

# PLAYING AS A TEAM

## SOME TIPS ON POSITIONAL PLAY

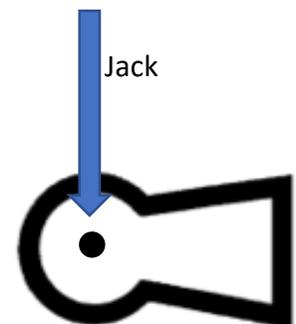
What is a "keyhole"?

Who is the "Motivator",  
"The Trendsetter", "The  
Jack of All Trades" or  
"The Heart of the Team"?

Now that our 2018 season is well underway, I thought it would be a good time to look at the different positions in a full game of fours, not only for the benefit of our new members, but also as a refresher for our long-term members. It cannot be stressed enough that different positions played in lawn bowls have unique responsibilities and the way players carry out these duties will invariably determine the overall performance of the team. It is hoped that this information will be useful to all bowlers, especially those involved in tournament play.

### THE LEAD

The art of Lead bowls is to be able to deliver the Jack to a length requested by the Skip, then get two bowls in the Head, or at least behind the jack within the "keyhole".



During my research on this topic I found that the *keyhole* as shown above and is an area 6" (150 mm) all around the Jack opening up to a spread for approx. a yard (1 m) behind the Jack.) In a tournament, use the "trial ends" to find the true side of the green and discuss this with the Skip as you pass on the green. (This will mean bowling forehand in one direction and backhand in the other to play on the true side.) Remember, although to be shot is desired, it is not essential because back bowls inside the keyhole area are good positional bowls and are equally important. Remember: if the Lead plays a good hand, usually the rest of the team follows suit. I have heard Leads say they are disappointed when their shot bowl gets knocked out. What the Lead needs to remember, they set the scene, and their bowls are the bowls to beat. The Lead is the "Trendsetter".

## THE SECOND

The Second must be a player with all the skills. If the Lead's bowl is holding shot, the Second can then turn his or her attention to: drawing (on either hand); play a positional bowl; or deliver a drive shot to "open up the Head". In other words, a good Second should be a "Jack of All Trades" to cover all situations that may arise.

## THE THIRD

The Third, like the Skip, is active at both ends of the rink – at the mat and in the Head. When stepping up to the mat, eight bowls have already been played and the Skip may have a particular strategy in mind. Connect with the Skip to ensure the right shot is delivered, e.g. rather than a draw shot, a strategic, or a take-out shot is called for. This means that the Third is required to be a strong bowler: must be capable of the full variety of shots, i.e. draw on either hand; play a "Yard on/Metre through", a "Hit and Stay" or a Drive when requested, as well as playing a Positional Bowl. The Third should also be able to encourage team performance; be diplomatic; and always trust the advice of the Skip. The Third must always be focused on play and be good at reading the Head, as the Skip may ask the Third for advice from time to time, so will need to be able to accurately assess the Head. When giving advice, **be clear and succinct** in direction, weight and desired outcome. It is important to not confuse the player on the mat by giving too much extraneous information e.g. doing the *Chicken Dance* saying, "This is theirs, and this is ours" and accompanying signals. Be specific. If the Third is unsure on which shot to call for, then be confident enough to ask for the Skip to come to the Head. The Third is the "Heart of the Team". The Third is the communication link with the Skip so share strategies with the Third and Lead ensuring all team members feel part of the action.

The Third needs to carry chalk and a measure and be a "capable measurer". The Third must be aware of the laws of the game, especially covering this area. The Third should stand still just behind the Jack when the Skip is playing, without moving or providing advice unless asked to do. When the Head belongs to the opposition, the Third should move to behind the Head and then stand perfectly still. A good Third would be a skilful bowler paying constant attention to the game, have endless patience and a fair amount of psychological strength to offer your teammates and the Skip.

## THE SKIP

The Skip should be a competent bowler playing every shot in the book and know the Laws of the Game. The Skip is the "Motivator", a good psychologist and an analyst. A Skip must know the team's individual players and call shots within their capability. A Skip must be clear and concise with their directions - **give just one desired shot to provide focus and intent for the player**; the chance of success is increased because of the player being able to visualize exactly what you want. Try it, the results may surprise you. I am sure you will agree that providing the player with several alternatives,

or a string of too much information (TMI) can cause confusion. I spoke with Rod Tester on this point and he stated that:

“A decisive attitude by a Skip benefits both the Skip and the player being directed. The Skip is demonstrating leadership and knowledge which is what the player needs to focus on one, and only one, shot and what the team needs to progress.

“I also have found from experience that clear and highly specific direction can enhance a player’s personal development. It’s surprising how often players rise to the challenge when given clear direction and achieve a level of performance that is higher than they anticipated. When players start to believe that they can “make the shot” rather than just being hopeful, they have reached a higher level of ability which they will not recede from.”

A good skip always praises good performance and does not express any feelings of displeasure with bad shots. If necessary, talk to the player having difficulties when passing them on the green by giving an encouraging word or a tip for improvement. The Skip should take the Third into his or her confidence to show the team, and the opposition, that the team is in complete harmony. A Skip must be loyal to his own team to bring out the best in them. Never let your team hear you criticize them back at the Clubhouse. (Many a skip has lost a good team member because of this mistake.) A Skip must be in tune with the state of the green, call percentage shots when required, have a good attitude, communicate clearly, and most of all show everyone you are enjoying the game.

A Skip must analyze the opposition as well as their own team for their strengths and weaknesses. There is a special relationship between the Lead and the Skip at the start of the end when setting the mat. The eye contact and hand signals need to be positive and clear indicating straightening of the mat, the length of the jack, and centring of the Jack. Wherever possible do not interfere with the Lead’s choice of direction as he or she are familiar with the shots required of a Lead. Only give advice if requested. Another relationship worth developing is that of the Skip and the Third. Take the Third into your confidence to show the rest of the team, and the opposition, that you are in complete harmony. Being a Skip is being a team member who has good management skills and a relaxed demeanour to ensure the team members play to the best of their abilities. Teambuilding is important, as the performance potential of a team is much greater than the individual talents of a player. Mutual respect, good communication, trust, acceptance and encouragement are just a few traits that will foster team spirit.

I hope you have enjoyed your journey through the positions with me. Hopefully there was a tip or two that you can bring to the game and to enhance your team’s spirit. Go Team!

