



Reflection and Questions Answered

As we head towards the autumn in the northern hemisphere and the spring Down Under, I thought it worth applauding the hardworking officials that have given up thousands of hours of time to assist the smooth running of the many competitions during the season.

In the UK, we have all been busy with the latter rounds of competition which have ultimately led to the respective national outdoor championships. In Australia, the 2025 Australian Indoor Championships have just completed and prior to that the mammoth Australian Open took centre stage. It's during these periods that it is 'all hands on deck' to fulfil the officiating commitments.

In my own county of Surrey, the final weeks of county competition require umpires and markers for the quarter, semi-final of each competition. These are played daily throughout July, culminating in the county finals at the beginning of August. With relatively low numbers of officials, we inevitably commit to several of these games over that period. This is echoed throughout each county around the country. I always enjoy officiating at these county events where I can.



English umpire Bernie Hill on marking duty at the Australian Open. Credit: Bowls Australia

The Bowls England National Championships are after 19 days of fierce competition utilising the services of over 50 officials all of whom must be of

national grade. Scheduling so many officials to match the schedules published by Bowls England is a huge challenge and it takes time to ensure that every session is catered for before publishing those schedules to the officials. Scotland's National Championships span just over a week at the impressive National Centre for Bowling in Ayr. Again, a huge commitment from the Scottish officials, with 46 participating in both umpiring and marking roles.

These final stages of competition, whilst an honour and privilege for officials to take part in, are really just the tip of the iceberg. The number of competitions aside these regional and national events is increasing year on year and it is key for

umpiring bodies to ensure that recruitment is at the top of the agenda for future.

On the opposite side of the planet, Bowls Australia are adept at hosting huge events, the like of which we rarely see in the northern hemisphere. The Australian Open is massive. There were 3,500 competitors playing over 15 host clubs on 39 greens. This demands over 30 ITOs, not just from Australia but from around the world. In addition to the ITOs, there are hundreds of national officials working tirelessly to help the event run smoothly.

A huge thank you to all of the officials that dedicate their time voluntarily to support the players and the sport. It is always nice to receive a thank you, it makes it all worthwhile sometimes.'



Pauline name to come officiating at the Bowls Scotland National Championships. Credit: Bowls Scotland

A ditch measure being carried out



"The number of competitions aside these regional and national events is increasing year on year and it is key for umpiring bodies to ensure that recruitment is at the top of the agenda for future"

MEASURE QUERY

I am always happy to advise players and allow them to question what I do, I think it is important as part of their learning experience. At one of the county semi-finals I was attending as umpire back in July, I had an interesting discussion with a couple of players about a particular measure I carried out. The players in question were relatively new bowlers and had enjoyed an amazing season reaching the final stages of the county competitions, so I was more than happy to assist. They called me to measure between the jack and a bowl in the ditch and three bowls on the rink a metre or so away. Bread and Butter stuff that is practiced in Umpire training and assessments.

I got out my long string measure and asked one of the players to assist. As I gave the end of the string to the player and explained what we would do, I could hear some chatter from the less experienced players who were on the bank watching intently. I measured each bowl in turn and made the decision on which were the shots, thanked my helper and left the rink.

After the game had finished and I was checking their scorecards, two of the less experienced players asked me why I hadn't used a box measure but had used a string that they had never seen before. When I asked how they would use the box measure in that situation, they explained that they would turn it around and

have the box part against each bowl in turn and the pointer on the jack. I pretended not to be horrified and proceeded to explain and demonstrate why a box measure would not be the most appropriate piece of equipment. The players were fascinated as they had always been shown to use a box measure over such a distance. I did explain that this may be slightly more acceptable if the jack was on the rink. We also have to be mindful that when playing matches where no umpire is present, the box measure is about the only items of equipment that is available. They thanked me and said they had learned such a lot at the later stage of these competitions having only really played club games up

until this season. I get a nice buzz from these sorts of interactions as I feel I have helped in some small way with their development as players.

INJURY SUBSTITUTION

Finally, this month I end with an interesting question from social media.

Julie asks: "If a player is unable to continue due to injury during trial ends, can a like for like position substitute be called upon?"

The simple straightforward answer to the is yes, a substitute can be brought in during the trial ends.

As with many things, it is worth putting a little more meat on the bones of this one though. I'll start by being a little pedantic, but it does lead to a logical explanation.

Julie mentioned the replacement being a substitute. They would not be a substitute at this stage as this is defined by someone that replaces a player than has to leave the green and cannot return within 10 minutes. This is described in Law 32.2. This law then goes on to explain that the substitute cannot play in the skip position which Julie alluded to when mentioning a like for like position.

In the case of a player not being able to complete the trial ends, it is perfectly acceptable to introduce a replacement player and they can take any position in the order of play. The reason for this is revealed in law 11.2.2 which states:

Law 11.2 Order of Play

11.2.2 The positions of players within a team must not be changed AFTER the first end has been completed unless the change is necessary because a substitute is introduced as described in Law 32.

Essentially what this is saying is that the order in which the players deliver their bowls is not fixed until the completion of the first end.

Hope that helps Julie.

