

Why have a captain?

We played a game recently against a team of new players. It was a triple. All three stood near the circle. They never ventured to the head until we told them the game was over and they wanted to know the score. We told them. They didn't argue.

In an end when they realised it was a close thing between a couple of boules they asked someone to measure for them. We said "No No you can" but they didn't have a measure.

It wasn't their fault. They were new to the game. When the teams were put together the Club should have put an experienced player alongside 2 newbies.



The team needed a captain.

It sounds so formal to have a captain for a team of 2 or 3 players. Is it really necessary or will it help the team function? We think yes.

Captains are experienced players who usually know the rules of the game. They have tape measures. They can toss coins. They usually stand near the jack and direct their team as to the best shot to play. If there's any shooting they usually do that. They probably have their own scorer.

Teams without captains are not quite headless chickens but...

They stand near the circle not knowing how close the last boule is or who actually holds the point. They don't know if it's their turn to play. They some times spend long periods deferring to their team mates. "You play" "No I'm rubbish today - you go" "After you". When they do step into the circle they aren't mentally prepared for the shot they have to play. They just play an any shot.

There's another category. Teams that have a captain but don't follow the captain's lead. They play without knowing who holds the point (sometimes while the captains are measuring); they change the order of play the captain set at the beginning; they stand about chatting; they check their email on their phone.

Finally there are the players who won't have a captain. "We'll sort it out between us"; "There's no need for a captain - we all know how to play"; "We don't bother with that" and my personal unfavourite "it's only a game"

Captains bring order to the game. They manage everything so that players can concentrate on playing. Captains are not born they are made. They were once novice players who realised that there's a step up from a social game to a serious league game. They upped their game and took the lead.

In top level games you will see all the players stand at the head where the action is. The team about to play discuss what's the best shot then they send a player down to the circle to play it. They stay at the business end.

There's no hard and fast rules here only soft and slow ones. Captains may not be the shooter - they may be a pointer; Captains (good ones) should consult their team members and be flexible but take the ultimate decision on what shot to play. Inexperienced players don't spot the shot or feel the need to close the game down and limit the damage. They'll hold the point with all the boules left to play and roll happily towards very dangerous situation at the head.

There are bad captains out there who treat their team members like a dog, bark orders at them and constantly criticize them. There are dominant good players who play both pointer and shooter roles and always play their boules first and when they've done then allow their inferior partner to play at the end. They think they're captain but they're just self centred and selfish. Such captains don't last too long as disheartened players suddenly make themselves unavailable if asked to play with a bad captain.

So next time you find yourself in a pair that's been draw at random in a melee ask your new partner whether they want to point or shoot. If they say "I'm new and don't yet know the rules" then you are the captain. If they say " I prefer to shoot" then let them be captain. Teams where players know their position play better as they don't have 2 players trying to dictate the play.

In a team of 2 there could possibly be too many chiefs and not enough Indians. If you find yourself in this position feed your new partner's ego. Let him be captain. If your new partner seems hesitant then step up and be the captain.