Strategies and Tactics

A collection of suggested strategies and tactics for Gateball games

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Gateball Australia is the name that the Australian Croquet Association Incorporated (ACA) has registered and uses for its Gateball operations. The ACA is the recognised National Sporting Organisation for mallet sports in Australia.
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STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Fundamental to the game in the first 15 minutes is control of Gate 2.

When Team A has Gate 2 covered the strategy for Team B to dislodge Team A's balls from in front of Gate 2 is essential in order for Team B to gain control of the game. While Gate 2 is covered by Team A's balls, Team A has the opportunity not only to make that Gate, but prevent access to the Gate by Team B. When Team A makes Gate 2 with 3 or 4 of its balls, it can move on to attack the balls of Team B at Gate 3 in the knowledge that it has a comfortable lead in the game.

The strategy of the captain of Team B should be focused on gaining control of Gate 2.

The Toss

Tactic 1 – The Toss
After winning the toss a team Captain has the choice of either leading or following. This decision is key as it will potentially affect the chances of gaining a good starting strategy for a team.

Choosing to always lead (playing red) is not always the best choice as an opposing team may be more conversant playing as the following team.

Chinese teams are more likely to favour playing as the following team. If they win the toss they are likely to play as the following team.

On the other hand the Japanese usually prefer to lead but often make the concession of playing following if they believe that doing so allows their opposition a big advantage.

If possible, it is important to have an idea as to what the opening strategy of the opposition team is likely to be. That way, strategies can be devised to stop the opposition gaining an early advantage.

If the opposition is a totally unknown quantity then a team should choose the colour they are most comfortable playing. For example, a team that is better at controlled gate making and positioning should play red by leading.

The team which is more accurate with longer shots as well as aggressive play and number manipulation (finding gaps in the playing order) should probably follow.

Opening Strategies for the Leading Team

FIRST BALLS OFTHE LEADING TEAM

Tactic 2 – Gate 2 Side Strategy
The traditional response is to place the first red ball very close to Line 2 but in a gate running position for the beginning of the second round. This standard opening is not used so frequently overseas. Increasing accuracy by the following team may result in this ball being attacked by incoming white balls.

Teams may increasingly decide to sit on or very close to Line 2, in line with the gate or up to a metre behind. A later ball may be placed in position for this ball to regain the front of the gate.

Tactic 3 –Gate 2 Side Strategy +
If Gate 2 is covered with one ball placed very tight to Line 2, a team may decide that another ball can be placed there too. Balls really tight to the line like this can carry out some powerful plays at the beginning of the next round. It was success with this strategy that lead to one of the two victories by Australian teams at an Australian Gateball Championship.

Tactic 4 – Placing a reception or connecting ball on Line 3
If Gate 2 is covered by a ball in a gate running position, a later ball may be placed close to the middle of Line 3 so that the first ball can connect with it on passing Gate 2. This ball is then in position for the gate running ball to slide off or spark to another position. Some players refer to this as the Japanese position as this technique was usually employed by Japanese players who first came to Australia to educate players about the game.

Tactic 5 – Double Gate Grab
Play a ball or balls to Gate 3 after placing a ball at Gate 2. This approach can be a counter to a team that aggressively attacks as the following team. The aggressive approach succeeds if balls pass Gate 2 after passing Gate 1. Teams that play this tactic to an extreme are said to be using "*Blitzkreig Stategy*" A Double Gate Grab is a means of countering this approach as balls at Gate 2 make it more of a challenge to blast through Gate 2 and then to blast through Gate 3.

Tactic 6 – Partial Holdback
The leading team should also consider holding balls back after another strategy has been attempted with the opening two balls. This is especially the case where the following team is known to be proficient at using the holdback strategy. Balls that are held back can always be played in to slide off balls placed behind Gate 1. A ball sent as a pioneer or pivot ball can also be sparked where it can attack opposition balls or run a gate when a holdback ball enters a court.

Tactic 7 – Third Line Attack Strategy
Leading teams will often attempt this aggressive move especially with later balls. An attack is made on Gate 2 with the intention of the ball coming to rest near C 3. Control of the length of the Gate 1 pass should be considered so that the ball can either connect with another team ball on passing the gate or being in a position to be touched and sparked by another team ball that passes Gate 2

Opening Strategies for the Following Team

FIRST BALLS OF THE OPPONENT TEAM

Tactic 8 – Hold Back Approach, The Full Monty
This strategy is widely accepted as the best opening strategy amongst Chinese players as they adopt a highly offensive strategy which focuses around being the following team rather than the leading team.

This generally involves playing white and not bringing any balls on until ball 10 which then sets a slide opportunity to Gate 2 with ball 2.

This strategy is highly effective against a team which is cautious in their play and does not often take risks.

This approach should only be attempted by teams prepared to be offensive with this technique and whose players have the confidence and ability to carry this out. These players would need to be strong gate makers and highly competent at slides. If the team is unable to make these shots with at least a 90% accuracy the strategy can misfire.

Tactic 9 – Second Line Edge Strategy
The following team may decide to bring on ball 2 with a long cross shot and tuck really tight to Line 2 about 3-4m towards Gate 2. If this ball is not tight to the line, there is a good chance this ball will be made an outball by ball 3. If this happens, ball 4 can be held back and benefit from Ball 2 being played into a slide position at the beginning of the second round.

A possible result of this play is that there is an attack by red 3 on white 2 which misses. This can leave a two ball target for ball 4. Ball 4 enters play with a long cross shot, touches on of these two balls and cleans out the opposition at Gate 2.

Tactic 10 – Third Corner Swift Attack Strategy
Teams will often attempt this aggressive move. A controlled cross shot through Gate 1 will finish in a position where a long shot at Gate 2 will sometimes pass Gate 2 but at least end up in a defensive position in Corner 3 or tight to the far end of Line 2.

If Gate 2 was run, this ball can sometimes attack red balls at Gate 2, tuck in near the line or move to gate 3 to adopt a position where its path through gate 2 can control the area behind gate 3. Possibilities open up of being able to set up a gate touch or post gate slide for this ball

Some teams will aggressively attack Gate 2 with most of their balls after passing Gate 1. This is sometimes referred to as the *Blitzkreig Strategy.* Of the strategies referred to in this document, this strategy has had the least success when playing overseas teams.

Tactic 11 -Take 3
Many Australian teams have previously placed their first and second white balls at gate three. Originally these were placed just in front of Gate 3 and tight to line 4. Others prefer placing the balls between the gate and line and some migrate to a position behind the gate. During the second round, these balls were used to set up an aggressive slide to attack red's control of gate 2 or, at some point, an opportunity may arise to spark a ball over to Gate 2.

Placement of balls 2 and 4 together in order to mount an attack can be set up in other parts of the court instead of at Gate 3, for example:

-Playing a short reverse cross shot towards line 1 Ball 2 is then played into corner 1 in an effort to group at least two balls together (2,4.) This can be highly effective as it is the largest distance that can be created between the white balls and the red balls at Gate two. This strategy is used best against a team which is highly defensive as they are unlikely to attempt to go through gate 1 and attempt to attack balls in front of Gate 1

- A riskier approach is playing to Corner 2 – A long reverse cross shot through Gate 1 can position the ball in Corner 2. Playing the ball extremely close to or on the line in corner 2 is highly effective against more offensive teams. Playing a ball to this corner will allow for the 2 ball to have a relatively straight shot at Gate 2 before ball 3 plays This can be an advantage if it can be run with control to take advantage of a misplaced ball 3 if it so exists.

Tactic 12 – Partial Holdback
Even if the following team has decided to use other opening strategies there are advantages to using holdback with some of the team's later balls. Balls that are held back can always be played in to slide off balls placed behind Gate 1. A ball sent as a pioneer or pivot ball can also be sparked where it can attack opposition balls or run a gate when a held back ball enters a court.

Partial holdback can also be used to create challenging scenarios with held off balls. For example, if white 2 and 6 are played on in the first round but 4 is kept off an interesting attacking scenario for round 2 is created assuming 3 is on the court. Ball 2 can place 6 as a pivot ball for 4 coming in. Ball 6 can be used as a slide ball for 4 and also be sparked to a situation where it can score a gate or take out opposition balls.

Tactic 13 – Beware of Early Outballs
Beware of being too aggressive as the following team. When several balls become outballs, it takes some time to recover while the Red team piles on the points.

General Playing Strategies

Tactic 14 – Gate Touch and Touch Gate
When two or more balls of the same team are at a gate, try to set up for a 'Gate and Touch' or a 'Touch and Gate' stroke.

Tactic 15 – Watch Opposition Tactics
All team players should assist the captain and check for danger situations.

If the opponent is set up for an assured gate and touch or touch and gate, scatter the balls of your team to minimise damage.

Tactic 16 – Setting Up Behind a Gate
Avoid setting up behind a gate unless the front of the gate is controlled by a ball of your team.

Tactic 17 – Close to the Line
Set up close to the boundary line and try and keep your team's balls about 1 metre apart. This lessens the chance of an opposition attack.

Tactic 18 – Clusters & Starbursts
Don't cluster balls if you are not in control of a game. If balls are together, set up the other two balls at a distance.

However, if the team has strong control of the game (significant opponents balls are out-balls), then there are advantages in getting all balls together. This enables balls to be sparked to positions to ensure control is maintained. Some have called this a **starburst** strategy from which balls are sparked to all corner of the field to take control of a game.

Tactic 19 – Avoid midfield clusters
Don't cluster balls away from the boundary as this exposes them to a Touch by an aggressive stroke by the opponent.

Clusters of balls can be a focus for an opposition attack but if it is safe to cluster balls, a situation will often arise where balls can be sparked to attack.

Tactic 20 – Looking for Gaps in Numbers
Look for situations where an opponent's ball is an out-ball and your team's balls either side of the out-ball number are together, For example, if 4 is an out-ball, and 3 and 5 are together, then 3 can touch 5 and spark 5 to a position on the court without any danger from 4. This is a very powerful tactic to get control of the game.

Keeping balls pairs together is a very powerful tactic. For example, keep 2 and 4 together so that ball 2 can spark ball 4 to a favourable position. Don't forget that the balls 1 and 9 and balls 2 and 10 are also pairs.

At the same time it is important to avoid creating these opportunities for your opposition.

Tactic 21 – Constant Attack
Always attack the opponent balls even when your team has a clear lead and control of the game. Do not allow the opponent to regroup for an attack on your team. However, during the last 5 minutes or so of the game, it may be better to concentrate on making gates and the goal pole. Remember that the game is often won or lost in those last minutes.

A great danger, for a team focussing on control at gate 3, is to allow the opposition to score and make G&Ts at gate 2. Come from behind wins are often achieved this way.

Spark balls to opponent balls to ensure opponent balls are not in a position to get back into the game.

Tactic 22 – Chains
Use chains to allow your team's balls to reach targets like Gates or the Goal Pole. Care is required with the numbers however.
Use both your team's balls and opponent's balls if appropriate.

Tactic 23 – Slide Slide Slide
Nearly every stroke to touch another ball can benefit from a slide. Slides can be used to place the stroker's ball in a position to:

- pass a gate,
- move closer to the next ball to touch, or
- on occasions, mount an attack from one side of the court to the opponent's balls on the other side.

Always consider a slide when attempting a Touch. If the target ball is close, the prospect for an accurate slide will increase.

Tactic 24 – Outballs
Consider playing in an outball just inside the boundary or onto the court boundary in a defensive position but ready to attack if the opportunity arises.

Tactic 25 – Use Opponent Balls
Before sparking an opponent to an outball, consider using it to assist your own team's play.

Tactic 26 – Bombards
Every time you spark, look for opportunities to bombard an opposition ball but think carefully before attempting a risky bombard on the next opposition ball to play. There may be occasions, especially at the end of the game where you bombard with your own team's ball!

Tactic 27 – Take advantage of unusual situations
Sometimes when sparking several opposition balls out, they can all be sent out in the same position. Putting your ball tight to the line and right in front of the outballs, limits where opposition balls can be played in.

Sparking an opposition ball onto the goal pole in the early stages of the game can have unexpected advantages. Without a certain numbered ball on the lawn, the opposition team has a ball that can be sparked anywhere on the lawn to attack.

End of game

Tactic 28 – Watch the clock

In the last 5 to 7 minutes each ball will only have one more turn. Make final turns count and be prepared to end your turn quickly if the following player can score plenty of points.

Tactic 29 – Goal Pole Opportunities

If two balls of your team with consecutive numbers have made Gate 3, try to keep these balls together when near the end of the game. On the final turn of these balls in the game, for example 2 and 4, then the first ball to play, 2, touches 4 then sparks 4 to near the goal-pole then 2 is positioned near 4 for the continuation stroke. When 4 plays, it touches 2, sparks 2 onto the goal-pole and then touches the goal-pole itself thereby gaining an additional 4 points.

If the time is close to the end, and your team has balls for the goal-pole, consider the tactic to peg these balls out to obtain the 2 points rather than the tactic to continue to try and make gates with the other balls.

Tactic 30 – Aggressive End Game

If your team is in front on points and the game is close to the end, for lone balls, consider strokes that are aggressive and if not successful will place the ball outside the boundary. This can achieve two objectives; the first is to Touch a distant ball or to make a gate; if the aggressive move fails, then the second objective is that the ball will become an out-ball and will not be available for use by the opponent team in the final minutes of the game.

Near the end of the game, consider aggressive strokes by lone balls.

Tactic 31 – Sparking Your Team's Ball Through A Gate

Earlier in the game this tactic should generally be avoided. Sparking balls through Gates forgoes the opportunity for the stroker to have a continuation stroke on passing the Gate and diminishes the number of occasions when Gate / Touch can be set up. This tactic should only be attempted when an opposition attack will thwart these Gate opportunities or at the end of a game, especially if the sparked ball is unlikely to get another turn.

Sparking your team's ball through a Gate is a useful tactic in certain circumstances, but always first consider, other opportunities carefully.