
Selecting Lawn Bowls

What size, weight, model, and grip should I buy?

Fernleigh Bowls Seminar - October 10, 2019 - Josh Sayer



Introduction

Buying a set of lawn bowls can be intimidating to first-time buyers. Should you buy new or used? What models will work well here at Fernleigh? What models will work if you choose to travel to a tournament elsewhere in the country? All of the major brands have salespeople who will recommend their favorites to you, but none of these salespeople have bowled at Fernleigh before and none of them bowl regularly here in the Northeast US. Since there are no retailers in this part of the country, you don't really have the option of trying out a set and then trading it in if you don't like it later. In addition, due to the weight of a set and the fact that bowls are all imported from overseas, it is expensive and time consuming just to have them shipped here. For most bowlers, buying a set of bowls is a one-time purchase, so my goal here is to give you my advice to get you the right set for you the first time.

What size and weight bowls should I buy?

Modern bowls manufacturers make bowls in various sizes from 00 to 5. The relatively new Aero manufacturer makes half sizes as well. If buying used, you may find a set of size 6 or 7 bowls on eBay or another website. So, what size is right for you? The chart below lists the diameters and weights of the different sizes of bowls. In general, you want the largest, heaviest set that you can comfortably hold. A common mistake I see at Fernleigh is someone switching to a smaller bowl because they are having trouble reaching the jack. Increased diameter leads to lower rolling resistance (less friction with the green) and increased weight leads to greater momentum, both of which mean that the larger bowl will roll further given the same initial arm swing speed. If you can't reach the jack, try a bigger bowl and see if that helps! Also, a heavier bowl makes it easier for you to move an opponent's or partner's bowl and makes it harder for your opponent to move your bowl. Even the heaviest bowls weigh less than 4 pounds, so they shouldn't be too heavy for you. Note that if buying used, the bowls may be marked with the actual diameter instead of the size numbers.

| Size | 00 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Diameter (inches) | 4 9/16 | 4 11/16 | 4 3/4 | 4 13/16 | 4 7/8 | 4 15/16 | 5 |
| Medium Weight (lbs-ozs) | 2-09 | 2-11 | 2-13 1/4 | 2-15 3/4 | 3-1 1/2 | 3-3 3/4 | 3-5 3/4 |
| Heavy Weight (lbs-ozs) | 2-10 1/2 | 2-13 3/4 | 2-15 3/4 | 3-1 1/2 | 3-3 1/2 | 3-5 1/4 | 3-7 1/4 |

Testing for size

There are 3 basic tests that can tell you what size bowl to use. To start, find sets of bowls in the various sizes that you think you are interested in. Next, I start with the fingertip test. Place your thumbs together around the widest part of the running surface of your bowl. Reach around the bowl with your middle fingers. They should touch or just about touch on the opposite side of the bowl. If you have overlap, try a larger size. If there is a gap, try a smaller size until you find the size bowl that most closely matches your hand size.

Gap between fingers
Bowl is too big



Overlap of fingers
Bowl is too small



Fingertips meet
Bowl is just right



Once finished with the fingertip test, make sure that the bowl really is comfortable for you by using the remaining tests. Depending on the grip you use to bowl, you may be able to move up a size or may have to move down a size from the fingertip test. Hold a bowl like you are about to bowl it and bring it to the furthest back point on your normal backswing. Can you comfortably hold the bowl there for a few seconds without changing your grip? If so, the bowl should work for you. If you can't hold the bowl there, you may need to drop a size. The final test is to use them in a short game and make sure you can deliver the bowl correctly.

What grip should I choose?

The only way to know what grip you like is to try out a set. Sorry I can't help with this option, it is just the style you play and what feels comfortable to you!

What brand/model should I choose?

Fernleigh is a slow outdoor green which should be taken into consideration when buying bowls. Narrow biased bowls (which turn less than average) are very popular internationally on the lightning fast greens of Australia and New Zealand but in general perform poorly on slower greens like ours. A few of our bowlers bought sets of narrow bowls a few years ago (on recommendation from a salesman) and now have trouble getting their bowls to turn at all. Narrow bowls are also more strongly affected by imperfections (hills, bumps, etc) in the green than wider biased bowls. I would only suggest purchasing narrow biased bowls if you are planning on playing on other, faster greens (particularly abroad, in the Southwest US, or on artificial surfaces like the one in New Jersey) on a regular basis. For bowling at Fernleigh I suggest either a standard (medium) biased bowl or a full (wide) biased bowl. There are 3 categories that I break things into each with their own advantages and disadvantages. I have used bold font for bowls that I recommend from the companies that George and Sandy have worked with. I have included the bias charts on page 6 for the 4 largest brands if you would like a visual for what I am describing.

Standard bias, consistent: These bowls have a fairly even curve throughout their entire line of travel. This style is very easy to get used to and are my recommendation to bowlers who plan to play lead throughout their careers at Fernleigh. At Fernleigh, they will remain a little on the narrow side and won't let you get around any short bowls up front (a common occurrence at Fernleigh), but if you are a lead there shouldn't be any short bowls when you get up to bowl. They are also excellent bowls if you plan to travel and do some of your playing on faster greens and are an overall great pick. Northeast Division Bowler of the Decade Patrick Duffy plays mostly with a set of Henselite Tigers.

Examples: **Henselite Tiger**, Drake's Pride Fineline, **Taylor Ace**, Aero Groove/Sonic.

Standard bias, strong finish: These bowls start their roll a little straighter, but then turn more strongly at the end to achieve the same total amount of curve as the consistent models above. This style will take a little more time to get used to, but the ability to get around some of the bowls up front can be very helpful in games. These are excellent bowls for both leads and skips and are closest to the traditional bowls many of you started with in our lessons. My father uses this style of bowl when he plays lead for my uncle and they've brought home

2 national championship wins as a team. I also use a set of Henselite Classics when bowling on faster greens (I tend to like more finish in my bowls than most other division bowlers).

New Examples: **Henselite Classic TRL/Classic II**, Drake's Pride Professional, Taylor International/**Legacy SL**.

Used Examples: Henselite Classic/Classic Deluxe/Standard/Championship, Drake's Pride Excel, Taylor Standard, bowls marked bias 2 or bias 3.

Full bias: These bowls curve more than the standard models above. This style will take the most time to get used to (you can't just follow the line of your opponent), but I find the increased bias to be incredibly helpful in games. These are my recommended bowls for skips who are jealous of how much curve I get when I play wide to get around a pile of short bowls. If you have been bowling with a set of Brunswicks from the club, you may already be used to this extra bias and I suggest that you don't go any lower. The extra bias (when on a slow enough green to be controllable) gives you the greatest selection of shots since you can usually draw around or through a hole in the pile, play with a little more weight to stay straighter and either promote a teammate's bowl or knock out an opponent's bowl, or they will stay very straight when thrown with the force required to just break everything up. Both my uncle and I usually bowl with full bias bowls. They are unusable or borderline unusable on very fast greens so I leave them home when I bowl in New Jersey.

Examples: Drake's Pride XP, **Taylor Lignoid**.

Used Examples: Henselite Full Bias, Drake's Pride Professional Plus, Most Brunswick brand bowls, Taylor-Rolph Concorde, bowls marked bias 4 or bias 5.

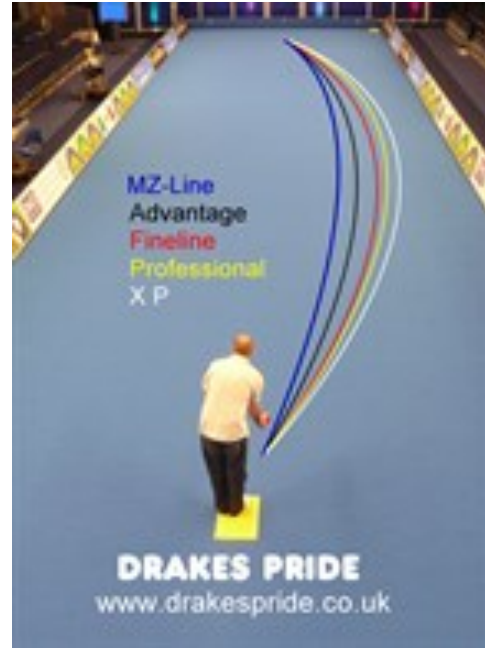
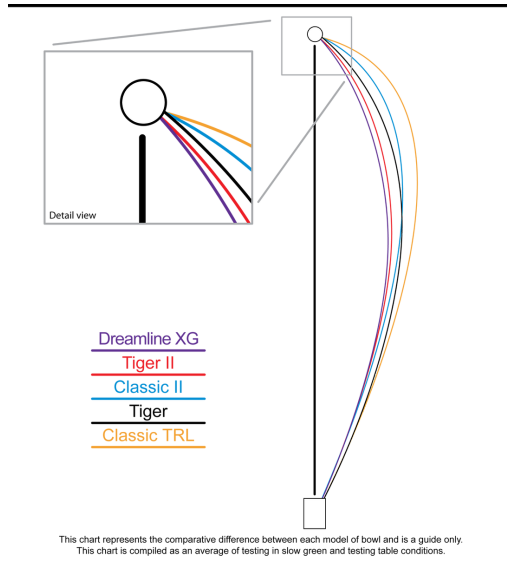
New or Used?

When taken care of, bowls will last you a lifetime so used sets are a great way to save money. Be careful that the set comes with all 4 bowls. According to stories, many Scottish bowlers were buried with 1 of their set, leaving a set of 3. Also, some clubs that played "rinks" (4 players per team, 2 bowls per player) would split a set into 2 sets of 2.

Note: To play in national or international tournaments, you should buy new bowls since the inspection stamp still needs to be legible for national tournaments and needs to be less than 10 years old for international tournaments. While the "visible stamp" rule technically exists for divisional tournaments, I've never been called on it while playing with my great-grandfather's bowls and I've never seen anyone else called on it either.

Bias Charts for the major brands.

Henselite



Taylor

EVERY BOWL A WINNER

TAKE YOUR PICK

- LAZER**
A slim profile bowl. Precision narrow bias. Progrip as standard. Designed for indoor and fast outdoor conditions.
- VECTOR VS**
Narrow drawing arc with no hook at the finish. Recommended primarily for all indoor surfaces and artificial surfaces.
- ACE**
Slightly wider drawing arc than the Vector VS with no hook at the finish. Recommended for all indoor and outdoor surfaces.
- INTERNATIONAL**
Similar to the Ace but with a stronger finish. Recommended for all indoor and outdoor surfaces.
- LEGACY SL**
A neat slim profile bowl, for easier grip and control. Medium to wide bias with a controlled draw to the jack. Progrip as standard.
- LIGNOID**
Predominantly an outdoor bowl with a wide draw, recommended for outdoor grass surfaces and short-mat play. Features Progrip as standard, the Lignoid retains a high quality finish at an extremely competitive price.

Aero

