



Assessment of officials

Above:
An assessor
at work

The continual development of officials in lawn bowls has been traditionally carried out by examination and training or, in some cases, by selecting individuals to events and hoping for the best. In many other sports, such as rugby and football, where professional officials are used, a rigorous programme of continual assessment is carried out on match day. It would seem equally logical to apply this process to bowls officials, after all the role is very much a practical one backed by good knowledge and application of the Laws of the Sport.

It has only been in recent years that 'working' assessments of bowls umpires and markers have been carried out on the world stage. Does this method of monitoring competency negate the need for putting an umpire through a false environment of an examination or subjecting a marker to a staged game of singles where deliberate mistakes are made? In my opinion, it most certainly does.

Starting at the very beginning, in the vast majority of nations that have an officiating structure, new recruits are qualified by completing a combination of theory and practical elements. Evidence of laws knowledge

is gained by answering questions and scenarios. Training in the use of measuring equipment and assessing their ability to measure accurately forms the second main phase of qualification. Similarly, where a formal marker training programme exists, knowledge of laws and the basic skills are demonstrated. Once qualified, an official is often left to their own devices and hone their skills by getting as much experience

“Once qualified, an official is often left to their own devices and hone their skills by getting as much experience under their belts as possible”

under their belts as possible. If they are lucky, they will work with more experienced officials and learn from them or have the opportunity to have a mentor to encourage them and guide them. That was certainly my experience as a newly qualified umpire back in the late 1980s.

Progression is usually by recognising their ability and selecting them for

latter stages of competitions coupled by further examination. Some get a lot of experience and therefore have the ability to maintain their skills and knowledge. Others may not have the opportunities to officiate a great deal and so may lose some of that knowledge and ability.

Subjecting an official to a false environment to prove their competency has been shown to be detrimental. Often, we here the comment: “I only do it that way once every four years to pass the exam.” Not a great attitude but similarly not a great measure of true ability.

The World Bowls International Technical Official (ITO) programme has been operating for around 15 years now and comprises the standard elements of theory questions and practical measuring. In addition, for new candidates, there is a five-end game of singles to mark with a script of challenges the players must throw in for the candidate to recognise and react to. This process has changed little over that period and still serves World Bowls well with recruitment and retention of ITOs. However, there are obvious flaws. I have already mentioned the false environments and the possibility of candidates doing everything right just for the examiner.

WORLD BOWLS ITO Performance Report



ITO Name: World Bowls Championships 2023
 Event: Gold Coast, Australia
 ITO Name: [Blank]
 From Date: 26/08/2023 To Date: 10/09/2023

Assessment Rating		
Below Standard	Meets Standard	Above Standard
1	2	3

Assessment	Umpire			Marker			Score	Comments
	Session (1/2/3)	1/2/3/1	1/2/3/1	1/2/3/1	1/2/3/1	1/2/3/1		
Technical Ability (Umpire)								
1. Conducted duties (other than criteria 2-5) in accordance with WB standards	2	2	2				2.0	
2. Reached timeliness to calls from players	2	2	2				2.0	
3. Wedged all bowls which were not lying flat	2	2	2				2.0	
4. Used the chosen measuring equipment correctly / efficiently	2	2	2				2.0	
5. Dealt with score cards in accordance with event requirements	2	2	2				2.0	
Technical Ability (Marker)								
6. Conducted duties (other than criteria 7-11) in accordance with WB standards							2.0	
7. Reacted to players' questions quickly and efficiently							2.0	
8. Dealt with score cards in accordance with event requirements							2.0	
9. Ensured score boards showed the up-to-date / correct score							2.0	
10. Used shot indicators correctly and with confidence							2.0	
11. Did not distract players in any way							2.0	
Fitness & Concentration								
12. Anticipated situations that could arise on their green / rink							2.0	
13. Was not slow in moving about their green / rink							2.0	
14. Performance was not adversely affected by mobility issues							2.0	
15. Performance was not adversely affected by climatic conditions							2.0	
16. Did not 'wander' on specific greens on their / other greens							2.0	
17. Maintained total concentration on their green / rink							2.0	
18. Adopted a satisfactory position at the green / on their rink							2.0	
Interactions & Ethics								
19. Interacted with players / officials / spectators courteously							2.0	
20. Interacted and worked well with colleagues							2.0	
21. Projected a competent / confident image							2.0	
22. Did not converse openly with players / spectators / officials							2.0	
Team Working								
23. Carried out the instructions of event management effectively							2.0	
24. Got on well with colleagues off the green							2.0	
25. Behaved appropriately both on and off the green							2.0	
26. Did the ITO contribute to the smooth running of the event							2.0	
Team Working Assessment Rating based on overall performance at the event.							2.00	
Overall Performance Rating							2.00	

Additional Issues:
 Detail any other game concerns from players / coaches about the ITO
 Detail any post game action the CTO feel necessary to take
 Detail any referrals to the Jury of Appeal relating to the ITO

Positive Feedback: [Blank]

Improvement Opportunities: [Blank]

Overall Comments: [Blank]

ITO response to feedback: [Blank]

Left: An example of an ITO performance report

We see some candidates 'fall apart' when put under exam conditions. Some would say that if they can't handle that pressure then how would they handle a measure for a gold medal winning shot in the World Championships. It is hard to argue against that point.

At the 2018 Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast, World Bowls conducted 'working assessments'. It was the first time this process had been used to assess ITOs 'on the job' following a period of regional trials. It was largely successful and following some tweaks, has been used at each World Championships and Commonwealth Games since.

Should we tell them or should we not? That is one of the most important questions that is asked when developing an assessment programme. The final decision from World Bowls was that ITOs would be told they were being assessed during the event. An individual may not necessarily know when, but they knew they would be. The process for ITO assessments is that at a large event, the Chief Technical Official and their deputies would devise an assessment schedule for each official whereby they would receive three assessments as a marker and three as an umpire. This is not always achievable due to play schedules and appointments. An assessor would watch the officials for about half of a session. For example, on a six-rink green there would generally be two umpires and if it's a singles session then there could be up to six markers as well. They would be watched for around eight-10 ends of the games. The assessment form contains several criteria that the assessor would observe each official carry out and score them accordingly. We use a simple three-point Likert scale. A score of two indicates the official met the standard expected, a score of one indicates there is room for improvement and feedback should be provided, finally a score of three indicates that the official exceeds the standards. In many cases the officials are oblivious to the assessment being carried out and will perform their duties exactly how they would normally.

The practical ability is not the only aspect that ITOs in particular are assessed against. At an event such as the Commonwealth Games, officials have to work together as a team, they have to ensure the event runs smoothly and they support the chief officials and the event management team. These important criteria also get scored in a similar way. At the

end of the event, the numbers are crunched and a report, with feedback, is provided to each ITO.

This process, at this time, has not replaced the five yearly re-accreditation examination that the ITOs have to undertake to renew their certificates. That may be something for the future, especially with the smaller nations that may only have one or two ITOs making accreditation sessions costly.

In England, we are about to introduce a very similar process for our markers and umpires on a more localised basis. The planned structure is to have a team of local assessors who will assess officials at local events. Equally this can be carried out with ease at the larger events such as national championships. This will be backed up with a short laws knowledge test either before or after

the assessment. Our aim in England would be to eventually avoid the need for officials to attend the false environment of an examination every four years.

Whatever scheme is in place, the aim is to develop our officials and provide continual support as they progress through their careers. Early days in England but the concept is proven at world level and so just requires a more localised approach with a bigger team of assessors.

I would love to hear your thoughts on assessments and of course keep those questions coming and I will answer them in future articles.

Next month, I will bring you some highlights of the World Bowls Indoor Championships held in Guernsey in my column.



Below: A training session underway

