

Learn to Bowl



The game of bowls is very simple to learn but can take years to perfect. Games are played courteously, with positive support and comments for all players. The goal of the game is to get more of your team's bowls closer to the jack (the small white ball) than your opponents on each "end" played. A typical game is 14 or more ends, with an overall running tally being kept at all times to establish the winner.

Bowls come in sets of 4, the maximum number you will roll in one end of a game. Three bowls are used by each player in a triples game and 2 are used in Rinks (four players per team). The big surprise is when you first pick up a bowl and feel how heavy it is. Notice that all bowls in the set are engraved with the same symbol to identify the owner. The very large number of available symbols means that it is highly unlikely that bowls of two players will have the same one. The ability to identify ownership is important during scoring.

But the bigger surprise is when you roll it and see it doesn't go straight! Wow. These bowls are not round. You always roll the bowl on its smooth areas (areas without emblems or markings), with the small emblem on the side to which you want it to curve. How much it will actually turn is a factor of how fast you roll it (known as "the weight"), where you aim it (known as "the grass"), the condition of the green, and other bumps of nature. But you always try to release the bowl smoothly aiming at a distinct point that you hope will bring the bowl to rest at its target.

While the bowling green is square, games are actually played in assigned lanes (known as rinks) which are designated with marks on the perimeter of the green. The marks can be used as reference points for aiming when you roll. To protect the grass, different rinks and different directions are used on different occasions.

There are both forehand shots and backhand shots, and you will need to learn both. But don't forget to check your emblems...to avoid the embarrassment of a reverse bias shot when your bowl will surely take off into a neighboring rink.

In singles play, it is just you against an opponent (with a neutral spotter to help center the jack). In a games of triples (a typical arrangement), the following positions exist:

Lead: The person who leads off

Vice: The next person to play, and the Vice Skipper of the Team

Skip: The Skipper. Always plays last. Usually the most experienced player who also guides most of the strategy.

The skipper of whichever team "has the mat" waits at the far end, then the Lead player, physically places the mat and has their Lead player role the jack to establish its position for that end. The Skip aligns it on a center line, with hand guidance signals from the Lead. After that, teams alternate who rolls their bowls, starting with Leads, then Vice. Once these players have all rolled, they change ends with the

Skips who in turn try to improve on their respective team's scoring positions. You are allowed to roll your bowls however you wish, provided you have at least one foot over the mat on release. Most will find that the smoother the roll the better. So watch the experienced players and see how smooth and consistent their releases are, even if they can't get low down to the ground.

If one bowl gets a bounce off another player's bowl, it is known as a 'wick'. Skips often get good at promoting their team's bowls to better positions around the jack. But that skill takes years to develop unless one gets lucky and luck is a part of the game as well.

SCORING: When all have finished rolling, the Vice's are in charge of agreeing on the score. The bowl closest to the jack scores one point. Subsequent bowls, of the same team, that are closer to the jack than any of their opponents continue to count one point. As soon as an opponent's bowl is the next closest to the jack, scoring stops for that end. The losing Vice or Skip puts the score on the blackboard or scorecard, while the losing Lead rakes the bowls to the starting point. Simultaneously, the winning team's Lead places the mat and prepares to roll the jack for the next end.

Each game is played to a pre-determined number of ends (common for pairs, triples, fours) or a pre-determined number of points (usually in singles). Often this is 12 or 14 end for social bowlers or early rounds in a tournament, but 18 ends in a serious competition. For singles, a tournament will often be first to a certain number of points, often 18 in early rounds and 21 in the finals.

NOTE: This is but a brief summary but all you need to get started. New bowler instruction and coaching sessions will provide you with lots more information. And then, as with all sports, you'll continue to learn as you join a game and then another and another. Interspersed with continued instruction from qualified club coaches and some practice and drills and you'll be hooked on this game in no time. It is a game you can enjoy for the social aspect, for the enjoyment of spending time outdoors and for the physical aspect of the game as you walk, bend, reach and stretch without high physical demands. And lastly you can find games of varying degrees of competitiveness to satisfy whatever level of competition you enjoy. Just get out and start rolling!