



The importance of a skilled marker



Law 42.2.6 states that a marker must 'answer a specific question about the state of the head which is asked by the player in possession of the rink.'

If you watched the fantastic coverage of the World Indoor Championships last month, either on YouTube, Facebook or BBC, then you will have noticed the role the marker plays when on the portable rink.

This role in that environment is somewhat different to what would be expected of a marker during any other game. However, the basic principles still apply and there are a few tips and tricks that can be picked up and used in our domestic games. Apart from the speaking bits and trying to avoid cameras, I tend to do everything else the same when marking a club singles game or the world singles final.

A marker in a singles match is pretty essential.

A game can not progress satisfactorily without one.

However, a marker can make or break a game despite being 'neutral' in their role.

I have spoken before about the standard of marking and the efforts being made to improve the skills of these willing volunteers.

There is a little more to it than chalking some touchers and keeping a scorecard, and even that can go horribly wrong sometimes.

Some key skills include:

- Standing in a position that does not affect the players but gives you quick access to answer questions and mark touchers
- Being in the right position when heavy bowls are played so that you do not miss touchers or get hit by a bowl
- Completing tasks in a certain order when bowls and the jack go in the ditch
- Completing the scorecard accurately and at the appropriate time; and
- Answering the players questions accurately and appropriately

All of these skills contribute to efficient time management when you are on the rink and allow for a smooth game. Consistency in each game you mark will also mean that you can deal with anything different that is thrown at you unexpectedly. That consistency and basic skill is most definitely required on the portable rink allowing us to then deal with camera angles, shot clocks, crowd disturbances and other unexpected challenges.

A classic example I like to throw at markers course attendees is when to complete the scorecard. Usually, the audience is divided into those that complete it before leaving the head,



those that do it walking up the rink and those that complete it at the other end before or after centring the Jack. With the advocates of the former two positions, I simply hand them a set of shot indicators (lollipops) and it completely throws their routine. The impact of this is that they are likely to forget to complete the card or not use the shot indicators effectively.

Of course, on the portable rink we don't have to contend with scorecards or lollipops, we just have to remember what to say when we walk up the rink.

Another important factor that greatly affects the players is how you answer their questions. Obviously, any answer provided by the marker is their opinion and it will be for the players to take that answer as fact or not. This is only achieved if the marker has earned the respect and confidence of the players.

Some very well-known past and present players challenge markers in the first few ends of a game by offloading a barrage of questions.

A good indication they are trying to gain confidence in your ability.

Judging shots is not easy and takes a good deal of practice and skill. However, don't be afraid of calling a measure but maybe following that up with the shot that you favour. Calling distances of bowls also takes practice and a good understanding of what a measure of distance actually looks like.

It is very disconcerting for the player when you call a bowl one foot short when it is in fact two feet short. That can make the difference between changing hands or drawing around the bowl. I am happy to admit that I have to practise distances before attending a tournament where I am

marking, it does not come naturally to me and I would recommend all markers do the same.

I also openly admit there are times when I have stood on the portable rink and called a random number only for Beryl and Bill on the front row to snigger and offer the loan of their glasses.

Law 42.2.6 states that a marker must 'answer an specific question about the state of the head which is asked by the player in possession of the rink.'

So, what actually constitutes a 'specific question'?

There is still a common thought that markers should ONLY answer a question specifically with a distance, a yes, a no, or which bowl is holding.

Unfortunately, that approach gets thrown in the bin when the player asks "what's the situation please?" Is that specific enough for a marker to answer? Or should they simply ignore it?

Well, I think it would be foolish to ignore it and not give an answer.

Purists will argue that the question is not 'specific' and the law therefore does not allow the marker to answer it. They argue that the onus should fall on the player to ask the right question in order to get the answer they are looking for – I am sure there are a few of you reading this thinking the same as me. Perhaps those markers need to put themselves in the shoes of the player.

Let me give you another example of a question, I have heard, the answer to which divides the player and marker community.

Have a look at the photographs here. One is the view of the three bowls from the mat perspective and the other is

the same three bowls from above. Now, a conversation between player and marker could go like this:

Red player: "Am I holding one?"

Marker: "No."

Red player: "Am I one down?"

Marker: "No."

Red player: "Who holds shot then?"

Marker: "Blue."

Red Player: "So, I am one down then?"

Marker: "No."

Red player: "Well, how many shots are against me then?"

Marker: "Two."

The result is a very frustrated red player. This is an actual conversation; I am not making this stuff up. I hope that most of you will agree that this is a ridiculous dialogue to be having on the rink, but the marker has answered the 'specific questions' and complied with the letter of the law.

I would expect any decent marker to say the following:

Red player: Am I holding one?

Marker: No, you are two down.

You may have noticed the markers on the portable rink taking this very approach when answering players questions under the constraints of the shot clock.

Time is also gained by knowing the situation in the head at all times and anticipating players questions.

How many times have you asked a marker a question and three minutes later after walking around the head a couple of times they give you an answer. It does not build any trust between player and marker.

It is clearly important to not give too much information and that, I believe, is the intent of the law. It would clearly be unacceptable for a marker to say: "You are two down and you should draw on the backhand to rest this blue bowl which is three inches past jack high."

Marking courses are held throughout the world and it would be nice to think that the same guidance is being given to those learning this important skill.

Unfortunately, I fear that a consistent message is not being delivered and the risk is that players will end up with mixed messages from those that are standing at the other end of the rink looking pretty and marking the card.



Have any questions on the laws of the sport or officiating? Send them through to us here at Bowls International and we will do our best to answer them in future articles.

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