

Bowls Website menu- Q&A
Using the placement of the mat to advantage

Using Mat Placement To Advantage, Taking Training Into Competition

QUESTION

Hi Lachie;

I trust all is well with the new bowls season.

I have returned from my month's holiday fully relaxed and ready to prove to myself (and others) that I am more than just a 'part time' Div. 1 pennant bowler. I still consider myself good enough to play at Premier grade, but am regularly frustrated by work commitments and other circumstances to demonstrate my potential.

Nonetheless, I continuously try to make best of whatever opportunity I have to play bowls and improve my standing at both Club and State / National level, although consistency continues to be my downfall.

Strategically though, I am always thinking about gaining 'that' competitive advantage over my opponent by thinking differently to conventional bowls strategy.

In this regard, do you have a view or any anecdotal evidence around mat placement. That is, when playing maximum length I always place the mat on the T, rather than just in front.

But when playing minimum, is there an advantage from playing to the centre of the green or from the centre to the ditch? I suspect the answer lies in personal preference or after weighing up the strengths / weaknesses of my opponent. Placing the mat on the T allows my opponent to find his line, given the consistent mat placement, whereas moving the mat up the green might give me an advantage, if I regularly practice long / short ends.

I also notice that the good / national bowlers tend to play long ends from near the T rather than on the T. I presume this is to nullify any perceived strengths of driving the jack over a full length.

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Any advice / information in this regard would be appreciated.
Many thanks

RESPONSE

Welcome back mate:

Thanks for seeking my view which is all it is of course.
I react in order of the email content as that is easier for an old bugger like me.

In my mind, you are the only one having to prove something to yourself as a skilled bowler. As soon as you are attempting to prove to others you make assumptions and one is they know how to assess you.

Ultimately wins are the gauge and anyone who gets a gig in a national, even a state side, gets selected not as a pennant player, as a successful singles player, sometimes an odd pairs / fours, but the event would have to be an elite level event.

I like your self confidence saying you would make a premier pennant player. Good ambition, however, others who work and may even be in your age bracket, compete at that level.

First you have to join a premier league club which requires commitment. Then you have to set your skills set, so as to embarrass the selectors into seriously considering you. Then, you need to give over time on weekends / evenings to compete in serious events such as Group championships, profile tournaments, club singles (and win one / some) to gauge your progress as a regular premier pennant player.

I am of a view that Div.1 pennant and above is the nursery for elite players so I would not sell Div.1 too short, noting no doubt, there is an elevated mindset as you move to premier level. You enter serious events to foster that serious mindset and you damn well choose playing partners who enhance that mindset, otherwise that is wasteful as well.

On consistency, refer my latest column (16 Oct. titled Consistent Competitive Formula) on my website in the what's new menu as it answers that very question.

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As you well know from my coaching experience, I never allowed players to say maximum was anything other than the mat on that two-metre spot and the jack had to be, at worst, only a metre from the two-metre spot at the other end. Anything less is not maximum, it is nearly maximum and nearly is not good enough.

Now that is a mindset you have to gain to be much, much better; in other words be intolerant of mediocrity. I don't coach a lot of people as the vast majority are happy to accommodate mediocrity, whilst wanting to be, in many cases, an elite bowler. It doesn't happen.

Same approach with minimum; it has to be the mat either on the two-metre spot or at the 21-metre mark, if that is our minimum up the green. The jack has to be no more than a metre beyond that 21-metres to be acceptable.

Why? Simply because mediocre bowlers play medium and my experiences, all recorded, validate that notion. Taking the mat up the rink a bit is OK if, and only if, you knew from training where 21 metres was at any length you set the mat from. In coaching I use the pegs and rink numbers on the side as a tool for the players to know the respective 21 metre marks from a set position up the green. Again, that is a mindset I would instill, did instill to those players wanting success at the highest level.

You know me quite well so it would not surprise you to read me saying forget the opponent and know your strengths, work on maintaining them, know your weaknesses and work to reduce or eliminate them. If I said to you or anyone, declare your level of competence in these seven skills - communication, fitness, mental, sensory, tactical, team, technical - can you measure / gauge the level you are at for some or all. I have no doubt moving the mat may be a ploy, but in general I think dominating at minimum and maximum will get you over the line. Remember you only have to win an event by one shot.

Your final note on where good / perceived bowlers place the mat caused me to laugh. Danny, who assisted me at Alphington coaches workshop has said, may even have said it that day, that he feels the good bowlers don't think much and base everything on the sheer technical prowess they possess, even work on. I agree with him in that these bowlers

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would not rate highly on my self appraisal form; and, years ago chatting to well known international bowlers they played set lengths as much to be consistent and to entertain the audience, wow!!!

We should chat, have a red, and work out how to get your success at a higher level.

I am as near as the phone mate.

Regards

Lachlan Tighe, 2017