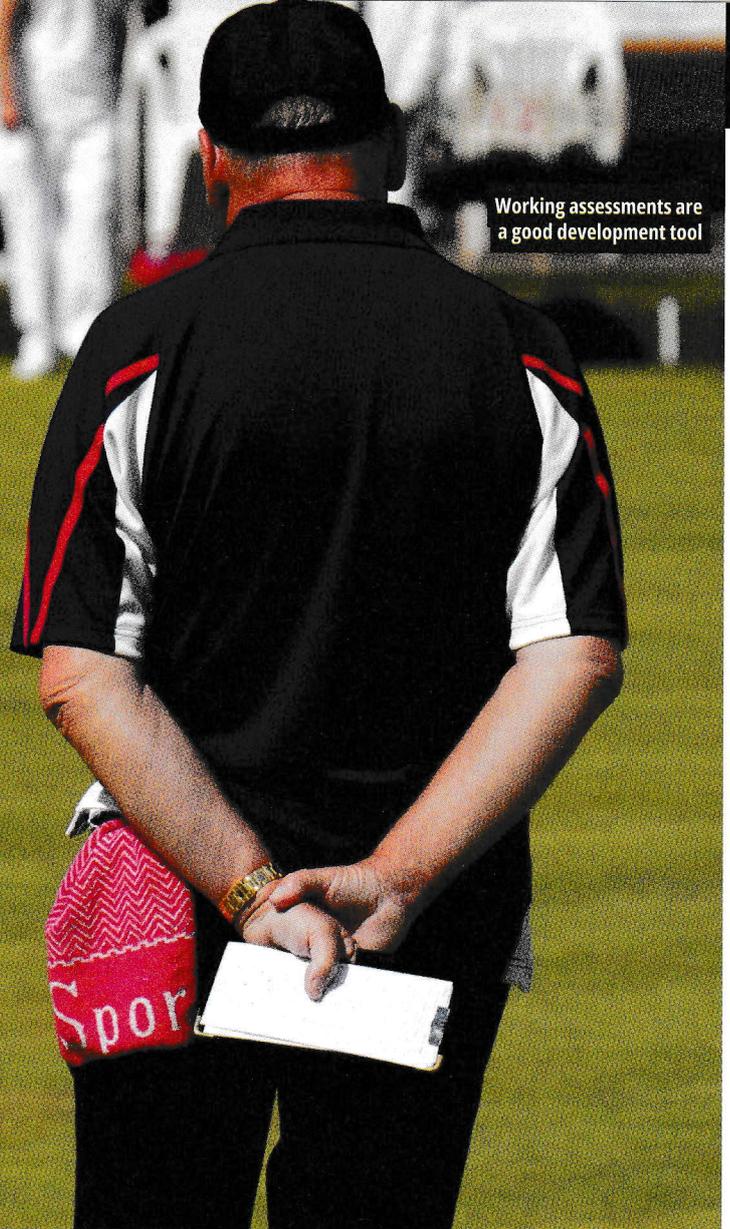




Working assessments are a good development tool

# How to train your umpire



Regardless of whether you think umpires are an integral part of the game or of any use at domestic games, their dedication to the sport cannot be questioned. Whenever I used to run training workshops, I always asked during introductions why they wanted to become an Umpire. The overwhelming answer was 'to give something back to the game' or 'to learn more about the rules'. Let's be under no illusion here, no one is becoming a lawn bowls umpire to pay their mortgage. Having that initial commitment is a great start to training any official in any sport, but just what level of commitment is required to become a lawn bowls umpire?

Each country has their own programmes for training and development of various grades of official from club or local level through to international. It's also worth mentioning that while there is a major focus on training someone to be an umpire, there are also schemes in place for those that just want to mark singles games.

All training is underpinned by two basic principles – practical instruction such as measuring and knowledge of the Laws of the Sport. It is the delivery of these principles that is generally where the biggest differences lay between countries.

Commonly, face to face workshops are held where groups of candidates are given tuition in the application of the Laws of the Sport. Inevitably, this is a bit of a dry subject so thinking of novel interactive ways of presenting them has become key to retaining interest.

Much of the law knowledge, in my opinion, is for the candidate to study prior to any face to face workshops. Such workshops should

ideally be dedicated to the practical application of just a few laws through demonstration and of course the measuring techniques.

I like to think of the laws being divided into three categories: definitions, factual laws and practical laws. Definitions and factual laws can be read and learnt without any need for a tutor to describe their application, for example the size of the jack or the depth of ditches. You would simply refer to the law book if anyone should ask you a question about these.

However, there are a number of laws that must be understood and applied when you are officiating, for example, what do you advise the players when the jack strikes the foot of an opponent when it is delivered, or, if you are called to measure a short delivered jack, what would be the required distance for it to be live? These can be demonstrated on a rink with some simple scenario set ups.

Training is just one aspect of the development of an umpire. There should also be a means to test that knowledge and skill and the



majority of countries will deal with this by way of assessment.

Laws can be tested by questioning, either written or oral. To make it more interactive, using the example of a minimum distance of a delivered jack, this can be asked whilst carrying out the practical exercise.

Measuring exercises can be assessed by watching the official and scoring against a number of criteria such as wedging leaning bowls, correct use of the equipment and correct determination of the shot. Indeed, this practical aspect of the umpire's duties can also be assessed whilst they are officiating if the assessing structure is established.

The COVID-19 pandemic meant that such practical face to face workshops had to be put on hold. Many candidates had to wait an extended period of time from application and playing catch-up has been a challenge as we have come out

the other side of the restrictions. However, there were many valuable lessons that have been learnt from this period.

For example, some of the laws knowledge tuition was conducted online via Zoom or similar. The cost benefit of this type of tuition means that this is now an ideal way of conducting these

workshops. While, the interactive nature of a face to face workshop is somewhat lost, the benefit is that you can get candidates together over vast distances and virtually no cost.

Unfortunately, this online approach does not lend itself well to the practical aspects of the training. There is no substitute to physically measuring bowls and jack. Practise can be done at home, but training and assessing is almost impossible to conduct virtually. That does not mean to say that the concept should be written off and there are discussions in various countries about how this can be achieved.

So, the initial training of an umpire is done, they have passed their assessment and are let loose on the greens to hone their skills.

Continual development is vital. Just leaving an umpire to get on with it for years without support, mentoring or follow up development is not a good idea. Bad habits can develop, knowledge of the laws may fall by the wayside and mistakes will not be rectified where necessary.

***“Training is just one aspect of the development of an umpire. There should also be a means to test that knowledge and skill and the majority of countries will deal with this by way of assessment”***

In most programmes, a process of re-assessment and knowledge update is established as the minimum requirement. Some countries have developed working assessment programmes. This to me is a great way to see how the official works in a live environment and not in a falsely created scenario. Of course, the downside to this is that they may stand there for three hours and not actually do any measuring or apply any laws.

Becoming an umpire is not cheap. Together with the training and officiating time commitment, there is a significant financial outlay to be considered. An umpire's kit is expensive, uniforms are not cheap and neither is travelling to venues. Thankfully, for many games and events, basic expenses are available but whether these cover the true cost to the official is debatable. In some cases,

the umpire may not even be offered a refreshment.

We all recognise, as in all sports, that officials can vary in their ability and can make mistakes. This often leads to a level of conflict between players and official and a loss in reputation. To players, the game they are involved in is the most important thing to them on

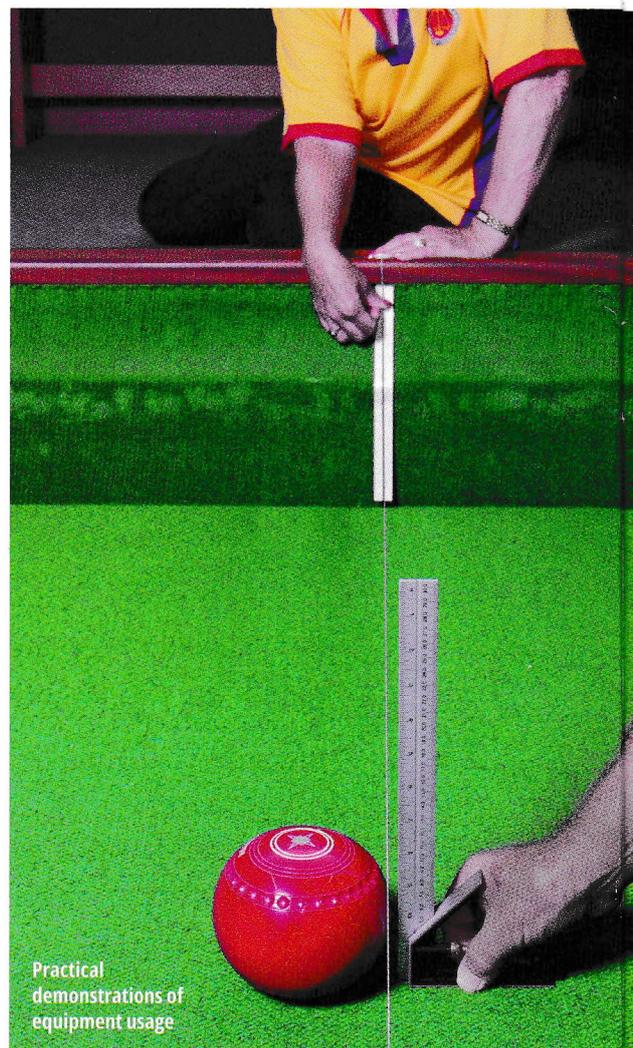
that day. Equally, for the official, that game must be the most important consideration to them out of respect to the players.

Hopefully, the commitment that the official has made to their training and development will ensure that mistakes are avoided and their reputation is upheld. I believe that it is important for officials and players to work together to ensure the game proceeds smoothly and without incident.

Without wanting to open up a can of worms, I would be interested to hear your views on umpires and markers. It all helps to develop the sport in my view.

Throughout 2023, I will be describing the use of the most common items of measuring equipment for umpires and markers. I will also share some behind the scenes ways of working at the major events through the year. 

**If you have any questions you would like answered then please forward them to *Bowls International's* editor at large Ceris Hewlings at [ceris.hewlings@keypublishing.com](mailto:ceris.hewlings@keypublishing.com) and I will do my best to include them in future articles.**



Practical demonstrations of equipment usage



Throughout 2023, Allan will be describing the use of the most common items of measuring equipment for umpires and markers



Allan will also be sharing some behind the scenes ways of working at the major events through the year  
Credit: Allen Simms