

How To Unbastardize Bowls

I detect a gnawing moan of disenchantment at what is happening in the great game of bowls.

Players in Canada, for example, are choosing to stay at home instead of chasing the provincial, then national title dream. It is the changes in the physical game itself, not the cost or time keeping them at bay.

In some misguided effort to make the game modern, or seemingly more cost and time efficient, beguiling bowls leaders internationally and nationally are ripping the heart and soul from the game, stripping away the skill of champions.

I am not talking about the new inventions designed to make bowls snappy, i.e. coloured bowls, TV and internet coverage, barefoot matches and bigger money showcases; all designed to draw new interest.

The concern is unnecessarily mangling established formats at the Commonwealth Games and World Championships, the penultimate tests for the best players, men and women, representing more than 50 countries. We seem to be burdening everyone with changes aimed at .0001 of the worlds' players.

Worse yet is the trickle down acceptance of this bastardization of the game by member countries at local and national levels looking for the same supposed efficiency of time and money.

World Bowls does it, so it must be right. Hardly.

The attack on the game has come from all angles by reducing the number of bowls played from three to two in triples, four to three in pairs, tightened time limits and God forbid anyone from striking the jack to force a replayed end, we'll just re-spot it. Add

to that more games in a day than physically responsible with players going on the greens by nine in the morning for eight hours.

Some countries have resisted the adoption of these changes in their own local and national events such as Scotland now playing off their championships with 21-up singles, four-bowl pairs and three bowl trips, as well as regular fours.

Canada has been juggling national championships to try and find the right fit for fours, triples, pairs and singles.

Sadly triples, one of the most popular games in Canada has been dropped from national play (senior triples men and women remain as a separate entity in two-bowl format).

Pairs has been stripped to three bowls and fours to 16 ends from 18. Singles is played following as 21 up.

These supposed time saving formats are not and will never reflect the real essence of bowls, nor will they satisfy players' needs for reasonable rest and recovery.

As a player, when you have four bowls in hand, your thinking is different and you play different tactically. Triples is not triples with two bowls. With nine bowls a side the potential for manufacturing a big scoring end is ever present.

Playing a reduced number of ends in fours (say 16) is akin to a jitney. There are swings of momentum and more chances to sway the game and recover stride and form at 18 ends.

Personally 21-up has never been the real test for me in singles. I dearly love the Australian take on singles at 25-up or 31-up. No flukes here. Best player wins.

I think, if we continue this hatchet job, we are headed for some form of video bowls where everyone can stay home and virtually play one bowl singles, pairs, trips and fours for World

championships. That thought is as ridiculous as the path we are headed down.

World Bowls and national bodies everywhere should stop messing with the number of ends and number of bowls played and simply enforce a hard time limit.

SOLUTION _ Players you have 2:30 (for example) or 18 ends for four-bowl pairs, three-bowl triples, two bowl fours or 25-up singles.

One designated successful kill-end per team is permitted.

Slow play will be punished with concession of a full count by the offending team.

Unbastardize the game and get back to REAL bowls.

Terry O'Neil, 2019