

## SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT COMPETITION PLAY and PENNANTS!

Len Hyde, February 2021



Combining and utilising team talents will more than often beat a team of talented individuals! It's something every team member not only needs to think about but strive to implement!

Taking time in getting to know and understand the strengths and weaknesses of each member of the team and incorporating that knowledge into our game plan can play a big part in winning. Sometimes we must balance the strengths of the majority of the team to defeat the opposition and indeed sometimes we need to stymie particular talents of an opposition player/s to achieve our objective!

Playing a specific length is the most basic and often used technique of a game plan. But there are many other, most of which will evolve as the game progresses!

### ➤ **Gathering details about the strengths of each member of the team?**

- Starting with the Lead, are both hands as accurate as each other. In other words can he play the game up and down on the same side or do you need to play around the clock?
- Just how accurate can the Lead consistently set up the end (this does not mean holding the shot rather than having bowls in close relationship to the Jack). What if any, are his weaknesses, such as being consistently short or long. Does he tend to draw narrow and/or across the Head?
- How well and to what degree does our Lead read and lead the game in looking for and trying to capitalise on weaknesses of the opposition players? This can have a bearing on the hand he prefers to play and where to locate each of his 2 bowls. *The Lead who can do this is truly a gift from heaven and when he says "but the opposition keeps running into my bowls" and to which I reply...you have them well and truly under pressure and not concentrating on their strengths... keep it going!*
- Can the 2<sup>nd</sup> play both hands? Is one hand more consistently accurate than the other? Can he play 1-2 metre on-shots without losing his bowl? Does he tend to play narrow on one side and if so which? Can he control deliveries to targets off the centre line? The combined strengths of our Lead and 2<sup>nd</sup> if utilised can be a big plus in setting up the end and it is a characteristic lacking in many teams.
- Can our 3<sup>rd</sup> draw on both hands and to what level of accuracy? Can he play on-shots from 1- to 4 metres? How good is his weight control with on-shots in not losing his bowl? How good is he at locating positional bowls? Is he a player that works with the Skip or prefers to do it his way? How skilled is he in communicating with the Skip? When providing information is he one of those 3<sup>rds</sup> who cannot help himself in supplying unwanted directions or does he know when to stop? Can he read the Head and make the Skip aware of dangerous situations such as being 4 down or with only 1 bowl in the count and he sees the Skip lining up a full blooded drive but does not open his mouth. Maybe there is an opportunity to bump out an opposition bowl for a plus 3 or 4 and he says nothing! The 3<sup>rd</sup> who knows when to and when not to open his mouth, is truly a great asset.
- Is the Skip capable of playing positional deliveries on either hand and if so to what level of accuracy. Is he capable of playing on-shots on both hands? Does he tend to favour one hand! How good are his communication and manipulation skills in developing the Head to the advantage of his team? Maybe the Skip is talented in delivering bowls but an individual player who lacks skills of a Skip. If so, building up a close working relationship with the 3<sup>rd</sup> becomes vitally important. This is a job for the selectors to ensure both players have an understanding of each other's skills and are

capable of an amicable playing relationship. You do not want a player with excellent knowledge of playing as a Skip to be in the position of a 3<sup>rd</sup> when the appointed Skip may lack that ability but be a better player with the bowl; it's potentially the wrong combination!

- There are always other aspects involved and it is especially up to the Skip and Lead to be on top of the answers throughout the match. The game will of course chop and change direction by the opposition particularly if you are getting on top and as such you have to be both aware of such changes and ready to counter them!  
Our Skip who has absorbed details about strengths and weaknesses of the team members is now mentally attuned into making decisions as opportunities arise!

**Let's start by agreeing that bowls of your team which unintentionally cross the Head or stop well short of the mark are not acceptable.**

The side on which a Lead delivers his bowl is chosen for 3 main reasons.

- (a) Because he is likely to deliver the bowl more accurately.*
- (b) Because that is the hand which the rest of the team are better at playing.*
- (c) Because the opposition prefers to play that side and it doesn't make any difference to your players...gets in the opposition's draw line!*

Bowling along the line of delivery preferred by the opposition Lead can at times upset their game plan and force the opposition players into having to draw on the hand they least prefer!

Our Lead will not do this if it is detrimental to both his skills and those of our team.

- At this time we need to think about the objective of our Lead which is to gain possession of the Head primarily with 1 bowl and the other in close proximity. While it may look good and give our Lead a fuzzy feeling, 2 bowls on the Jack is not always a good thing for it makes the job of the opposition 2<sup>nd</sup> ever so much easier; the target is bigger and no longer 50 mm in width rather than 250mm!  
Ideally we want to be holding the shot with the other bowl behind the Jack and in a location to catch it if moved. Our Lead's 2<sup>nd</sup> bowl does not need to be too close as it can be used as a stopping point for the opposition's next delivery. Location of every bowl is going to have an influence both on the next opposition delivery as well as that of yours!  
Our smart Skip is not going to call for following bowls of his players to be drawn on the opposite side to those of his Lead...you must avoid making the target larger. A positional bowl on the opposite hand is on most occasions best positioned well behind the Head to act as a catcher or deterrent to the opposition; or in some cases as a blocker!
  - When developing the Head, it can at times be warranted to force the opposition into drawing into your bowls not away from them! In this way if the Jack is touched it is going to move into your bowls. Of course your bowls need not be located in a cluster or line and act as a stopping block for the opposition to intentionally draw into and cut out our counters!
  - The game of bowls and decision making is never black and white and it is not easy to provide fixed guidelines when writing an article such as this!  
You must be continually awake and have a person at the Head be it the Skip or 2 i/c who both understands the ability of the next player and tactical objective. Playing every delivery to gain a shot is not always the way to go. It is very much a tactical game and a fluid approach to decision making is imperative.
- As bowlers we each have strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes when playing the game, but as team players we must accept direction from the Skip. Sometimes his call may exceed

our own perceived skill level particularly when from the mat you believe there is an easier shot. If you are having difficulty and not achieving the attempted result it's time to have a chat with your Skip! Maybe on some of his calls he is looking for a positional bowl rather than what you may perceive as looking for a shot. This may simply come down to communication or our Skip not wanting to alert the opposition Skip!

- Let us now look at the role of our 2<sup>nd</sup>. There are some who believe the 2<sup>nd</sup> is the most important player in the team. In a game of Fours the team holding the shot with back bowls has gained a big edge in the outcome of that end. If the opposition is holding shot our 2<sup>nd</sup> needs to have the skill to draw into the Head and break it open. On shots played by the 2<sup>nd</sup> need to be no more than + 2mtrs as it is important his bowl is retained in proximity to the Head and a potential catcher. It is an advantage particularly in Fours for your team to be holding shot after the 2<sup>nd</sup>s have finished.
- When our Lead has won the Head, we are -well aware that the opposition will try to gain possession by having their 2<sup>nd</sup> play into it. So our objective is one of 3 moves:
  - (a) *Locate a catcher*
  - (b) *Locate a blocker.*
  - (c) *Draw an additional shot*

The location of bowls both in the Head and behind is going to influence play and our Skip will have to decide if this is the time to add to the score, position a catcher or blocker to deter the opposition from playing a weighted delivery. Early in an end I favour catchers over blockers for the simple reason the objective of the opposition is to move rather than draw the Jack and if successful the jack is going to go towards the ditch. Most on-shots are more than often overweight!

Unless our 2<sup>nd</sup> is very accurate, more than often calling for a blocker frequently ends up as a wasted delivery. It also highlights the role of our 3<sup>rd</sup> in making the Skip aware of the situation.

- We now come to the 3<sup>rd</sup> whose job is going to add to the score, recover the lead or cut down an opposition's score. Accurate deliveries using a variety of weights on either hand are a necessary ability. The main difference between playing skills of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and Skip is very little other than the Skip's ability to skilfully direct his players, manipulate the Head plus winning the match.
  - Without a doubt our 3<sup>rd</sup> must have an ability to read the Head and communicate with the Skip. Such communication must not be given as a directive rather than a clear precise explanation of the situation. There are times when it is also appropriate to call the Skip to the Head and times when the Skip may ask for guidance. Only provide guidance when asked and as long as you understand both ability of the Skip as well as the draw line of his bowls! Do not provide advice based on your ability rather than that of his; this means you need to play together, and not as opposition, in order to build a strong playing relationship.
  - Our 3<sup>rd</sup> is also the guiding light for the Lead and 2<sup>nd</sup> in as much as keeping their spirits and attitude to the game positive. All too often we see our Lead and 2<sup>nd</sup> taking little notice of the game after playing their bowls! A few helpful words particularly when one of the team is not achieving results can often make all the difference; but it is not the time or place to act as a coach!
  - There are times when our 3<sup>rd</sup> is going to be called upon to play an aggressive on-shot, usually with his 1<sup>st</sup> delivery. The 2<sup>nd</sup> delivery is often needed to re-find the Jack! Seldom will our 3<sup>rd</sup> be called upon to play 2 aggressive on-shots.
  - Team management by our 3<sup>rd</sup> often comes to the fore towards the later ends of the match. This is the time when players are getting tired and concentration starts to ebb; one teams gets on top, changes length of the end and lifts speed of play. How often do you see a match won or lost over the last 3-4 ends and how often do you realise this is manipulation of the game by the Skip? So what can our 3<sup>rd</sup> do when he sees this happening? Start by making his Lead and 2<sup>nd</sup> aware of the change, even hand around a few peppermints to wake up the senses and most certainly watch to see if a few words about the change of length is warranted.

This is a move our own Skip needs to keep in mind and if adopting the tactic make the 3<sup>rd</sup> aware of it before calling for the Lead to move the mat to a new location. Keeping the team well informed is a positive tactic.

- As team members we are looking to the Skip to occasionally pull off a miracle shot to save our skin! At all other times it is the role of the Skip to ensure the team wins ends and the match. It only takes one shot in the final count to win the rink. Of course in pennants where the combined score of the teams determines the winner there is a need to keep an eye on the score board especially towards the later part of the game. It may be a time when risks to increase the score have to be taken. Most importantly we expect our Skip to be a good communicator and leader who understands and supports without criticism or innuendo those of us who may be having a bad day!

### **“FIFTEEN ASPECTS OF THE GAME TO THINK ABOUT”**

- ✓ *THERE ARE MORE POINTS WON FROM DRAWS THAN WEIGHTED SHOTS*
- ✓ *TEAMWORK BEATS INDIVIDUALISM*
- ✓ *DON'T LET GAME PRESSURE GET THE BETTER OF YOU; SUCK UP MORE OXYGEN*
- ✓ *KEEP EMOTIONS UNDER CONTROL AND DO NOT DISCUSS WITH OPPOSITION*
- ✓ *EVERY DELIVERY COUNTS*
- ✓ *AN XTRA FEW SECONDS BEHIND THE MAT GETTING YOUR BRAIN INTO GEAR CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE TO THE RESULT*
- ✓ *A MINOR FAULT FROM THE MAT IS A MAJOR FAULT AT THE FINISH*
- ✓ *MAKE CORRECTIONS IN SMALL DEGREES*
- ✓ *ONLY BY WATCHING YOUR DELIVERY WILL YOU IMPROVE THE NEXT*
- ✓ *AFTER THE GAME RECALL BOTH YOUR GOOD AND BAD SHOTS, WORK ON CORRECTING THE BAD ONE'S*
- ✓ *IT'S NOT YOUR BOWLS OR GREEN, THAT DICTATED THE RESULT*
- ✓ *CONCENTRATE ON THE GAME AS A WHOLE*
- ✓ *THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A WIN OR A LOSS IS BUT ONE POINT*
- ✓ *THE GAME IS NEVER FINISHED TILL THE FAT LADY SINGS*
- ✓ *AFTER THE GAME, EVERYONE IS A FRIEND*

### **“DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU KNOW THEY ARE TRYING TO DO UNTO YOU”**

I trust my comments are helpful in making your time on the green more satisfying and enjoyable. It is an easy game to play but more demanding to be consistently good. If you have any questions we have 5 top coaches willing to provide answers. **Have a good Pennant season, it's your time to shine!**