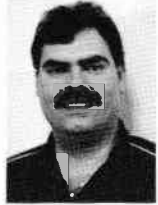


THERMONUCLEAR CRICKET



By Tony Payne

OPENER		OPPOSER
○ 20 ○		17
○ 19 ○		
○ 18 ○		
× 17 ○		
○ 16 ○		
× 15 ✓		
B		

Q. In this game, the Opener scores a miss, s15 (to close) and then pauses on what to do with his third dart. He decides to close the 17's but misses. Was this the correct strategy? Also, how important is maintaining your "rhythm" in a game? Does frequent pausing, to think out the next shot, affect your throws?

Tony: Opener had two options here: the 15 or the bull's eye. The most likely choice was the 15. Now, he misses the 15 with the first dart, closes on the second dart, and then tries for the 17 with his third. Was this strategy correct? No, I don't believe so.

Consider that this particular round is going to make or break the man. Obviously, he needs to trip that 15 for points; without them, he's sunk. I can see some merit in going for the 17, but this is desperation right now. Either you trip that 15 on that turn and give yourself a chance in this game or you are beat. It's that simple.

Secondly, rhythm is everything in a game. I think after you have enough Cricket games behind you and have developed what I call a sixth sense in knowing what your strategy is, then you pretty much know what to do without breaking your rhythm. In '01, when you hit a dart then reduce your score, it

automatically clicks into your head what you have left, and you don't have to break your rhythm.

I know I'm strongest when I'm up there throwing and can hardly get the darts out of my hand quick enough — I'm confident that my game is going well. Now, when I start hesitating and pausing, then the reason for that is confusion. And that will usually hurt you every time. I believe that if you take too much time to think, you give negative thoughts a chance to get into your game. In order for a player to be great he has to get up there and bang, bang, bang! And it does make for more interesting television darts.

Let's look at Darts in its proper perspective. It's a pretty simple game and it's boring. If you're taking too much time at the line, then it's going to kill the Sport, especially here in America. There's too much action on the other channels. Viewers don't want to sit around watching somebody take a whole minute at the line to throw three darts.

Q. Do you ever adjust your grip on the dart in relation to throwing at particular numbers? What about a change in your stance? What corrections (if any) do you make when you move on the oche to get a better shot on a particular target, or is it advisable to go after another number if you're blocked by a previously thrown dart?

Tony: You never adjust your grip. I've talked to some players who have, but never a great player. I hold the dart the same way every time. Of course, I throw the Tony Payne Signature Dart, but I believe that wherever you look at the target is where the dart is going to go, provided everything else is the same. I've never changed my grip in relation to trying to throw at a particular number.

Now, what about a change in stance? The fact is that a couple of years ago I would change for certain doubles and I've watch-

ed a few American players do it, so I thought there might be something to it. But after a while, I figured that if you are going to choke, you're going to choke no matter how or where you are standing. And if you're going to hit it, the same holds true. As I always say, if you have the proper frame of mind, you don't have to practice your doubles any different than you do your triples because you are going to hit them. It's just a matter of where you are looking.

As for correcting yourself at the line to get a better shot, there are some matters to note when you do move. If you line up perfectly center to the dart board, then move from side to side away from the center, you are going to be shooting at a longer distance, especially if you are severely blocked and still have to shoot at that target.

Suppose you are playing Cricket, and you have two darts blocking a triple but you still need to get a dart in there. You might have to move two or three feet to one side to get that shot. I've found that if I make a quick mental note that I am further from the target than normal, then things seem to correct themselves without me having to think about throwing harder or higher. Just make that mental note and trust yourself to make the adjustment; it'll easily work itself out. I base this on the school of thought that Darts is a game of mental prowess rather than physical prowess.

Finally, you ask if it's advisable to go after another number if you've blocked yourself with the previous dart. This depends upon the situation. In '01, I know that if my dart lands in 20 in a certain spot, it will deflect the rest of my darts coming in at the 20. In this case, I'll drop down to the 19 or even go over to the 18. I have no hesitation about scoring on another number.

Cricket is another story. Sometimes you have to throw at that number. Suppose I'm playing a top darter such as Rick Ney and I have the first shot at the 20's. If I go single, single and both are on top of the triple

blocking me, I'd be a fool to try to force that third dart into the 20. If it deflects wrong, catches a flight, robinhoods or just bounces out, I know that Rick is going to come behind me and pound that 20. It would be much smarter to shoot a fat 20, just below the double. The important thing for me is to close the 20.

I spend a lot of time in practice throwing one dart at the t20, another at the t19 and a third at t18. The 20 may be the bread and butter shot, but I now feel I can trip the 19 or 18 just as well. If you practice these other numbers, after a while you start tripping them with regularity. Then you develop a confidence about them and will be able to close and point more effectively.

Now, if you watch the great English players, they never seem to vary; they never deviate from that triple 20. They take shots at a seemingly blocked triple I wouldn't attempt, but they somehow manage to sneak, pound or force the darts in there. You watch them and wonder how they can consistently do it. When I try to force a dart in when the triple is blocked, it deflects. It seems like I always get penalized.

There is a temptation to shoot like one of the big boys and pound on that 20, hoping that the darts don't deflect. But, I'm not Eric Bristow, John Lowe or Bob Anderson. I have to do what works best for me, and that's to drop to the 19 or move over to 18. It's okay to want to be like other great

players, but if that doesn't work for you, you'd be silly to continue to do so.

* * *

Here's another point that needs to be covered. When I'm at a tournament, somebody will inevitably come up and say, "Watch my stroke and tell me what I'm doing wrong."

I'll watch them throw three, six, maybe nine darts, and nine out of ten times, they've got a perfect stroke. There is nothing wrong, and I tell them so.

Then they ask why they aren't getting any better. I ask them how much they practice. They'll say two or three hours per day plus league play three nights a week, etc. Then I ask them what they think about during practice. They talk about trying to figure out where they are holding the dart, how they are standing and how they are doing this and that.

"Stop!" I say. "You're doing everything right, so you don't have to think about that anymore." I point out that they already know

A couple of years went by, and I had an opportunity to watch myself throw darts via a video camera. After I watched myself, I thought "Tony, you've got one of the nicest strokes in the dart game." Then it hit me! So why am I continually trying to improve on it? The reason that I'm not as good as I want to be must lie somewhere else, I thought to myself.

I started looking in my head for the

answers. And that is how my game started to improve. One of the best hints I can give on bettering tournament play is not to beat yourself. I forget that very concept once or twice a year, then after I've been beat enough it'll come back to me. I'll realize that I've just been choking and refuse to continue the bad streak.

I'm not going to have any part of beating myself. Challengers will have to defeat the real Tony Payne. If more of you could think in these terms, your games would jump up dramatically.

How do you keep from choking? It's really tough. But, after you've been beaten enough and those losses have hurt deep down, it will finally hit you. You'll say, "I'm not going to choke any more." When you can incorporate that into your game, you are going to play up to your potential.

how to throw a dart; the problem is that they overanalyze their technique.

This takes me back to 1983 when I arrived on the dart circuit. Dick McGinnis, a good friend who was helping me start out, discussed in depth the stroke and other physical aspects of the game with me. He once warned me, "Tony, you are throwing great, but don't overanalyze what you are doing." At the time, I couldn't understand what he was talking about.



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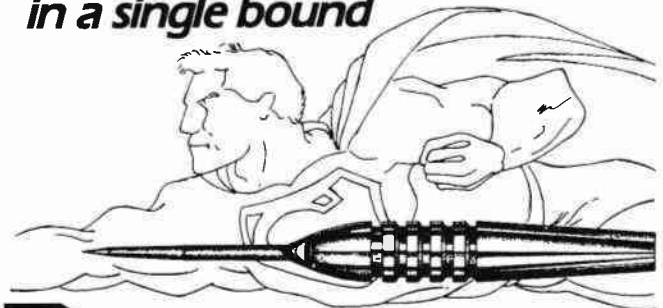
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