The Novice's Guide to the (lawn bowling) Galaxy Don't Panic

The Outfit

Shoes

When it comes to lawn bowling attire the only firm requirement applies to your shoes, which is silly because you don't actually need to wear shoes. But if you do indeed choose to wear shoes they must be flat soled. This enforces the only sacred commandment in the Lawn Bowling Commandments — "Thou shalt not mess up the green!" Club members and non-club members really care about this. So leave the stilettos in the locker room and find your sole-mates.

For the serious bowler, flat bottom tennis shoes (AKA sneakers) are the way to go. Vans or Converse for the youngsters (under 60), and New Balance or Adidas for the orthoticly impaired. National and international bowlers wear actual lawn bowling shoes. That's right, you can buy shoes made specifically for lawn bowling. You may want to wait until you win a few big tournaments before you invest in those. Or better yet, let your sponsor provide them, if you ever get good enough to land any sponsorship.

If you forgot your flat soled shoes, barefoot bowling is acceptable. They even have a barefoot bowl tournament in Hawaii. You have to be pretty cool to pull this off in Laguna Beach. Only surfers and others with serious beach cred should try this, and your feet need to be presentable (or at least have an amazing excuse). Toenail polish is optional, and watch out for the rabbit poo. Got partial beach cred? Try sandals, or better yet flip-flops. What they lack in support they make up in volume. FLIP-FLOP-FLIP-FLOP as you stroll past the skip to the other end of the rink. Smile, you're having a Corona moment. Not recommended for cold winter days.

Clothes

You have to wear clothes while bowling. It's an unwritten rule generally enforced at the Laguna Beach club. White is the universally approved color, but recently it seems to be becoming more of a guideline. Lots of white bowling shirts have color stripes or stars or other designs, and many club shirts aren't white at all. Many clubs only require white on weekends or are "white preferred". So I keep a set of all-whites that are for special occasions, like my tuxedo. Otherwise it's white shorts and the royal blue Laguna club shirt for me. Simple, reliable, repeatable, idiot proof. Club shirts are about \$35 - \$40 depending on the club.

If you and partner(s) want to, matching shirts are OK for a tournament. That is, if whoever makes the choice gets it right. Or if not right, then amazingly wrong. Wild pattern team shirts can become famous. Marshals, TJ Max, and Ross are good for one offs, but you are not likely to get three of a kind in the correct sizes. For matching shirts try the outlet mall in San Clemente.

For cold weather, long white pants are sometimes needed. Just make sure they don't bag up or sag too much like clown pants. Golfers are really the only ones who can get away with this, so try any golf outlet. Otherwise, back to Marshals, TJ Max, or Ross, because white pants are not available at mainstream stores ever since disco died off.

Hat

It can get hot and sunny a lot, even near the beach. So head cover is essential, even for people with a full head of hair. More important than sun protection is the statement it makes about you. A hat is your primary fashion accessory. When you join, you should be given a white Bowls USA baseball hat or a white Bowls USA visor. They work. They shade most of your head and keep you cool enough. They are also about as neutral and low-key as it gets. The Laguna Club has a similar baseball cap that (almost) nobody wears. Men wear baseball caps and they have very specific requirements regarding the bill, material, hat shape, and logo. The Laguna caps appear (to me) to have been ordered by someone who is not a man. If your USA Bowls hat does not provide enough coverage, or if it gets lost, or too dirty, you can move on to your own personal bowling hat. Your choices are:

Y<u>our favorite old baseball hat.</u> Your personal hat brings your life history to the bowling green. Worn out college alumni hat or worn our truck driver look. Most people will accept it, if you can sell it.

<u>Hipster flat bill baseball hat.</u> This is on the very edge of the lawn bowling universe. Strictly for the millennial crowd. Do we even have enough millennials to make a crowd?

<u>The off-white fedora.</u> Classic look for the gentleman lawn bowler. Ok coverage, but requires some sun screen. Best if you have a movie star profile.

Off-white bucket hat. Classic look for the slouchy lawn bowler. Works best for those not resembling Gilligan.

Wide-brim straw hat. Classic look for the retired golfer turned lawn bowler.

<u>Crazy wide-brim straw lifeguard hat.</u> Excellent protection. Screams beach, but you might also be confused with a migrant farm worker. Goes well with tank top and baggies.

<u>REI outback adventure hat.</u> Not fashionable, but has very effective sun protection. People might think you have had skin cancer. Who else would wear one of those?

Women's visor. That is pretty much all I know about women's hats.

Sleeves

Two words here: Skin Cancer. En Espanol, El Skin Cancer. Cover up or slop on the sun screen. A single match will take as long as two hours, and a tournament goes all day. Sun sleeves are a new invention. They are light UV resistant spandex sleeves that protect arms from the sun without sloppy sun screen. These are popular with the gals. Of course long sleeve shirts and under armor have been around forever. If you go with sun screen go big. I use SPF 70 which is supposed to protect me from skin damage even during a nuclear war. It is a gloppy mess and makes your hands slippery when gripping the bowls. The spray stuff is easy and effective and you don't get your hands all greasy (watch out for your eyes).

Forgot your sun screen? Ask anyone. Everyone has some and will be happy to share.

Towel

A towel is completely optional. As a practical matter they help with many things. If the bench is wet you can dry it off. If the bench is too hot or dirty you can sit on your towel. If you spill your drink on your teammate's equipment you can wipe it clean. When conditions are dry, a wet towel provides just enough dampness to make your bowls gripable (an alternative to a damp towel is a damp sponge, but a sponge has no other purpose in lawn bowling). Between matches, towels can provide cushioning for the bowls in your bag. During the game you can regain your Zen by carefully wiping down your bowl while contemplating your next shot. Its only actual use in the game itself is to provide a spot to put the bowls that score points as you count them (see section on rituals).

When it comes to type and color, here are some recommendations. The thin microfiber versions are cheap and come in many colors. You can get these at Walmart in the automotive section. They are usually on the small side. An old terry cloth hand towel or a leftover golf towel works well. Cotton dish towels are a bit thin. (I would stay away from the obvious kitchen patterns unless you have a good story why you chose the dancing cows or the corn on the cob pattern.) Matching your towels to your bowls or outfit is a personal choice. It can be a bit matchy-matchy, but at least you will know which one is yours.

You can keep the towel on the bench or in your bag, but there is a 50% chance your towel will be on the far side bench when it is needed. You can hang it from your belt or pocket, but don't let it interfere with your backswing. Some bowlers keep it on top of their bowls to keep them cool. In all cases, be sure to always know where your towel is (important advice from The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy).

Plumbers Crack

Not really a problem in lawn bowls and we all want to keep it that way. There is a lot of stooping, squatting, and bending over on the green. And some things you can never un-see. So leave the low rise pants and shorts at home. We will all thank you for it. Maybe get a long tail undershirt. My long sleeve undershirts go almost to my knees. If yours don't make sure you are wearing an extra-long tail shirt. And get a belt. Baseball belts are basically adjustable elastic straps with a buckle. They are cheap, come in many colors including white, and are super adjustable. Get one at Dicks or online.

Also scary are those almost transparent shorts and pants. Please check your look in the mirror before you force it on the rest of us for god's sake. Can you see your underwear? Then it is no go. We don't care how cute the little hearts are. Your mother covered all of this, right?

Finally, the VPL (Visible Panty Line) is a minor transgression for the women, but a level three felony for the guys.

The Equipment

Bowls Hierarchy

Yes they look like balls. And in every other sport they are called balls. But in lawn bowling they are called "bowls". The sooner you can train your mouth to say "bowls" the better. Next to having the right shoes they are the most important part of your set up. Here is the hierarchy of lawn bowls:

Beginners and visitors use club bowls. They work and they are free. Everywhere I have been they date from the 1980s. Material science and manufacturing techniques have improved a lot since then and so has the design and strategy of lawn bowls. The old bowls are always black (free) and they are worn (free) and they have a wide bias (free). Apparently in the 1980s, lawn bowling strategy revolved around attacking the jack from the side. These bowls hook a lot. As such, they are among the most difficult to master. Your friends will compliment you on how well you bowl with the difficult club bowls. Your enemies will secretly laugh while you struggle to play with club bowls. Most beginners find their favorite set of club bowls and try to get them every time. Club bowls are first come first served, so it is survival of the quickest at social bowls. My favorite club bowls were the size 3 blue swans.

Tired of digging through the club bowls for your favorite? The next step up is used bowls. Randy runs a used bowls advertising web site (free) that you can get to from the Laguna Beach web site. There are all types. For \$50 you can get your own set of 1980s bowls. They will behave just like club bowls but you won't have to dig through the club bowls to get your favorite. And if you travel to another club, you will have your own bowls. I should warn you that these old bowls are usually available because of the passing of the previous owner, which might creep-out some of us. I got a set and imagined myself giving the old bowls a second chance to play. They had white ducks and stripes.

Have more than \$50? There are used bowls of all ages and prices. The age of a bowl is generally measured by the expiration date. The bowls work fine forever, but when they leave the factory they are only certified for tournament play for 10 years. Expired bowls are fine, unless you are competing at a national or international event. Apparently recertification is easy and can be done at national and international tournaments (or so I am told). The newest of the used bowls are demo bowls. These have (allegedly) never been used other than as demonstration models by bowls distributors. The selection is limited but is generally up to date. The distributors want to move them when the new models and colors come out. They seem to be priced about \$100-\$150 below retail.

Don't want to take a chance on used stuff? New bowls are great, and your deserve them. They are available at distributors in California in a lot of sizes, styles, weight, and models (bias). You can contact the distributor and buy off the shelf from their stock. If remote, have them send you a picture to confirm color, size, etc. You can also arrange to meet the distributor at their club, or occasionally they travel to Laguna Beach for a demo day. At a demo you can try out and inspect your bowls before you buy. Figure \$350-\$450 for off the shelf new bowls. Shipping can get pricey because they are heavy. Maybe choose regular freight if you can stand to wait.

Ready for the top of the line? Custom bowls shipped from the factory. Pick your size, color, weight, and most importantly, the symbol. Perfect for equestrians, NFL football fans, college alumni, etc. Some manufacturers also include some text. Show off your loyalties and talk smack at the same time. These are pricey at \$500+ and they can take 3-6 weeks for delivery. Choose priority overnight shipment because you deserve to have the best right away. It is better to look good than to be good, and "so what" if you take some flak because your bowling skill does not measure up to the bling on your bowl. They are all just jealous.

Selecting Bowls

Which bowls are right for me? This is the only question on earth that can not be answered on the internet (and not just because you really need to try them yourself). The suppliers of lawn bowls worldwide have a convoluted set of product names which change from year to year, supplier to supplier, and country to country. Also, there are few agreed-to metrics between manufacturers. So bias, weight, and grip will all be supplier-unique with no direct comparison across brands. The only agreed to specification is the size. A size 3 from Drakes Pride should have the same circumference as a size 3 from Taylor. And that size 3 should be the same 10 years ago and 10 years from now.

Bias charts indicate how much and the type of curve in the bowl. However, most charts do not compare across companies and they rapidly go out of date as the manufacturers change the names of the bowls. You can compare the bias of the bowls within a company using the company specific chart. Beware that some companies have different names for similar bowls in different countries. It is all just confusing.

So in the end, you need to try them out. Representatives from the suppliers might come to Laguna for a demo day this year. You should drop in for that if it happens, and try out their samples. In the meantime, you need to be borrowing other club members' bowls. You should ask first. Just dole out a few compliments and they will surely agree. Make it quick. Maybe 4-8 max. If it feels good, arrange to borrow them for an extended trial at an agreed to time. Some people selling used bowls will let you take them for a week or so. And some players have more than one set, so ask.

Talking about bowls is an important part of the culture. It is generally a safe topic for bowlers of all abilities. How did they buy them? How long have they had them? What do they like most about them? It is sort of like an interview, except there is no resume involved and you don't have to wear a suit. Once you get bowls, people will ask you the same questions, so you should start on your own story immediately. If the truth is uninteresting, make up something. Just don't tell them your size 4's were previously owned by Arnold Schwarzenegger. That's my story.

Bowls Markings

Chartreuse with fuchsia speckles and aquamarine icons. Great color choice. But beyond the bowl aesthetics there are other markings that help you find the jack. You may notice that some bowls have painted grips. These rings give visual feedback on any bowl wobble (you don't want bowl wobble). The sooner the bowl is rotating smoothly the better and more reliably it performs. Sometimes the paint on the grips are just dots or dashes. This is not a mistake. It lets you see wobble and also see how fast the bowl is rotating. A lawn bowl travels between 15 and 16 inches on each rotation. Every rotation counts as the bowl slows down approaching the jack. If you are $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet short you needed two more rotations. You might not see why this matters but your brain does. Of course, if you can't see dots on the bowl it does not matter. So if you are visually challenged you may need a bi or tri colored bowl. These are relatively new to the market. They cost more and look cool, but more importantly, as they rotate they give clear feedback that can be seen from the mat. Mine can be tracked from low earth orbit. I am told they might induce seizures if you watch too closely. If you are staying with your favorite old school black beauties you can add a few dabs of white paint in the grips. I have used Testers model paint, but I bet nail polish would work too.

Bowls Bag

What a great set of bowls you just got! So, how are you going to carry those around? The bottom of the line is the sling or bowl carrier. The club uses these for club bowls. They come in 2-bowl and 4-bowl versions. Of course you need a pair of the 2-bowl carriers (unless you want to make two trips). The 2-bowl carrier lets you distribute the load across both arms and they are narrower. You don't see too many 2-bowl carriers. The 4-bowl carriers carry the bowls in a square pattern that can cause it to bump against your knee as you carry the bowls. Bowl carriers work, they are lightweight and they are cheap. But the bowls can fall out and end up bouncing on the concrete, so be careful. Perfect for the beginner or the minimalist.

Next up in line is the Home Depot special. Tool boxes and tackle boxes have given way to the modern tool bag. These look like old school doctor bags but are made of modern polyester/canvas fabric and they hold four bowls. These are practical and cost only \$8-\$10 at Lowes (black) or Home Depot (red). They give better all-around protection and there is room inside for bowls paraphernalia. They come in bigger more expensive versions that hold a lot more and have wheels. Perfect if you are going for the blue collar lawn bowler look.

Who would drop \$\$\$\$ on a new set of lawn bowls and go cheap on the bag? Why not buy a top of the line lawn bowls bag from one of the bowls suppliers? These are specifically designed to carry 4-bowls, lots of paraphernalia, and they even have room for some clothing. Plus, they come in colors to match your bowls. The interior is compartmented specifically for bowls and bowls paraphernalia. Some come with wheels and handles, just like carry-on luggage.

Got still got more stuff. Then you need carry-on luggage with roller wheels and a handle extension. Luggage will not have internal compartments designed for bowls, but if you pack carefully, you can carry four bowls and pack enough clothing for a weekend in Vegas.

The wine bottle carrier (the perfect bowls carrier). On a recent lawn bowling and wine tasting trip, one of our club members discovered that a two bottle wine carrier can be used to carry four lawns bowls (up to size 3 or 4). They are light weight and inexpensive like a sling, but provide much better protection. Most importantly, they carry the bowls vertically. With the bowls stacked on top of each other, it can be carried at your side without banging against your knee. When you set it down, it stands vertically. This takes up less room and the handle can be grabbed without bending over. To get the bowls, you just turn it over and dump them out. Some even come with a side pocket for paraphernalia. Perfect for the lawn bowler and wine sommelier. Check them out on amazon.com.

Paraphernalia

In the sport of lawn bowling, most of the time you are both competitor and referee. So it won't be long before you have to participate in the scoring the match. To do this you will need trinkets.

Bowls measure. When the bowls are too close to call, you will need a bowls measure. All bowls measures are variations of a tape measure. Some have flexible metal tapes; some have strings. They cost about \$25 and the club sells them. The European Premier Boule Measure is ubiquitous, so if you get one, put your name on it. Basic measuring is done from the jack to the closest bowl of the team that does not have the shot. Once this distance is locked in, then every bowl inside of that counts a point for the scoring team. If you do it right, you only need to stretch the tape to one bowl. If you do it wrong, you will end up resetting the measure and measuring the distance to every (possible) scoring bowl. OK you really need to see this to understand it.

Chalk. Chalk is good for a few things. Foremost, if a bowled bowl hits the jack, it is still alive even if it goes into the ditch (or is pushed into the ditch later). Chalk is used to mark this bowl right after it hits the jack so you don't lose track of it. The top players put a chalk line on all sides so it is visible in the ditch regardless of which side of the bowl is up. That might be a little overkill. One skip I know puts a smiley face on his team's bowls and a frowny face on the opponent's bowls. In addition, chalk can be used to mark the 2 meter mark. This helps with placing the mat and replacing the jack if it is knocked out of bounds. Also, some skips will mark the jack location at the start of each end to help in moving future jacks to the center line. Many people use sidewalk chalk (the big fat sticks); others use chalk spray. Chalk spray allows you to mark a bowl without touching it. "Get out the chalk" is a way to announce to everyone that your teammate just hit the jack. You are allowed to say this loudly.

<u>Calipers</u>. When the bowls are too close to call and too close for the measure you use calipers. This has only happened once to me this year. Some measures have a tiny set of calipers in the bottom of the measure. The full size calipers are rare, but if someone has them, for sure they are dying to use them. All you have to do is ask if anyone has any calipers and they will run to their bag and dig them out.

<u>Score card</u>. In competitive matches each team will keep a score card. The score card tells you which rink and opponent you play in each round, so don't lose it. You (the skip) will write the score on the card in addition to recording the score on the score chalk board. After each match in a tournament, you should get the signature of your opponent and hand in the card to the tournament staff. Once they update the master scoreboard they will give it back. We don't usually require scorecard signatures for Laguna club tournaments.

<u>Towel</u>. The towel's only official use is to help when counting out a large score. The scoring team lays out a towel on the green and puts the scoring bowls on it one by one. This is only done if there are 3 or more bowls involved. "Get out the towel" is a way to announce that your team just hung a big score on your opponents. You may not want to say this too loud, unless you are good friends with your opposition.

<u>Flipping coin</u>. This is flipped to determine who will set the mat in the first end. I have one of the Laguna Club coins, but I prefer the Australia 50 cent piece. With that coin you call "heads" or "kangaroos".

<u>Bowls lifter</u>. Bowls lifters are sticks with a U shaped hook on the bottom used to pick up bowls and jacks. Perfect for the flexibility-impaired and believe it or not, not bad for your back. It's not obvious where you get these, so if interested, ask someone who has one or Google it.

<u>Bowling arm</u>. This is an industrial version of those toys with dinosaur heads on the end of a stick that kids use to pick up stuff or bite their sister. They are used by players with severe knee or back issues and are approved for tournament play. They seem simple to use but they are not. Anyone using one obviously loves the game and should be given your full support.

<u>Locker</u>. If available, the club will provide a locker, only if you have your own set of bowls. They will accommodate a typical bowl bag, but not much room for anything else.

<u>Clubhouse key</u>. Once you have taken your 3 introductory lessons and desire a key, the club will give you one for a \$10.00 deposit (unless you joined during Open House where this fee is waived). This allows you to open and close the club, the gates, and the bowls shed. Always check before you leave to be sure if someone still at the club has a key and knows to lock up.

Get a Grip

Hanging on to the bowl until you want to want to release it is one of the most important skills. Even with the correct size bowl it can get tricky sometimes. Cold weather, dry weather, and cold dry weather are the worst. But you can also have trouble if the weather gets really hot. And in the rain you definitely have trouble, mostly because you are dumb enough to bowl in the rain. Worry not, the bowls industry has created everything you need to keep a grip in all conditions.

Bowls wax. Grippo is the most popular bowls wax. Grippo makes your bowl sticky, like Sex Wax or other surfboard wax. (Do they still sell Sex Wax?) Anyways, Grippo comes in a tube and is available at the club for about \$6. Put a small dab on each bowl and smear it around with your hands until it dries. More is not better. The hardest part is dealing with the smell. You may like it but your cat will not. Neither will your kids or spouse. Grippo makes your bowl tacky and it will pick up a bit of grass from the green. It will last for 20 or more ends, but you can always re-apply more during the game or between matches. Grippo will also make your hands tacky, which brings us to the next topic.

Hand grip. A product called Monkey Grip comes in a tin, is used to make your hands tacky, and can also put on your bowls. I can't get it on my bowling hand without getting on both hands, and closing the tin will get some on the lid and in the threads. Eventually the Monkey Grip tin will become a tacky mess and the lid won't close. Grippo can also be used directly on your hands. The Grippo tube does not seem to get as messy, but Monkey Grip seems to last longer. Some folks have experience with a tack cloth and prefer it. You can get tack cloths at a hardware or craft store. They are used to pick up dust before applying paint or varnish. It is easier to keep the sticky stuff on one hand. You just grab the cloth with your bowling hand and you get instant stick on your fingers and palms. No rubbing around is needed. You have to keep your tack cloth in a plastic bag to keep it working and to keep it from making everything in your bag sticky.

Want more grip without messing up your hands? Think golf or batting glove. Apparently there is no rule against wearing a glove to improve your grip. I have not tried this, but I have seen it. It definitely helps preserve your manicure too. In extreme cases, you could probably put pine tar on you batting glove like Mike Trout. Hard to see how that would work. Strike that. Bad idea.

Finally, if you want to improve your grip in tough conditions there are traditional, natural methods. Wet your hands on a damp towel or a damp sponge. Getting the right amount is critical. Too little and you don't get the benefit; too much and it makes the bowl more slippery. I go on the wet side, then rotate the bowl in my hands until it dries out just the right amount, and then bowl really fast. The drinking fountain between the greens is never used for drinking, just wetting down towels and sponges (I am not sure the water from the fountain is safe to drink). If you are without a wet towel or sponge, you are stuck with breathing on you hand, licking your fingers, or spitting in your palm. Women seem to prefer breathing into a curled hand like it is cold outside. Men will lick the tips of their fingers. Not a great idea because you might actually be ingesting fertilizer or other chemicals used on the green. I have yet to see anyone spit into their hand like Albert Pujols. Not sure how that would go over at Laguna, but I might try it next year in the Winter League just to unbalance my opponents.

The Game

Rituals

No culture is complete without rituals. Here are the ones I know so far:

Determining who bowls the first end first. If you have a coin, flipping it determines who is first to set the mat, roll the jack, and bowl first on the initial end. The club will give you an official Laguna Beach Lawn Bowling Club flipping coin when you join. It does not actually have a "head" (which can be a bit confusing). One side is blue and the other gold. So ask the other team to call "blue" or "gold". (You will probably lose it in the bottom of your bag anyway.) When you don't have a coin, you can roll a bowl sidewise and the opponent calls "big or little". When the bowl stops flopping over, either the big or small emblem will be up. Some people say this favors the "big" emblem because the side the small emblem is on is physically "flatter". Note, this hasn't been statistically proven.

Placing the mat. By rule, the mat just needs to be centered and the front must be at least 2 meters from the near ditch. Because most people habitually position the mat near the 2 meter mark, in wet conditions (and otherwise) this can cause wear and tear in this area. Consequently, it is a good idea to position the mat further ahead of the 2 meter mark to prevent this from happening. Plus, it can also be used strategically (either for or against you) as it puts you closer to the jack. There are several methods of placing the mat including: facing the ditch and backing up in line with the number, laying the mat at the ditch and then flopping it over twice (seldom seen), and setting the mat and putting the jack in the middle of it so the skip can help you align it. (Some folks get worried if the mat is not in perfect alignment with the center line.) Before you bowl, you are allowed to center and realign the mat as long as you do not move it up or back.

Signals for aligning the jack. After the jack is rolled, it needs to be centered. The jack needs to be on the center line at least 21 meters from the front of the mat (USA rule) and not closer than 2 meters from the ditch. Signaling instructions for the skip are some of the craziest parts of the sport. It is much funnier than the signs given by the third base coach in baseball. In general, the leads indicates the direction and distance to move the jack by holding their hands on one side with the distance indicated by the space between the hands. The skip interprets the sign and moves the jack accordingly. This is repeated until the jack is close to centered. Getting the jack exactly on the center line may require the "roll-it-over" signal which is done by making a curling motion with your hand in the direction you want the jack moved. Try not to get so intense that you engage your body too much, and try to smile the whole time. When correct, the lead gives the all-good sign, which is generally left up to the imagination of the lead. Some give thumbs up, some raise their hands (indicating both touchdown and I surrender), some point at the skip, and some just turn around and step off the mat.

Moving the jack. Most skips will use their foot to position the jack. Why with the foot? Well, mostly habit, but it could be because rather than bending down, it's easier for them because they're still able to balance on one foot for short periods of time without falling over. Another method is to squat or take one knee (if you still have the knees for it) and move the jack while looking at the lead. (Dizzy people say that this is the most efficient method.) Remember, we are all throwing at the same jack, so exact placement is not worth slowing the game to a crawl.

<u>Marking the jack</u>. If the above process for centering the jacks seems silly, you can eventually avoid doing it every time by marking the jack position on the green with chalk. Be careful not to drill a hole in the green. After several ends, there are usually enough marks on the green that the skip can center the jack without performing the dance of the jack alignment.

Collecting the bowls. After an end is completed and the score agreed to, the lead from the team that lost the end collects the bowls. The rake (or collector) is very efficient for doing this, especially if the others kick the bowls toward the center line (proper etiquette). Once lined up, it takes less than 10 seconds to rake the bowls and deposit them behind and to the right side of the mat (as you're facing the far ditch). Usually you assume the mat will be close enough to the ditch that the bowls belong about a meter out from the ditch. If the other leads move the mat up for a short jack, you can just reposition the bowls with the rake. There are only two things you can do wrong with a rake: damage the green or scrape someone with it (rake bite). So drive the rake carefully and please don't drive if your blood alcohol is over the legal limit (which is occasionally the case during social bowls).

Mat entry/exit. In general, the next bowler is directly behind and to the left side of the active bowler who is supposed to exit the mat to the right. (A clockwise motion.) Oftentimes the active bowler will lean over or move side to side to watch the bowl and sometimes they even try to exit to the left. When this happens, wait until the bowler has finished, stand your ground, and eventually the bowler will learn to exit to the right. Alternatively, pose the following question "Which side of the mat are you supposed to exit on?"

<u>Leaving a bowl on the mat</u>. If your skip is the first to bowl, it is traditional to put his or her bowl on the mat before you walk to the other end. This requires you remember who your skip is and which are your skip's bowls. This can be a lot of thinking if you are busy reliving the glory of your last shot (or slurping a beer). If you can't remember, just leave the bowls where they are. Your skip will survive.

<u>Walking to the other end</u>. Stay in your rink when walking to the other end. Walking into a neighboring rink when a game is in progress doesn't make you many friends. It also helps if you walk on the side of the rink that your skip is walking on, so you can exchange information (only if your skip wants to). With both teams trying to have a conversation and share strategy, failure to do this can result in a traffic jam in the middle of the green. Also even if you're in your rink, be cognizant of games on the neighboring rinks. A bowl could be rolling into your rink (which is perfectly legal) and you would want to avoid it if at all possible. It's the making friends thing again.

Approaching the head. When it is your skip's turn to bowl, if you are the vice in triples or the lead in pairs, you can approach the head to better see the makeup of the head. Your turn starts when the other team's bowls stops and they step off the mat. Be ready to back off fast if your skip begins to bowl. Some skips bowl quickly. (They probably won't want to hear from you anyways.) But if you have to answer questions, be loud (enough) and point to things using your entire hand. Pointing to a bowl and patting your chest means "ours". Pointing to a bowl and making a sweeping away motion means "theirs". Your skip may want to know if a bowl is in front or behind the jack and by how much. Tapping your head X times means your team has X bowls that are closest to the jack. Tapping your leg X times means your opponents do. If in doubt, cup your hands to your ears and pretend you can't hear them. Faking a hearing issue always works because so many bowlers are actually hard of hearing. I SAID, FAKING A HEARING ISSUE – forget it.

<u>Sneaking a look at the head</u>. Leads are not supposed to approach the head. However, you might sneak a peek as you walk by or maybe lean in just a bit. If caught in the act, just say you are trying to learn some strategy so you can become as good of a vice as they are.

Talk Track

Lawn bowls is inherently a social game. The talk track for lawn bowls is similar to golf. Generally participants prefer clean language delivered in soft tones. Compliments are safe as are a limited number of self-deprecating remarks. Compliments on your partners/opponents bowls or their outfits are your bread and butter. And at Laguna you can always compliment the view and the sunset. We are so lucky.

Unlike baseball or hockey or lacrosse, heckling and insults outside of your circle of close personal friends, is not appreciated. But, if you decide to insult your friends, make sure they will think it is funny. If people overhear your offensive remark, just tell them "It's OK he's my brother-in-law."

Be prepared. Some folks just don't talk. If you are partnered with or competing against one of these, you are stuck with safe meaningless phrases like, "Good weight" or "Good line" or "Nice one". You may also say "Can I get you a beer too?", because after ten ends of nothing but meaningless clichés you will probably need one.

Competition

Social bowls is the easiest and friendliest way to start learning how to compete. It is "almost" competition. Mostly it is chatting and drinking with a little bowling going on in between. They do actually keep score, but it is mostly an afterthought. At Laguna Beach they determine the teams by hand. That is, someone will assign the teams. At Newport, Hermosa, and other clubs, the teams are randomly assigned. The usual process is to figure out the positions (lead, vice, skip) and then draw poker chips to determine the make-up of the teams.

Laguna Club tournaments are you bread and butter for novices. They are limited to only the Laguna Beach Club members and are always played in Laguna Beach. As a novice you are eligible to complete in all of them. I strongly suggest you get into the first novice tournament you can. As a full-on beginner there is no pressure, and your opponents will be happy to help you understand the rules as they thump you and take all the points. The only confusing part is the vet/novice, pairs, and "you pick" pairs. All three involve two people playing as a team in doubles. In the "you pick" version the players choose their partner (like Wimbledon). If the tournament does not say "you pick" then you are randomly assigned a partner when you show up. Combine that with random assignment of opponents and your outcome is largely in the hands of the lawn bowling gods. The perfect excuse.

In tournaments there are too many opponents so you will not play every other player/team. So you draw at random the 3 or 4 opponents you will play. Draw all beginners and you look like a champ. Draw all best players and you can get thumped. This is part of every tournament so get used to it. There is no justice in lawn bowling.

Winter league. This is a great way to get into easy competition outside of the club. The Silver division is specifically set up for novices. Laguna will field one or two (or more) teams depending on signups. The teams play the other clubs in the area on Saturdays in November, December, and January. Each team is four players and a match is two doubles games followed by a singles and a triples game. So you play a little of everything. It is all set up in advance and you have the support of your teammates in all matches. You can be a regular or a substitute. So it works for everyone. Check this out. It is about as easy as it gets.

The singles ladder. Almost like singles ladders in other sports. \$20 to join, and you can start challenging away. I warn you the instructions are a full typed page in small font. But you can ignore that because the other people in the ladder know the rules and will keep you in line. It does require a phone call or a few emails to set up a match, kind of like ordering pizza. Singles matches go fast. The initial start positions on the ladder are random at the beginning of the year, but soon you will be plummeting down the ladder to join me in the cellar where all the really cool players hang out.

Southwest tournaments are seemingly simple events that are somehow made nearly incomprehensible. I would rate them somewhere in between club tournaments and official Southwest Division competitions. To start with each club in southern California creates its own tournaments. They make up their own unique formats and name the tournaments after local lawn bowling heroes. And they name the tournament using a new set of jargon including, mixed, mix match, skins, cutthroat, Australian pairs, etc. Some have A and B green. There is no published rule for which green you will be assigned, but expect novices to always be on the B green. In some two day tournaments you have to qualify for the second day and/or get slotted into flights. It will all make sense after 5-10 years, but to the novice it is really confusing. Your best bet is to find a veteran that understands the lingo and/or has played in that tournament.

Are you a phenomenon? Then you can sign up to play in the US nationals qualification tournament, called playdowns. They have singles, pairs, and triples. These are held all over the country to select the players to go to the national championships. The odds are against you, but if you want you can give it a try. Something to tell you grand kids about between naps (yours and theirs).

For the truly cosmic players there are international tournaments in far off exotic locations. You need to be selected to represent the USA by people called selectors. Unfortunately for you and me, these people do not accept bribes (that we can afford). It would be cheaper to just tell everyone you have been selected to some exotic (previously unheard of) tournament, pay for your own trip to Australia, play some bowls, fake up some pictures, and buy a used trophy at a pawn shop. Top it off by sending back a very detailed set of blog entries describing how you struggled to make the finals and then beat the Duke of Brisbane in the final match.

Games

The basic formats for competition are singles, doubles, triples, and quadruples (which is called rinks because quadruples is too hard to say). Social bowls are almost always doubles or triples, because it wouldn't be sociable enough if everyone just played singles. For the most part singles and doubles are 4 bowls each, triples is 3 bowls each, and rinks is 2 bowls each. That keeps the total number of bowls on the green under control. Team set up can be by arranged teams or random draw teams. For the most part all play is alternating with the leads first, vices second, and skips third. FYI, vice is short for vice skip. Of course there are variations. There is something called Australian doubles. On the odd ends the leads bowl 2 each. Then you switch with the skips and they bowl 4 each. Then you switch again and the leads bowl 2 each. On the even ends the skips and leads change positions. Whew. Lots of walking back and forth. In this format there is really no difference between the leads and skips. Each player does some of both so you both need to be good at all parts of the game. At least I think that is why they made up this version. They are Australians after all.

Anyways, so how do you know when you are finished? In social bowls you set up for a number of ends, and quit when the bar opens (or the food is ready). In tournaments you finish after some number of ends (might require an overtime end if tied), or you play until the first player gets to a certain score (like 15 or 21). Playing a number of ends is more consistent. Playing to a score can be fast (15-0) or slow (21-20).

Got a hankering for some grade school math? A singles or doubles player will throw 40 bowls in a 10 end match, and 48 in a 12 end match. Playing 3 matches of 12 ends requires 144 bowls. Add in 4 -8 trials and you are looking at 150 bowls in a day not counting warm up. Better hit the gym before your next tournament.

Lawn Bowling vs Golf

I was trained to play golf at an early age. Our country club in Ohio had a junior program and I enjoyed learning the game. I was never any good at it. Thank god I found lawn bowling before I retired and was forced to move to Florida and play golf all the time. We all know lawn bowling is just better. Here is why.

In golf your score is determined by how many strokes it took to you finish the round. I am opposed to any sport that suggests I may have even a single stroke during the game.

In lawn bowling strokes are bad and your medical history is private.

In golf your score is measured by how many strokes over par you took to complete the round. So basically it measures how many more mistakes you made than a skilled professional would have made. If you keep it under ten over you had a great round (ask Randy what that feels like). I was never better than 25 over par.

In lawn bowling your mistakes do not count (literally they do not contribute to the count). It is your best bowl that counts, not your biggest mistake. And there is no standard that you can fail to keep up with. Who cares what a professional might score on this end.

In golf when you mess up you may need to fish your ball out of a pond with one of those retriever things your kids got you for your birthday. Or you can just let it swim around the bottom until somebody with scuba gear collects them all for resale. I generally blow through a dozen golf balls in a round. More if the rough is deep. It is expensive to be as bad at golf as I am.

In lawn bowling I have yet to see anyone throw a lawn bowl into a pond, a flowerbed, or the ocean for that matter. I have yet to see anyone lose a lawn bowl during a match. I always finish with the same number of bowls that I started with.

In golf when you mess up (and miss the pond) you may get to hit the next shot out of a sand trap or poison oak. In some cases you lose stroke and distance, or take a penalty stroke and have to hit it again from the same spot.

In lawn bowling no matter how bad your last shot was, you always play the next one from the mat. The only sand is in the ditch, and you never have to stand in it. And there is no poison oak, snakes, or alligators. There are no penalty strokes in lawn bowling.

In golf you have to wait for the snack cart to get a beer. Or wait for until you get to the ninth hole. Beers cost like \$8. And you are always at least five hundred yards away from the nearest bathroom.

In lawn bowling the clubhouse is always open and just steps away. If you want you can actually bowl with a beer in your hand (hard but do-able). Need I remind you of our low beverage prices? We also serve wine which is forbidden on the golf course. And we have a clean bathroom adjacent to both greens, and it is not an outhouse.

Golf today requires 5 hours to get in a single game. It costs tens of thousands to join a private club and the dues are hundreds per month. A single golf club can cost over \$500 and you need more than ten of them (but no more than fourteen in your bag). That's right, most golfers own more than fourteen clubs.

In lawn bowling you can play an entire tournament in 5 hours. The club dues are less than \$200 per year. A complete set of brand new custom bowls is less than \$500. I don't know anyone that has more that fourteen bowls.

I could go on, but you have the idea by now. The next time you are stuck listening to golfers brag about their new drivers and putters (that do not make them any better) feel free to lay down some smack. But don't make it sound too good or they might want to defect to our side.

Status

As you get better you work your way up the lawn bowling ladder. In lawn bowling most people see the skills ladder as a way to organize the games. Only a very few slackers use the structure as a way to belittle players or their inflate egos.

Everyone starts out at the bottom of the ladder as a lead. In the beginning you will think this is like sitting at the kids table at Thanksgiving. It is. Do not despair. Enjoy it. When you get better you will realize how important the lead is in competitive matches. You can not win the game as a lead, but you can certainly lose it. Skips have a limited amount of magic shots (I have none). If the opposing lead is always on the jack and you are chronically out of bounds your team is doomed. Doomed. No really, doomed. Be long and on the jack. Nothing short. Try to stay out of the ditch. Remember, everyone is rooting for you when you are a beginner.

Next on the ladder is the vice (vice skip). Generally you try to make things better for your team as a vice. Maybe you will be asked to try to clean up some situations, but mostly you will be asked to fix up what the lead did wrong. So mostly it is like advanced lead. Also some (OK only a few) skips will want your opinion. Usually they just want enough information so they don't need to walk down and see what is going on for themselves. Vices score the game. Skips and leads have to live with your assessments and measurements. You will need a measure and chalk. I try to get the score right as fast as I can, and signal clearly. A strong signal indicates confidence and deters questions. A lot of people prefer playing lead over vice. Less responsibility with more socializing.

Top of the ladder is the skip. This position has several levels. A lot of bowlers do not want to skip so at social bowls they will ask some folks to fill in. That can be you. At the first level you will skip the kids table games. There will be low expectations, and you will play down to them. I think the most important goal is to give your team the impression that you will step up and not suck too much. One or two good shots and few close calls might be enough in a 12 end game. Fortunately the kids table is filled with friendly partners and opponents - not necessarily bad players. The only pressure will come from inside you (that is your fault). You will be standing with the other skip the whole game. It gives a different perspective and is a new social situation. Talk at the skip end of the rink is different. Be likeable and positive. Make new friends and support your teammates. I would tell you more about being skip, but this is as far as I have gotten.

The Facilities

Green Setup

What do you need to know about setting up the green? Not much. That is why we pay greens keepers. A green usually about 125 feet square. That is based on the required length of a rink, and since we play north-south and east-west the greens are square. Each rink is about 15 feet wide, and is marked by the orange stakes (not always orange at all greens). The number in the center of each rinks tells you which rink it is. You can get 7 rinks on a green easily. You can jam on 8 rinks but the end rinks will not have any room outside the stakes. Wide bowlers beware. Also, the club has a 2 meter stick that can be used to mark the 2 meter mark with chalk. It is usually used just for tournaments. It helps to know the length of your foot (or step) in meters so you can establish the 2 meter mark if needed. That is pretty much it.

Well not quite. The hog line is marked with yellow paint on the bumper. That helps you figure out if the jack was thrown far enough. The hog line mark assumes you place the mat with the front at the 2 meter mark. The hog line marks is 21 meters (in the USA) from that spot which is a total of 23 meters from the ditch (21 + 2). But you don't have to put the mat 2 meters from the ditch. Troublemaker. If you move up the mat and throw the jack short it can be over the hog line mark but not 21 meters from the front of the mat. Ut Oh. So at this point the skip (if they care) tries to determine how far the mat is moved up and how far the jack is past the hog line. There are no signals or vocabulary for this. And a lot of the time the lead is busy signaling to move the jack side to side, not responding to the skips question about the location of the mat. Why is he asking about the mat? It can become a scene from Green Acres. So if you move the mat up and throw the jack short be ready to tell the skip how much further up the mat is from the 2 meter mark. Don't make them bring out the 25 meter tape measure.

Laguna Beach vs Newport vs Laguna Woods

With the demise of the San Clemente club there are three major south Orange County lawn bowling clubs that field most of the competitive players. We all know and love Laguna Beach, but it is good to have rivals. A little green envy never hurts. North of Laguna is the Laguna Woods Lawn Bowling Club. Further north and west is the Newport Beach Lawn Bowling Club. What's up with those clubs, and why aren't they as good as Laguna Beach?

Laguna Woods. If it isn't bad enough that the stole Laguna as part of their name, they are a private-ish club that requires you live in Leisure World to be a member (oops I meant Laguna Woods). To make up for this they have tried to end-run the legitimate clubs by installing brand new, state of the art, artificial greens. I have yet to be invited to bowl there, but I am told these greens are super fast and super wide. Wide enough that you might need really narrow bowls to play. These were constructed earlier this year and during construction many Laguna Woods folks bowled at Laguna Beach, so I figure they owe us right?

Newport. Yea those guys. Newport is the home of the most competitive lawn bowling clan in South County. Nice enough folks, and built for competition. Their greens are a little faster than ours and well maintained. Their pot lucks are run with military precision. They turn out in numbers and have a bigger clubhouse. And they have lights, a bit more room, and free parking. All in all, not quite as good as a fabulous ocean view, but still really handy stuff. Playing at night under the lights is also really handy, especially when we are off daylight savings time. Several of the Laguna folks maintain a second membership at Newport. Clubs usually discount a second membership at a second club. At least we do.

Grass vs Artificial Turf

Artificial turf has swept the nation in all sports. Back in the day turf was a major cause of knee explosions, broken ankles, and turf burns. A decade ago they invented the modern turf field with those little rubber pellets made of ground up tires. The flat, reliable, low maintenance surface makes artificial grass the surface of choice for most sports. Those old turf-injuries are no longer a concern. They have been replaced by new concerns about possible cancer from those nasty little rubber pellets made of ground up tires. And moms hate their kids tracking them all over the house. Fortunately, artificial lawn bowling greens are pellet free so they don't cause cancer or track stuff into your house. The future may have arrived.

A quick recap the terms. In all other sports, turf refers to artificial turf. In lawn bowling turf means old school grass. So make sure you add "artificial" or "fake" when referring to greens that are not grass. If you visit a club with non-grass greens and you want to be invited back say "artificial surface". Save "fake grass" for the derogatory comments behind their back when you lose.

A real live grass green is a source of pride. And like all really cool status symbols, it is also plenty expensive. Only god knows what we pay to keep our green in great playing shape. How good is it? Glad you asked. Greens are good when they are flat and fast. The speed of a green is measured in seconds. Make sense? Of course not. Here is what is up (the very simple version). A fast green is around 15 seconds. That is because it has very little friction/drag so the bowls take a long time to stop. Think how long it would take if you rolled your bowl on concrete. It can go slow and take forever to stop. A slow green is around 7 seconds. A soggy green will slow down the bowl quickly. Think how quickly your bowl would stop in mud. So we are looking for at least 12-15 seconds at Laguna. What is the actual measurement? Who knows? I have never seen anyone measure the green. Why don't we know the actual measurement? Who cares? It is more fun to brag without actual facts getting in the way.

How to measure a green. You can look it up online. In one method you roll a bowl and time how long it takes to stop with a stop watch. It needs to travel about 27 meters to count. The other methods involves a ramp and a small ball. You roll the ball down the ramp and measure how far it goes. Then look up the time on a chart. To get it right you measure in several directions and calculate the average. I understand they measure greens before major tournaments. I aspire to play in a tournament where they tell us the green speed in the pre-tournament meeting.

Bowls Travel

Combine bowling with travel. A match made in heaven. In my not so extensive experience I have located bowling opportunities in several nearby locations. Join up with some fellow compadres and hit the road on a bowling safari. Here is what I know so far.

Santa Maria and the Foxen Canyon wine trail (been there). Head toward Los Olivos (north of Solvang) and get ready for 45 miles of wine tasting at the vineyards on Foxen Canyon road. At the end of the canyon is the Santa Maria Lawn Bowling Club. It is a small club with an artificial green. The people we met were really nice and very good. They tolerated our difficulties with the green and our appalling lack of talent. Stay at the historic Santa Maria Inn if you don't mind sharing you room with a ghost. On the way back make sure to spend some time in Los Olivos for some relaxing in town wine tasting.

Cambria near Hearst Castle and Paso Robles vineyards. I have not been there yet, but one of the club members has confirmed it is real. This is down the road from the Hearst Castle, and more importantly, not far off Peachy Canyon (zinfandel country). Paso is a favorite wine tasting spot for me and my wife. We should send a scout team ASAP. Volunteers?

Santa Barbara area. Two clubs in town if you want to enjoy the upscale lifestyle in Santa Barbara. Or maybe stop through on your way to wine tasting further north. Santa Barbara club is freeway close and almost Amtrak accessible. Mackenzie Park is closer to the Earl Warren show grounds if you are equestrian oriented.

Oxnard (been there). This club is not far off the 101 and also Amtrak accessible. They feature some cool homemade rakes and easy parking. Another stop on the way to wine tasting. You can get there for Saturday social bowling if you leave by 7:30.

Berkley (been there). Located in the Poets Corner area not far from of the university. Very cure neighborhood. I have been there twice but could not manage to be there when they were actually bowling. Maybe they are ducking me? On a good day it is only 90 minutes to Napa (plus \$5 for the toll bridge).

Hawaii. I hear they bowl in Honolulu. The club is just north of Waikiki in Ala Moana Beach Park. Yes in the beach park, like Laguna. Somehow we missed it on all our trips to paradise. It seems TSA may have a problem with lawn bowls in your carry-on luggage. Something about using them to beat other passengers. Apparently they do not know I can't beat anyone with mine (on or off the green).

The How

Methods

It seems there are several ways to roll a bowl on grass at a target. There are too many to cover here, but I can talk about three general strategies.

Metrics. Process. Measurement. Repetition. Adjustment. Do these sound right? You might be one of the "by the numbers bowling" tribe. In this approach the game is broken down to simplify it into actions that can be measured, controlled and improved. Some coaches teach this method. Usually it involves adjusting you location on the mat, the height of the bowl in your starting position, the angle of your elbow, the length of your step, and not letting your brain adjust the shot. The method takes care of all adjustments. Don't think, just watch and calculate the needed changes. It works.

Consciousness. Flow. Sub-consciousness. Karma. Cosmic alignment. Do these sound right? You might be one of the "Zen bowling" tribe. In this approach the game is turned over to your inner bowler. All you do is concentrate on the target and let your brain tell your body what to do. After all, your subconscious brain actually drove you down here, because most of the time you were ignoring the road while you talked, grooved on the playlist, and texted your friends (note: texting while driving is illegal). Furthermore, your subconscious brain has been running your body's internal organs successfully for decades. So why not let your brain control how you bowl too. Some coaches teach this method. The hardest part is resolving conflict between the parts of your brain. There is lots of staring at the jack, imagining the trajectory, and muscle memory in this approach. It works.

I didn't notice. Look there's a dolphin. Get me one too. Do these sound right? You might be one of the "we are here for the experience" tribe. In this "approach" you focus on enjoying the moments with your friends. Now and then you have to roll those bowls, or it would be just another outdoor cocktail party at the beach. Once the bowl is out of your hand you can get back to holding your drink. Not many coaches teach this method, though they practice it all the time. It works (depending on your goals).

Still not sure what you are doing? Searching is OK. Almost everybody is experimenting with some part of their game. Maybe if I changed my step, or my grip, or my shoes, or my hat. You can switch between the tribes any time (sometimes even mid-shot). There is no hurry and nothing is permanent.

Finally, are you getting too much help? Does everyone want to help you get better? This is a common problem for beginners in many sports. Here is my secret. Take lessons with Heather. She knows her stuff and is fun to learn from. And the next time you get unwanted advice casually say, "Thanks, I am taking lessons from Heather and want to stay with her directions". Usually they will respond, "Heather? Heather Stewart?" Smile and as casually as possible say "Yes, she is really nice and so helpful." They might be surprised. They might wonder why you aren't any better. They will certainly shut up. Works for me every time. And I learned a lot in the lessons too. Thanks Heather.

Mastering the Grip

Disclaimer: I know nothing about lawn bowling. You should have figured this out by now. This section may sound dangerously close to advice. Please ignore anything that sounds like advice or coaching.

There are many methods for gripping the bowl. One popular one suggests you put your middle finger in the middle, index and ring fingers in the grips, and pinky and thumb on the side to grip the bowl. Several top players use this grip and when properly done it is as graceful as ice dancing and incredibly effective. I have tried it and discovered the following:

Apparently there is an argument going on in my hand. My index finger is convinced it is always right, which comes from a lifetime of being chosen to point to everything. My middle finger just wants to tell everyone else to F-Off (for obvious reasons). My ring finger is miffed that I wear my wedding ring on the other hand, and my pinky is still mad because I hit it with a hammer in 1984. My thumb is the contrarian of the group and seems to be opposed to everything. I have yet to get two fingers on the same page when bowling. I have given up and use the mitten grip. Four fingers together acting as one unit in the center of the bowl with the thumb in the grip. There is no tolerance for independent thinking in this regime (sort of like East Germany). I have not gone as far as super gluing my fingers together, but I have used it as a threat when any finger starts getting ideas. It works for me. But you should not listen to anyone who even thinks of super gluing his fingers together.

Injuries

When it comes to injuries on the lawn bowling green the worst are inflicted by apis mellifera and bombus californicus (Honey Bee and Bumble Bee). These mild mannered insects hang out in the neighborhood working in gardens and lawns minding their own business, until they are threatened. Sometimes they will sneak a drink from your soda so keep you drink covered. Worst of all, some of our club members are allergic to their sting, so please don't piss them off. If you are allergic to bee stings let someone know if you are carrying an eppy pen. Note: you can also hurt yourself by panicking, running away from a bee, and tripping over the lawn bowls. Some of the bees think this is really funny.

After the occasional bee sting the next worst injury is the twisted knee/back/ankle caused by recklessly stepping onto the green. This similar to the stubbed toe caused by underestimating the height of the walk when exiting the green. It happens. Heather covers all this in the introductory lesson. It sounded silly at the time didn't it?

Kicking the bowls does not cause as many injuries as you might think. Just curl up your toes and let the sole of the shoe take the impact. Or use the side of your foot. Using the rake is probably more dangerous, especially when you factor in the nine step process it takes to put it back properly in the shed. Watch your head, watch your feet, fold the wheels backwards, hold them in place, move the other rakes back, etc. And what are those hooks in there for anyways? So when you are driving the rake, be careful, and remember to signal before you make any abrupt turns or stops.

I have yet to see anyone receive an actual concussion while lawn bowling. So you can leave your helmet at home. You should be more worried about sun burn, so bring you sun hat instead.

Finally we all dread the possibility of needing to use the new automatic defibrillator. So far we only have the case, but we will have one soon so you should get trained. Update: the AED has arrived and training completed. If you missed it pay more attention next time.

Cheating

Cheating is admired in several sports. It happens mostly in sports where referees are supposed to catch cheaters. The rule is, "if the ref didn't see it, it did not happen". I am a bit of Boy Scout, but I admit I admire cheating if it is creative, funny, and harmless. If you opponent doesn't laugh when he figures it out you haven't done it right. Anyways, it does not happen so much in sports like lawn bowling where the honor system is in effect (except golf — "put me down for a four"). In lawn bowling cheating is not generally appreciated. I have not witnessed cheating in lawn bowls. This probably means my opponents are cheating me in every match and I am way too inexperienced to notice. Or maybe it is too hard, or maybe it is not worth it at my level, or maybe I am not hanging out with the right group of people. For the most part people seem to bend over backwards to be honest and do their level best to record the correct score on the chalkboard. If you think the score is wrong, most likely one or both of you is having a senior moment. When people are desperate enough to ask my help to resolve a conflict with the score I usually respond by looking surprised and saying, "Oh, are we keeping score today?" Hopefully it helps people back down from DEFCON 2. If that does not work blame the chalk. The only rules enforcement I have experienced is the formality of signing your opponents score card at the end of a match. This assumes you have your glasses and can read your opponents scrawl. Is that a one or a seven? Can you score a seven in one end in a singles match? Wait, I think that is the rink number. Never mind. If you want to play with the tournament director sign you next opponent's score card "Player #4". You can't read my signature anyways.

Practice

Really. There are some people so desperate to improve they actually practice. Some can't help themselves. Others have nothing better to do. If you are going to practice there are some general rules. Try to practice long, short, forehand, and backhand. Make sure don't just work on one thing. The most efficient method is to put/set a jack at both ends and carry a mat between ends. I would not use two rinks (one up one back) unless there are four or more of you practicing together. Some time you may want to snag four or five jacks and practice throwing them. It won't take long to get pretty good at it. This concludes the instructional portion of this section. Let's talk about training aids!

There are lots of toys (training aids) you can buy or make for lawn bowling. Are you tired of hitting/moving the jack all the time in practice? Cutting a tennis ball in half yields two jack simulators. These will not move if you hit them during practice. Need a target to the side of the jack to help you aim/align your shot? You can buy tiny little traffic cones online. At some point you will have to practice driving, as in full power to take out an opponent's bowl. The best target is a flop over bowl simulator. You can buy these online or make them out of plastic. I use plastic folders from target. You cut out a bowl shape with an extra tab at 90 degrees that you anchor into the green with a large nail. Ask around, our coaches have all of these and more.

The Club

LBLBC

The Laguna Beach club claims all rights to the acronym LBLBC. Sorry Long Beach. We like saying it and like writing it on our checks (some people still write checks).

The Laguna Beach Lawn Bowling Club is in fact a club. It has rules and procedures and guidelines. The important ones are online. Once a year they have a general meeting. It is not real painful, and you get to meet members you have heard about but never crossed paths with. Also you will find out who is on the board. Lay low and you won't get dragged into any assignments. Or speak up and get lots of actions items assigned to you. I strongly suggest you pay your dues on time. Otherwise some unlucky board member has to pester you, and that is no fun. You can volunteer for some simple stuff, like keeping the refrigerator stocked for a month or replacing supplies. At some point you may stumble onto of the monthly board meetings. They are not secret. Fortunately we are blessed with competent leadership and for a while you can enjoy the benefits of their efforts without diving in. But not forever.

There are websites for the clubs and the southwest region and Bowls USA. These are the best ways to keep up on events and upcoming opportunities to play. I guess you have found them as you are reading this nonsense. I am fairly certain the club does not sell you information to political consultants, and we seem to be free from Russian hacking.

Email is one of the best ways to communicate with club members. My kids tell me it is so old fashioned. Texting or actual phone calls work too. Emails are usually about setting up matches or coordinating teams for winter league, etc. I have noticed that club members prefer really short emails, and do not like long email chains. The board sends out emails to all club members now and then to keep you informed. They are pretty helpful. The membership list online includes contact information for everyone.

It Takes All Types

You want to have a club with lots of different people, personalities, and perspectives. Otherwise it would be a political action committee. We are fortunate at Laguna Beach to have plenty of diversity. For the most part we seamlessly mingle the retired and working, the young and old, the serious and fun loving, the athletes and athlete wannabes, and the talented and talent free. Given the wide range of individuals we have energetic, skilled people in every role needed to make the club special. The club members put on a variety of party bowl events for the party holidays like St Patrick 's Day, Valentine's Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Fourth of July, Oktoberfest, Thanksgiving, etc. (nothing yet for Talk Like a Pirate Day or Festivus). I recommend you join in, and if you want to contribute there seems to be plenty of opportunities.

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