

Lesson 6: Reading the Head and Shot Selection

EBCS Level 2 CPD – Advanced Tactical Coaching

Learning Objectives (for the coach)

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Teach players how to accurately read a head in various situations.
- Develop structured approaches to shot selection (draw, positional, conversion, drive).
- Design scenario-based drills that replicate tactical decisions in real play.
- Coach players to justify their shot choices and reflect on outcomes.
- Support players in building confidence to make independent decisions.

Background (why this matters)

Reading the head and making sound shot selections are key tactical skills in bowls. Poor decisions often cost more than poor deliveries. Coaches must help players:

- Assess the head: count shots for/against, identify positional strengths/weaknesses.
- Consider risk vs reward before selecting a shot.
- Balance safety (minimising loss) with opportunity (maximising gain).
- Apply different strategies depending on singles vs team play.
- Build confidence in decision-making by practising scenarios.

Practical Activities

Session Options:

Option 1 — 90-minute CPD Workshop:

- 1) Introduction to head reading and structured shot selection (15 min)
- 2) Scenario-based head analysis (30 min)
- 3) Shot execution under chosen tactics (25 min)
- 4) Group discussion and review (20 min)

Option 2 — 70-minute On-Rink Player Session:

- 1) Warm-up: short tactical ends (10 min)
- 2) Scenario setups: players read and select shots (20 min)
- 3) Play and review: execute chosen shots (20 min)
- 4) Match-play situations: guided end management (15 min)
- 5) Homework briefing (5 min)

Sample Scenario Drills:

- Scenario 1: Opponent holds two shots near the jack, but no back bowls. Objective: Decide whether to draw close for safety or attack with weight.
- Scenario 2: Player holds shot, but Jack is exposed. Objective: Consider whether to add another shot, cover back, or protect against the opponent's drive.

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- Scenario 3: End is even, with scattered bowls. Objective: Choose between positional draw to the wing or attacking conversion.
- Scenario 4: The Team is trailing by 3 shots with only two bowls left. Objective: Decide whether to attempt a high-risk drive or minimise loss.
- Scenario 5: In pairs, one player acts as skip and asks the lead to play a set tactic (e.g., cover, positional, aggressive). Review team communication.

Questioning Prompts

- 'What does the head look like—who is holding, and where are the dangers?'
- 'What are the safest and riskiest options available?'
- 'How would your choice change if you were ahead/behind in the match?'
- 'What role should this bowl play: add, cover, convert, or attack?'
- 'How confident are you in executing the chosen shot?'

Coach Notes (ethics, inclusivity, safety)

- Avoid labelling decisions as 'wrong'; focus on the reasoning and learning process.
- Ensure all players, not only skips, practise head reading and shot selection.
- Tailor scenarios to the ability level so that success is achievable.
- Encourage inclusivity by letting all players contribute to tactical discussions.
- Safety: supervise when practising drives or heavy-weight shots.

Reflection (self + peer)

Coach self-reflection:

- Did I provide a clear structure for head analysis?
- Did players explain their shot choices, not just execute them?
- How did I balance technical correction with tactical freedom?
- Which scenarios stimulated the best decision-making?

Peer feedback:

- 'I saw you prompt players by... (specific). This encouraged... (evidence). Next time you could... (suggestion).'

Player homework:

- Watch one live or recorded match and write down 3 tactical shot choices, skips made.
- Practise one scenario setup in training and record decisions.
- Create a personal decision-making checklist for shot selection.

Outcomes (what you should achieve)

- Ability to coach structured head reading and shot selection.
- Skill in designing and delivering realistic head scenarios.
- Confidence in questioning players to explain tactical decisions.

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Berkshire Bowls Coaching Scheme



- Support players to balance safe vs risky tactical choices.
- Promote inclusive tactical learning across all playing roles.



Appendix A

Reading the Head & Shot Selection – Scenario 1

Opponent holds two shots near the jack, but has no back bowls.

Objective: Decide whether to draw close for safety or attack with weight.

Setup:

1. Place the **jack at medium length**.
2. Position **two opposition bowls** within 30 cm of the jack, holding shot.
3. Leave **no opposition bowls behind the jack** (empty back position).
4. Give the player 2–4 bowls to play from this situation.

Method:

1. Ask the player to **assess the head** carefully.
 - Opposition has shot now (2 close).
 - They have *no back cover*.
 - The jack is vulnerable to movement.
2. The player must declare their **shot choice** before delivering:
 - **Safe option:** Draw close to reduce the risk of dropping 3 shots.
 - **Attacking option:** Play a weighted shot to displace opposition bowls or trail the jack into open space.
3. Deliver the bowl and evaluate the outcome.
4. Discuss whether the choice fitted the scenario, considering both *scoreboard pressure* and *end management*.

Coaching Points:

- Reinforce the decision-making process:
 - *What is the score situation?*
 - *What is the risk if I miss?*
 - *What is the reward if I succeed?*
- Emphasise that the **lack of back bowls** is a major clue — weighted shots carry less danger, as the jack trailing back is more likely to favour the attacking side.



- Highlight team communication: skip must make clear whether the aim is defence (limit loss) or attack (chance to win the end).

Progression:

- Vary the number of opposition bowls in the head (e.g., 1 vs 3).
- Add back bowls for the opponent — now attacking is riskier.
- Run this as a team drill where each side debates and declares their chosen shot before execution.
- Apply scoring:
 - +2 for successful draw or conversion,
 - +1 for safe outcome (limit loss),
 - -1 if the choice worsens the position.

Outcome:

- Builds skill in *reading heads* beyond just looking at the closest bowl.
- Trains players to weigh up **safety vs attack** options.
- Reinforces the importance of **back bowls** in tactical decision-making.
- Prepares players for real match pressure, where one choice can decide the end.

Reading the Head & Shot Selection – Scenario 2

Player holds the shot, but the jack is exposed.

Objective: Decide whether to add another shot, cover the back, or defend against the opponent's drive.

Setup:

1. Place the **jack at medium length**.
2. Place a **player's bowl as shot** (within 30 cm of the jack).
3. Leave the **jack open/exposed** (no blocking bowls).
4. Set up space behind the head where the jack could be driven.
5. Give the player 2–4 bowls to play from this situation.

Method:

1. Ask the player to **read the head**:

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- They currently hold shot.
 - The jack is exposed, so a drive could remove it.
 - They have no back cover.
2. The player must declare their **intended tactical option**:
- **Add another shot**: Draw close, but risk leaving Jack still exposed.
 - **Cover back**: Place a bowl 1–2m behind as insurance if the jack is driven.
 - **Defend**: Play a positional shot, short or wide, to block the opponent's drive line.
3. Deliver the chosen bowl.
4. Discuss whether the option suited the risk profile of the situation.

Coaching Points:

- Reinforce the key tactical principle: *"It's not always about getting more shots — sometimes it's about protecting what you have."*
- Ask the player: *"If the opponent drives and hits, what happens? If they miss, what happens?"*
- Emphasise that a back bowl can often be more valuable than trying to add another front shot.
- Highlight the skip's role in clearly calling whether to defend, add, or cover.

Progression:

- Add an opposition bowl near the jack to increase pressure.
- Vary score situation:
 - If ahead, the defence/back cover is more valuable.
 - If behind, it may be worth chasing an extra shot.
- Run scenario as a team drill where leads/thirds discuss options before execution.
- Introduce scoring for decisions:
 - +2 for effective defence/cover,
 - +1 for adding a safe shot,
 - -1 for leaving Jack vulnerable.

Outcome:

- Builds awareness of when to defend versus when to attack.



- Reinforces the value of the **back cover and positional play**.
- Trains players to think about the **opponent's next shot**, not just their own.
- Develops confidence in making strategic choices based on the game situation.

Reading the Head & Shot Selection – Scenario 3

End is even, with scattered bowls.

Objective: Decide whether to play a positional draw to the wing (future advantage) or attempt an attacking conversion (immediate advantage).

Setup:

1. Place the **jack at medium length**.
2. Position **3–4 bowls scattered** around the head — none clearly holding shot.
 - Example: one short, one to the side, one 1m through, one wide.
3. Leave space for both a **positional bowl** (cover or future scoring position) and a **conversion attempt** (resting or moving a bowl).

Method:

1. Ask the player to **assess the head**:
 - Nobody clearly holds the shot.
 - Scattered bowls mean both teams are vulnerable.
2. The player must declare their chosen approach:
 - **Positional draw:** Place a bowl on the wing, behind, or short as future insurance or to set up pressure.
 - **Conversion shot:** Use controlled weight to rest or move a scattered bowl, trying to create a shot immediately.
3. Player delivers their declared shot.
4. Evaluate both the **execution** and the **tactical thinking**.

Coaching Points:

- Reinforce *percentage play*: sometimes it's wiser to build position than chase a risky conversion.
- Encourage the player to explain *why* they chose their shot.



Berkshire Bowls Coaching Scheme



- Highlight team roles: leads and thirds may favour building, while skips may take conversion opportunities.
- Ask reflective questions:
 - *"If you miss the conversion, what danger is left?"*
 - *"If you add a positional bowl, how does that help later in the end?"*

Progression:

- Change the balance of scattered bowls:
 - One side slightly favoured → pressure to defend.
 - Truly even → both options are viable.
- Adjust scoring scenario:
 - If **ahead in the match**, positional play is safer.
 - If **behind**, conversion risk may be justified.
- Run as a group drill: each player suggests their shot before one executes it.
- Add scoring:
 - +2 for successful conversion,
 - +1 for useful positional draw,
 - -1 for a poor choice that worsens the head.

Outcome:

- Builds judgement between **short-term gain** (conversion) and **long-term pressure** (positional).
- Reinforces that good shot selection depends on **score, end, and risk level**.
- Develops strategic communication between skip and team.
- Prepares players for complex heads where no single option is obvious.

Reading the Head & Shot Selection – Scenario 4

The team is trailing by 3 shots with only two bowls left.

Objective: Decide whether to attempt a high-risk drive to turn the head or play defensively to minimise loss.

Setup:

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1. Place the **jack** at **medium or long** length.
2. Set up a head where the **opposition holds 3 shots**, clustered around the jack.
3. Give the player **two bowls only** to change the situation.

Method:

1. Ask the player to **read the head and scoreboard**:
 - Opposition holds 3.
 - Only 2 bowls remain.
 - Losing the end heavily could decide the match.
2. The player must declare their **shot selection**:
 - **High-risk drive/yard-on**: Attempt to remove opposition bowls and turn the head, possibly converting for shot or reducing the count.
 - **Defensive draw**: Place a bowl to minimise damage, conceding fewer shots.
3. Deliver the chosen bowl(s).
4. Discuss outcome: Did the choice fit the scoreboard context?

Coaching Points:

- Stress *game awareness*: sometimes it is better to **save the match** by limiting damage, especially if more ends remain.
- If it's the **last end**, a high-risk shot may be justified — nothing to lose.
- Reinforce Skip's role in calling percentage play based on context.
- Ask reflective questions:
 - "What happens if you miss the drive?"
 - "What happens if you draw safely and concede 1 or 2?"

Progression:

- Change the match situation:
 - Final end, trailing → attacking drive more attractive.
 - Mid-game, trailing slightly → defensive reduction may be smarter.
- Adjust the number of shots held (2 down, 4 down) to force different responses.
- Run as a **team discussion drill**: team debates the correct shot before playing it.

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- Add scoring overlay:
 - +3 for successful conversion drive,
 - +1 for safe reduction,
 - -2 for a failed drive that worsens the loss.

Outcome:

- Builds awareness of how **scoreboard context** shapes shot choice.
- Trains players to balance **calculated risk** against **match management**.
- Reinforces communication and decision-making under end-game pressure.
- Prepares skips and players for real competitive situations where one decision can win or lose the match.

Reading the Head & Shot Selection – Scenario 5

In pairs, one player acts as skip and asks the lead to play a set tactic (e.g., cover, positional, aggressive).

Objective: Practise team communication and tactical clarity between skip and lead.

Setup:

1. Form pairs — one as **skip**, one as **lead**.
2. Place the **jack at a chosen length** (short, medium, or long).
3. Skip sets a **tactical instruction** for the lead, e.g.:
 - *“Place a front bowl 1m short as a cover.”*
 - *“Draw behind the jack for positional security.”*
 - *“Play aggressively to rest the opposition’s shot bowl.”*
4. The lead must deliver according to the skip’s instructions.

Method:

1. Skip communicates their tactical plan **clearly** to the lead.
2. Lead delivers the bowl, aiming to execute the tactic.
3. After each delivery, review communication:
 - Did the skip explain the purpose of the shot?



- Did the lead understand what was required?
 - Was the feedback constructive and aligned with the tactic?
4. Swap roles after a few ends to ensure both players experience skip and lead positions.

Coaching Points:

- Stress that **clarity of communication** is as important as execution.
- Encourage skips to explain *why* a shot is required, not just *what* to play.
- Highlight the need for **positive feedback** — even if the result isn't perfect, reinforce the intention.
- Ask reflective questions:
 - *"What did the skip say that helped you most?"*
 - *"How could instructions have been clearer?"*

Progression:

- Add opposition bowls to create realistic head situations.
- Vary tactics across ends: defensive, positional, aggressive.
- Run timed scenarios: skip has 10 seconds to communicate the shot before delivery.
- Record team performance: 1 point for understanding + attempt, 2 points for successful execution.

Outcome:

- Improves **skip-lead communication and trust**.
- Reinforces understanding of **tactical language** (cover, positional, aggressive).
- Builds discipline in following the team plan.
- Prepares players for competitive pairs/triples/fours where teamwork determines outcomes.

Appendix B – Glossary of Coaching Terms

Head Reading: The process of assessing the current layout of bowls and identifying tactical options.

Shot Selection: Choosing the most appropriate shot (draw, positional, conversion, drive) based on the head.

Positional Shot: A bowl placed strategically to cover danger, set up future shots, or defend the head.

Conversion Shot: A controlled weighted shot designed to turn an opposition bowl out and take shot.

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Decision-Making Checklist: A structured set of questions players can use before choosing a shot.

