

**BOWLS SOUTH AFRICA**  
**GREENS STANDING COMMITTEE**

**GRASS CLIPPINGS**

June 2005

Welcome to this the first newsletter addressed to the green keepers of the RSA. If one considers the amount of information the Green Keeper (GKP) can glean just by studying the grass clippings in the mower bin then we hope that he will learn as much from the Grass Clippings appearing in these newsletters. Let us start by taking a hard look at ourselves and our position in the club.

#### What's in a Name

Our counterparts, the bowls green keepers, overseas do the thinking plus all the manual work. Here we only do the thinking and the manual work is done by the greens assistants – are we actually not only greens supervisors – just a thought. .

#### Our Importance and Status in the Club

Nobody doubts the importance of a GKP in the club set-up. Irrespective of how good or how bad he is the club will not function without a GKP. The members depend on him to provide them with a playing surface on every “club” day. They recognize his existence even if it is only to complain if that surface has not been well prepared. At the same time we as GKP's do not enjoy the same status as our friends in the other disciplines. The Technical Officials (TO) and the Coaches are bowlers who have passed an examination and now hold an official position with a badge as proof of their new status. Their actions are monitored by the District Standing Committee and thereafter by the Standing Committee of Bowls SA. If they are diligent in their work and willing to study further they will be rewarded by being upgraded to the next level. Their status in the club is not questioned and the average member respects them for their knowledge.

In contrast to all this let us look at the position of the GKP.

He (or she) is appointed by the club and immediately carries the title of Green Keeper. He has had no formal education in the art of green keeping and has to learn by trial and error. There are

no structures in place to enable him to further his education.

The newly appointed GKP is not only exposed to the taunts of those who lost that afternoon but also has

to listen to the “know alls” in the club who are prepared to “advise” him about his greens management.

He does not have the knowledge to argue with any degree of authority and withdraws into himself. He

often becomes averse to criticism and, will in time, become a “difficult old man”.

Sometimes he even  
resigns in frustration

The percentage of GKP's who enter green keeping before the age of 60 years is very small. By the time they have the experience to be good GKP's they are ready to retire - hence the high turnover of GKP's

Your Greens Standing Committee is obviously concerned about this state of affairs but we believe that by following our objective, which is to improve the standard of green keeping in the RSA, the image of the GKP will improve and recognition will follow.

As the only person who can improve the standard of Green Keeping in the RSA is the GKP himself we

will have to devise ways and means to gain access to all the GKP's so that we can equip him with the necessary knowledge and motivation to allow us attain our objective. To do all this we have settled on a two-pronged approach – Education and Motivation.

Education - Two- fold

Personal – Advice on a one-on-one basis when visiting greens during inspections and, where

available, encouraging the GKP's to attain a level-one certificate.

We already have a curriculum for Level One GKP's and soon, we hope, we will be in a position to

offer a course of bi-weekly lectures over a 6-week period in some of the major cities.

This would

be followed by a written examination. The practical part of this examination would involve an

inspection of the candidate's greens.

General – By way of Circulars to all the Clubs, “The Book” and seminars at strategic venues

From our own experience as members of the Greens Standing Committee we realised that a

green keeper could learn a lot about green keeping by inspecting his own and other greens.

It was therefore decided that our first objective would be –

-to broaden the base of green keepers doing inspections for BSA Tournaments by delegating the inspection of greens for the SA Nationals to the District Greens Standing Committees where the event is being staged,

-to enable each Club in the RSA to evaluate its own greens.  
Having decided to broaden the base of inspections it was essential that there should be uniformity in the inspections (a “B” grade in the Western Province should be as difficult to obtain as a “B” in Gauteng or Durban). This uniformity could only be achieved if the GKP’s used the same instruction manual and scoring sheet.  
The Book (Evaluation and Grading of a Bowling Green )

This “book” took about two years to finalise and was distributed amongst the Districts in August 2003. Most of the Districts staging the SA Nationals are using the “book” to inspect and grade the greens.

It was also decided that each club should get a “Book” to enable it to evaluate it’s own greens.

The idea being that the GKP and some of the Committee members would evaluate the green and apportion responsibility.

Few clubs realise that green keeping is a joint venture between the GKP and his Committee – after all – the GKP “inherits” a green and if, when he takes over, there are some major deficiencies on the green (wrong grass, wrong soil or major variations in the levels). These deficiencies might be of such a nature that they would limit his ability to produce the type of green the members want. It is important to apportion responsibility at an early stage of a GKP’s tenure.

Having examined the green and identified the deficiencies it is up to the GKP and his committee

to decide on what is required and within what time-scale

If studied with care there is a lot to be learnt from the “Book” and GKP and the club members will

quickly learn how to anticipate or correct problems on the greens.

Recently there has now been a resurgence of interest in green keeping and many Districts are

asking for more copies of the book. Bowls SA has responded by printing another batch

Motivation Here we again have a two-fold approach.

The GKP Himself – it is surprising how many GKP’s are happy with their lot. They are quite

content to go on as they are and have the support of their Committee and members. If they are put under any pressure to put themselves out to improve the grading of the green they will resign

On the other hand there are a number of GKP's who would "go that extra mile" to improve their greens if they had the support of their club and there was an "outside" incentive to do so.

The Authorities – By this I mean anything from the Club Committee to the District Exec. and even

Bowls SA. Incentives come from recognition and recognition comes when it is standard practice

for the authorities to allocate their tournaments only to those who produce the best playing surfaces.

In those Districts where tournaments are awarded to the clubs with the best green there is some

incentive for the GKP and the club to improve their greens. Sooner or later other clubs will get

the message and understand that they will not get any of these lucrative tournaments until they

do something about their greens.

By contrast, in those Districts where the allocation of venues for tournaments is done on an

arbitrary basis without any reference to the suitability of the greens there is no incentive at club

level to create good greens and the standard of green keeping in the district as a whole will

suffer.

Unless they are prepared to adhere to a policy of "best greens for the tournaments" the good

GKP's will become frustrated and lose their motivation to produce good greens.

In my travels to different districts to inspect greens for Bowls SA it was easy to identify those

districts which were concerned about the standard of green keeping in their district.

Therefore, it follows that the road ahead is going to be long and bumpy. On the one hand there is the

need to motivate some of the Districts and on the other hand it is up to us to find easier access to the

Clubs and their Green Keepers – bear with us.

This issue of "Grass Clippings" has confined itself to the lot of the GKP and his position in the hierarchy

of Bowls in the RSA, the next issue will be more exciting and have something for the enthusiastic GKP to

mull over.

CHL

