

## GRASS CLIPPINGS 17

### THE GREEN KEEPER AND HIS COMMITTEE

When a President and his Committee take over the reins of the club, they, also, become the custodians of the club assets of which the main ones are the clubhouse and the greens'

It is incumbent on them to ensure that when these two assets are handed over to their successors they will be in the same condition- if not better- than when they assumed the custodianship.

Unfortunately, this does not always happen – unenlightened pressure from the members exerting undue pressure on the committee often result in the greens being at risk.

Recently, while browsing through an overseas publication I came upon an article written by a Greenkeeper (GKP) in the UK lamenting the fact that as a result of demands by the Club Committee and members his ability to maintain a healthy bowling surface was being compromised.

Whilst admitting that the Club Committee is there to promote the game of bowls and encourage the members to play more often there must come a time when the GKP should be able to call a halt because the health of his green is threatened.

He cited a few main problems –

1 Green keepers time was being eroded by their demands for more "Playing time".

2 Demands by the Committee and members for faster greens

3 Demands for sponsored tournaments when one green is scheduled for renovation.

1 **Green keepers time vs Player's time**

- Although I do not have a serious "Player Count" problem at Kowie I suddenly realised when reading this article how much of my "Green keepers Time" had been taken away rather insidiously by the various Club Committees and members over the span of 26 years

When I started at Kowie we played Tabs-in on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays – I had the other days to prepare the greens - then, they wanted to play on Fridays (Bounce Games and practicing)

The next concession was for Wednesday's mornings when a few older players wanted a green for themselves.

The next intrusion came when an enthusiastic coach demanded a green on Sunday afternoons for her "nursery".

Having coped with all these player days we also have to cope with the "Night Bowls League" (two sessions of 6 weeks each / year)

played on Friday evenings. Only one green has lights and any major work on that green has to be organised around the "Night Leagues"

All this meant more green fees and members but it has created a nightmare for the greens management team. -especially when it comes to finding time for annual renovation.

I am sure that there are many Green keepers out there with similar problems e.g. in those cities where the Municipalities had been in charge of renovation and closed the green for up to 11weeks there is now a tendency for players to demand that at least one green be kept open and that renovation be restricted to allow for more "Players Time"

At what stage does the GKP say to his committee so far and no further – and – will they believe him.

2 **Speed** - The quest for speed has, since time immemorial, been the greatest area of conflict between the GKP and his club.

The players concept of speed is limited to the mowing height. As far as they are concerned all the GKP has to do is to cut shorter and the speed will follow.

While not wanting to go into the dynamics of speed - it was adequately dealt with in Grass Clippings 3 -- one has only to look at the position at my own club to get a better understanding of speed.

My "B" green has a hard firm soil base. The bowl runs on top of the surface and the resistance from the firm base is minimal. My "A" green has a softer sandy base. The bowl running on the surface sinks into the sand and the area of contact with the sand is greater than on "B" green – the resistance is greater – so –if I want to equalise the speed on the two greens, I would have to equalise the resistance on the two greens i.e. I will have to reduce the resistance on "A" by either thinning out the mat or by reducing the mowing height – both procedures being fraught with danger because of the reduction in "leaf area"

While it is relatively easy to attain acceptable speeds on "B" green any attempt to do the same on "A" green carries with it the dangers associated with an excessively reduced leaf area. After many years of experimentation I have reached a, sort of compromise, with myself as far as "A" is concerned – I only reduce the "leaf area" for a special tournament after which I return to normal again.

Our writer from the UK stressed the fact that, in spite of his protestations as a professional the club insisted on faster greens. Having reduced the leaf area and increased the speed he now had to fall back on all his cultural experience to induce the "fewer" leaves to

produce more Carbo-hydrates in order to keep the grass alive.

All this increased stimulation inevitably led to the grass becoming more prone to diseases and eventually dying off because it was no longer capable of supporting growth in the grass plant.

Let us see what the pundits say

**A very experienced GKP in Australia** said to me “Reducing the mowing height by one millimetre requires three times the expertise”

**A.J. Sturgeon** “Reducing the mowing height requires an increased use of fertilisers, irrigation water, pesticides and cultural methods. With each additional operation the potential for error increases along with the number and severity of problems encountered during the growing season **as the cultural intensity increases so do the required levels of technical expertise and operational capability – it is hardly a game for amateurs**”.

I can go even further with another quote from A.J. Sturgeon - “While excessively close mowing will reduce the CHO reserves excessively high rates of nitrogen fertilisation, on its own to increase the growth rate, can also exhaust all the CHO reserves so that the grass plant is solely dependent on the photosynthetically produced CHO which might not be enough to sustain the desired growth rate”

This implies that having reduced the mowing height (and leaf area) attempts to stimulate the grass to grow faster can, in itself, lead to disaster.

I wonder if those Club Committees who concur with their members and exhort their GKP to greater efforts by reducing the mowing height have ever read, or even heard of A.J Sturgeon.

**3 Sponsored Tournaments.** The club committee is only too eager to stage sponsored tournaments and should be encouraged to do so - the only problem lies in the timing of these events.

A GKP normally sits down with his Club Committee to organise the years programme round his renovation programme and the Major club events where all the greens will be required.

The position becomes “difficult” when a new sponsor decides to support a tournament and then specifies a date which is completely unacceptable within the GKP’s renovation programme.

According to our friend in the UK the GKP is, more often than not, overruled

At the conclusion of his article our writer mentions the survey done in the UK a couple of years ago in which GKP’s were asked

“when last did the club President walk around the greens with you and 95% answered “never” – my experience when inspecting greens is that the position is no better in the RSA – very few Presidents actually support (or protect) their GKP in the face of demands from the members and when passing on their custodianship to their successor do so with their tongue in their cheeks.

## **MOWERS AND MOWING**

Most clubs try their utmost to supply the GKP with the equipment he needs to provide them with a satisfactory playing surface.

Having done so it is now the responsibility of the GKP to –

- Service and maintain the equipment according to the prescribed manuals.
- Use the equipment in such a way that it gives him the maximum benefit on the green

During my more recent inspections I could not help noticing the apparent increase in instances where there was “mower abuse”

Mal-adjusted mowers and slovenly mowing techniques seem to be the order of the day.

I have often said that a well cared for and perfectly adjusted mower in the hands of an expert can convert a “C” green into a “B” while, a badly adjusted mower used incorrectly can reduce a “C” to a “D”

As a visiting player walks on to a green, he must say to himself “would I like to play bowls here to-day” If he sees a well-cut smooth green with no evidence of any mower marks his spirits are immediately lifted even before a single bowl has been delivered because he can see that the members of the club care for their green.

It is not easy to walk on to a green for an inspection and sense the expectations of the Committee members only to see –

- A fluffy green with the tips of the leaves bruised and torn
- Many marks where the mower overlapped or “dug into” the green or had one side mowing better than the other
- Weak and bare areas on the perimeter where the mower is turned
- That the mower has not been cleaned for a few months
- Dry moving parts.
- A gap between the cylinder and the bottom blade
- A worn and very sharp bottom blade and / or blunt leading edges to the cylinder blades
- Potentially dangerous electrical connections

- Oscillation in the front roller due to faulty bearings
- The mower is set at the fast-cutting speed

One must stress the fact that the main thrust of an inspection is to evaluate the condition of the green and determine its grading. Tucked away in Section “A” is an item “Mower” and when I examine the mower I am, in fact, commenting on the manner in which the GKP has looked after the mower and other machinery and how he is using it. – the list of “faults” mentioned above would not make good reading when the Club Committee read the report and wonder why their green lost marks unnecessarily.

When I mark Section B of the Grading sheet I would come to the item “Appearance”

Here again the manner in which the mower has been handled will become evident. Mower marks and obvious evidence of a mal-adjusted mower will be punished.

Mower care seems to be a forgotten art – one has a club using 5 bottom blades per year on every mower while another club will make a bottom blade last more than a year – the difference will be obvious on the greens – trying to save on bottom blades by not adjusting them to cut the grass cleanly is not only false economy but the bruised and torn leaves take much longer to heal than when the leaves are severed cleanly.

We have often mentioned the need to ensure that the cutting edge of the cylinder is correctly positioned in relation to the bottom blade

What the average GKP does not realise is that if the cylinder is perfectly adjusted then the leaves will be cleanly severed and heal quickly whereas a badly adjusted blunt cylinder will cause bruising and extensive laceration of the leaves. This would require much more time and Carbo-hydrate to heal. It follows that the GKP with the perfectly adjusted cylinder can afford to reduce his mowing height before the GKP with the poorly adjusted cylinder who has to allow for an increased call on his CHO reserves

A few years ago, my assistant was a fanatic with the machinery – he insisted on replacing the bearings on the mowers every year irrespective of whether they showed any signs of wear. Needless to say, we never had any problems with the machinery

I have inspected green where the mower is adjusted once a week or even less and I have inspected greens where the mower is adjusted on the green every morning and then, if another green has to be mowed the adjustment is reviewed at the next green – who do you think would have the better greens.

The mower speed is always a bone of contention – I would walk on to a green and ask the GKP “are you mowing at the slow speed” he would solemnly answer “yes” and yet when I examine the mower, I find it set at the fast speed – strange!

The mowing height is another problem area – many GKP stick to the same mowing height throughout the growing season without putting some thought into it when conditions change eg. after it has rained the base of the green is slightly softer and the mower would sink into the surface. The obvious response would be to raise the mowing height by 0.5 mm to compensate for the softness of the base and avoid mowing marks from cutting too short.

I have lately come to the conclusion that, in the curriculum for Level One Greenkeepers mower care and mowing should be one of the most important items

### **LEVEL ONE CERTIFICATION**

The Greens Standing Committee of Bowls SA has, behind the scenes, been active in establishing Examining Committees in those Districts which were willing to participate in the Scheme. Our first recipient of a Level One Certificate was Andre Bezuidenhout from Oudtshoorn Bowling Club. Andre looks after four greens in what is probably one of the most beautiful settings in the RSA. He uses a spirit level to ensure that the boundary pegs are vertical at the recent inspection he got the only “A” grading I have awarded in two years and “C” s for the other greens.

Some time ago we promised to visit as many Districts as possible to improve the skills of those entrusted with Level One examinations, we still intend doing these visits as soon as funds are available.

In the meantime, we hope that District Executives will support the efforts of their examining Committee and encourage Greenkeepers to “go for it” and apply to have their greens examined.

## **SUMMARY OF GRASS CLIPPINGS 17**

Conflict- The main thrust of GC 17 is to draw attention to those areas of conflict between the President of the Club, his Executive and the members on the one hand and the Greenkeeper who has to ensure that the health of the grass is not jeopardised. The one group is trying to promote the club and boost the finances while the other party is

trying to avoid putting too much pressure on the grass.

I have often said that a well cared for and perfectly adjusted mower in the hands of an expert can convert a “C” green into a “B” while, a badly adjusted mower used incorrectly can reduce a “C” to a “D”

Above all this is the fact that the President is the custodian of both the Clubhouse and the Greens and honour bound to ensure that they are not irrevocably “damaged” during his term of office.

Mowers and Mowing Recent inspections have indicated a “falling off” in mower care and mowing and many greens have been downgraded because of marks lost because of slovenly mower care and mowing techniques.  
Up –date on Level One. Progress report.