

Short Mat Bowls: The Essential Rules

Short mat bowls is a game of skill and precision played on a foam-backed carpet (usually 45ft x 6ft). The objective is to get your bowls closer to the **Jack** than your opponent.

1. The Equipment

- **The Mat:** A standard mat is 6 feet wide and between 40–45 feet long.
- **The Fender:** A wooden surround at the "ditch" end to keep bowls on the mat.
- **The Center Block:** A wooden block placed in the middle of the mat. Bowls must not touch or pass over this block.
- **The Jack:** A small, weighted yellow ball.

2. General Gameplay

- **Starting the End:** Players toss a coin to decide who bowls first. The winner delivers the Jack to a designated spot.
- **Delivery:** Players must stand entirely within the **delivery mat** (the "footer"). At the moment of release, at least one foot must be on or over the delivery mat.
- **The Delivery:** The bowl must be rolled. It cannot be dropped or thrown.

3. Key Rules & Violations

To keep the game challenging, there are several ways a bowl can be declared "dead" and removed from the mat:

Rule	Description	Penalty
The Center Block	The bowl must not touch the wooden block in the center of the mat.	Bowl is dead / removed.
Ditch Rules	A bowl that enters the ditch without touching the Jack is dead.	Bowl is dead / removed.
Line Fouls	The bowl must stay within the side boundaries of the mat.	Bowl is dead / removed.
"Touchers"	If a bowl touches the Jack during its original delivery, it is marked with chalk.	Stays live even in the ditch.

4. Scoring

- An "end" is finished when all players have delivered their bowls.
- The player/team with the bowl closest to the Jack scores **one point**.
- If they have multiple bowls closer to the Jack than the opponent's nearest bowl, they receive one point for each.
- The winner of the end starts the next one.

5. Etiquette

- Stand behind the mat while your opponent is bowling.
- Do not move or "kick" the bowls until the score has been agreed upon by both sides.
- Keep the mat clean; usually, flat-soled shoes or "bowling slippers" are required to avoid damaging the carpet.