

# How do you play crown green bowls?

A level of proficiency at crown green bowling can be reached by anyone if they enjoy the game and are prepared to follow a few basic principles.

In this article I hope to offer help and guidance to anyone wanting to start playing or existing players trying to improve their game. I don't profess to be a "world beater" but have been fortunate enough to have a "feel" for the game. As part of my work selling bowls I am asked for advice on a regular basis, especially from customers who want to start playing but have little or no previous knowledge at the sport.

I've recently had discussions with playing colleagues about problems they are having, which has prompted me to try to put "pen to paper", or, in this case, finger to keyboard. I hope I can supply a few pointers which may help to answer any queries you may have. You may not agree with all I say, but bear with me and try the suggestions out.

Whatever you think, I can assure you that anything I've written here, I believe in.

## What are crown green bowls made of?

Traditionally, crown green bowls were made from *lignum vitae*, a very hard wood grown in the southern hemisphere. For many years much of the wood used by the major bowls makers was literally "picked up" at the docks. Long lengths of the timber were used by cargo ships as ballast, and left on the dockside once a new cargo was loaded.

These stacks of timber provided a ready supply, especially if the bowls maker was based locally. Unfortunately, the governments of the countries where the *lignum* grew were concerned about the amount of trees being cut down, and brought in tougher controls.

They would still supply *lignum*, but only in small blocks. This was not much good as it had been easier, and cheaper, to use only the best part of a long length of timber and discard the rest, as opposed to having to buy smaller blocks of wood and not be able to pick and choose the quality.

Luckily enough, the introduction of composition bowls made from a phenolic resin gave us most of the bowls we see and use today. Some *lignum* bowls are still being sold, but are usually, used, flat green bowls which have been remodelled as crown green bowls.

## What size crown green bowls do I need?

Having the correct weight of bowl is imperative, especially to the new bowler. It is very personal and it is not easy to generalise as to the weight you should have. However, there are one or two things to consider, it was always recommended that you should use as heavy a bowl as you could manage. This is not as straight forward as it sounds.

Given that hand size as well as wrist strength varies enough to complicate the issue. I always tell people to hold the bowl "upside down" with the bowl facing the floor. If they can do that without struggling to hold on to it, then the bowl is not too big or heavy for them. Different makes of bowl have slightly different shapes, so try holding various

ones to see which one suits you best, if possible, ask at the club, where you intend to bowl, if you can try different bowls to see which feels the best.

Bowls are made, normally, in 2 ounce increments, starting at 2lbs, upto 2lb 12 oz, although some makers will supply the “odd” weights if requested (high density bowls start at 2lb 2oz).

### **Crown Green Bowl Densities**

There are three densities, standard, high and low:

*High density bowls* compared to standard density are smaller for the weight. These tend to pull up slightly quicker, and can be an advantage on “running” greens.

*Low density bowls* compared to standard density are larger for the weight. These are roughly the size of wooden bowls and do run on that bit more, ideal for slow or heavy greens.

I would usually advocate a new bowler to start with a *standard density bowl* unless physical limitations may restrict the user to smaller bowls. **You can find our range of crown green bowls available [here](#).**

### **Bias**

As the [standard jack](#) used in all games has a 2 full bias, all bowls will have the same bias as the jack. In case you didn't know, the bias is created by shaping of the bowl and not, as some believe, adding weight to one side.

The bias side of the bowl is denoted by the indentation on the mount and the bias side on the jack is on the opposite side to the one where the 3 “pips” are. It's worth noting that, although bowls have the same bias, there can be slight variations in strength of bias.

This is perfectly normal and if your bowls do seem to run on a slightly different line to the jack, as long as you know how they run, it can be an advantage. It allows you to sometimes find a way past bowls that are “in the way”.

Some of the modern bowls may not have a separate mount but contrasting rings, however, they still have the indentation on the bias side.

## **Learning To Bowl**

### **How to hold a crown green bowl**

There is no definitive way to hold the bowl. Some bowlers “cradle” the bowl, whilst others may feel more comfortable having their thumb and/or little finger along the side(s) of the bowl. You'll sometimes see the “claw” grip, where the thumb is placed up the back of the bowl. This is a style often seen in flat green bowls, and is not the easiest grip to master. Just choose the one that works for you!

The main thing is that the bowl leaves the hand correctly. Before delivering the bowl, make sure that the bowl is held in such a way that is “pointing” in the direction you want and the sides of the bowl are upright. I’ve always maintained that the bowl is an extension of the arm, and once you’ve become used to the feel of your bowl in your hand, you almost forget that it’s there.

That means there is one less thing to think about!

### **Preparing For Delivery**

To bowl consistently it is vital that you keep your balance right throughout the delivery. Any deviation will be exaggerated by the slightest sideways movement. The first thing is to find a stance that is comfortable for you. The stature of the bowler will sometimes affect how they achieve this, but try to avoid over extending your lead long (the left if you are right-handed), as this is often how good balance is lost.

You’ll often see bowlers automatically brace themselves by holding the lead leg with their non-bowling hand. In some cases, they won’t even know that they are doing it, it is a pure reflex. Please remember, the lead leg must be on the opposite side to the bowling arm to be legal.

### **Aiming**

This is an area where there are two options to assist in getting the right line. When I started playing I was told by a bowler, with many years experience, to look for a reference point at the side of the green and aim for that. I soon discovered that, whilst it did help, I sometimes had a problem with either spectators or other players preventing me from seeing where I needed to go.

I was later advised to select a point on the green at about 6 to 10 feet in front of the mat and use that for alignment. This I found was a much more reliable method, provided I didn’t focus on a feather or piece of paper, which invariably blew away.

However, since then, I usually use a slightly different method. Listening to top golfers, they often say that they “see” the shot in their head before they play it. I suddenly found that was what I was doing and realised that the best aiming aid we have is our brain.

Once the jack has been sent, if I watch it intently, I remember the line it took. If I close my eyes, I still have the memory of that line in my head. There’s no way of knowing if this would work for you, it’s just another option. Just try the alternatives, as all three do work. I sometimes use the first two methods too, depending on the length of the mark. Maybe a combination of more than just one method is best for you, so don’t dismiss any until you’ve tried them all.

### **The Jack Line**

It is important to realise that, although the bowls and jack have the same bias, on a falling or pegging mark gravity gets involved. This is more noticeable on faster greens, with heavier bowls. Whilst the bowl will follow the jack to start with, as soon as it slows down and starts to peg, gravity will kick in causing the bowl to move off the jack line.

By setting your bowl out on a slightly higher line you should be able to compensate for this. The same problem can arise on straight marks bowled along the edge of the green, as well as greens with a high crown.

## **Delivering The Bowls**

Before releasing the bowl (or jack) make sure that your back foot is on the centre of the mat (the same side as your bowling arm). Delivery of the bowl is an individual thing, everyone has their own style or technique. No two actions are the same. The component parts of the delivery, however, have to be correct to maximise the efficiency of the action. As with a lot of sports involving propelling an object, the smoother action, the better the results.

In the case of bowls, a problem a lot of people have is reaching the jack on long marks. Normally longer distances can be achieved without dramatically changing a player's natural action. A person's physical size is not a major factor in the distance they can send a bowl, it's how they apply themselves to having an efficient delivery.

### **The Delivery**

This is made up of four components: backswing, down swing, release and follow through.

### **Backwing**

The backswing starts from when you pick the bowl up. As you take the bowls back keep a smooth rhythm letting the weight of the bowls dictate the distance before starting the downswing.

### **Downswing**

As the arm starts moving forward, keeping a smooth speed, accelerate it and release the bowl as parallel to the ground as possible. In fast running conditions you may need to decelerate.

### **Release**

Let the bowl come out of the hand naturally, if you release too early it will hit the ground at an angle causing a reduction in distance. Likewise, releasing too late makes the bowl travel through the air before, again, hitting the ground at an angle.

### **Follow Through**

This part is probably the hardest factor to understand, but after you release the bowl, the continuation of the arm movement does affect the distance the bowl travels. Watch any top class sports person in tennis, snooker, cricket, golf, field athletics etc, and notice the action always continues after they have made contact with the ball or released the shot, javelin, discus etc. The absence of follow through can be useful on a fast green, when a short mark has been set, to avoid sending the bowl too far.

### **Adjusting The Distance**

This is achieved by simply changing the speed of the delivery. In average conditions a minor change in speed will affect the distance achieved. Obviously on heavy or wet

greens the variation in delivery speed is more dramatic and on dry, running greens, the tiniest of adjustment can make a big difference.

## **Popular Misconceptions**

You often hear the comments, “I wasn’t strong enough to reach” or “my bowls weren’t heavy enough to reach”.

Strength is not directly related to how far a bowl will travel – if the delivery action is correct. If your opponent is physically bigger than you they won’t have to rely on having a good delivery action quite as much. But by improving your technique and gaining confidence in your ability to put your bowls anywhere on the green, and at any length can give you an edge.

Whoever you play will try to play to their strengths, either through length of delivery or by using straight or pegging marks, so it is vital that you have the confidence in knowing you can put your bowl anywhere the jack may land. Once your delivery action becomes comfortable you can concentrate purely on the correct line, and the distance required becomes instinctive.

Regarding the weight of bowls. The bowls you use, if of the correct weight to suit your hand size and wrist strength, are an extension of the arm and consequently the delivery speed will again govern the distance attained. However, the lighter the bowl the faster the action required, due to the physics of the bowl to achieve the same distance.

## **How to improve your crown green bowling**

**Step 1: Practice, whenever you can, smoothing out your action and ensuring that you feel comfortable and balanced right through the delivery.**

That way you will reduce the number of things to concentrate on whilst delivering the bowl.

**Step 2: If you have the jack, hold your first bowl in your other hand when sending the jack out.**

That way you don’t have to take your eyes off of the jack line after delivering the jack. Similarly, if your opponent goes first, have your bowl in your hand whilst they are delivering theirs.

**Step 3: When your opponent bowls first, remember, although it’s great to get close to the jack, the main thing is to beat their bowl.**

Also, if both of their bowls are counting, just try to limit the damage by at least beating their second bowl so that they only score one.

**Step 4: Don’t assume that because your opponent is more experienced, you can’t beat them.**

Just concentrate on playing the green. You can’t do much about how they bowl, only how you bowl!

### **Step 5: Always try to at least get level with the jack.**

A short bowl can be a problem if it's on the right line, and a useful "winger" for your opponent if it's on the wrong line. As is often said "there's nowt for short!". The exception to the rule is to use a short bowl as a "blocker" if your first bowl is counting but needs protecting – also known as a "bobby".

### **Step 6: Study the green, look for hollows and ridges that will make the bowl deviate from it's natural line.**

These anomalies can be helpful so don't be afraid to bowl into these areas, before your opponent does!

### **Step 7: Try to stay relaxed, too much tension only makes the game harder.**

If you play a bad bowl, don't dwell on it – just try to work out why it went wrong, then try again.

## Crown Green Bowls

As a sport, bowling has many different varieties. The game may be played on either real or artificial grass and either indoors or outside. One form, usually called flat green, or rink bowls is played, as the name suggests, on a green that is flattened and players bowl up and down the green. Alternatively, crown green bowls is played on an uneven surface and challenges the player to quickly determine the lie of the land and learn the green. It is this form of bowling that this site is devoted to.

## Principles of Bowling

One player begins by bowling the 'jack' – a smaller ball. The same player then sends his own bowl (or 'wood') and is followed by his opponent. Each player has two bowls and the winner of an 'end' is the player who is closest to the jack. If a player has one bowl closer than his opponents he scores a point. If he has two bowls closer than his opponents nearest bowl then he scores two points. The winner is the first player to score 21 points. The full [rules of crown green bowls can be found here](#).

## Bias of the Bowl

Bowls do not travel in a straight line as they are designed to make them curve. This is called a 'bias'. The bowl will naturally pull to one side – the side is usually determined by a dimple in that side. The challenge of the game is to not only determine the right angle to release the bowl in order to place it closest to the jack, but to do so whilst also trying to navigate the uneven nature of the green.

## Crown Green Bowling Tips

You are in the right place if you are looking to find out how to play Crown Green Bowls. We will be editing and adding to these tips over the coming weeks.

## Choosing the Right Bowl

As a beginner, the first thing that you will need to do is choose your bowls. If you have friends that play, try to use their bowls for practice before purchasing your own. This will give you a better idea of the right weight for you. Commonly used bowls range from 2lbs 6oz (known as 2-6s) to 2lbs 12oz (2-12s). I have always used 2-10 high density.

You may be able to pick up some bowls second hand from members of your club or from online marketplaces such as ebay/gumtree. There are also shops in the UK where you can buy new bowls, and nowadays you can get a range of different colours. You can also find bowls for sale and relevant reviews on Amazon - see the links below for more details.

## Delivery

If you are right handed, stand with your right foot on the mat and bowl in your right hand (opposite if left handed). Step forward with your left foot as you swing your right arm back, and bend your knees.

For an ideal delivery, you should get low to the ground, so that the knuckles of your delivery hand are only a few millimetres from the ground. You should aim to release your bowl at around the position of your left foot, although this will change dependent on the pace you want on your delivery.

## Getting the Land

In theory there are only two things to consider to send the perfect bowl - the land and the weight - or where you throw it and how hard!

In practice, that's harder than it sounds, especially for a beginner. In order to get the right land I was always taught the following;

- If you are not sending the jack, watch carefully where it goes
- pick a feature on the green that it passes through or by - around a metre or two in front of you
- when it is your turn, try to send your bowl through that same spot

If you are sending the jack, simply try to pick an feature on the green yourself. Features will usually be a slightly different coloured section of grass - try not to use leaves (or bugs) as they are liable to move before you send your bowl!

Once you have been playing a while and understand the green (especially on your home green) you may be able to pick an appropriate land without having watched the jack, or you will be able to bowl the alternate bias and still bowl a good wood. However common sense says you should always pay attention to where the jack goes and watch your opponents bowls also.

## Getting the Weight

Sending the bowl at the right weight is always a little more tricky to describe and simply takes practice. The 'right' weight is dependent on not only how far the jack has been sent, but also on the weather and the condition of the green; dryer, lower cut grass will be quicker than wetter, thicker grass.

When starting to play the best advice is the most basic - simply concentrate on trying to put the same effort, backswing and weight into sending your bowl as you do the jack.

Use your first bowl to give you an idea - adjusting with your second if you need to. This is especially good advice if you are playing a competitive match and don't have the jack.

Advice I was given as a youngster was 'make sure you're up'. If your bowl is short you are not in the running for anything - if you make sure you get to the jack, there is at least a chance of hitting either the jack or another bowl. In that sense, it is better to be too heavy than not reach!

## Adjusting

As suggested above, a key part of the game is adjustment. This means changing your land or weight on your second bowl, based on what happened with your first.

Adjustment is always difficult for a beginner, especially if both land and weight were off with the first bowl. The steps for adjustment should be something like;

- assess whether land or weight was off (or both) - this can be more tricky than it sounds, as if weight is too heavy it will mean the bias doesn't kick in soon enough and could make it seem that your land is off also. Think about whether your bowl went through your landscape feature to indicate whether your land was right - or was it the same land as your opponent, and where did their bowl go?
- pay attention to your opponent when they send their bowl - the amount of effort they use may indicate the weight they are sending it, and watch carefully to see if your landscape marker was correct to find the right land.
- send your second wood considering the above. Also assess that. Consider whether you made the right judgement - but don't dwell on it. Your assessment of each end will help to build up the picture of the green and use it to your advantage on future ends.

## Concentration

As with many sports, concentration is vital in bowls. I have already highlighted above that you should be watching closely where your opponent bowls and picking features of the green which will help you to pick the correct land. It makes sense, therefore that you need to be able to concentrate to do this.

Bowls is a game where external distractions can sometimes throw you off - whether that is other players actions on the green, or cheering or shouting from around the green. It is important that you keep your focus on your game, adjusting when necessary and capitalising on any mistakes that your opponent may make.

However, as in many games and sports, the mental aspect is often what makes the real difference between good and great players. The very best players are usually those who are able to put their emotion aside and remain relaxed under pressure. This allows them to identify what improvements or adjustments they need to make from one end to the next without allowing frustration or over confidence to cloud their judgement.