

Frequently Used Laws

The *Laws of the Sport of Bowls* describes the rules that govern how lawn bowling is played that bowlers throughout the world follow. Sixty rules are defined covering a diverse range of topics from setting up a game to infrequent situations encountered during play. You don't need to know all that to get started, but there are some rules that all bowlers need to know. You will find the basics below.

Starting the Game

To begin the game, the teams have to decide who goes first. The rules state a coin toss is to be used, but alternatively you can roll a bowl with one team calling big or little (logo size). The winner chooses to either set the mat, roll the jack and the first bowl, or go second and have the last bowl (Law 5.2). The winner of an end sets the mat, rolls the jack and first bowl, and the opponent rakes (Law 5.4).

Placing the Mat

Setting (or placing) the mat at the beginning of an end is very important. At a minimum the front of the mat must be at least 2 meters from the back ditch (the ditch behind the bowler), but it can be moved up to a point where the front of the mat is 23 meters from the front ditch ("the hog line"). It is placed lengthwise on the center line. (Law 6.1) Once the first bowl of an end is rolled, the mat must not be moved (unless straightening it relative to the center line.) At any time, if the mat becomes cockeyed, it should be adjusted so that it is centered lengthwise on the center line. As players become more experienced, they realize the strategic importance of where the mat is placed.

Delivering the Jack

Just as placing the mat can be strategically important, so to is delivering the jack. The basic rule about jack delivery is that it must be rolled at least 21 meters from the front of the mat (Law 9). To be considered a legally rolled jack, it must come to rest in bounds and on the green, not in the front ditch. If the jack comes to rest out of bounds or in the front ditch, it is returned to the mat and the opposing team rolls the jack (the opponent can also change the location of the mat). If they also roll an illegal jack, the jack is centered 2 meters from the front ditch and the first team to roll the jack is allowed to move and center the mat anywhere up to 23 meters from

the front ditch. Once the jack is legally centered on the rink, the first team to roll the jack also rolls the first bowl. If after a bowl has been rolled and it is noticed that the wrong team rolled the jack, play must continue (Law 10).

Where Should Bowlers Stand?

When an opponent is in the process of delivering a bowl (i.e., has the mat), players should not conduct themselves in a manner that would be considered deliberately trying to give their team an advantage (Law 36). This can come in many forms (e.g., talking, moving behind the opponent, standing on the rink to cast a shadow on the mat). Players at the mat end of the rink who are not delivering a bowl must be at least one meter behind the mat. Players at the head-end of the rink who are not controlling play should place themselves behind and away from the head (Law 12.1).

A player should not go into a neighboring rink when play is progressing. They should also not go into or walk along the edge of a neighboring rink if their opponent is in the process of delivering their bowl (Law 12.2).

Possession of the Rink

The player or team whose bowl is being played is considered in possession of the rink and remains in possession until their bowl comes to rest. During this period the opponent team should show respect by not actively communicating with each other or otherwise disrupting the activities of the team in possession (Law 13). If the opposing team delivers a bowl before the previous one comes to rest, penalties can be assessed. Law 36, deliberate non-sporting actions, violate the possession law.

Touchers

If a bowl when rolled comes into contact with the jack (regardless if it touches other bowls in its course) is considered a toucher. Unlike a bowl that does not touch the jack, but ends up in the ditch, a toucher is considered live if it comes to rest in the ditch or is knocked into the ditch later in the end. If it comes to rest next to the jack and then falls onto the jack before the next bowl is rolled, it is considered a toucher. It will not be a toucher if when delivered it touches a jack that is already in the ditch (Law 14).

A toucher should be marked (chalked) when it comes to rest. Because it is a live bowl, if it is knocked into the ditch, it would remain there and could be included in the scoring process. If marking the toucher would cause the bowl to fall over, it could be “nominated” instead by the players in the head. The location of the jack and any live bowls in the ditch should be circled and ditch markers placed on the backboard (Law 15).

Dead Bowls, Live Jacks and Dead Ends

A dead bowl occurs in several situations. The result is that the bowl is removed from the rink and cannot be counted in the score. The most common situations are when it comes to rest outside the boundaries of the rink, has come to rest in the ditch without being a toucher or when it is bowled less the 14 meters from the front of the mat (Law 17).

Jacks can be either live or dead. This is determined in the conditions of play that were set before a game begins. In games played outside the USA, a jack would be considered dead if it was knocked outside the boundaries of the rink and the end would be replayed. This has the effect of lengthening the game. To avoid this, most conditions of play in the USA re-spot the jack when this occurs to a spot centered 2-meters from front ditch (Laws 18, 19, 56.5).

There are rare situations where a problem in an end cannot be resolved. This is considered a dead end and the end must be replayed (Law 20).

Scoring and Measuring

The bowl(s) of a team that are closer to the jack than the nearest opponent's bowl are called “shot(s).” At the completion of the end, each shot bowl is counted as a point. Agreement must be reached between opponents scoring the end and the final total is reported. No bowl is removed from the head before both opponents agree whether it is a shot (Law 22).

There are a number of events that could occur while determining the number of shot bowls:

- if a bowl is likely to fall, either opponent can use the best available means to secure it in its position;

- if a bowl needs to be measured and it is currently resting on another bowl which is interfering with the measurement in any way, any player should use the best available means to secure the resting bowl in its position and then remove the other bowl;
- if a bowl falls of its own accord, it should be left in its new position while deciding the number of shots scored continues, and all the shots agreed before the bowl fell will count;
- if a bowl is displaced by the equipment being used during measuring, the opponent must put it back to its original position;
- if the jack is displaced by the equipment being used during measuring, the opponent must put it back to its original position (Law 23).
- If a bowl is resting on its edge, any person scoring can ask that scoring be delayed for 30 seconds to see if the bowl falls.

Playing Out of Turn

If a player plays out of turn, the opposing team can stop the bowl and return it to the player to play it in the proper order. If the bowl has come to rest, the opposing skip can choose to leave it as is and have their team play two bowls in a row or return the bowl and get back to the proper order. If the bowl disturbed the head, the opposing skip can choose whether to leave the resulting head as is and have their team play two bowls in a row to get back to the proper order, or replace the head to its former position, return the bowl and go back to the proper order, or declare the end dead (Law 29.1).

Playing Another Player's Bowl

If a player plays another player's bowl instead of their own, the other player's bowl must be replaced with the player's own bowl where it came to rest on the rink (Law 29.2).

Leaving the Green during the Course of Play

No player must delay play by leaving the rink of play or their team unless their opponent is informed and then only for no more than 10 minutes (Law 32.1).

Only Mat & Jacks, Bowls and Feet on the Green

Players cannot place objects on the green, on the bank or in the ditch that can be interpreted as helping a player. This includes hanging towels or other objects from the bank.

Bowl and Jack Displacement

There are many rules on bowl and jack displacement, too many to discuss here. However, there are a few terms that are used repeatedly that you must understand. All displacements are from one of the following states:

- “A bowl or jack in its original course” is from the time the bowl or jack is delivered (leaves the player’s hand) until it comes to rest.
- “A bowl or jack in motion” is when a bowl or jack at rest is moved from that position.
- “A bowl or jack at rest” is when there is no movement from either, it is just sitting there.

If a bowl or jack at rest is displaced accidentally (or on purpose) by a player, their opponent is responsible for putting the bowl or jack back in its original position (Law 37.1.5).

Bowl displacement by a bowl from a neighboring rink (37.6):

- If a bowl at rest on the rink is in danger of being moved by a bowl from a neighboring rink, any player at the head can choose whether to:
 - lift the bowl at rest to allow the other bowl to pass and then replace it, as long as this action would not influence the outcome of the head; or
 - stop the bowl from the neighboring rink.
- If a bowl that has been stopped was in its original course and was delivered on a bias that would have taken it back into its own rink (not delivered on the “wrong bias”), it should be replayed (Law 37.6).