

Risk and Reward in Bowls



Every bowl carries risk and potential reward. Good tactical decisions come from balancing both against score, head shape, access, and your current execution reliability. This is not about avoiding risk. It is about using the right risk at the right time.



Why It Matters

Many costly errors happen when players choose a high-risk shot without checking whether the reward is worth the exposure.

The reverse is also true: players can miss opportunities by always choosing the safest option, even when match context requires a stronger move.

A clear risk-reward method improves consistency and late-end decision quality.

Risk-Reward Framework



Key Ideas



1. DEFINE

Define the required result first.



2. ASSESS

Assess head shape, access, and score.



3. AFFORD

Decide what affordable loss you can accept.



4. COMPARE

Compare shot options by outcome.



5. COMMIT

Commit to the best option and execute.



Affordable Loss

The outcome you can accept if execution misses.

It depends on score, stage of end, and match context.

Examples:

- One up: turning one up into one down may be too costly.
- Three down late: conservative play may not change match direction.
- Early in the end: a miss may be easier to recover.
- Late in the end: protect may be your affordable loss.

Clarify your affordable loss before choosing risk level.

Practical Example

Comparing three shot options for the same head.

Option	Best outcome	Likely miss outcome	When useful
Draw for cover	Protect score and improve shape	Still leaves partial protection	When ahead or stabilising
Yard-on to move counter	Gain count swing	May miss and change little	When moderate change needed
Full attacking weight	Open head and big scoring potential	Can open head and worsen count	When score pressure demands swing

The best tactical choice is often the option with strongest value across both hit and miss outcomes.

Common Mistakes / Things to Watch

- ⚠ **Chasing the miracle:** taking high-risk shots when the reward does not justify the exposure.
- ⚠ **Ignoring the context:** not factoring in score, stage, or rink position.
- ⚠ **No affordable loss:** not deciding what you can accept if the shot misses.
- ⚠ **Overvaluing potential:** focusing on the best-case outcome and ignoring likely miss.
- ⚠ **Decision drift:** changing your mind mid-delivery.
- ⚠ **Poor execution:** choosing the right risk but executing below your reliable standard.



Try This

- Before each bowl, say out loud: Define, Assess, Afford, Compare, Commit.
- Pick one bowl per end to map the risk-reward quadrant it falls into.
- Review one end after you play: Was the risk level appropriate for the context?
- Track your results over a session: Are you in the right zones more often?



Summary / Key Takeaway

Good decisions balance risk and reward. Define what you need, understand your affordable loss, compare options, and commit.

Better choices lead to better heads and stronger results.



Related Public Resource

Explore more in this series:

- How to Read a Head
- Choosing the Right Shot
- Weight and Line
- Building Heads
- Game Sense and Strategy

Visit your club or association website to access these free resources.