



ESMBA UMPIRES

On the mat

AUTUMN ISSUE No.1

*Fair game.
Every end.
Every time.* ♡



SUPPORTING UMPIRES • PROMOTING STANDARDS • STRENGTHENING OUR SPORT

Hello everyone,

I was appointed as the new National Umpires Director at the ESMBA AGM on Saturday 18 July 2026.

I'm really looking forward to working with you all and supporting you in this important role. Brab will be supporting me as I familiarise myself with new responsibilities.

I have already had the pleasure of meeting many of you, and I look forward to getting to know the rest of you.

I would be grateful if you could help me build a clearer picture of your needs, preferences and aspirations as umpires, so I can support you as effectively as possible.



John Alder
Umpires Director

*Proud to serve our
umpiring community*

"There is no judgement from me; I simply want to understand how best to support you — and who better to advise me than you?"

AT A GLANCE



ESMBA Matches

Dates and key information for upcoming matches
[See Page 2](#)



Dave & Annabelle's Journey

From family fun to the World Stage
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Why become an Examiner

Find out what the role involves and how to get started
[See Page 5](#)



Umpire's Corner

Real-life scenarios for umpires
[See Page 6](#)



2026 Rule Changes

A summary of the key changes and what they mean for you
[See Page 8](#)

WHAT MATTERS MOST

Umpires are the guardians of fair play. They ensure the rules are applied consistently and create a positive playing environment to help our sport thrive.

YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS

Some umpires prefer to officiate only within their own County — and that's absolutely fine. Others are happy to support different Counties, and some may wish to umpire at ICC finals or National competitions. Please let me know what works best for you.

EXPERIENCED SUPPORT LOOKING AHEAD

Experienced umpires serve as Regional and Area Managers. We also have examiners who test and support those starting their umpiring journey.

We have some vacancies, please let me know if you might be interested in such a role in the future.

THE NEW UMPIRE'S NEWSLETTER

The newsletter will be published twice yearly. It will include different umpire scenarios so that we can all learn together. It can also include charity bowling events and other worthy causes. I will include newly qualified umpires and those umpires who retire.

Umpire Allocation to 2027 Competitions

I have allocated umpires to all of the 2027 Opens, ICC and National competitions. However, I have left some spare spaces for umpire players who are not successful in qualifying in these events. I appreciate their love for the actual game and hope everyone plays well. I am grateful to all those umpires who have already volunteered and at least they can start to organise their accommodation.



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ESMBA MATCHES

Dates for your diary — January to April 2027

30th & 31st January 2027	ESMBA Open Triples & Pairs	Solihull
6th & 7th February 2027	ICC Prelims	Solihull
20th February 2027	ICC Quarter Finals	Solihull
27th February 2027	Over 55's Open Triples / Under 18's Finals	Melton Mowbray
28th February 2027	County Knock Out Cup Double Rinks	Melton Mowbray
7th March 2027	ICC Semi-Finals	Solihull & Melton Mowbray
13th March 2027	National Mixed Fours	Melton Mowbray
14th March 2027	National Over 55s Pairs Final	Melton Mowbray
21st March 2027	England Under 21s International	Solihull
8 th - 11th April 2027	ESMBA Nationals 8 th Singles 9 th Pairs 10 th Fours 11 th Triples	Melton Mowbray
18th April 2027	ICC Finals	Melton Mowbray



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FROM FAMILY FUN TO THE WORLD STAGE

Dave and Annabelle's Umpiring Journey

When Dave introduced his daughter Annabelle to short mat bowls in 2017, he was simply hoping they would find a sport they could enjoy together. Nine years later, the father-and-daughter team have not only represented England, but have also stood side-by-side as National Umpires at the Short Mat Bowls World Championships in Norway.

It's a remarkable journey—but one they insist began with something very simple.

A SPORT FOR EVERYONE

"Short mat bowls is one of the few sports where anyone can compete on equal terms," says Dave. "Age, gender, strength or disability don't matter in the same way they do in many other sports. That's what makes it so special."

For Annabelle, now 16, the greatest reward has been sharing that experience with her dad.

"We've always enjoyed activities together as a family. We've travelled together, played together and now we umpire together as well. It's given us something really special to share."

SUCCESS ON THE MAT

Their partnership has flourished on the mat. Playing together in the fiercely competitive Stockport League, they lost just one match all season to claim the division averages award. Their performances also earned both players England honours, helping the national team lift the British Isles title last year—the first time England had reclaimed the trophy in 15 years.

For many players, those achievements would be enough. For Dave and Annabelle, they were only part of the story.

FROM PLAYERS TO UMPIRES

In 2023, they decided to qualify as umpires together. Both passed the written examinations with outstanding marks before throwing themselves into officiating at County competitions whenever their playing schedules allowed. National events soon followed, and within an

exceptionally short period they had both earned their National Umpire badges.

Along the way, Annabelle quietly made history, becoming what is believed to be the youngest qualified umpire in the Association at just 13 years of age.

Their dedication did not go unnoticed.



ON THE WORLD STAGE

Earlier this year, they received an invitation many officials only dream about—to officiate at the three-day Short Mat Bowls World Championships in Norway.



David and Annabelle flying the flag and representing the ESMBA umpires at the Opening Ceremony.

"It was hard work," Annabelle laughs, "but it was an amazing experience. You meet people from different countries, work with experienced officials and really feel part of something special."





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Ask either of them what they enjoy most about umpiring and neither mentions prestige or qualifications.

WHY THEY LOVE UMPIRING

"The people," Dave answers without hesitation.

"You make friends all over the country, you get to help other bowlers and you see some fantastic competitions. It's a brilliant way to give something back to the sport."

Perhaps the biggest surprise has been how much umpiring has improved their own bowling.

"Understanding the laws in greater detail makes you think differently on the mat," says Annabelle.

"It's definitely helped my own game."

As ambassadors for short mat bowls, both are passionate about encouraging others to follow the same path. They know that many players are hesitant to take the first step, but their advice is simple: give it a go.

GET INVOLVED

The Association is always looking for new umpires, and the rewards extend far beyond learning the Laws of the Sport. New friendships, new experiences, greater confidence and even opportunities to officiate on the world stage all begin with a single decision.

Few could have predicted that a father and daughter who simply wanted to enjoy a sport together would one day be standing at the centre of a World Championship, ensuring the game's highest standards were upheld.

Dave and Annabelle's story proves that every umpire starts in exactly the same place—as a bowler with a love for the game. The next inspiring journey could be yours.

ANDY NEAL – UMPIRE & KAREN NEAL – UMPIRE & LEVEL 2 COACH

Andy and I are Wiltshire players and proudly represent our club and County. We enjoy playing the game and just felt it was a natural progression for us as a couple. We wanted to learn more about the rules so we decided to become umpires. We only qualified earlier this year so it is a steep learning curve. During the summer we have umpired at several ICC friendlies and an Open competition in Wales.

Being umpires has made such a difference. We have improved our knowledge, our game and the ability to help support other new bowlers. We're both extremely competitive and definitely should never play bowls, golf or any competitive sport together.

When Umpiring, it's great that we can do this together. When we are not competing, it works!



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We are looking forward to meeting and learning from our fellow Umpires.

Why Become an Umpire Examiner?



Chris Escott

My journey into bowls began almost by accident. I started playing outdoor bowls in the early 70's. In 1976 I qualified as a coach and then as an outdoor umpire. I quickly discovered how rewarding it was to support the game from a different position. Umpiring gave me the chance to help competitions run smoothly, meet players from across the County and beyond, and keep learning from other officials.

OLD PEOPLE'S GAME!

My real start in bowls was when I was going home from Brighton, where I worked as a tool maker, to go and see my parents who were both bowlers. My brother and I vowed that we would not play an 'old person's' game!!

I decided to pop into their bowling club and say hello. I wanted to let them know I was going to their house. BUT, and it's a big BUT, the home team were one player short! Picture me in full motorbike leathers and the club captain Les Fuller asked me to step in. They provided over shoes for my bike boots and both teams helped me to play the game. Not sure of the result. The tea and refreshments were made by my mother, a

domestic science teacher. Absolutely delicious, so no going back from there to where I am now!!

In the early 90's I qualified as an ESMBA umpire. Later, having quickly progressed to a National umpire, I was invited to become an examiner and look after the East Sussex region.

PASSING ON EXPERIENCE

That role has been especially satisfying because it is not just about testing candidates; it is about encouraging people, sharing experience and helping new umpires develop the confidence to take the next step.

SEEING PEOPLE PROGRESS

Over the years, I have encouraged many people to consider becoming umpires. Some have decided it was not for them, but others have gone on to qualify and remain active today. Seeing those people progress is one of the most enjoyable parts of being an examiner.

WHO WE NEED

We always need experienced, approachable umpires who are willing to pass on their knowledge. If you enjoy helping others, have patience, and want to give something back to the game, becoming an examiner could be a very worthwhile next step.

YOUR COUNTY, YOUR CHOICE

Not all umpires want to travel long distances. Some are happy to umpire in their own County. There is nothing wrong with that.

I still take great pleasure in being involved as an umpire and examiner. It keeps me connected with the sport, with fellow officials and with the next generation of umpires. I would encourage anyone who is interested to find out more—you may be surprised by how rewarding it can be.



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UMPIRES CORNER

The idea here is to review scenarios that various umpires have had to deal with. The identities of the umpires, players, Counties and competitions have not been disclosed for obvious reasons. The purpose of these scenarios is to share situations that umpires have faced and invite other umpires to consider how they would have dealt with them. The impartiality and fairness of the umpire is not in question. We all know how important it is to make a decision.....and sometimes that can be easier said than done. Remember, according to the little book we all carry, the umpire is always right!

These scenarios are based only on ESMBA rules — **what are your views?**

Scenario 1

An umpire was asked to adjudicate because a player had deliberately put their foot against a fender. The purpose of this was to encourage the bowl or jack to go over the fender. The bowler had correctly announced that they intended to play a forcing or firing shot. The action of putting a foot on the fender worked, and the bowl went over the fender. The bowlers' team immediately complained, stating that the player, by putting their foot on the fender, had deliberately interfered with the path of the bowl. They were adamant that the bowl would not otherwise have gone over the fender. The argument put forward by the other team was that there is nothing in the ESMBA rules that prevents a player from putting their foot on a fender. The team member responsible admitted that his intention was to cause the bowl or jack to go over the fender. Apparently, this is common practice on the Short Mat Players Tour.

Scenario 2

During the final end of a Fours competition the Skip bowled the last wood of the game. It was not a forced or firing shot. The bowl completely missed all of the woods and was slowly heading towards the ditch. A player from the opposing team stopped the bowl on the ditch line and removed it from play. The other team objected because the bowl was still in motion. An umpire was requested. The player who had removed the bowl said it was an involuntary action and argued that the game was effectively over. It was agreed by all that there was no likelihood of the bowl ever going over the fender. At this point the team who were objecting were three shots down.

Scenario 3

During a 2-wood Triples competition the first player bowled and this resulted in a toucher that was resting against the jack. The next player missed the head and the toucher remained in situ. When the same lead was about to bowl their second wood they collapsed on the mat and had to leave the game. After a lengthy delay, whilst first aid was given, the other players returned to the mat to resume the game. As the game was about to restart it was noticed that the toucher had been removed. The skip from the other team had removed it. When challenged the skip stated that because the player had left the game the shot was no longer valid. An umpire was requested.



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UMPIRE DECISIONS – What Would You Do?

Scenario 1

The umpire's view was that, by deliberately putting their foot on the fender, the player was guilty of unsporting conduct. The instruction given was to replay the end. No penalty points were awarded.

Scenario 2

The decision of the umpire was, that by stopping and removing the bowl, the player had breached B (4) (b) Displacement by a participating player. The decision of the skip was to play the end again and the team ended up winning the game by two shots.

Scenario 3

The decision of the umpire was, that by removing the toucher the skip had breached B (4) (b) Displacement by a participating player. The reason given was that although the player had left the game the shot was valid at the time and remained so. The decision of the other skip was to replace the toucher.

RULES EXTRACTS

E. THE PLAYER AND THEIR DUTIES (Scenario 1)

E (7) Conduct

In the case of a wilful breach of the Laws of the Game or unfair play or **unsporting conduct**, the umpire may caution the offending player(s) or spectator(s) or order them to retire from the rink.

DUTIES OF OFFICIALS

(2) THE UMPIRE

(b) see that the game is continuous and played in a competitive and sporting manner.

B (4) (b) Displacement by a participating player (Scenarios 2 & 3)

If a bowl while in motion or at rest on the rink mat or if a toucher in the ditch be interfered with or displaced by one of the players the opposing Skip shall have the following options.

- restoring the bowl as near as possible to its original position or
- letting it remain in its new position or
- declaring the bowl dead and removing it from the rink mat or • playing the end again and it MUST be from the same direction.

UMPIRES CLOTHING

The umpire's polo shirt, Gillett and fleece have proved to be very popular. I have spoken to several new umpires and without exception they are all in favour the new style uniform over the blazer, shirt and tie. Brab has kindly agreed to continue to deal with ordering the clothing directly from the manufacturer. In the first instance please refer all enquiries or orders to me at john@esmba.co.uk and I will pass them on to Brab.





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ESMBA RULES CHANGES 2026

The new **SHORT MAT BOWLS 'THE LAWS OF THE GAME'** Rules Book is planned to be reprinted in the near future. This version will include the September 2026 amendments.

UMPIRE EQUIPMENT

APPENDIX 6 (amended September 2026)

ESMBA APPROVED MEASURING EQUIPMENT

NEW WORDING – (Amended September 2026)

(1) CALLIPERS

- Any size internal engineering callipers
- Any calliper made specifically for bowls measurement

(2) FLEXIBLE MEASURES

- Steel - Retractable - Must be in good condition and function correctly
- String – Retractable box type. Must be in good condition and function correctly

(3) OTHER MEASURES OR ITEMS TO ASSIST MEASURING

- Bullet Measure – Must be Lockable
- Pen Measures – Must be Lockable
- Engineering Feeler Gauges
- Torch or light
- White strips to assist the umpire when measuring

(4) SQUARES

- Any Opaque Set Square
- Swivel (Line Fault) e.g. The Rooney Square
- A Set Square

(5) WEDGES

All Wedges must be non-slip and may be made from wood, steel, plastic or rubber and be of various sizes.

BOWLS STICKERS

Re Law B. The Bowls Page 10

Law (1) General – Page 10

Law 1 (c) – Page 10

NEW WORDING (Amended September 2026)

Coloured discs or stickers may be used to identify team or club bowls and for this

purpose they shall be classed as part of that bowl. The placing of more than one sticker on either side of the bowl will render it illegal. In all ESMBA competitions, every team player will have the same stickers on all their bowls or all team members will have no stickers. The use of England stickers is reserved for England games only.

FOOTWEAR & VISITING THE HEAD

Subject to final approval by the ESMBA Management Committee



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