

# Tony Payne's Thermonuclear Cricket RE-LAUNCHED

## PICKING THE BEST FIRST SHOT!

### Part 4

One of the most important tactics in Cricket is knowing which number to shoot first. It is crucial to the implementation of proper strategy. Game shot considerations are especially important.

The thought processes that lead to picking the correct first shot cannot be explained easily. Experience will be your best teacher. Knowing your own ability as well as that of your opponent is certainly a factor. But there are some rules to follow that will make it easier for you to select the best first shot.

Normally, you should pick for a first shot the dart whose result, at this point, is uncertain. This is easier explained through illustration.

Suppose a single is required and a triple is required: Your opponent can probably be counted on to hit a single with one dart. He cannot be certain that he can hit the triple with one or even two darts. Although he may think he can, he won't actually know until he has shot it. Then it may be too late. Now the trick here is to leave yourself various options depending on the results of the first and second darts.

In this example, it's Opposer's shot. Certainly he is concerned with the 19's point threat. If the

opponent hits a single 19 for score, Opposer can regain the lead only by hitting two 15's (after closing the pie). That should not be his primary target.

Lets suppose on first dart that Opposer closes 19's, and with the remaining two darts goes for game shot but singles the 15 twice. What has happened?

Opposer has left his opponent a very makeable game shot. More important, Opposer has forced his opponent to take the game shot.

If Opposer had left 19's open and singles the 15 three times for a close, then his opponent still needs only three 15's for game. Here lies the kicker. If his opponent shoots 15's and misses on the first or second dart, it is very likely that, needing a triple or double to win with third dart and considering the improbability of hitting it, he may panic and shoot the 19's for points. If Opposer had closed the 19, opponent would have no choice but to take the game shot.

Here is a real situation that my partner, Mike Geiger, and I faced in the third leg of the finals of Open Doubles Cricket at a tournament: We're

a triple 15 last for game, my game shot will be single 18. I'm putting the pressure on the first dart, rather than the last, for game shot. However, on the other hand, by shooting triple 15 last, I will have game shot more often than by shooting triple 15 first, but I would not be so certain of the shot.

Personally, I'd rather know the result of that most crucial triple 15 first dart, and make allowances for it now (if necessary), than have to face the repercussions of missing it on third dart.

In this game, we hit single 15, single 15, triple 15, for 75 points. The opponents came back with triple 19 first dart, which left them two darts at 15 for game. Their second dart (at triple 15) missed, so they sent the third dart back at the 19 pie for points, hit a single, and thus racked up a total of 76 points.

Our shot, and again we faced the same situation. This time we hit the triple 15 first dart and tucked the match away with comparatively easy singles in the 18 and 19 wedges.

The point I'm making is two fold:

1. Put your first dart under the gun, so as to give yourself the most flexible position.

2. By shooting this option as I have explained it, you give your opponent a chance to panic instead of forcing him to take the game shot.

Here is a situation with some very interesting possibilities. By putting the first dart under the gun, we can reduce this traditional three-dart game-shot situation to a two-dart game-shot. It's

OPENER	CRICKET	OPPOSER
	20	
	19	X
	18	
	17	
	16	
	15	
	B	

OPENER	CRICKET	OPPOSER
↓	20	
	19	X
	18	X
	17	
	16	
	15	
	B	

playing the Opposer side and it's our shot. Down 31 points, game shot is triple 15, single 19, single 18. As I explained earlier, I want to shoot that shot first whose result, at this point, is uncertain (triple 15). If I hit the triple 15, then I leave myself a very makeable single 19, single 18 game shot. Rather than shooting

OPENER	CRICKET	OPPOSER		
99		20		90
		19		
		18		
	X	17		
		16		
		15	/	
	B	X		

Opposer's turn. If he shoots 17's first, then game requires three darts: single 17, triple or double 15, and a single bull. If he shoots bull first, then the game can be won in two darts: double bull, triple 15.

Let's assume Opposer shoots at the bull with his first dart and hits a single bull. Then he goes back at bull for points and sends his third dart at triple 15 for game. We're shooting bull for points with the second dart because that forces the opponent to score two 15's to get his point lead back.

Here's a riskier shot using the bull with the first dart, which you may want to try depending upon the ability of your opponent. If your first dart is a single bull, send your second dart at triple 15. If you single the 15, then your third dart should go to single 15 for the close. This requires your opponent to hit three bulls and 17 for game shot. I don't care who you are, that's pressure.

Of course, if on that first dart you hit the double bull, then you need just two fat 15's for match shot. I stress two fat 15's because it's foolish to shoot the triple or double in this situation. Why?

1. The triple is surrounded (or protected) by a heavy concentration of wire, which sometimes produces bounceouts.

2. The triple area is smaller than the fat area, which leaves you less room for error.

3. The area surrounding the double is also protected by wire. Moreover, darts on the outside of the wire will count nothing.

When 1, 2, or 3 singles are required for game shot and you have that corresponding number of darts in hand, always shoot fat. It pays to play percentages.

**CRICKET PRIMER**

This time, we asked Tony Payne to consider some more real-life situations from matchplay and share his opinions on appropriate strategy and alternate plans should the player fail to execute on the first or second dart.

**Example 1**

This example has been a real strategic game with each player scoring about 2.5 marks/turn. Opener just shot a s19 to regain the lead and then took two darts at the 17, catching a single on the last one.

OPENER		CRICKET		OPPOSER	
38		20		20	
74		19	/	60	
93		18		77	
112		17		94	
	/	16			
		15			
		B			

1. Was that a good strategy for Opener? What would have been better?

2. What should Opposer's strategy be?

This is a crucial part of the game for both players. The strategy for each player should be to emerge from the beginning part of the game with all numbers (20-17) closed and a point lead. The first player to do so will have an edge in that he'll be fighting a downhill battle while the other will have an uphill battle.

The ideal hit would be a triple and two singles. We want the triple to count full value. For Opposer that would be triple 17. For Opener, before he shot last turn, that would also have been triple 17. The question is what is the best and most efficient way to do this in a safe manner? That answer can be found in our earlier discussion. Shoot that number first whose outcome, at this time, is unknown.

For Opener, the first dart should have been at triple 17, then point. If triple 17 misses, then he should head for 19's with his last two darts. For Opposer (after Opener's shot, which was single 19, single 17), triple 17 first dart then two fat 19's. We're shooting fat on 19's to insure a close. If triple 17 misses, Opposer should stay on 17's with his last two darts. We're pointing on the last two darts to keep it difficult for our opponent to accomplish our mutual goal, which is to emerge from the beginning part of the game with all numbers closed and a point lead.

**Example 2**

Opener started with four 20's and Opposer countered with four 19's. A no-count by Opener allowed Opposer to shoot four 18's and close 20's with a triple! Opener then shot five 17's and Opposer responded with a triple 19 and caught the single 17 on the last of his two remaining darts. Opener shot three 17's to gain the point lead. It's now Opposer's turn:

OPENER		CRICKET		OPPOSER	
20		20		19	
54		19		37	
108		18		94	
		17	/		
		16			
		15			
		B			

1. What are his options?

2. What are the percentage shots?

With three singles (single 17, single 17, single 19) Opposer can emerge from beginning part of game with a nearly insurmountable lead. But we don't want to limit all of our darts to singles at this

stage of the game. For Opposer, the important shot at this time is to close the 17's. The percentage shot is first dart triple 19, hit or miss two fat darts at 17's for the close.

A single 17, single 17 and third dart at the bull is also a good option. The difference in points is almost negligible. A single and triple on any open number will get his points back.

Remember, any dart at bull at this time (no marks on bull as of yet) is always smart for two reasons.

1. We're shooting an open number in an attempt to bring the game to a close, which is in Opposer's best interest because he has the lead.

2. Opposer can't waste darts because it takes at least two darts to close the bull.

**Example 3**

This game has been a real point battle. Both sides are scoring almost 3 marks/turn, sometimes just 2 and then maybe 5. The Opposer has just scored two 15's to narrow the point difference to just 23. (Opposer's score is now 380 with one dart in hand left to throw.) He's had three other single darts at the 16 in trying to close it, but has caught only a single. Opener has done likewise on the 15's.

OPENER		CRICKET		OPPOSER	
		20			
		19			
		18			
		17			
403		16	/	350	
	/	15			
		B			

1. What's the best option on the last dart?
  - a. 16's?
  - b. bull?
  - c. score?

Clearly, Opener has a big advantage. Opposer is so far behind there is no amount of strategy that can pull this one out. Neither player as yet has the composure to put the game away.

Generally, in this situation I'd shoot bulls because a single 15 doesn't give Opposer a point lead. In this situation Opposer should ask himself if he can hit a bull. If he has doubt, then he should try to pick the triple 15.

