



## IRISH LAWN BOWLS HOW TO SET UP A BOWLING CLUB AND THE REASONS WHY 2015



### Dimensions of a green

The green may be rectangular or square; the length should be between the minimum length of 31 metres and maximum length of 40 metres. The green should have a ditch between 200 mm and 380mm wide and between 50 mm and 200mm deep, and the ditch should have a bank against its outer edge which should be at least 230mm above the surface level of the green.

The playing surface should be divided into sections called rinks. A minimum of four rinks is essential but 99% of greens are divided into 6 rinks of between 4.3 metre and 5.8 metres wide for grass and between 4.6 metre and 5.8 metre wide for synthetic. There must be a minimum of 600mm from the edge of the green to the edge of the first rink and last rink.

**The BLI would strongly recommend that the green be a minimum of 32 by 32 metres and contain 6 rinks.**



### A short history of the game.

Bowls is probably the world's oldest sport. Some say it was played in the 13<sup>th</sup> century – others claim it was played in Egypt about 5,000 BC. There are many versions of the sport, bocce, (which is the Special Olympics version of the game), Boules, Petange, Bolla, Bolle and Ula Miaka

The oldest known green is in Southampton, which was founded in 1299

Most people have heard of the story of Sir Francis Drake in 1588 playing bowls on Plymouth Hoe and on being told that the Spanish Armada was on its way, he replied we still have time to finish the game.



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In England during Henry the eighth's reign bowls had become very popular, and the commoners were giving up archery to take up bowls. Henry was concerned that his people were not practising archery, and this could have a devastating effect on future wars so he banned the game amongst commoners' altogether.

The first mention of bowls in Ireland was in 1621 in the "Dublin Assembly Roll" "the enrailed bowling place in Hoggen Green (now College Green) was placed by the city under the care of Robert Taylor, with permission to make what benefit he could of the free use or exercise of bowling"

In Trinity College there was a bowling green quote "for the exercise of the students after the fatigues of their studies.



### The modern game

During the late part of the nineteenth century a group of Scottish men set out the rules for the playing of flat green bowls. Today this is more commonly known as lawn bowls.

The game started to thrive in Scotland and England and in 1842 the first modern green in Ireland was laid in Belfast bowling club. Three more clubs followed in the north in the 1880s. The first green in Dublin was formed in 1892 in Kenilworth square. In 1909 they moved to Grosvenor square, but still retained the name Kenilworth bowling club.

In 1904 the Irish Bowling Association (IBA) was formed to control bowls on an all-Ireland basis and to organise international competitions. They also organise three all-Ireland cup competitions, one for senior players, another for intermediate and finally one for junior standard, where clubs from both the south and north enter a knockout competition. The ladies have a similar arrangement with the Irish Women's Bowling Association (IWBA) which is their international federation and they have one all Ireland cup competition.

From 1904 to 1925 five more clubs were formed Railway Union, Blackrock, I.C.I.C.Y.M.A. in Cork, Leinster, and Clontarf. These 5 clubs along with Kenilworth formed an association which is now the Bowling League of Ireland (BLI), the National Governing Body for bowls in the Republic. They BLI is in turn affiliated to the Irish Bowling Association. The progress of ladies bowling in the republic was slow with only four clubs in existence in 1955. By 1962 with the formation of the Ladies Bowling League of Ireland (LBLI), clubs had begun to grow in the number of ladies playing the sport.

For the past 6 years both the ladies and men sections have been working closely together in developing and promoting the game in the Republic. About 16 years ago we had 15 clubs based in three counties. The BLI now have 30 affiliated clubs spread over 9 counties, whilst 22 of these clubs are also affiliated to the LBLI. This is all down to the cooperation of both the men and ladies committees in formulating our strategic plans.



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## **Why you should consider setting up a bowling green**

### **1. It is a game for all regardless of age or gender**

Bowls is one of the few sports where age and gender make no difference. Once you have acquired the basic skills, you can play against anyone. Strength is not an issue – once you get the line and weight to project a bowl down the green to be as near to the jack as possible, anyone can win.

### **2. Young People**

There are a great number of school children, who for one reason or another, do not like to play contact sports. This could be down to a number of reasons; fear of injury; parents who are not interested in sport; or are afraid of permanent injury to their child; physically incapable; bowls is the ideal substitute, where youngsters can meet their peers without fear of scorn or ridicule, and yet be competitive at the same time.

In the past the game of bowls had strict dress codes, very much like Wimbledon, where everyone must wear whites, and play with either brown or black bowls. This changed in 1999 when coloured bowls were introduced, one of the main reasons for this change was to encourage the young people and get away from the stuffy image of the game. You can now play with orange, white, red, blue or even multi-coloured bowls. This was followed a few years later with shirts and jackets in club colours being allowed. Most of the young players now play with coloured bowls.

There are under 18 and under 25 singles competitions. An under 25 inter-association series is played annually against the 3 associations in the North. After the inter association matches are completed the under 25 international team is selected and it consists of members from all 4 associations.

In 2014 the BLI and LBLI set up a joint committee whose role is to attract more youth to the sport. This committee has become very active and has held a number of open days to introduce the sport to new bowlers under the age of 25. More of these open days are planned.

### **3. People who have given up other sports**

A great many people who reach their middle thirties or early forties, and have been actively involved in sport like Soccer, Gaelic, Tennis or Hockey to name a few, come to realise that they are no longer physically able to continue at the high level that they were used to, but still want to enjoy the competitiveness of sport. Bowls is the answer: it is not physically challenging, it is competitive, and is enjoyable.

### **4. Great friendships formed and people who have retired**

How many of you have heard of people who have retired, have no hobbies or other interests, and just sit at home in front of the telly, and a few years later they have passed away. Those people who have joined a bowls club have the advantage, as they not only now have a hobby to enjoy, but they



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have a social life that brings them in contact with many new friends. The great majority of clubs have a very active social calendar, and even if your partner does not play the sport, they can get involved in the social life of the club.

## **5. Keeps players fit and outdoors all year round**

With the number of all-weather surfaces now in existence in clubs (of which there are 12 at the moment), an all-weather bowling league was set up a few years ago to play during the winter months. The main selling point of this league is that it is mixed with both men and women competing as equals. Each team has 12 persons, which is split in to 3 rinks of four persons. Each team must have at least a minimum of 3 persons of each gender. The league is played on a Saturday morning at 11.00am and usually finishes around 1.30pm. There are over 25 teams that play in this league.

## **6. International team representation**

As mentioned earlier the Irish Bowling Association (IBA) is the international federation for the men and the Irish Woman's Bowling Association (IWBA) is the international federation for the ladies. These are both thirty two county associations.

The BLI and LBLI associations control the sport in the Republic for the men and ladies respectively. There are three associations in the north for men and three for the ladies. The private greens association which is for privately owned clubs around the Belfast area, the Northern Ireland bowling association which are for clubs based in the various public parks and the provincial bowling association which are the clubs in the northern region of Northern Ireland like Portrush, Coleraine, Limavady, etc.

Each group of the four associations have a series of matches over a weekend where each association plays each other, and from these games the international team is selected the same applies to the under 25 international team, and the ladies have exactly the same procedure for selecting their international teams. The home internationals are held every year against Scotland England, Wales, Jersey and Guernsey.

There are other international events which are controlled by world bowls. The world championships which are held every 4 years, the Atlantic Rim tournament held every 2 years, and European championships every 2 years plus international events in Hong Kong, America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa to name a few and of course the commonwealth games, which at the moment we in the Republic are not a part of the commonwealth. The international team is made up of all ages

## **7. Individual international representation**

First of all I should explain that there are three levels of competitions Senior, Junior and Underage

Junior means junior standard and is not related to age but to ability.



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Senior is for the more experienced bowler and Underage refers to those under 18 and under 25 competitions. Those eligible to play in the underage competitions may and do also enter the Senior and Junior competitions depending on their skill level.

The winners of the senior championship competitions, see below, progress to the all-Ireland National Championships in the first week of September. These are normally played in Northern Ireland. The winners of the national championships then qualify for the British Isles Championships at the end of June in the following year. In addition to this the winner of the National Singles then goes on to play in the world champion of champions against the champions of 42 countries.

## **8. Championship competitions.**

Every member is entitled to enter our Championship Competitions no matter where their club is located in the Republic. For the preliminary rounds the luck of the draw decides who has home advantage. The semi-finals and finals of all the championships are played at the same green over the week ending with the August Bank Holiday weekend in the case of the BLI and in mid-August for the LBLI. The club where the finals are held varies each year and normally the BLI and LBLI finals are held in different clubs.

All members entering a team must be from the same club. There are 4 senior competitions singles, pairs, triples and fours and the same in juniors. Then there is an under 18 singles and an under 25 singles. There is also a Senior 4's competition which is open to all members, both senior and junior, the only qualifying criteria being over 55 years of age on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April of the current year.

## **9. Leagues**

I have made reference to this previously, but here I would like to outline all the different leagues that are available.

In men's league competitions there are three leagues divisions 1 to 3 that play on Saturday afternoon's division 1 and 2 are for senior bowlers and division 3 for junior bowlers. Each team consists of 16 players divided into 4 rinks of 4 players each. There is promotion and relegation between these divisions.

Division 4 and 5 are junior divisions and are normally played on Monday nights. Again there is promotion and relegation between these 2 divisions. Each team consists of 12 players divided into 3 rinks of 4 players each.

There are three veteran's league divisions comprising 26 teams which play on Thursday afternoons/ Membership is confined to players who are over 55 on the 1st April in that year. In these leagues there are a mixture of Senior and Junior players. Each team consists of 8 players divided into 2 rinks of 4 players each. There is promotion and relegation between these divisions.

At present the league competitions are confined to clubs within 80 kilometres of the GPO in Dublin. With more clubs coming on stream we are looking in zoning the leagues into provincial areas or including all clubs in the league, now that the road infrastructure is greatly improved. Our strategic planning committee is looking at the logistics of that at the moment.



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In the 2014 season we started a new league called the Southern League which has 4 teams competing. Our 2 clubs in Cork city and a club from Rosslare and Dungarven.

In addition there are individual knockout cup competitions for divisions 1 to 3 and a cup competition for the combined divisions 4 and 5. Cup competitions are open to all clubs in the republic and currently the two clubs in Cork compete with the Dublin clubs. The luck of the draw decides who has to travel.

The ladies section is very much along the lines of the men, with the exception of their league programme. They have two leagues divisions 1 and 2 that play on Wednesday afternoons. Each team consists of 16 players divided into 4 rinks of 4 players each. There is promotion and relegation between these divisions.

Separate leagues play on Thursday afternoons namely divisions 3 and 3A. In addition there is an evening league on Tuesday evenings and a Saturday morning league. These last two cater for those ladies who are unavailable to play in the afternoons due to work or other commitments. There is one knockout cup competition, the Open Challenge Cup.



### **Development Fund**

Many years ago a fund was set up, which every club subscribed to, to support existing and new clubs.

The aim of the fund is to foster and develop the game of bowls in the Republic of Ireland by way of Interest free loans to member clubs. These loans must be repaid over three years and can be used to finance the acquisition and development of bowling greens and premises.

These loans are available to all clubs affiliated to the BLI. Applications for a loan must be submitted to the Honorary Treasurer of the BLI.



### **Coaching & Umpiring**

The staff coach is responsible for all coaching and there are a number of senior coaches, club coaches, and assistant coaches who carry out the actual coaching. All these coaches have had to pass stringent examination through the National Coaching and Training Centre at Limerick



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University. Coaching is free to member clubs, however if travel is involved a mileage charge is applicable.

There is also a staff umpire who is responsible for allocating umpires when required. Umpires officiate at club tournaments and cup semi-finals and finals and the championship semi-finals and finals for both the BLI and LBLI.

We are also fully compliant with the Code of Ethics for Children in Sport and the –Anti-Doping policy.

### Costs



The costs have come down dramatically due to the present economic climate. Five years ago the cost of transforming a green field site to a full size bowling green with 6 rinks with an all-weather carpet was in the region of €150K to €160K now the price is between €110K to €120K.



## Further Information / Contacts

For any further information please contact

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Mobile 086 835 3439

Or see our website <http://www.irishlawnbowls.ie/index.html>

Here are the addresses of some contacts that may be of help

Swords Sports and Leisure: - Contact Eamonn Ashe  
Contractors for laying a Bowling Green with a natural surface or all weather surfaces  
[eamonn@swordssportsleisure.ie](mailto:eamonn@swordssportsleisure.ie)  
[www.swordssportsleisure.ie](http://www.swordssportsleisure.ie)

Dale Carpets: - Richard White  
Supplier of all weather carpets  
[richardw@dalessports.co.uk](mailto:richardw@dalessports.co.uk)

Greengauge  
Contact Colin Cooper  
[colin.cooper@crystalslimited.co.uk](mailto:colin.cooper@crystalslimited.co.uk)  
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