

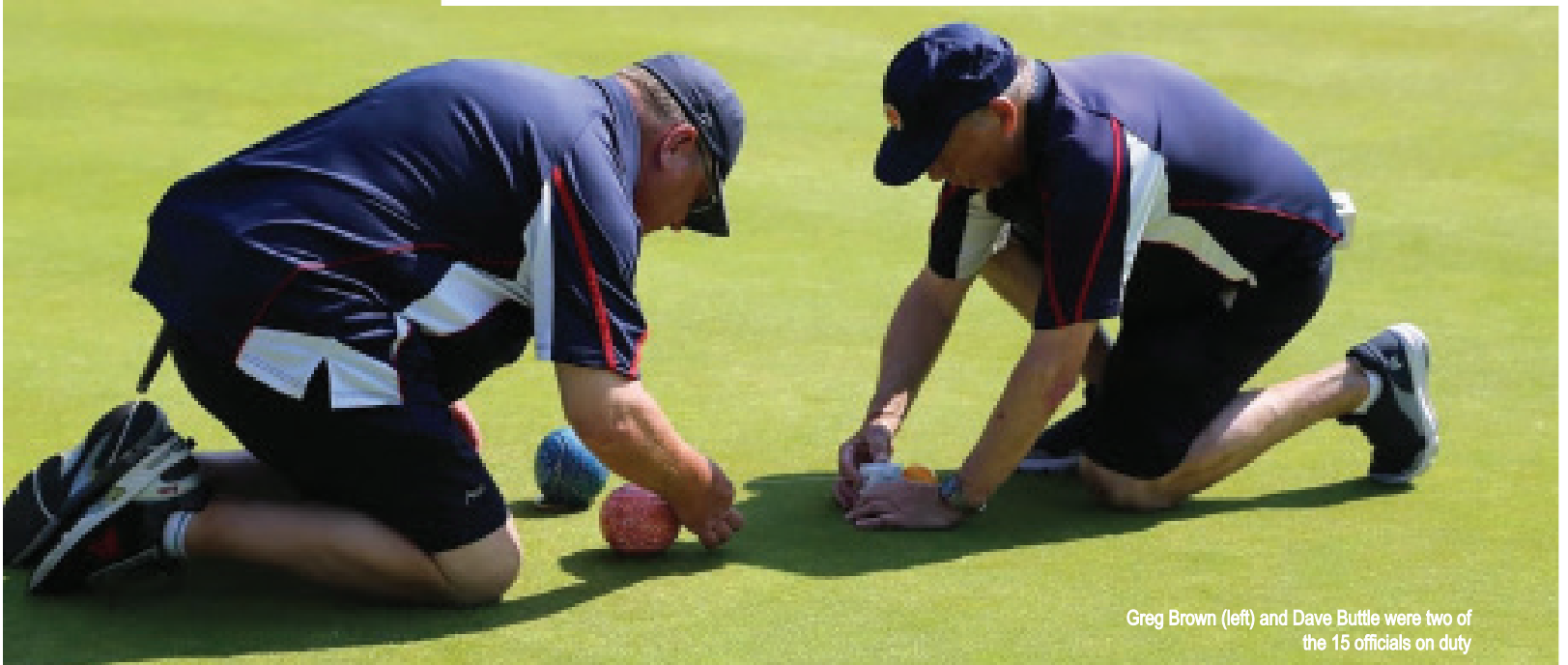


Allan on marking duty.
Credit all pictures: Sporting Highlights/Bowls England



British Bowls

in reflection



Greg Brown (left) and Dave Buttle were two of the 15 officials on duty



It would be nice to know exactly what to pack when off on a trip to officiate outdoors in England in the summer. Attending the British Bowls Championships and Series at the home of Bowls England, in June, was one of those occasions where I could have taken the whole wardrobe and still got it wrong.

Arriving on the Tuesday afternoon for a Wednesday start of the Championships, the greens looked immaculate as did the weather. Eight international umpires from the English Bowls Umpires Association were selected for the first 2 days to oversee the British Bowls Championships with myself and EBUA Secretary, Bernie Hill coordinating the team. After a final check through the schedule and the conditions of play, a managers meeting was held. Details of the venue and the format were relayed by the technical delegate, Alistair Hollis and his team from Bowls England. This was followed by any questions the managers may have for myself and the management team. Thankfully no tough questions on this occasion.

The first two days of competition saw the 2023 national champions from each home nation battle it out to become British Bowls Champions. The format was a straightforward knockout covering the disciplines of singles, Under 25 singles, pairs, triples, fours, senior fours, Under 18 singles for the men and Under 25 pairs for the women. Three sessions of play on each day with no time limits.

Wednesday was a scorcher and plenty of sun block was required to get us through without burning. The games were certainly competitive as one would expect and we were kept busy with some challenging measures. There were no issues and both days proceeded smoothly. Congratulations to all 14 British Bowls champions.

The British Bowls International Series followed straight on from the Championships. Amidst some

controversy, the Series saw 15 players from the national teams of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Jersey compete in a multi-discipline format. Whether the change of format from the traditional six rinks of fours was popular or not, the players put their all into representing their respective countries and from what I witnessed it was an extremely competitive affair. The scoring appeared complex at first but after the first couple of sessions it all started to add up. Three points were awarded to the winner of each individual discipline, plus an additional six points for the overall session score between the two nations. So not only was it important to win overall, but it was also important to win on each rink as well.

Our numbers were boosted by another four officials, some of whom were attending their first international event. Our day started with arrival at the venue for 8 am where we would prepare the greens for play. As the format involved re-spotted jacks instead of dead ends, we inserted

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small plastic strips at the two metre positions on each rink. Next job was to measure the rink boundaries and markers, but the Leamington greens are pretty well marked up so this was a quick job. Jacks, mats and scoreboards with the country name boards inserted were the last job before the start of play.

The sessions in the series were timed and, following trial ends, an airhorn was sounded to signify the start of the two-hour 15-minute sessions. With four sessions of play on the first two days, it was without doubt a gruelling schedule for the players and us officials. As published session start times overran, there was no break between games unless you were lucky enough to draw a fast singles match. Our schedule was to alternate between umpiring and marking where possible. Unfortunately, we did not have sufficient officials appointed

to allocate our usual two per green. Instead, we had one per green and one covering two greens. Not easy for those roving umpires having to be alert to 12 rinks. Play ended around 9 pm about an hour later than it should have after the knock-on effect of late finishing sessions due to allowing longer breaks for the players.

By the end of day one, the legs were tired and a quick meal was followed by a good night's deep sleep. Day two was a repeat of the first. On Sunday, the final day, it was all to play for with just two sessions being played to decide the final placings of the countries and the British Bowls series champions for men and women. Eventually, England topped the table in both men and women's events.

From our perspective as officials, it was tiring, as it was for the players as well of course. It was an enjoyable format for us as we had the opportunity to mark singles matches, which is unusual at international level outside of the Commonwealth and World Bowls events. With all new events there is scope for improvement and certainly from our point of view the addition of at least two more officials would have eased the pressure a little. Of course, we recognise that costs money as we received an allowance towards our accommodation and travel expenses.

While time limits were imposed on each session, there were no slow play regulations or sanctions. With the requirement for a win on each rink, extra ends pushed the games over the time limits whenever they were required. On the face of it, the solution may be to introduce slow play regulations but along with that comes a method of monitoring and sanctioning that simply would not be achievable with the bare minimum of officials.

In my opinion, it was a great event, there was a good buzz around the venue most of the time. There were a decent number of spectators, more so for the championships than the series. The lack of live streaming and some teething problems with live scoring are issues that can be addressed in the future, but of course come with a cost.

I would personally like to thank and congratulate all 15 officials appointed over the five days for their stamina, excellent teamwork and for packing a good selection of hot, cold and windy weather clothing. I would also like to congratulate two new international grade officials, Maxine Groce from Yorkshire and Tony Hatch from Essex. Very well done on your performances.

Left:
Bernie Hill
measuring