

Etiquette in the Sport of Bowls

Editors' note: this document is considered gender neutral.

Bowls is a sport that encourages social interaction and friendship. Etiquette simply means displaying "good sportsmanship". This is achieved by having knowledge of what behaviour is acceptable in the game and applying it using common sense, honesty, fairness and consideration for others. If unsure about something relating to etiquette it is OK to ask questions. Etiquette applies to persons playing, marking, umpiring and spectators at a game of bowls and also to the members of a Club. This document better reflects the polite behaviours of today's multicultural, inclusive and technologically advancing society that help us to display good sportsmanship.

Game Etiquette

Bowls is a sport that is played on several kinds of surfaces, grass being the most common and synthetic indoor and outdoor surfaces. In relation to synthetic greens, some Clubs replace at least one of their grass greens with synthetic in a bid to cut maintenance costs, it also provides variety in playing surfaces for their members. There are also different categories of bowlers, elite bowler, competitive aspiring Club bowler, the recreational or social bowler, junior and senior bowler and bowlers with a disability. Displaying appropriate etiquette should be a part of all categories. Some of the topics covered are; arranging a game, what to do during and after a game, inclusive practices, playing positions, appropriate clothing, drinking, offensive language, smoking, over enthusiasm, Club and pennant commitment, spectators, markers and umpires.

Your Opponent

If a game has been arranged whether formal (Club or tournament) or informal (roll up) it is polite to be on time. If running late or you need to reschedule, call your opponent or the Club and advise them of your situation. As we are living in the age of ever evolving technology most people have mobile phones and are easily contactable. Before commencing a game all mobile phones, pagers and other electronic devices should be switched off for the duration of a game. Music listening devices such as iPods should not be used during a game as this can be viewed as anti-social behaviour.

Always greet your opponent with a handshake and a friendly smile before and after the game. Bowling greens should also be treated with respect, you should not throw or drop your bowls onto the green and you should not sit on the bank or place your feet in the ditch.

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In any game whether it's Singles, Pairs, Triples or Fours, when the mat has been laid to commence the game, it is a nice gesture to hand your opponent the jack and his bowl (be aware that not all players like you touching their bowls). Often this gesture is restricted to just the first bowls on the first end. Handing the jack and/or mat can help get the next end under way promptly. During the course of the game commend good bowls, acknowledge good luck such as fluky bowls, and do not show too much emotion when bad or fluky bowls are delivered. Remember that fluky bowls even out over time and everyone will have their share of them.

Show respect for every opponent you play by never moving about while they are on the mat, or making noise while they are about to deliver a bowl. There are specific rules regarding standing behind the mat or behind the head. Bowlers should not crowd around the head after delivering their bowls, only those that need to be there should be there. When asking a player/s to move, be sure to be polite, courteous and show good sportsmanship at all times.

During a game no player should leave the rink without informing their opponent and play should not be held up for more than 5 minutes. If an end is declared dead and you need to go back to the other end pick up the bowls and carry them, do not roll them. When an opponent is on the mat they have control of the rink and opposing players should not walk up the green until the opponents' bowl has come to rest and the player has left the mat. At the completion of the game the graceful loser should congratulate the modest winner. During drinks in the Club it is good etiquette to avoid making excuses for lack of success or gloating about how good you or your team were on the day.

Bowls is a very inclusive sport and your opponent may be a person with a disability or from a culturally and linguistic diverse group or from a different generation to you. Remember to treat all people with the same amount of courtesy and respect that you would want to be treated. When your opponent is from one of these groups you should apply common sense in regard to being a good sport as your opponent may not be able to conform to the standard etiquette guidelines. If in doubt talk to your opponent about what guidelines they would feel happy using. For example, some people just cannot bend down to measure and may require assistance with this.

Each format of the game has certain responsibilities associated with it when playing Singles, Pairs, Triples or Fours games. These will be explained but applying commonsense and asking politely if you are unsure of the duties is always the best way to learn.

The Lead

It is good etiquette to hand your opponent the jack and their bowl after they have laid the mat to commence play, be aware that some bowlers do not like anyone touching their bowls. Also use common sense in regard to how you do this as players with certain physical disabilities may find this difficult. The first job of the lead whose team won the previous end is to place the mat. This helps the others in how far to kick back the bowls.

Throughout the course of the game, you may continue to hand your opponent the mat and jack. If playing pairs the lead does the measuring, if assistance is required for a longer measure ask for help from the opposition lead. If playing Triples or Fours the lead is only responsible for rolling the jack. Look to your skip for any instructions regarding mat placement and jack length.

The Second

In the modern Fours game, each player is responsible for initiating their own introductions. If opponents advise you of their nickname then it's commonly acceptable to use that throughout the game. Clubs usually supply a new member with a name badge, if you did not receive one you should contact the Bowls Section Captain. Using someone's name throughout a game demonstrates good etiquette. When playing Fours, it is not advisable to chase your last bowl up to the head and leave your third isolated unless you have discussed this with them and they are OK with this practice. The main role of this position is to keep an accurate scorecard by waiting for the shots to be revealed once the head has been declared. Regular checking with your opponent score keeper and the scoreboard is advisable to ensure that the score is correct. Pay attention to the development of the head by watching the lead's bowls.

The Third

The responsibility of the third is to control the head while the skip is on the mat. The third should wait for the skip to ask his opinion about the head and advice about shot selection but ultimately the final shot selection rests with the skip. Always provide precise and accurate answers when the skip is on the mat. Once all bowls have been delivered the third has to measure any bowls that appear the same distance from the jack. If playing against an opponent or are yourself a player who is unable to measure due to age, injury or disability then ask for assistance from a fellow player.

Consider all shots that may be in the count and confer with your opponent third that all possibilities have been measured. Indicate using your hand the number of shots won or lost on the end by placing fingers up or down, it should also be voiced clearly. Retrieving any bowls from the ditch or wherever they finish and that are not in play is also good etiquette.

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Possession of the mat (rink) passes to the other side when your bowl comes to a rest. You should then wait for your next turn on the mat before exchanging information with your skip.

The Skip

Cohesive teams often perform better and have greater success. The skip should lead the team with confidence by being supportive of any special needs and by providing continual encouragement before, during and after a game. Everyone will play bad bowls and no bowler is likely to deliver every bowl just how they want it, the skips role is to play the best bowls they can and refrain from showing disappointment or enjoyment at bad bowls played by anyone. Body language can affect team confidence so remain focused on the game and your team. Remain still while standing at the head to avoid distracting your own team and opponents.

The Team

Bowls is an individual and team sport. It is important to remember that individual performances should not be highlighted or degraded when playing in a team. It is good for team cohesiveness if players assist when bowls need to be kicked back after the completion of an end. At the completion of a game players should assist others to carry their bowls down to the other end when required and mats and jacks should be returned to the appropriate place. At completion of a game players should return inside the Club and the home player should offer to buy their opposing player a drink, alcoholic or non alcoholic. In some instances the opposing player may not want a drink or you may politely reject their offer to reciprocate. You should not feel obliged to have two drinks of anything if you do not want to.

Clothing

Clubs today have adopted more stylish and colourful uniforms that are used to play Club games, pennant games, tournaments and when representing at Regional, State or National levels. In many instances these consist of polo shirts, tracksuit pants, vests, wind jackets, bucket hats or caps. Cream or white long pants or shorts can be worn with the coloured shirts or as specified. If wearing shorts, white socks are worn, shoes can be any colour and flat soled. Clubs also allow people to bowl barefoot but it is advisable to ask if this is acceptable.

Cream/white or Club clothing is a requirement when playing in some Club matches or galas and is usually specified on the registration sheet for that event. The event registration sheet will also specify if mufti dress is acceptable. Mufti dress means that participants can wear normal clothing that is clean, neat and does not contain any offensive language, pictures or gestures. Each Club has their own rules regarding bowling attire and what is acceptable, so be sure to find this out.

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There are also rules regarding having the Bowls Australia logo on certain pieces of clothing when playing some events, if unsure ask the Bowls Section Captain.

Drinking

If alcohol is being consumed during a game, it is good practice when first greeting your opponent to advise them that you will be drinking and offer to buy them a drink when you have the first one. Drinks should never be carried onto a green and players should not stand too close to the bank and drink. Glasses should be placed in drink holders where available. Empty glasses should be returned to the bar when possible and excessive drinking to the point of disrupting the game or other players should not occur. Drinking is a part of our culture and there is nothing wrong with enjoying a few drinks with your opponent/s and markers after the game but there are Responsible Service of Alcohol laws that Clubs will enforce if you show excessive signs of intoxication. Always accept the decision of staff to 'cut you off' and follow the directions that are given to you by them.

Offensive Language

Inappropriate, bad or offensive language is very common place in all aspects of today's society; it should not be used on the green out of frustration, anger, disappointment or in celebration. You should always be mindful that certain words, phrases or gestures could be very offensive to some people. It should also not be used within the Club environment. Often as a result of excessive drinking, bad or offensive language becomes exaggerated or louder, if this situation occurs and you are told to settle down, do not take it personally and simply abide. If you are with someone who is beginning to behave in an inappropriate manner take them aside and calmly remind them of their obligation to display "good sportsmanship".

Smoking

You should be mindful that many people find smoking repugnant and the laws surrounding second hand smoke are being toughened through all facets of modern society. Smoking on the green is not permitted in Tasmania. Check Bowls Tasmania Smoking on the Green Policy.

Over Enthusiasm

Expressing passion for the sport of bowls is increasingly becoming more animated. Players are so focused on delivering the perfect bowl every time that their actions can be seen as displaying bad etiquette. In the laws of the game you are not permitted to follow every bowl to the head. When chasing a bowl you must not exceed a distance from the mat that will slow play or interfere with your opponent playing their bowl. If chasing the bowl to the head do so in accordance with the laws of the sport and do not hold up play.

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Excessive shouting and jumping around after a delivery has the potential to affect players on other rinks. Be aware of the boundary pegs for your rink and be careful not to walk into an adjoining rink.

Committing to a Club or team

If nominating to play pennants, make a commitment to your Club that you will be available for the duration of the season. It is considered bad etiquette if you change your mind midseason for whatever reason. Accept the decision of the selectors without disdain, they do a difficult job and are working for the benefit of the Club, their selection decisions should not be taken personally. Often as not, they are balancing personality types as much as bowls ability.

The Spectators

Spectators also need to display good sportsmanship so that those around them are not distracted or offended in anyway. We all want our player or team to win and there are acceptable and unacceptable ways to show support. All good shots should be applauded and no loud remarks or laughter should be expressed at bad shots. Clapping and cheering is common place at sporting events but is only appropriate at certain times, it should never be done when a player is on the mat ready to deliver their bowl or when players are at the head doing a measure. If spectators are in the line of vision of a bowler then you should remain still when they are on the mat ready to bowl. It is unadvisable to attempt to interact with a bowler while they are playing a game. In regard to mobile phones it is considered polite if you switch your ringtone to silent or turn it off, and do not engage in overly loud or animated conversations. Spectators are not allowed on the green however in some events for persons with disabilities, carers or directors are allowed to enter the green to push wheelchairs or assist bowlers that have visual impairments or are blind.

The Marker

If your Club needs markers for certain games or events and you are available it is good etiquette to offer your time to help. Consider making yourself available as a marker whenever you can, as a new player it is a good way to learn more about the game and individual players. At the beginning of a game shake hands with the players and introduce yourself.

When the jack has been delivered the marker should centre it and stand back and to the side ensuring they are not in the line of vision of the player. Markers should answer specific questions from the player on the mat about the state of the head, short precise answers are all that is required, such as, "yes you are" or "no you are not". Offer no advice to the players beyond what questions are asked. If you are unsure you may offer your opinion about who is holding but make them aware you are unsure.

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All touchers should be marked immediately they come to a stop and marks should be removed from non touchers. All dead bowls should be removed from the rink with the approval of the players. No bowls should be moved until the end is completed and the number of shots awarded. Complete impartiality should be shown during a game and no applauding or encouragement should be offered to any player. At the completion of the game players should shake hands with the marker and thank them for their time. Invite them into the Club and offer to buy them a drink either alcoholic or non-alcoholic.

The Umpire

The role of the umpire is to adjudicate on any measures or rules of the game that arise during play. While the umpires are doing their job it is good etiquette to stand on the bank away from the head and let them do their job without interference. Umpires may request that you retire to the bank while they perform their duties. If a decision goes against you it is good etiquette to accept the decision without argument and continue on with the game. Remember that the markers and umpires are giving up their time voluntarily so that you can enjoy the great game of bowls, show them respect and always thank them with a handshake, a smile and an invitation to join you in the Club for refreshments.

Club Etiquette

When a new member joins a Club, it is good etiquette to introduce yourself to them, be polite and friendly and show them the Club facilities if someone hasn't already done this. Relevant information should be provided to the new member about the Club and its members and introductions to the Club officials and staff are advisable. When the member plays their first game or first roll up, and they are by themselves it is polite to ask them if you can join them. The majority of Club officials are voluntarily doing a job and mistakes may occur. Members have a right to question the decisions or actions of officials but this should be done in a manner that is courteous, respectful and not in breach of the Club by-laws. Silence should be observed when officials are making important club announcements. Good behaviour reflects positively on your Club.

Employees of the Club should be respected and only Club officials have authority to direct them. Members should abide by the laws governing Responsible Service of Alcohol and conform to all requests made by staff in relation to them. Some Clubs are struggling to survive so it shows excellent etiquette if you support any fundraising efforts that the Club is running and if available offer assistance when volunteers are required for work around the Club or greens. When membership fees are due, always pay these within the timeframe asked.