

Lesson 6: Advanced Tactical Play

EBCS Level 2 CPD – Advanced Tactical & Strategic Coaching

Learning Objectives (for the coach)

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

- Develop advanced tactical awareness in players beyond basic shot selection.
- Coach decision-making skills for various match situations (attack vs defence).
- Help teams manage ends effectively, considering shot order and positioning.
- Design scenario-based drills to simulate real match tactics.
- Encourage strategic thinking and adaptability in players.

Background (why this matters)

At advanced levels, bowls is as much about tactical awareness as technical execution. Players must learn how to manage heads, control the pace of a game, and adapt tactics depending on opposition, surface, and conditions.

Key tactical considerations include:

- Head building: drawing to supportive positions, not just to the jack.
- Defensive play: protecting leads, covering back bowls, limiting opposition opportunities.
- Offensive play: conversions, drives, and calculated risks when behind.
- Team dynamics: ensuring roles (lead, second, third, skip) are understood and executed.
- Game management: balancing risk and reward depending on score and stage of game.

Practical Activities

Session Options:

Option 1 — 90-minute CPD Workshop:

- 1) Tactical theory discussion with diagrams (15 min)
- 2) Scenario drills on rink (45 min)
- 3) Group decision-making exercise (15 min)
- 4) Reflection and review (15 min)

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

- 1) Tactical warm-up (e.g., draw to protective positions) (10 min)
- 2) Head-building drill (20 min)
- 3) Conversion/defensive shot scenarios (20 min)
- 4) Match-scenario challenge game (15 min)
- 5) Review (5 min)



Sample Tactical Drills:

- Head-Building Drill: Place the jack and require players to build a head with positional bowls (front, cover, back).
- Defensive Cover Drill: Jack set at 23m; opposition has shot. The player must cover the back position to prevent drive danger.
- Conversion Challenge: Set head with opposition bowl close to the jack; player attempts a weighted shot to convert the shot bowl.
- Risk vs Reward Game: Give the team options to play a safe draw or an attacking drive. Award double points for success, minus points for failure.
- End Management Simulation: Play mini-ends where the focus is not just to win the end, but to limit loss when behind or maximise gain when ahead.

Sample Tactical Scenarios (Diagrams/Descriptions)

Scenario 1: Head Building (Diagram Placeholder)

- Jack centred, two opposition bowls near jack.
- Objective: Draw to the wing to create future shot opportunities.

Scenario 2: Defensive Cover (Diagram Placeholder)

- Jack at 25m, opposition bowl 30cm behind Jack.
- Objective: Place a covering bowl 1m behind to reduce drive risk.

Scenario 3: Conversion Play (Diagram Placeholder)

- Jack surrounded by one opposition shot bowl within 15cm.
- Objective: Play controlled weight to remove the opposition bowl and take a shot.

Scenario 4: Risk vs Reward (Diagram Placeholder)

- Player must choose: draw safely for one point, or drive for two points with risk of losing end.
- Used to encourage decision-making under tactical pressure.

Questioning Prompts

- 'What tactical option gives the best chance with the least risk here?'
- 'How would your choice change if you were two shots up instead of down?'
- 'What role should your bowl play in building this head?'
- 'How does team order affect tactical choices?'
- 'What did you learn from the outcome of this tactical decision?'

Coach Notes (ethics, inclusivity, safety)

- Keep tactical sessions constructive: avoid blaming poor choices, focus on learning.
- Encourage all team members (including leads and seconds) to contribute to tactical awareness.
- Use scenarios appropriate to skill level to ensure success and avoid discouragement.
- Promote inclusivity: ensure every role in a team is valued in tactical discussions.



- Safety: when practising drives, ensure spectators and players are alert and safe.

Reflection (self + peer)

Coach self-reflection:

- Did I encourage players to think strategically, not just technically?
- Were players able to justify their tactical decisions?
- Did I balance teaching with allowing independent decision-making?
- How did players react to risk/reward exercises?

Peer feedback:

- 'I noticed you encouraged tactical reasoning by... (specific). This helped when... (evidence). You could also try... (suggestion).'

Player homework:

- Watch a recorded match and note 3 tactical choices made by skips.
- Practise one head-building and one defensive cover drill in the next practice.
- Write a short 'tactical plan' for different match scenarios (leading, level, behind).

Outcomes (what you should achieve)

- Ability to teach tactical awareness alongside technical skills.
- Confidence to run scenario-based tactical drills.
- Skills in questioning players to enhance decision-making.
- Support players to balance risk and reward appropriately.
- Promote inclusive tactical discussions across team roles.

Appendix A

Tactical Drill: Head-Building Drill (Positional Bowls – Front, Cover, Back)

Objective:

To develop tactical awareness and discipline by requiring players to place bowls in different **positional roles** (front bowl, cover bowl, back bowl), building a strong head, rather than only chasing the jack.

Setup:

1. Place the jack at a medium or full length.
2. Mark three key positional zones with chalk or flat discs:
 - **Front Bowl Zone** – 0.5–1m short of the jack, ideally on line.
 - **Cover/Side Bowl Zone** – off-centre to protect or block access.

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- **Back Bowl Zone** – 1–2m behind the jack for insurance.
3. Assign each player (or each bowl they deliver) a **specific target role**.

Method:

1. Player delivers one bowl to each positional zone in sequence (front → cover → back).
2. Coach observes whether they adjust the line/weight correctly for each role.
3. Discuss the **tactical value** of each bowl:
 - Front bowl = protection and pressure.
 - Cover bowl = defence, blocking the opposition lines.
 - Back bowl = insurance for jack movement.
4. Repeat the cycle with multiple ends, rotating which bowl is played first (e.g., start with the back bowl one end, front the next).

Coaching Points:

- Stress that **not every bowl should be to the jack** — positional bowls often decide ends.
- Reinforce pre-shot decision-making: *“This bowl is insurance, so weight must be through the head.”*
- Encourage communication in group practice: skips call the required positional shot.
- Ask reflective questions: *“Why is a back bowl valuable in this head?”* or *“How does the front bowl change the pressure?”*

Progression:

- Add opposition bowls to make the head more realistic.
- Run it as a team drill: leads focus on front bowls, thirds/skips practise cover and back bowls.
- Introduce scoring:
 - 2 points for an accurate front bowl.
 - 2 points for effective cover.
 - 2 points for a useful back bowl.
- Create competitive scenarios: one side instructed to build the head, the other to break it down.

Outcome:

- Players learn the **value of head structure**, not just drawing a shot.



- Reinforces tactical discipline and positional awareness.
- Prepares players for **match play strategy** — protecting, defending, and insuring the head.
- Builds understanding of team roles (lead → front, skip → cover/back).

Tactical Drill: Defensive Cover Drill (Back Position Insurance)

Objective:

To train players to recognise when the priority is not drawing a shot, but **covering the back** to protect against opposition drives or jack movement.

Setup:

1. Place the **jack at 23m** (minimum length).
2. Place an **opposition bowl in shot position** (within 30 cm of the jack).
3. Define a **back position zone** 1–2m behind the jack, marked with chalk, discs, or cones.
4. Brief the player: *“The opposition has shot. Your task is to place a back bowl for insurance, in case the jack or shot bowl is driven.”*

Method:

1. Player delivers a set of bowls, aiming specifically for the **back position zone**, not the jack.
2. Each bowl is assessed on whether it provides **useful insurance** (close enough behind to count if the jack or shot bowl is moved).
3. Discuss tactical implications:
 - If opposition drives, your bowl behind the jack may count.
 - Without a back cover, the danger of dropping multiple shots increases.

Coaching Points:

- Reinforce discipline: *“Don’t chase shot; your job is to cover.”*
- Emphasise controlled weight: enough to pass the head but not run into the ditch.
- Highlight that **good skips value a back bowl as much as a shot bowl** in dangerous heads.
- Use reflective questions: *“What risk are you preventing by covering?”*

Progression:

- Vary jack length (short, medium, long) to practise covering across distances.
- Add more opposition bowls to increase pressure.

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- Run as a **scenario drill**:
 - Team A leads by 1, final end.
 - Team B holds the shot but has drive danger.
 - The player must cover to protect the win.
- Scoring option: 2 points for bowls in the back zone, 1 point for bowls just beyond the jack, 0 outside the zone.

Outcome:

- Builds tactical discipline: knowing when to defend instead of attack.
- Reinforces the principle that **not every bowl should be aimed at the jack**.
- Improves weight judgment for **back cover insurance**.
- Prepares players for late-end scenarios and pressure match play.

Tactical Drill: Conversion Challenge (Weighted Shot to Gain Shot)

Objective:

To develop skill and decision-making in using a **conversion shot** — displacing the opposition's shot bowl to turn the head and gain advantage.

Setup:

1. Place the **jack at medium or full length**.
2. Place an **opposition bowl within 30 cm of the jack** (counting shot).
3. Optionally, place one or two of the player's bowls in useful positions (just short or behind) to simulate a realistic head structure.
4. Brief the player: *"The opponent holds shot. Your task is to play a controlled weighted shot to remove or rest their bowl and convert the head to your advantage."*

Method:

1. Player delivers bowls at a **yard-on to firm draw weight** (not full drive), aiming to rest onto or displace the opposition's shot bowl.
2. After each attempt, assess outcome:
 - Did the bowl move the opposition shot cleanly?
 - Did the jack move, and who gained the advantage?
 - Was there collateral risk (knocking the opponent's back bowl in)?

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3. Discuss how different weights (yard-on, firm draw, running bowl) change the result.

Coaching Points:

- Stress the difference between a **draw** and a **conversion** — weight must be firmer, but still under control.
- Encourage **pre-shot visualisation**: where will my bowl finish if I rest on the shot bowl?
- Reinforce that conversion is about **percentage play** — acceptable risk to turn the head.
- Ask reflective questions: *“What weight did you feel was needed?”* or *“What safer alternative was available?”*

Progression:

- Add back bowls behind the jack to simulate risk/reward.
- Vary the position of the opponent’s shot bowl (tight to the jack, angled to one side, just in front).
- Score attempts: 2 points for converting shot cleanly, 1 point for effective contact that improves position, 0 for misses.
- Play under match simulation: player gets one attempt per end with tactical briefing.

Outcome:

- Builds confidence in using **weighted conversion shots**.
- Improves judgement of weight and angle when playing controlled aggression.
- Reinforces tactical thinking: when to attack versus when to defend.
- Prepares players for real match scenarios where simply drawing will not win the end.

Tactical Drill: Risk vs Reward Game (Safe Draw vs Attacking Drive)

Objective:

To teach players to evaluate tactical options by balancing the safety of a draw against the potential payoff of an attacking shot (yard-on, firm draw, or drive).

Setup:

1. Place the jack at medium length with a **head that offers two clear options**:
 - **Safe draw option** — a draw shot to hold or add a shot with low risk.
 - **Attacking option** — a drive or firm-weighted shot to remove opposition bowls or trail the jack.



2. Create a **scoring system**:

- Safe draw: normal scoring (1 point if successful).
- Attacking shot: **double points if successful** (e.g., 2 points).
- But minus 1 or 2 points if the attacking shot fails (depending on severity).

Method:

1. Split players into two teams.
2. Each turn, a player or team must **declare their shot choice** before playing.
3. Deliver the bowl and award points according to the outcome.
4. Continue for a set number of ends or until a target score is reached.

Coaching Points:

- Emphasise the thought process: *“What is the score situation? Do we need safety or do we take a risk?”*
- Reinforce that attacking is not always wrong — but it must be justified by the match context.
- Discuss outcomes after each shot: Was the risk worth it? Could the draw have been better?
- Encourage skips to lead the discussion, helping players understand tactical leadership.

Progression:

- Change the head setup at each end: sometimes attacking is attractive, sometimes dangerous.
- Adjust scoring system (e.g., double points for risky success, minus 2 for failure).
- For advanced groups: limit the number of attacking shots allowed in a game, forcing players to save them for the “right moment.”
- Add pressure: set scenarios (final end, down by 2 shots, etc.) where risk may be necessary.

Outcome:

- Builds awareness of **percentage bowls** — balancing safety with ambition.
- Develops tactical decision-making under simulated match conditions.
- Reinforces team communication and the role of the skip in calling shots.
- Prepares players for real competition where risk vs reward must be judged carefully.



Tactical Drill: End Management Simulation (Controlling Risk vs Gain)

Objective:

To train players in managing ends strategically — limiting damage when behind, and maximising opportunities when ahead — rather than simply chasing every end.

Setup:

1. Play **mini-ends** (e.g., 2–4 bowls per player instead of full sets).
2. Before each end, the coach assigns a **scenario**, such as:
 - *“You are 2 shots down with one end to play – you must try to win multiple shots.”*
 - *“You are 1 shot up with 2 bowls left – priority is to protect, not attack.”*
 - *“Your team is 5 shots down after 10 ends – your aim is to stay in the game by limiting losses.”*
3. Set up heads to match scenarios (jack in centre, opponent already holding shot, or open head with scoring potential).

Method:

1. Teams play the end with the given objective.
2. After completion, discuss outcomes:
 - Did the team’s shot choices fit the game context?
 - Did they protect when ahead or take necessary risks when behind?
3. Rotate scenarios so each group faces both attacking and defensive end management.

Coaching Points:

- Reinforce that **winning an end by 1 shot** can be as valuable as multiple shots, depending on context.
- Highlight the importance of **minimising risk** when protecting a lead (cover bowls, blocking).
- Stress that when behind, calculated risk is required (conversion, drives, trailing the jack).
- Encourage skips to **communicate the plan clearly** to teammates.

Progression:

- Add a scoring overlay:



- +2 points if team meets scenario objective (e.g., protects lead or wins multiple shots).
- 0 if neutral outcome.
- -2 if the team plays against the tactical situation (e.g., loses big when trying to defend).
- Increase complexity: vary head layouts, introduce cluttered heads, or simulate different scoreline pressures.
- For advanced groups: assign a **match scenario** (e.g., "County Final, 15th end, you are 3 up — how do you play it?").

Outcome:

- Builds understanding that bowls is not just about shot-making, but about **end management strategy**.
- Teaches discipline in defence and calculated boldness in attack.
- Reinforces communication and shared decision-making within a team.
- Prepares players for match play where context dictates the correct tactical choice.

Appendix B – Glossary of Coaching Terms

Head Building: Placing bowls in supportive positions to strengthen control of the head.

Defensive Cover: Positioning bowls behind the jack to protect against opposition drives.

Conversion Shot: Using controlled weight to remove an opposition bowl and take shot.

Risk vs Reward: A tactical decision where a higher reward comes with increased risk.

End Management: Strategically controlling an end to maximise gain or minimise loss depending on the match situation.

