

Key Points from Coaching Session at Nottingham for Mercia 29th October 2016

Initial Principle – If it is suggested that you should change part of your technique, and it appears to work, it is important that you stick with it and don't revert to your previous style (comfort zone) once the pressure is on, otherwise we have wasted our time and effort. You need to accept that any change to your game will lead to your results dropping for a while as you concentrate on the new element but that your overall game will eventually build back stronger than before.

Pointing considerations

The skill of the pointer is to work out the best combination of height of trajectory, distance of the landing spot from the circle, hardness / softness, thickness / scarcity of cover and the slope of the ground to arrive at the desired spot relative to the jack.

You need to be able to land a boule at a variety of distances from the circle to find a good landing spot and to avoid difficult landing areas such as uneven stones, muddy patches or soft ground. It may also be necessary to lob point over front boules, especially if the jack has been moved back beyond them. Finding a good landing spot is essential.

Having identified your landing spot (the *donnée*), you are allowed to fill in one hole made by a previous boule. Even if your shooter doesn't need one filled, it is a good idea to fill a hole to make your pointer's life easier later in the end. Prepare the ground to give the best result.

Pointing technique

Grip - You need to hold the boule with your fingers together and your thumb alongside but not using it to grip the boule. Choose boules small enough to hold backhand without effort.

Stance – Stand with your right foot forward (if you are right-handed) pointing towards the line of throw and your left foot slightly behind and at an angle. This gets your hip out of the way to allow a straight swing and the back foot improves sideways stability. Left-handers reverse these positions.

Backswing – Create the longest backswing that you can comfortably manage as this allows greater acceleration before release and allows you to throw greater distances through the air without straining (too much effort leads to loss of control). Players who tend to step forward at the end of the throw usually have a short or non-existent backswing because they have to commit body weight forward to reach the target.

Use of other arm – Prepare by holding your 'other arm' slightly behind you and a bit away from your body. This helps to reduce shoulder movement (the pivot point) during the throw.

Follow-through – Try to follow through with a straight arm towards the landing point to avoid putting accidental 'side' on the boule.

Release – Keep your hand level and your fingers together so that the boule can backspin off your fingertips. This increases control after the landing. If you drop your hand to one side (usually the little finger) this produces sidespin rather than backspin and boules run too far or veer off.

Flex your knees to help with high lob points and use your whole body, not just your arm.

Shooting Considerations

There is very little difference between pointing and shooting in terms of technique. Both are attempts to land on a particular spot. The spot in shooting just happens to have a boule on it.

The main variation is that shooters need to throw further through the air than pointers to reach the target and therefore need the longest possible backswing to accelerate the boule before release.

Shooting technique

Greater backswing is achieved by bending forward at the waist to enable the arm to be drawn back as far as possible, whilst keeping the head still.

The mindset should be to land on the target, rather than hitting it hard and flatter. The release should be late enough to loop with a high trajectory which means that the boule will come down steeply and stop more quickly, even if it misses the target boule.

It isn't always necessary to shoot boule-to-boule (unless you are a purist) but you must be able to do so because there will be many occasions when you have to shoot over boules in front or even difficult ground. Master that and you can modify your technique if the situation allows.

General Points

You should develop a routine for both pointing and shooting. Every shot or point should be a separate event with mental preparation and concentration when you are in the circle.

Leave your other boule(s) off the playing area to force you to leave the circle and reset before the next play. Holding one in your other hand leads to a tendency to simply swap the next boule over to throw without leaving the circle. At some stage, you will not have another boule to hold and that will feel different.

Visualise the flight of the boule before you throw. Imagine the boule looping and landing on the donnée or on the target boule. This technique is employed in the coaching of golf, darts and other target sports and is evident in the visualisation of the flight of the ball in the sport of rugby by players preparing to take penalties and conversion kicks.

Practices

Confidence is born of consistency and consistency comes through practice.

Practise landing at a variety of distances to arrive at the same position in front of the jack.

Test your ability to control the length of the run by putting the jack 10cm in front of a barrier and playing to get within 50 cm without touching the barrier. A high delivery puts the brakes on.

Place an obstruction in front of the landing spot to encourage you to loop rather than trundle.

Do this, as well, when shooting, to practise 'boule to boule' so that you can get to targets over obstructing boules.

To promote a boule, trail a jack or point through a narrow gap, throw the boule with height as close to the gap as possible to minimise the chances of it running off line.

To practise shooting, play the conditioned games where you get a point for every hit as well as what is on the ground (playing to 31) or insist that each team uses at least four of their six boules for shooting on every end. The 'Shooter' game, where two players play singles and must request the third player to shoot twice for each of them, is purposeful practice when only three turn up.

Place boules in line across and shoot the middle one without touching the other two or place three boules in line away and target the back, then the middle, then the front, in sequence.