

## Know Your Role

Pennant bowling is a side and team game. Each player is selected to give the side in which they play the best possible chance of success and players are selected in specific positions within their team to use their skills to best advantage. Over four editions, the Tranmere Times provided a series entitled *Know Your Role* to explain the attributes of each position in a fours rink.

### The Lead

The lead is such an important position in the team. A great lead sets the match up for their team, both in putting it on the front footing, as it were, and in the positive energy a good start engenders. Many state sides consider this to be the second most important position in the team after the skipper.

Obviously, consistency in draw bowling is an essential skill of a lead bowler. Having a positive attitude that you can win the game with your own bowling helps a lot. Sure, the opposition will be doing its best to remove or replace your great opening bowls and sometimes they do it. But, not all the time and at least they are chasing you rather than the other way around. And your team mates will relish the opportunity to build on your great bowls.

Never overlook the value of a good second shot. Even if you don't get shot, close bowls will give your team mates something to work with. The general standard you should aspire to depends on the level of competition in which you are playing. At the higher levels, 400mm short to 1 metre behind are good markers and if your first bowl is close, be sure to arrive or be behind with your second bowl.

Normally the narrow hand is easier to play. However, if your opposition is playing the wider hand, your skipper may call you to play the wider hand as well to at least get in the opponent's line. You should bowl the same side in both directions unless otherwise agreed with your skipper. This can be reviewed with your skipper during the game. Never take it upon yourself to change things without prior discussion. If a bowl appears to be in your draw, don't change hands unless directed to do so. Have confidence in yourself to get under or around the bowl as required.

Rolling the jack can be strategically important. Be aware of where the skipper wants the mat placed and avoid using the same mat position as the opposition. The skipper should be directing both mat position and desired end-length and you should be aiming to achieve a roll of the jack to within one metre of the desired position.

### The Second

The most important thing for you to remember as a second is to play the shot the skipper calls you to play, not the shot you can see and that you think might be appropriate. Do not predetermine your shot and stay off the mat until you've received directions from the skipper. The skipper will have his or her reasons for calling a shot, which might be attacking or defensive. If you see the situation differently, do not engage with the skipper openly there and then. Play the shot the skipper has called and either discuss the situation after the match, or, if it is likely to be brief, mention it as you change ends.

Pennant bowling is overwhelmingly about draw bowling, either to the jack or to a position bowl behind the head. In rare circumstances you may be asked to draw a position bowl in front of the head. Your first priority should be to become the surrogate leader and recover the situation in the event that your lead bowler has not performed up to the mark.

A second must pay particular attention to weight. Unless specifically called to do otherwise, a second should always aim to reach or be past the head. Short bowls are the greatest crime a second can commit.

When the skipper asks a second for bowls in the head when the team is not holding shot, don't be overly concerned with getting the shot with your bowls. It helps if you do, but it isn't essential. Your third and skipper will have bowls to come and your bowls in the head will give them confidence to play their shots. On the other hand, if your team is holding shot and the skipper asks for a bowl to the head, don't be afraid of giving shot away and falling short or avoiding the head because of it.

Seconds should ensure that the scorecard and scoreboard are correct at all times. It is good practice to set up an understanding with your opponent at the outset and to verify the result and aggregate score after each end.

Seconds, together with their team mates, contribute to team spirit and harmony by the way they engage with them and deal with their own disappointment should they not be bowling as well as they could. It is never acceptable to openly critique your skipper and other team mates during the course of the match. If there are concerns, these should be held in check until the match has been completed and the team can have a meaningful review of the day.



## The Third

The third is a pivotal player. They will have the skills to deliver a full armoury of shots, any one of which may be called upon in a range of circumstances. Hopefully the team has had a solid start, in which case the third will be asked to strengthen the position either by drawing to add more shots to the count or to place a positional bowl in a defensive spot. In the hopefully much rarer circumstance of both the lead and second having failed, the third must become the lead bowler and draw close bowls to give the skipper something to work with. Where the lead and second have bowled well but the opposition has one better bowl, or a bowl that is holding up a multiple shot count, the third may be asked to play a forcing shot to remove and replace that bowl. Occasionally the third will be asked to drive at the head.

If you are a third, make sure that you have the required skills to bowl each type of bowl with confidence. Be prepared to do some drill practice for those shots that are not so strong in your armoury.

Having a good rapport with your skipper is very important. Always wait for your skipper's call and then play the shot to the best of your ability. Now and again you may see an alternative shot from the mat end. Discuss this with your skipper and, on some occasions, you may be allowed to visit the head to have a look and be invited to play the shot in which you have more confidence.

Observe and become familiar with the way your skipper likes to play the game. On the change of ends be clear with your skipper about the objective with the remaining bowls. Do not interfere or offer the skipper advice from your end unless you are asked to do so, the head has changed significantly, or you believe the skipper has missed something important. When asked, give quick and precise directions. If the head has changed significantly after either of the two skippers' first bowls, it might pay to have your skipper visit the head to evaluate what shot is now required. Don't be concerned about taking up time; the rules allow for this and it may make the difference between a win or a loss in a tight contest.

It is important that you maintain an even demeanour, irrespective of the circumstances and especially try to stay relaxed in tough situations. Be a leader and motivator at your end. Remember, it is never acceptable to openly critique your skipper and other team mates during the course of the match. If there are concerns, these should be held in check until the match has been completed and the team can have a meaningful review of the day.

The third has a critical role, in conjunction with the opposing third, to declare the result after each end has been bowled. Always have a measure on hand, know the rules and be thorough. Do not rely on an opponent's say-so or measure if you are unsure.

## The Skipper

One of the skipper's most important roles is to encourage a high morale in the team. The skipper is the leader on the rink and, by his or her demeanour, establishes the tone for the team. Talk to your players beforehand, if only for the simple objective of relaxing them. It is vital, above all else, that the skipper remains positive, exudes confidence and avoids negative comments and body language at all times.

A skipper should respect and understand his or her players personally and recognise their skills and shortcomings. The skipper should be mindful of the player's feelings (nervous, serious, too relaxed) and respond accordingly. Acknowledge good and effective bowls of team mates on the crossover. Avoid being too kind when bowls don't achieve the required result and don't over-praise.

Skippers play a pivotal role in the tactical approach to the game and each end. For every game, the skipper needs to evaluate the strengths and possible weak points of their opposition as quickly as possible. Be clear, precise and specific with directions; keep it simple.

A good rapport and working relationship with the third is highly advantageous to success. Discuss tactics for challenging situations with your third. Take them into your confidence, let them know what you are attempting to achieve and therefore give them the best chance of fulfilling their role in supporting you in your shot selections.

Build a head and either add to the count if safe to do so, or cover a downside risk to avoid potentially big losses. Stay relaxed in tough times and be willing and able to play the big shots when required. Running and weighted shots must hit their target more often than not. Always evaluate what might go wrong.

Pennant bowling is a side game. Many matches are won or lost on the final few ends of play and shot selection can become even more critical than early on in the game. Skippers must be aware of the overall side score. Play for the side, not the team, and decide whether to play a more defensive or attacking game plan.

Enjoy your bowling

