



ENGLISH SHORT MAT BOWLING ASSOCIATION

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ESMBA Chairman's Report 2021

Never in my wildest of dreams did I imagine I would be writing this report after the year we have gone through. This year has seen the committee addressing what is probably the most challenging of a lifetime, with always in the back of our minds that everything we do need to sustain the Association.

Due to the Covid 19 situation we have had to postpone more events and even cancel some. We have virtually lost a year of elite competition. The committee were in uncharted waters, remaining on post for an extended year with no possibility of an AGM. It's only now we will hold the 2020 AGM directly before this 2021. It has been a stressful year with hard decisions to be made. Although this year has hit us all hard with restrictions to our lives and the loss of many family and friends through this evil virus, there has been many positives to have come out of it. Before I go on, I would like to take this opportunity to remember all those members that have been taken before their time. I would especially like to pay tribute to George Clarke, who sadly passed away from ill health during the pandemic. I don't think anyone can question the loyalty and service that George gave this Association and if I can give just half of what he did, then I would be achieving so much. George will be greatly missed at all levels of bowls and I know once the restrictions are lifted the family will hold some kind of memorial for members to pay their respects.

Early on in the spring of the year, it was realised that we were not going to have normality for some time. We had been in discussion with the DCMS about how we could get members back to bowling. It was decided that we would cancel all competition and elite events and actually concentrate on the grass root bowlers and assisting clubs in returning to bowls in a safe and secure manor. In the early weeks, there was a lot of consideration as to how we would enable members to return, finally the initial idea of Safe Bowls certificate was formed. I presented my initial thoughts to the committee and then following that and help from other members the protocols developed. We quickly got into a position of presenting the scheme to the DCMS and although we were expecting them to come back with amendments we were surprised when it was return without any improvements but congratulations on the scheme.

Then came the hard task of making it all work. The scheme relies on a volunteer network that can be managed centrally. The best way to do this was through the Safeguarding officers. When I first addressed the County Officers by zoom with Lynn Dean, I think there was much fear and concern but I have to thank each and every one of those officers that have made the scheme such a success and assisting their members to safe bowls. I personally would like to thank both Lynn Dean and Brian Baker not only for the work that they have put in in making this a success, but also being a rock and sounding board for me in a time when hard decisions had to be made. They both would never sing their own praises and sit what looks quietly in the background but I, for one know what they have done and the hours they have put in to keep this Association going in its hour of need. So from me and all the membership thank you.

No one knows what is around the corner and although there is a thought that everything will be back to normal very soon, I fear that what is normal will not be the same as 18 months ago. We must continue to look at ways we can keep our members safe and enjoy the game of bowls, and we must evolve to stay ahead of the game. Be that of our business structure, the competitions we offer and the way we develop and work with others.

The one thing I personally don't want to lose following the last year, and that is being back in touch with the grass roots bowlers, the clubs that make the Counties that are members of the ESMBA. Although there is no direct path for clubs to join the ESMBA, there is no problem with the ESMBA working with clubs directly as well as Counties. We are here as servants to our membership. This Association prides itself on the talent pathway and everyone starts as a club bowler, clubs are the heart of this Association and its those that we must protect and support.

Although all the positive that have come out of the safe bowls scheme, I was a little disappointed in that when we create a fund to financially assist clubs, not many took us up on it. I'm not sure their reasonings not to but it was one of the few if not only times the Association was offering cash grants to its members to survive.

The reduce diary of events did enable us to work on areas that have always been put on the back burner, well the back burner became the front burner and I'm pleased to say that the ESMBA has now got an approved CPD module with coach bowls for all coaches to undertake and understand our sport. Ongoing communication with Coach Bowls means we are looking at improving our relationship with them and also taking more of a lead role within the organisation.

We were also approached by the new chairman of the BDA, a swear word with some in the Association to open up communication. It appears that the Sport England want the BDA to be a true representative of the Bowls family. The BDA has had a change around at board level with more independent directors and have had new employees including a new managing director and development manager. I have attended a few meetings now as a welcome guest the BDA and have had key input to the new strategy for future funding from Sport England. The current BDA know of the history between us and them and know that any agreements if any will be slow to come forward, but at present things look positive to our access to certain services as a non-affiliated member to build trust.

Now, lastly there will need to be changes to the committee, Joseph Newsome due to a new employment opportunity has to step down and I thank him for his work and wish him the best of luck with his new career path. I have no doubt knowing his personality he will make a success of the role he is about to do. Linda White due to increased commitments within her own County does not have the time to commit to the general secretary role, although she would be happy to fulfil as slightly less time consuming one. Thank you, Linda, for your work in what has been a hard year.

With Brandon now standing for President that leaves the competitions Organiser slot empty.

It doesn't pay much, in fact it doesn't pay at all but the satisfaction of enabling members to bowl is worth more than any pay check. We as a committee are here to work for our members and I hope that come the AGM we have a few volunteers. If someone is interesting in a role then I'm happy to discuss prior.

Finally, It has been a time when we have had to make difficult decisions, which in some instances may have been somewhat unpopular but our only objective is to protect all our members now and yet still be there for them in the future. Hopefully we have done this and will see you all back on the mats soon.

Barry Hedges