

GRASS CLIPPINGS 15

COMMITTEE INTERFERENCE

Browsing through the latest magazine of the New South Wales Bowling Association I came across an article with the heading –

“A CAMEL IS A HORSE

DESIGNED BY A COMMITTEE”

I was obviously intrigued and read the rest of the article. It was actually a repeat of what had come up before in “Turfgrass Management “ – a magazine which is more golf-orientated.

This article starts by quoting a recent article which had appeared in the “New Zealand Sports Turf Review’

The New Zealanders were expressing their concern over the fact that many Green keepers (GKP)s were leaving the profession because of ‘Committee Interference “ in what they regarded as their own domain as professionals.

It implies that Greens Committees should ask themselves “what is our function”

In discussions with Turf Managers of various sporting bodies (even racecourses) one of the most frequent cited problems is the “well meaning” interference of Committee members on how they (the GKP’s) should do their jobs.

On the whole very few of these Committee members have had any experience in managing sports turf - yet they have the power to instruct GKP’s to undertake tasks which may be contrary to sound management practices.

When one examines their lack of experience and the fact that the composition of the committee might change every year it is no wonder that these professionals get frustrated.

The Aussies went so far as to suggest that a Committee of Experts from outside the club should lay down guidelines which would be operative for two or more years and not be subject to the whims of the Club Committee.

In bowls the suggestion was that an outside agency of experts would decide on what should be the optimum speed for a green bearing in mind the capabilities of the green i.e. the texture of the soil, the variety of grass .and the expertise of the GKP. The club members would not be allowed to coerce the GKP into looking for speeds beyond that figure This interference also covered the financial aspects of greens management .

Who has not sat in on a Committee where a member says “why do we want this new stuff – what we have is quite good enough”

One must not forget that, in the case of New Zealand and Australia we are talking about Professionals who had qualified for their positions by passing an exam after four years of study and practical tuition with a recognised senior Green keeper.

Although they are technically the employees of the club and paid a salary commensurate with their qualification they are experts in their field and should not be called upon to submit to Committee members who are given – or take upon themselves – the authority to pontificate on technical matters and club policy regarding the management of their greens.

One can only hope that common sense will prevail and that while the GKP expects to be recognised as a professional he, in turn, will behave like a professional on and off the green.

In the RSA our position is somewhat different because our green keeper (GKP)s are not paid a living wage and only receive a small stipend which, often , does not cover out of pocket expenses.

This does not mean we do not have Committee Interference – we do – and on a large scale but the outcome only means that the GKP just resigns and does not have the financial loss which our brethren overseas have to consider before they move on out of the system – as they are apparently doing.

In the RSA we have a different position – our GKP’s are not trained and cannot always answer queries with authority. They are easily swayed by Committee members on how to manage the greens green - especially when it comes to the speed of the green.

With Club Committees being elected every year there is very little chance of continuity in those appointed to serve on the greens Committee.

One must remember that, in any club, the greens portfolio is a minefield and any Committee member aspiring to higher honours usually avoids the potential dangers lurking in the Greens portfolio.

It can happen that the person appointed to the greens is genuinely interested in greens management but as soon as the GKP has educated him to the level where he understands the basics of greens management he goes on to a different portfolio.

The real problem in the RSA is not always direct interference but the indirect restrictions brought

about by the steady erosion of the funds available for the greens.

In the RSA we have the position where the majority of the Committee members have retired and their attitude towards improvements is much more conservative than one would find with members who are still working.

They are well aware of the financial difficulties of some of the members and will do anything to avoid increasing the fees – rather cut down on fertilisers or bottom blades.

This attitude has resulted in very few clubs keeping up with inflation with the first casualty being the greens – how many greens in the RSA have been replanted with a new grass in the last five years – yet in Australia they happily replant every 7 years.

An interesting feature about retirement is that your forward vision is often limited to the time you expect to be active

While you will work hard for and probably contribute to a scheme where you will see the benefits in your time you are not so keen on matters which might only benefit the club in the long term.

We also have the problem that many of our competent administrators came from the other sports and having been successful in their vocation and worked hard in those other sporting disciplines they now decide to take a rest and refuse office on Bowls Committees.

And then you have the member who has never played another sport and never amounted to much in his working life now craves a position of authority and makes himself available for the Committee. The one thing he wants in life is to be able to “lord it over” another being – which might well be the GKP.

Many a well-meaning and enthusiastic GKP in the RSA has been sacrificed on the altar of Committee interference.

There must be a middle line somewhere – if the President of the club is going to protect his GKP from the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” and kept away from the potentially difficult self-seeking Committee member it is also incumbent on the GKP to improve and maintain an open line of communication with his committee – a problem shared is a problem halved.

An invitation to the President and some members of the Greens Committee to walk around the greens with him will greatly enhance his standing and promote a better understanding of what greens management means.

Even the GKP's reports to the monthly meetings of the Club Committee must be in writing and not verbal.

No verbal report is interpreted in the same way by all those attending such a meeting there is always the possibility of some ambiguity

Another source of irritation is the fact that some Clubs impose heavy financial constraints on the GKP

In this respect it is vitally important that the GKP should submit an itemised budget to the Out-going Committee for submission to the AGM of the Club and while he maintains his expenditure within the limits of the budget he should be allowed to use the approved funds.

It is important that in any club the members should realise that –

- 1 The speed of the green is influenced by-
 - The texture of the soil
 - The variety of grass planted on the green
 - Whether there is more than one variety of grass

Before they can urge the GKP to speed up the green they must first establish whether the green is capable of such speeds.

- 2 A green deteriorates all the time.

Any person buying new car knows that, in spite of Regular servicing the car still deteriorates and has to be replaced at some time.

A green also deteriorates and in spite of regular renovation and care the upper layers become clogged up and the GKP is forced, either, to remove the upper 30mm or replant the whole green
Note Reading through all this I realise that I might have created the impression that members interfere in all clubs. This is not the case – what I was trying to point out was that all over the world there are bowlers who like to interfere and while the position is more serious where there are professional GKP's and it affects their livelihood we do, also, have the same problem at some of our clubs.

There is a very thin line between “interference” which is to be discouraged and “constructive participation” which any GKP should welcome

The care of the green goes beyond just the period of service of the GKP and / or the Committee and - somewhere - a committee must tackle the problem of a major uplift of the green e.g. replanting the green

PLAYING BETWEEN RINKS

How often have we not heard the cry “we are playing between rinks”.

In fact, the other day I heard of a major tournament where the players refused to allow the GKP to move the rinks because they would be “playing between rinks”

The GKP acceded to their request and needless to say the mat area was bare at the end of the tournament.

Of course, there is no such thing as playing between rinks if the GKP diligently moves the rinks all the time – every week in summer and after every two sessions of play in the winter.

By moving the rinks as set out above no “hollows” will develop in the centre of the rinks and no ridges will appear along the boundaries.

Moving the rinks regularly is essential part of good greens management on any green not only as explained in **Grass Clippings 10 2.6** if the player count is high.

It is up to the GKP to ensure that the rinks do not stay in the same position for too long otherwise it might well happen that the centre of the rinks are slightly lower than the boundaries of the rinks.

While it is easy to say the rinks must be moved regularly it must, also, be easy for the GKP to do so – otherwise he will tend to “put it off”

The GKP must now decide how wide the rinks will be although, as Bowls SA have decided on 5.00m rinks for all SA Tournaments it would be advisable for the GKP to adopt the 5.00 m rink

The easiest method is to use colour markers on the ditch boards.

I have always just used two colours and have found them to be perfectly adequate.

Let us start on the North side of the green and find the centre spot

Note Do not start at the corner of the green unless you are absolutely certain that your green is perfectly square.

Having found the centre spot on the north side clean the ditch board at that point and paint the ditch board with a small marker of red paint.

Note Some more correct GKP's use a file or hacksaw to make a small mark or indentation on the ditch board at that spot

Now measure 2.5 m from there and put another marker of red paint- repeat on the both sides of the centre spot.

Continue by putting a red spot every 2.5 m until you reach the corners....

Now go back to the centre spot and find a point 1.25 m from that spot.

This spot is painted black.

From that spot proceed as before painting the ditch board every 2.5 m from there until you reach the corners.

Repeat the whole process on the other three sides.

On a 36.5 m green the last red spot should be 750 mm from the corner. You will now have 7 X 5.0 m rinks.

On a 38.0 m. green your last red spot will be 1.5 m from the corner.

The black marks will give you 6 X 5.0 m rinks with the last black spot 2.00m from the one corner and 4.5 m from the other corner

If you only want 6 rinks with the red marks then the boundary of No 1 and No. 6 rinks will be 3.25m from the corners.

If you know you will not need 6 rinks on a certain day then you can set out the green for 7 rinks on the red spots and only use the central 5 leaving out No's 1 and 7 .

Using only two colours gives the GKP four moves before he will be forced to come back to the first position – in the summer the grass would have recovered by that time. In the winter it is just a question of each area carrying an equal load until spring

Once the GKP has taken the trouble to mark the ditch boards it is easy to move the rinks regularly and no one will be able to complain about “playing between rinks”