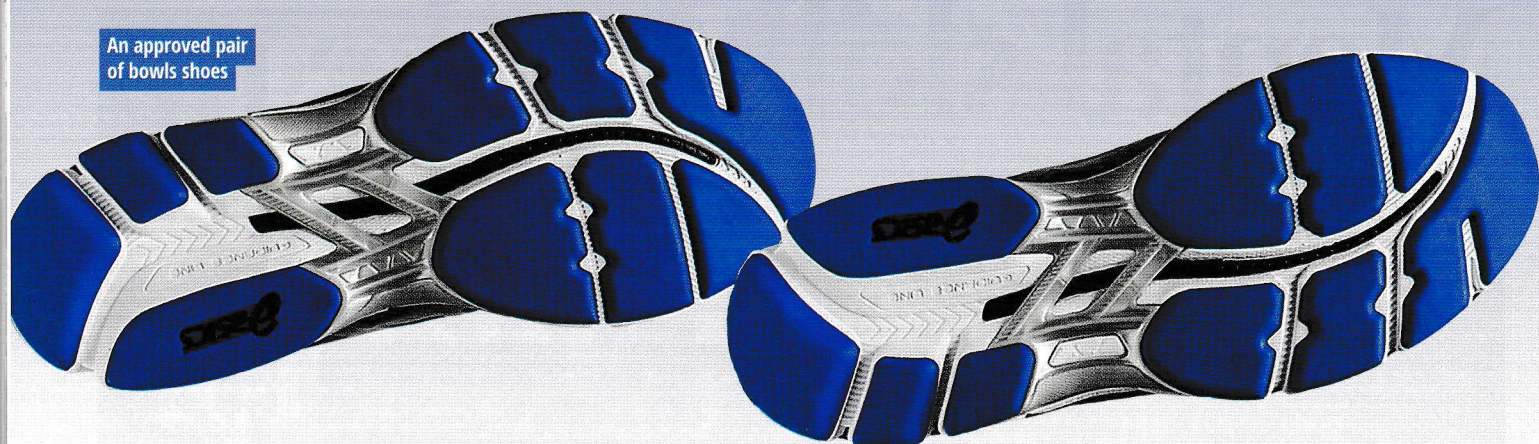




An approved pair of bowls shoes



# BOWLS SHOES

There can be little doubt that the design of lawn bowls clothing and footwear has a bearing on recruitment and retention of members in clubs.

Without evidence I would suspect that clubs persisting with blazers, white shirts, ties, white trousers and brown or white shoes are not encouraging younger players to walk through their doors.

Clothing aside, many questions are raised about style, colour and compliance of bowls shoes. There are an abundance of manufacturers and retailers of shoes specifically designed for the sport, but there

are also high street names whose trainers are being seen on the bowls greens.

Speaking personally, finding a comfortable and supportive pair of bowls shoes is challenging. I have suffered in the past with Plantar pain especially after long umpiring stints.

At the British Bowls event in July, I resorted to a pair of black Sketchers after a painful first day in a pair of bowls shoes. The same must apply to players and playing two or more three-four hour games a day will take its toll on those pins.

So, what about these questions round compliance and are bowls shoe manufacturers complying with the requirements with their ever evolving designs? Do trainers from brands such as Sketchers, Addidas,

Nike etc meet our requirements for the sport?

Firstly, let's turn to the Laws of the Sport to see where we stand (excuse the pun) with all of this. The specifications for footwear can be found in the Appendices of the Law Book, specifically Appendix A.2.

*A.2.1 Players, umpires and markers must wear flat-soled ('heel-less') footwear when they play on the green or act as umpires or markers.*

Well, that could not get more straightforward, could it? Well, it appears that questions can still be raised about the interpretation of 'flat-soled'. Note that it does not mention 'smooth-soled'. This wording was removed with the introduction of the Crystal Mark

edition of the laws almost 20 years ago and yet we still get that interpretation. Flat-soled does not mean smooth. Indeed, I have seen several accidents on the green and on slippery green surrounds caused by bowls shoes with smooth soles.

Modern bowls shoes have some areas of indentation, they are still flat. Where questions are raised is around those shoes that push the boundaries with their indentations and grip. I have included some examples of bowls shoes available on the market nowadays and also included a photo of the sole of my Sketchers. So where do we draw the line with what is or isn't acceptable? All bowls shoe manufacturers are fully aware of the requirements of the Laws of the Sport and it is generally accepted that if they are

specifically made for the sport then they must be fine to wear. However, let me highlight the second part of Appendix A.2.

*A.2.2 World Bowls and Member National Authorities can approve specific colours for footwear and the types of sole.*

On the face of it this sounds like a bit of a cop out on World Bowls

behalf but actually it is there for very good reason. The Laws of the Sport apply around the World and we all know that surfaces that we play on vary considerably, be they indoor carpet, soft grass, hard weed surfaces, outdoor synthetic etc. All of these surfaces can react in different ways to the type of shoe we wear, the type of delivery and so on. So, this clause has been added to allow individual bowling nations to decide what type of sole is acceptable on their surfaces.

It will come as no surprise to you that some countries do an excellent job with permitting certain shoes and others don't. As new shoe

***"So, what about these questions round compliance and are bowls shoe manufacturers complying with the requires with there ever evolving designs?"***



Allan's Sketchers are compliant in his view



designs come on to the market it is for the countries to add them to their list of approved sole-types and decide how this is applied. Of course, nowadays we have the additional complication of high-street trainers being used and not being approved.

Here is an example of guidance from one MNA which is backed up by a shoe policy document with photographic examples:

*Shoes must be flat-soled with no separation between the front sole and heel (i.e. flat from toe to heel). Walking shoes and sports shoes are acceptable; sandals with a heel strap are also acceptable, as long as the back strap is firmly fitted when worn. Flat-soled wedge shoes (i.e. shoes that increase in height from toe to heel) are not acceptable. The width of any heel must be at least 50% of the widest part of the sole. Another MNA specifies the criteria for approving bowls shoes: Approvals will be based on (but not limited to):*

- Contour of the sole
- One piece sole
- Channel depth
- No raised heel
- No attached heel
- Rounded edges
- Indented non-slip sole
- No excessively pronounced ripples/obstructions

So where do we go from here and how do we appease the complainants?

Quite simply in my opinion, each country should have a simple document showing types of soles that are permitted on their particular surfaces just like the example above. Examples showing the extend of grip and indentation that is permissible and of course clear guidance on how this is enforced.

But, are we trying to use a sledgehammer to crack a nut here? In my view, yes. Ninety-nine percent of players have shoes that are manufactured by our excellent range suppliers and they are fully compliant with the laws. Sometimes, a bit of damage is done to the green surface be



Countries should have a simple document showing types of soles that are permitted on their surfaces

it, bobbles or creases on an indoor or synthetic outdoor carpet or a bit of grass being lifted leaving a little dirt patch. Is this damage the fault of the shoe or is it more to do with the movement of the player, scuffing, twisting or sliding their foot. I will leave you with one more thought, what do greenkeepers generally wear on the green? Many of the ones I have seen wear safety boots for obvious reasons and these are heavily ridged and have heavy solid heels. Sledgehammer to crack a nut? I think so, we are over thinking things in my view.



These soles are not approved



## SCORECARD QUESTION

**Thank you to reader, Rick from England who sent in an interesting question relating to the scorecard. Here is his question:**

I have just read your article re the responsibility of the skip in marking the score, now clause 40.1.7 under the latest rules of the sport.

However, is there any penalty if the skip does not fulfil his responsibilities? I was in a game recently where the opposing skip was asked by his third 'who is doing the card?' This was already the fifth end of the match. It was obvious that no one had done the card as the third asked me to lend him my pen. I complied but two ends later, the third asked to borrow the score card so that he could complete the score on the first five ends.

The skip thus broke at least two of the rules under section 40.1.7 but I cannot find any penalty that should follow.

This scenario is actually quite common. Firstly, Law 40.1.7 does specify that the skip must keep the scorecard. However, under Law 40.1.9

*40.1.9 For domestic play, Member National Authorities can transfer the duties described in Law 40.1.7 to other members of the team. However, they must make sure that the duties are transferred to players whose positions, in order of play, are the same in each team.*

This clause therefore allows for other players to complete the card, but they must be playing in the same position e.g. second or third. England has such a domestic regulation that allows for such delegation with the added condition that if agreement cannot be reached on which players keep the card then both skips must keep it.

From an officiating point of view, we would be looking for the card to be completed by players in the same playing position e.g. skips or seconds, but if they are not then the result of the game will be taken from the card maintained by the skip in accordance with the laws. To directly answer Rick's question regarding penalty, there isn't one unfortunately.