



TK Bowls – Bowling Guides

Guide No. 1

A Guide to Buying Bowls

If you are just starting to play bowls I suggest you do not rush out and buy a brand new set of bowls costing around 6-7,000 Baht without even trying them out. First play a few ends with different makes and sizes of bowls borrowed from friends or club colleagues in order to find out what sort of bowl you are most comfortable with. In doing so the advice in the following paragraphs is worth noting.

SIZE

You will need to decide the size of bowl that best suits your own hand. As a rough guide, the average size for men is 4, while for women size 2 or 3 is most common. Size 5 is 5" in diameter, size 4 is 1/16" less than this and each subsequent size is 1/16" less. A quick way of determining your proper size is to try spanning the running surface of a bowl with both hands. If with your thumbs touching, your middle fingers are just touching, the bowl is a correct fit. If there is a gap the bowl is probably too big and you need a smaller size. If your middle fingers overlap the bowl is too small and you are better using a larger size. Please bear in mind this procedure is only intended as a rough "rule of thumb" and the correct bowl is one which is comfortable for you to hold and deliver, without putting any undue strain on either your fingers or wrist. Please note some makes are slightly broader than others so size 4 in one make may be more comfortable than size 4 in another make. I generally advocate using the claw grip, which requires you to hold the bowl mainly with your fingers, rather than the cradle grip where you hold the bowl in your palm. If you prefer the cradle grip you could probably use one size bigger than if you use the claw grip. However it is for each individual to determine what grip suits him/her best

and what size of bowl feels comfortable in the hand. If you only play shortmat bowls you may be able to use a bowl one size bigger.

GRIP

I generally advise the use of a gripped bowl on grass surfaces, as this aids delivery in cold or wet conditions. Various types of grips exist, according to the manufacturer and make of bowl, so try out a few different grips to find which feels most comfortable. Some examples of different grips are deep dimples, shallow dimples, dimples with pimples, zig zag, small pimples, vertical grooves and crescent grooves. Remember the grip is neither aesthetic nor cosmetic, it is intended to improve your grip on the bowl, so it is a matter of trying them out to find your personal favourite. The type of grip really is just a matter of personal preference and indeed some players prefer to use a plain bowl, especially on indoor carpets.

WEIGHT

The next consideration is weight (ie medium, medium heavy, heavy or extra heavy). If you look at the serial number on a bowl it will begin with M or H, indicating if it is medium or heavy. I generally recommend starting with a medium weight bowl for grass and heavy weight for indoors, but again this is an individual choice, not a tablet of stone! However, if you need to use a very small bowl (e.g. size 00, 0 or 1) it is probably advisable to choose a heavy bowl in that size, as it will tend to hold its line on the lawn better than a lighter medium bowl. There is only about an ounce of difference between a H and M bowl or between sizes (e.g. size 4 is about an ounce heavier than a size 3). When it comes to indoor bowls I do think it is a little easier to make the necessary small adjustments to your delivery length on the much faster indoor carpets if you use a heavy weight bowl. Remember the extra weight involved is quite small and it is much easier to deliver a heavy weight bowl on carpet than on grass. Again the final decision is yours but in my experience the vast majority of players choose a

heavy weight bowl for indoor bowling while many more prefer a medium weight bowl for outdoor bowling. At the end of the day the choice is yours.

COLOUR

Black is still by far the most predominant colour, followed by brown, and of course most importantly they are also the cheapest. Coloured bowls (eg blue, red, green, speckled, etc.) are becoming more popular nowadays but the new price is usually about £40 more expensive and they will perform no better, so unless you like your bowls to stand out from the crowd, my advice is to start off with a standard black (or brown) bowl. Many more players nowadays prefer to use bright coloured bowls indoors, rather fewer use them outdoors on grass, as they tend to show more obvious signs of use on grass surfaces, which will usually contain small particles of grit, sand and fertilizer. Manufacturers also make more coloured bowls specifically for indoor use than outdoor use although the modern trend is definitely towards coloured bowls, which are becoming very popular especially among young players.

COST

Your first purchase should normally be a used bowl, which is still in pretty good condition, with only some minor surface scratches, but no serious scrapes or gouges and which is still reasonably new; by that I mean not more than about 15 years old. This bowl will perform just as well as a brand new bowl, but will cost you much less, most probably half the price of a new one. Should you subsequently decide to change a year or two later, it will only have lost a fraction of its cost. Do remember that a nearly new set of bowls will last you at least 10 years, so it is much better to buy wisely than to buy economically. Indeed penny wise & pound foolish is a good maxim when buying a set of bowls. They will give you much pleasure over a long time and are an excellent investment, bearing in mind that a used bowl costing around £75 will still be worth around £60 some 3 years

later, so it is really only costing you about £5 per annum! A bargain or what! A bowl with a centre logo is a little more valuable than one with none. Think of the hours of enjoyment you are going to get from your investment and spend what you can afford. Remember the initial expenditure on a good used set of black bowls when spread over 5 years is only about 800 Baht p/annum.

AGE

You can determine the age of a bowl by examining the oval / rectangular stamp on the side of the bowl. This is a 10 year manufacturers guarantee stamp, so if the year shown on the bowl is for example 13 it was actually manufactured in 2003. However, do remember that it may not have been used for some years after that date, as it may have been lying in a store or shop for some time before its sale. My advice is don't buy a bowl with a stamp older than 00, unless of course it has not seen much use and is in much better condition than its age would suggest. A World Bowls (WBB) stamp is slightly more preferable than a British Isles (BIBC) stamp, as some major competitions will insist on this particular stamp. However, as a newcomer to the sport, this is of much less significance than the general condition of the bowl itself, because it is only relevant if you reach the heights and wish to compete in regional or national competitions.

MAKE

The actual make of bowl is not that important, as all manufacturers (ie Henselite, Taylor, Almark, Drakes Pride, Greenmaster and Cotswold) produce good quality bowls, which must conform to the standards laid down in World Bowls Regulations. New Henselite bowls tends to be a bit more expensive than the others, but this price difference is much less marked when buying used bowls. Pay more regard to the actual brand name / title of the bowl. The following list indicates in descending order the width of draw for the 5 main manufacturers. ie **Henselite** -

Classic, Tiger, Tiger Pro, TigerII, ClassicII, Dreamline: **Taylor** - Lignoid, Legacy, International, Ace, Vector, Lazer: **Almark** - Sterling Gold, Sterling Slimline, Sterling King, CrusaderII: **Drakes Pride** - Professional Plus, Jazz, Professional, Advantage: **Aero** - Maxim, Groove, Revolution, Defiance, Space. I have listed the brand names shown above in order to give some indication of the type of drawing line that particular bowl will take (ie wide, medium, narrow) and whether it is intended for use on outdoors, short mat carpets or indoor stadium carpets. Bowls, with only a very few exceptions, are generally designed either for indoor or outdoor use. An indoor bowl is designed to have a much narrower bias than an outdoor bowl. An outdoor bowl has usually much too wide a swing for use indoors and is too difficult to control consistently if you really want to be competitive, so unless you are a masochist, use a set of bowls made for the purpose. When I say indoor bowls I am referring to stadium bowls, not shortmat bowls. There are very few bowls manufactured specifically for short mat bowls, although Stevens (previously associated with crown green bowls) have recently entered this market with an attractive range of coloured bowls. Generally speaking most outdoor bowls are also suitable for use on short mat carpets but wider swinging bowls are especially favoured. The first two named bowls in each list of manufacturers bowls would therefore be intended for outdoor use and the latter two named for indoor stadium use. If you require advice on the actual draw line of any particular bowl please ask and I will be only too pleased to help. If the bowl has a logo in the centre it is generally worth a little more than a bowl with a plain centre. Nowadays all new bowls have to be made with a centre logo.

SUMMARY

There are now well over 30 different bowls available in UK, in 8 sizes (00 - 6), in 4 weights (medium, medium heavy, heavy, extra heavy), and at least 7 different types of grips or plain. A buyer certainly has a wide range to select from and such a choice can often be rather confusing to a beginner or novice. However bowlers are generally a friendly bunch and only too ready to help newcomers to the club choose a satisfactory set of bowls, so please don't be shy of asking for their advice. As a beginner you would be best advised to start with a narrow to medium drawing bowl, as you will probably be asked to play at the front end of a rink, where your primary task is to place your bowl as close to the jack as possible.

