought to your ripper comments.

A third can add the emotional energy by being the stable one when things are awry these few ends and the third can pump the tyres of the front end when they are setting us on the winning path

Which brings me to Jamie;

As we know Jamie was in the winning AO 4s team as third.

If you watch the final on YouTube you will see this big squad member of ours display all the signs of the ultimate energiser and never went near the head as he invested in the front end.

When the skip bowled there was big jimmy hovering over the head as if he was on the prowl.

No skip could be exempt from feeling this guy is in my corner; yet Jamie and I spoke in the days leading into the final and he agreed he was able to skip, but the skip lacked the 'comfort of his ego' to be anywhere other than skip.

Hell I watched this guy skip and he can bowl but leadership, hello anyone home!!!

Our big jimmy was one important variable making the difference simply doing the role as third.

Great role model within our squad is the boy.

Thanks danny

Lachlan

(8) Hi all

Great input Lach, it's obviously a passionate subject and one that I feel very much shows the difference between elite team mindset and the way bowls has been played for 100 years.

Despite a lot of people saying they play in a team, the large majority of pennants teams are a group of 16 individuals with 16 ideas of how they will play their own position. Ask any pennant skip to say exactly where they want their leads first two bowls and initially they will look blank, then indicate that they have never been asked that before, then look blank again and then with some prompting eventually give some indication (sometimes quite precisely, other times quite vaguely).

Once I have got the skip to indicate where they would like the lead's bowls to be, I then turn to the lead and ask them if they knew that's what their skip considered an ideal first two bowls. I have probably run this exercise 20 -30 times, from pennant to international, and not once has the lead been able to say 'yes'. If the skip hasn't got any real idea of where he or she wants his teammates bowls, how can they possibly convey this to their players (not only during the game, but more importantly during the team training sessions beforehand).

The large majority of players are only interested in the bowls they deliver and provide very little if any support or assistance to their teammates. This means bowls as we currently play it is all about egos. An average game of pennant takes 210 minutes and each player may own the rink for a total of 21 minutes during that time. So what are they doing for the other 189 minutes??? Each player in a pennant team delivers 42 bowls, the team delivers 672, so if a player is only thinking about their own 42 bowls then the team doesn't have much chance! The one saving grace is that nearly all teams play like this, so everyone is on a level playing field and usually the best bowlers do win.

If we ever want bowls to move onto the next level in professional sport we need to throw out this old way of thinking and start moving to an elite team mindset.

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I have seen an elite team on the bowls green recently. It was in the Gold medal match of the men's fours at The SEA games. Malaysia beat Brunei comfortably. BEFORE Malaysia celebrated, they first of all graciously shook the hands of their opponents and then they all met with their skip (Boy) in the middle of the rink and, using their stats card, reviewed their performance. (sound familiar Lach?). I saw this and thought wow, Lachs influence there. Then they celebrated. That's elite team mindset.

Elite team mindset is not that hard ONCE the egos are put aside. Everyone has a role, everyone is excited about their role and the contribution they make to the team, everyone knows the plan and has practised it during the week (as a team). Everyone is on the same page with a common goal AND an understanding of how we are going to get there. Most pennant players do have a common goal (win or if we don't win make sure they don't get dropped) and with no idea of HOW they are going to get there (or perhaps they do have an idea, but I can guarantee it will be a different idea to their skip and the rest of their teammates)

In response to Simon's email I'm not saying that the third should be at the mat end, because that's the way we were brought up and nothing is going to change that. It just happens that the ideal position for the third in an elite minded team is with his teammates that will determine the result (the lead and the second). It's about where you, as third, need to be located to provide the best level of service to your teammates (it's all about the 189 minutes!).

All for now

Danny

(9) hi all

Our Simon threw out a challenge to me about some of my views pertaining to a third.

The other squad members deserve to read your thoughts as some may also wish to convey a personal, and different, view and should feel at all times comfortable in doing so.

I don't have a mortgage on bowls knowledge, my anecdotes simply reflect experience.

Now Sime let's detail my reaction to some of your thoughts.

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On me having a dogmatic approach to the third.

I am happy to be so this time if dogmatic is based solely on success and the input from relevant professionals, those four sports psychologists I used from three countries to observe such behaviours from teams at events.

As Lloyd said of Picasso in his email- copy and steal; as soon as a better / new approach to bowls performance comes into existence or to our attention, trust me, it is my /our new approach to elite performance.

In my view it is all bunkum thirds at the head.

I use anecdotes to justify my stance; Lloyd and Alison in their emails gave descriptions from experience to reinforce the view.

My view being, we perform better long term as we raise our bowls related skills.

Joanne, our USA colleague, has shared her recent technical skill audit so she has an idea of the possibility of delivery success with that audit knowledge intact.

Now with a third there are two other skills imperative to extend which are in our self appraisal form - team skill and sensory skill as the judgement and estimate of distances of a head 23-35m. away is a requisite.

By being that third who is at the head seems to me to challenge their capacity to extend both those related skills.

In my view it is ego for a third at the head.

An observation, mine alone, is most players want to skip the fours either to ensure they are always in the game, or, they are unwilling to play a role anywhere else in the fours team.

In pennant competition in Victoria this past period watching thirds at the head it appears to me a pseudo skip thing, they get to be in the game they crave the role of being the skip.

Lloyd mentioned Bear, who you have heard about as a former club member, and Senior as two blokes who exemplified leadership either as skips or other roles assigned them in the fours team.

If they were thirds they never did anything other than execute what was asked, had great demeanour, energised the other two in the front end team.

In a separate email I said Bear was among the top five skips i ever observed.

Well Sazali from Malaysia was the icon, the very best skip.

Yet he approached me when I first went to coach their country saying I should not feel obligated to 'inherit' him as the fours skip, if I felt he could / should play elsewhere in the Games team.

That's how cool this guy was, all about the team success for his country.

No third worth their salt needed to be alongside him.

In fact the opposition skip and third combined were not up to his leadership level.

The comment you made about a third facing 8-11 bowls to contend within estimating distance is valid.

But, the answer is two fold - the agreed and trained game plan as Danny states, and the competency of the skip to communicate the delivery instruction adequately, positively.

Mate, pennant is a cesspool full of mediocre skips and muddling communication. For you others elsewhere read pennant as your local competitions.

Accept it for what it is; however don't adopt the practices because if you do you don't need to be in the squad as we are of no help to you; what do I say- be intolerant of mediocrity.

Sime, and you members still reading, I have an ephemeral approach to competitive performance in that it is short lived until I find a better, successful, way of coaching to suit me.

As 30 squad members we may have 30 different approaches; for some - Jamie, Pat, Leanne, Robbie, Chrissie, Jackie- who are national champions why would I urge them to change (while they succeed).

I would challenge them to take their related bowls skills further as their game improves too, and not rest on their well deserved laurels.

Lachlan Tighe 2022