

## GRASS CLIPPINGS 14

### Inspections– Assessments and Gradings

Having almost completed our inspections for the 2008 SA Tournaments we have had our usual queries regarding our inspection policy and our weightings of the various items.

Most of our critics do not appreciate the fact that there is a difference between the information found on the inspection sheet and the report we submit to Bowls SA and the Tournament Committee

#### Preparation for an Inspection

When preparing a green for such an inspection the GKP should glance through the Book on “The Evaluation and Grading of a Bowling green”

This would help him to avoid “silly mistakes” which might cost him a few marks. He must also set out a few rinks as he would for the tournament as proof that he knows how to set out a green for a tournament.

In our inspections this year not a single GKP had consulted the “Evaluation Book” when he prepared his green for the inspection.

Instead of criticising our system would it not have been better if a Club President and his committee had examined our inspection sheet and asked the GKP where he could have avoided “foolish mistakes” and perhaps not have lost those marks

#### The Inspection Sheet

The Inspection sheet was devised about 50 years ago and although your Greens Standing Committee reviews the sheet every year as far as I can recall only two items have been added to the sheet in 20 years. We have, however, changed the weighting as circumstances change.

I believe that, with so many clubs neglecting their levels, we will soon have to put more emphasis on levels.

Our sheet has more items than the Australian Sheet but I put that down to the fact that their Green Keepers (GKP) are all professionally trained and certain items which their GKP’s would take for granted have to be looked at with our relatively in-experienced GKP’s.

The inspection sheet virtually covers every aspect of Green keeping and could be regarded as an external audit on the Green and the GKP –

1 Green - Whether there are basic problems in the green which the GKP inherited.

2 The GKP

How he handles the equipment

His management policy

Whether the “Laws of the Game” are observed

It is a confidential document which is given to the club only – Bowls SA does not get the inspection sheet.

When asked by Bowls SA to inspect greens for a SA Tournament we first do an inspection and record our findings on the inspection sheet.

We then consider the format of the SA Tournament

1 What is the duration of the Tournament - eg. In the old days the SA National lasted 14 days and the greens used at Headquarters had to endure much more traffic than they were used to. For that reason the wearing capabilities of the green plus the experience of the GKP were important

We are also mindful of the fact that the green has to be handed back to the members after the tournament

2 How many rinks would be required –eg. In the Inter-Provincials we need 10 rinks at a two-green club – one can therefore avoid up to two “dicey” rinks which one cannot do in a National

3 For an Inter-provincial and Mixed Pairs two-green clubs are needed – we often find a club with one excellent green but the other green is a bit dicey and we therefore have to discard that club

The kingpin in all this is the GKP.

When we have completed our last inspection the fate of the tournament lies in the competence of the GKP What is he going to do in the run-up to the Tournament. It must be remembered that when we have approved a green for a tournament we can only “advise” the GKP on what to do we cannot instruct him to do anything. – of course we can still take the tournament away from that club if the “offence” is of such a nature that using that green might jeopardise the tournament

A few years ago a relatively in-experienced GKP over-prepared the green and brought it to it’s peak three weeks before the tournament – all this wear and tear was just too much for the grass with the result that it could not be used for 4 months thereafter.

When we have to decide on the suitability (or otherwise) of a green for a SA Tournament we take from the inspection sheet those items which are relevant to the requirements of that particular tournament and submit our report to Bowls SA

Let us examine the Inspection Sheet (Copy Attached)

**INSPECTION SHEET**(There are three sections A,B, and C)

#### Section A

This Section is devoted to –

- The Legal Requirements as set out in the Laws of the Game.
- The Banks and Ditches – Including the Legal Requirements
- The presence of a Wind Indicator, Steps, Log Sheets, Speed Board

- The Equipment available to the GKP and it's condition.

There is also space for the Inspector to record his first impressions – Does the green and surrounds look as if the members are house proud. Will a player arriving there for the first time say to himself “I am going to enjoy playing in these surroundings” Apart from the legal requirements for the Banks and Ditches we expect that there should be uniformity about them – are the banks all; the same height with the same angle – are the ditches all the same width and depth

The condition of the banks is also important – In all my experience I have only seen 6 perfect banks and they got full marks (6) – I argue that if a GKP has spent so much time creating a perfect bank why should I give the same marks to slightly inferior banks with the odd gap and weeds in the grass.

The Equipment – the club has spent a lot of their time raising funds to give the GKP the equipment he needs – it is up to the inspector to report on how that equipment is being used and maintained – even if it has to be a negative report

The inspector will, also, be quick to inform the Club Executive if the GKP's efforts to create a perfect surface are hampered by the fact that he does not have certain important pieces of equipment.

Note Very little of the information contained in Section A has any relevance regarding the suitability of the green for an SA Tournament. A mal-adjusted mower will be picked up in Section B.

### **Section B**

Here we are concerned with the health of the green If grass is given water and fertilisers it will grow and cover the green with a healthy mat of grass..

If, in his efforts to produce a perfect surface, the GKP abuses the grass to the extent that it is under stress then a number of things can go wrong. The results of his efforts will be reflected in Section B

At the same time a GKP normally “inherits “ a green. His inheritance might include basic flaws which can have a bearing on his ability to produce the perfect surface – this too will be identified in this section.

Predominant Grass The inspector is required to identify the variety of the predominant grass on the green because this will have a bearing on the management of the green.

Weak and Bare Areas After renovation the green should be completely covered with a layer or mat of grass. If the GKP is too enthusiastic in thinning out the mat or mowing too low the grass plant will become stressed and new growth will cease – weak and bare areas will appear on the green.

Weak and bare areas will also become obvious on the perimeter if the Greens operator always turns the mower on the edge of the green.

Note Grass abuse is a serious offence and if it is found that the GKP has deprived the grass of it's ability to sustain growth his green will lose marks.

Compaction Compaction is always a problem especially on the perimeter but will, also be more prevalent in clayey soils – part of the GKP's inheritance. The question is “what is the GKP doing to avoid it”.

Root Depth Root Depth is mainly of concern with clayey soils and the inspector would like to know what efforts the GKP has made to encourage deeper rooting.

The Mat The thickness of the mat will influence the speed. If it varies with thick areas interspersed with thin areas then the draw and speed will be inconsistent. This will be more obvious with a mixture of grasses on the green because each variety has it's own optimal mat thickness.

The Pests The presence of Algae/Fungi, Weeds, or Insects on the green indicate that the GKP has not instituted preventative treatment.

Foreign Grass The presence of more than one variety of grass on the same green(a Heinz Green) poses problems for the GKP especially if the one grass is one of the finer varieties (Skaaplaas.Bayview) and the other(s) is one of the coarser Kweeks. The one would have a thin mat while the other would require a thick mat before it covers the green. Large patches of either would also influence the run of the bowl.

In !963 the Australians recognised the problems inherent in having Heinz greens and announced that no State Championships would be played on such greens.

Here in the RSA our powers that be did nothing about it and to-day 95 % of our greens are Heinz greens.

In marking such a green the inspector would deduct marks just because foreign grass is present and if the foreign grass has invaded what was previously a single grass green the GKP is hit again for neglecting to keep his green pure

Then if the inspector is of the opinion that the patches of different grasses are so large that they can influence the run of the bowl then more marks are deducted

Appearance This item covers more than just the aesthetic appearance of the green. Mower marks, sodded areas, uneven fertilising, bare patches, chemical spills for whatever reason can be an indication of bad greens management and will be penalised.

Smoothness The GKP should ensure that there are no bumps and hollows which might divert the bowl. Here the clubs with Roller/Polishers have a distinct advantage as those greens are usually smooth

Run-off A most frustrating experience for a bowler if he finds that he cannot stop the bowls near the edge of the green. Run-off must be penalised

heavily because it is so easy for the GKP to take the necessary steps to avoid it – I know one green where there has been severe run-off on all four sides since 1988 and the club has still not fixed it.

Levels Levels are most important. If there are variations in the levels then the run of the bowl will be affected. Levels can change and it is up to the GKP to ensure that he is in possession of a recent level profile or has the green professionally levelled .If the GKP cannot produce a satisfactory Level Profile at the time of the inspection then marks will be deducted

Note With the cessation of Municipal assistance where the greens were levelled every year clubs have been caught unprepared and there are now many greens which have not been levelled for a long time.

The above is a short summary of what the inspector has to consider when scoring Section B

Section B will give the inspector an indication of –

- How well the GKP is looking after the grass  
– Large weak or bare areas, invasive weeds or foreign grass, variations in the thickness of the mat are all indications of grass abuse or lack of control.

- How the bowl will run when tested in Section C i.e. Levels, Run-off, Variations in the thickness of the mat, a Heinz green

It is really an indication of what the GKP is doing

If as a result of our inspection it is found that the grass is at risk then it will appear at various points in Section B

### Section C

This section belongs to the player. He is not interested in the health of the grass as long as the bowls runs at a reasonable speed without any untoward deviations affecting the draw and the weight.

The complaints we get every year from the players after a SA Tournament have to do with the unpredictability of the draw and weight on some of the rinks where they played

Note It must be remembered that a player only plays on one rink out of a possible six. He is, therefore only really moaning about that one rink but actually condemns the whole green.

It is impossible for an inspector to examine and judge the draw and weight on all the rinks for all the possible positions of the jack on that rink - we just do not have the time or the equipment to do accurate measurements.

We have to rely on the evidence we get from Section B

Having completed Section B diligently the GKP will have a reasonable idea of what to expect eg

1 Weak and bare areas will influence the run of the bowl.

2 Variations in the thickness of the mat will influence the run of the bowl i.e. the draw and weight.

3 The texture of the soil making up the base of the green might not be the same all over leaving hard and soft areas.

4 A bumpy green with knobs or hollows will divert a bowl from it's true course.

5 Patches of foreign grass interspersed with a finer grass will have the same affect as variations in the thickness of the mat

6 Variations in the levels will cause inconsistencies in both the draw and weight.

Note We accept variations of up to 5 mm over 5.0 m and 3,0 mm over 2.5 m. Any deviation greater than that will cause the bowl to deviate from it's course - especially on faster greens.

Armed with that information the GKP has some idea of what to expect when testing the draw weight and speed.

Speed The demands for speed by the members has frequently caused the downfall of many a GKP's.. Many members demand a faster green without knowing whether –

1 The infrastructure of the green makes it possible to produce a fast surface.

2 The GKP is capable of managing such a green – a very prominent Aussie GKP once said that “to reduce the mowing height by 1.0 mm. requires three times the expertise

As inspectors we are on the look-out for evidence that the health of the green has been sacrificed on the altar of speed

Speed can be tested by measuring the time it takes for a bowl to run 27m on the green.

An average over at least eight readings will be needed in both North/ South and East /West directions.

A few years ago. After extensive consultations with the top players and Green Keepers it was decided that the speed would be tested over 27 m and that the ideal speed for South African conditions would be between 12.5 and 13.9 secs.(22Marks) For any speeds above or below that range marks would be deducted with no marks being awarded to a green running at less than 10.0secs or above 16.5 secs.. These figures would apply throughout the year at the coast and in the warmer months up to the first frost on the highveld.

Draw - While delivering bowls to test the speed the Inspector must also observe how the bowl behaves –

1 Is the draw constant?

– Is the width of the forearm the same for all the rinks in the same direction ?

- Is the draw on the forearm the same as that of the backhand?

Here possible allowances can be made for the Nap or Grain of the grass.

2 Is the weight the same on both the forearm and backhand.

All these things must run through ones mind when assessing the draw and weight.

We normally test the forearm and backhand on short and long ends in both direction on Rinks 1,3, and 5 North / South and rinks 2,4,and 6 East / West.

One of our most difficult tests has been to decide on discrepancies in the weight because there are very few bowlers who can accurately say that the draw on the one side is faster or slower than the other.

Our tests are obviously flawed but it is all we can do in the time available. We therefore have to fall back on the information available in Section B. Variations in the levels, patches of thick mat interspersed with thin areas, Heinz greens, and run-off into the ditch obviously indicate inconsistencies in the draw and weight.

It is for this reason that we never award full marks for the draw.

We start off by subtracting three marks and then more marks for every inconsistency we pick up.

Stimpmeter The golfers have for many years used stimpmeters to measure the speed of their greens. Many bowling clubs have also adopted a modified stimpmeter to measure the speed of their greens

Without detracting from the use of a stimpmeter to measure the speed of a bowling green I believe that we should make more use of large stimpmeters to measure the weight and the width of the draw on our own greens.

Various clubs have made large stimpmeters measuring – 4.00m in length, 2.00 m high and with a “shute” about 4.47m long.

Such a stimpmeter will allow a bowl to run about 29.m on a green running at 12.5 secs to the 27 m mark.

In constructing the stimpmeter the “shoe” where the bowl runs on to the green must be worked out very carefully to avoid the bowl bumping on to the green and losing speed.”

Of course such a stimpmeter is not portable and will have to be confined to a club – I hope that some bright spark will devise a stimpmeter which gives one a 4.5 m run and can still be folded into a motor car.

To me our greatest challenge is to invent portable equipment which can accurately measure the draw and weight on a green – it would enable us to identify inconsistencies on the green without players accusing us of making them play on a “cabbage patch”