

## Technique : Body Position

Your body position is an important part of setting yourself up for a successful bowl.

Ideally, you want your body, feet and shoulders aligned with the line you want to bowl.

Even if your action does not allow for this then it is still important.

If you are too far off alignment then the consequence will be

- Forehand – your bowling action is likely to take your arm away from your body
- Backhand – your bowling action will take your arm a long way across your body.

Both of these are significant barriers to control and consistency.

That is not to say you cannot bowl well at times but that by doing so you are making it more difficult to do so.

Top Tip : When playing on a different rink, if the line is different then adjust your body position. This allows you to hit that line without changing your action and benefit from the muscle memory you have already developed.

## Technique : Release Point

In almost all sports, control is generated by stopping a contact or release point being too far away from the body.

Bowls is no different.

The main impacts for a bowler is that as your arm gets further forwards

- Your shoulder will naturally start to turn
- Your wrist is also more likely to turn as this happens
- Your hand will be the past the bottom of the arc and start to rise.
- You will have less follow through so can tend to bowl short

Keeping your release point closer to you will help you to avoid these factors impacting your line and weight.

Top Tip : Think about the weight you are going to bowl and give yourself enough swing to deliver it. Trying to add weight as you are about to release is the most common cause of pushing the release point forwards.

# Technique : Release Height

The most important aspect of the height you release the bowl at is the consistency with which you do so.

When a wood bounces it will lose some of its momentum as opposed to if it runs smoothly along the ground.

The higher you release, the more variable this is likely to be so it is best to have a release height as low as you can consistently reproduce.

If you cannot release lower due to physical limitations do not see this as a problem though! There are exceptional bowlers who release the bowl relatively high.

Top Tip : If you have lost your line or weight then this can sometimes be to your body position having risen a little by increment. As you look for the same release height this can cause you to move your release point forwards.

## Technique : Weight Control – Arm or Wrist?

There are four basic ways you can vary your weight

- Changing the length of your swing
- Speeding up your swing
- Pushing through with your wrist
- Shortening your follow through

Generally, the last is not recommended as going off your normal swing but slowing the action as you release is the hardest to control and tends to result in short bowls.

Using your wrist will incrementally change your weight the most for the least effort but can make it harder to avoid turning your wrist and impacting your line.

For most bowlers, the top two give the most control.

Top Tip: For lengths close to minimum, consider if you need a minimal backswing if any at all, your follow through as you deliver may be sufficient to generate the weight needed

# Technique : Routine

Having a set routine when you bowl is a huge part of consistency.

- Always start with checking the bias on the bowl to avoid embarrassment!
- Think about how your body is aligned with the line you want to bowl.
- Think about how the weight you want to bowl in your arm feels
- Sequencing – if you step, think about the timing of when you start your swing relative to the step to ensure you deliver at the right release point.
- Focus on your line, wrist position and follow through as you deliver the bowl

Top Tip: Take your time once on the mat! Deliver the bowl right rather than quickly.

## Technique : A compact action

Keeping your action compact limits the scope for the action to go wrong.

A bigger swing back from where you hold the bowl often involves taking the bowl around your body and way from the line you have aimed meaning you then have to refine the line as you deliver. Whilst this is achievable, it is harder to replicate consistently.

Starting your action with the bowl lower but in line with the line you want to bowl, usually being a little to the side of your body makes it easier to hit the line.

Top Tip: A golf coach once pointed out to me that you don't hit the ball on your backswing so keeping it slow and controlled would help me hit the ball better. The same principle applies to delivering your bowl.

# Technique : Grip

There are two generally recommended grip techniques.

- Claw Grip using your fingers to grip the bowl, often with a thumb on top to give more feel and control.
- Cradle Grip with the bowl deeper in the palm.

Both have an emphasis on aligning your middle finger with the centre of the bowl to help with a straight delivery.

There are different grips on the bowls with different names but mostly come down to dimples or channels. The depth of the channels can change the feel significantly

Top Tip: Do not buy your first bowls or change bowls without trying the grip type first. It can feel very different and may not suit you. The shop will let you try them if they have them and if you are thinking of trying something a fellow bowler uses then they will often be kind enough to let you have a quick go to see how they feel.

# Technique : Running Woods

I am classifying this as using more than 3-4 yards of weight upwards.

Here are two ways to add the weight you need.

1. Accelerating your arm though as much as needed off the same action.
2. Putting on extra weight with your wrist as you deliver.

The former will give you better control but if you want to go very heavy then you are likely to need some element of the latter.

If you are accelerating your arm through the line then think about your sequencing if you step as this will change when you reach your release point. Ideally to keep the best control you still want your release point to remain the same.

If you don't step, then the increase in weight may be a bit more limited but keeping that timing of the release remains just as important.

Top Tip: Practice on either hand on an end rink towards the ditch using a mat turned sideways as a target. Try different weights and body positions to hit your lines. If it is a short distance then your feet may need to point across your line to stop you being wide.

## Tactics : The percentage shot

Drawing to the jack is a skill but does not always give you the best chance of winning the end, increasing your shot advantage or reducing the shot deficit.

- If you have bowls multiple bowls a yard or less shorth then bowling at them with a little weight may give you better odds.
- If there are bowls behind the jack in the count or as shot then bowling to them can give a higher percentage shot than trying to stop inside them.
- Moving the jack or pushing a bowl on to the jack to move it to bowls behind may be the best option
- Punching out a bowl that is jack high by adding a yard or two of weight may be a good option.

The percentage shot will often be the one giving you the most options of success

It is important to realise though, there is not always a right or wrong answer and the strengths of individuals is part of the equation.

Top Tip: When you are playing against more experienced Angel bowlers then, if you ask them, they will be happy to give you their perspectives.

## Tactics : 'A yard on or a positive draw'

You will often be asked to arrive at the head with a yard or two on.

This will be intended to move the jack, promote a bowl of your won side or push out a bowl from the opposition.

When working out the line you need to take for this you should think about how much your bowl turns in the last yard or two so that you arrive at the head with the yard on

You may alternatively be asked do a positive draw which will be similarly weighted but may be without the need to tighten the line. The key here is that your skip does not want you to be short!

Top Tip: When you get chance follow your bowl down to the head. The way your bowl finishes can look very different at the head from the mat!  
Remember that you should be at the head by the time your bowl finishes and if it is in a competition/league to check the rules around how often you can visit the head.

## Tactics : Position on the mat

Most players have a position on the mat they use consistently. When there are bowls in your line short of the jack, moving around the mat can be another part of your arsenal. Your bowl should in theory follow the same arc for the same delivery. Moving your position on the mat can create options.

- Moving to the inside of the mat can tighten the line of the bowl allowing you to be underneath a bowl(s) on your line
- Moving to the outside of the mat can widen the line of the bowl allowing you to be around a bowl(s) on your line
- Moving backwards or forwards on the mat can allow you to repeat a bowl whilst changing the distance marginally. A useful way to find 6” by repeating the weight of your last bowl.

Top Tip : When bowling on a ditch rink moving to the inside of the mat to tighten your line can give you extra margin to the ditch. Alternatively, on other rinks, moving either way can help you avoid known runs.

## Tactics : Mat Position

If you change the length of jack delivery whilst maintaining the mat position then any, if you are using one, the aim point will remain the same.

Once you move the mat forwards, anyone using an aim point will have to narrow it. Moving the mat can be a great tactic to take people off their lines if they are bowling well.

It can also introduce some variability as you will be using carpet that has not had the same usage.

Equally, it can be very good way for other players to do the same to you so you should always make time to practice different mat positions.

**Top Tip:** Understand the angle that you bowl at relative to your body as this should not change. Being familiar with this makes it easier to adjust your line.

# Tactics : Risks and Opportunities

It is an important skill to be able to spot risks and opportunities.

In the latter stages of a game, you may be forced to take risk chasing a game or look to manage risks whilst leading but spotting both earlier can dictate the position you are in.

- Opportunity – The most common opportunity will be to either push out an opposition bowl or move the jack to waiting bowls.
- Risks – The most common risk will be that the opposition move the jack on you. Make sure you have bowls behind. If you only have one bowl in the head, do what you can to ensure another.

If you are playing good opposition, always assume they will take these opportunities if they fall to them. Be pro-active rather than reactive.

Top Tip: Don't be afraid to lose one shot to gain 4-5. The former will not change the game, the latter may!

## Tactics : Keeping the same hand

It is fundamentally to your advantage to be strong on both forehand and backhand. Regardless of the position you play.

There will be rinks where one side is much better enabling you to keep on that side in either direction.

Bowl to bowl though, it is easiest to adjust length on the same hand.

If a bowl is in the way then consider whether you can go around it or under it by changing position on the mat or adding or losing weight.

Getting the consistency of weight on the day quicker will support you getting more bowls in the head which will increase your sides change of winning the end.

Top Tip: Bowling to the jack is not your only target, you can often get shot without bowling to the jack.

## Tactics : Creating a Target

This is not something you want to do, particularly against better bowler.

Sometimes, drawing in to increase the shots you are holding

- Creates a wider target for the opposition to run at
- If a bowl is jack high or just behind can create a shoulder for the opposition to sue with a positive draw.

If you already have shot, consider where you can add to the count without creating either of the above.

The match situation is important context and on occasions you may choose to draw more in but be aware of the risk.

Top Tip: Consider if bowling short can disrupt the opposition line if there is not a good opportunity to add to the count without creating a target

## Tactics : Using running woods

Using running woods of different weight to change the head can be a useful tactic to change heads in your favour

Some considerations

- Be conscious of what bowls you have in the head and any risk of knocking them out. Where would that leave you?
- How many options will the shot give you for success (use bowls, move jack, punch bowls out)?
- Do you want to change the head a bit or rip it apart?
- Are there bowls short, working out the weight you need to be under or around them may determine the weight of the shot.

Top Tip: Practice! You are using different weights and lines. Understanding them will come from practice.