SPEED AND MOWING PRACTICES

The Covid-enforced lockdown allowed most of our greens to recover well, with good, healthy grass coverage. However, inspections of a few greens showed bare and stressed patches. We are concerned that this might have been the result of greens being cut too low. Hence the reason for this document. Much of this information can be found in Dr Louw's excellent publication **Lawn Bowls: Greens Management**.

Most GKPs are encouraged by the members of their Club to produce "fast" greens. While there is no doubt that members are entitled to reasonably fast greens (running speeds of around 13/ 14 seconds), the health of the green must remain the prime consideration. The desire for speed must never outstrip the capabilities of the green or the GKP.

The speed of a green is inversely proportional to the sum of the resistance that the bowl experiences. We also know that this resistance will vary from green to green and also vary on the same green on different days.

Simply stated, the resistance on a green is influenced by
1. The hardness and texture of the soil
2. The moisture content of the soil
3. The thickness of the grass mat
4. The mowing height
5. The type of grass.

As GKPs, we cannot do much about (1) the hardness and texture of the soil. Here in the Western Cape, most of our soil bases are sandy, and therefore naturally slower than a green with a clayey base. We also cannot do much about (5) unless we replant a green.
Regarding (2), we can decrease the speed of the green by watering prior to an event, or not water for a few days to increase the speed.
The most important contributor to speed or otherwise, which we can and must control, is thinning out the mat (3). Regular grooming and brushing will achieve a faster green.
If we do this we will not have to resort to setting our mowing height so low that we damage the grass plant.

Mowing is a traumatic experience for the grass plant. It causes
- a temporary halt to the growth of the plant
- a reduction in the production and storage of food (carbohydrates)
- fluids to escape from the plant
- cut leaves to allow diseases to enter
- a temporary reduction in the absorption of water by the roots.

There is a generally accepted rule of thumb practice that one not cut more than one third of the vertical grass shoot at a time.

Cutting too low is called "scalping". This results in the exposure of unsightly shoot stubble. If there are no leaves, then the plant cannot absorb the necessary $CO^2$and so the process of photosynthesis cannot take place. And if there is no photosynthesis, then there is no food for the plant to survive.

If the process of cutting too low takes place during the winter months, then at worst, the GKP will have to resort to introducing sods or, at best, the turf will not recover in time for the busy competitive season.