 Charity No. 273134

Visually Impaired Bowls England

 Patron Mr Tony Allcock M.B.E.

**AIDS TO SUPPORT THE PARTICIPATION OF THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED IN THE SPORT OF LAWN BOWLS.**

**Law 41.3 of the World Bowls Laws of the Sport of Bowls – Crystal Mark Third Edition - states that: “Players who are classified partially sighted or blind by their National Governing Body for partially sighted and blind bowlers *(that is, in England, Visually Impaired Bowls England)* can use any form of assistance necessary (including having an assistant with them and having a white, breakable string placed on the surface of the green, along the centre line of the rink) to allow them to take part in the sport of bowls, as long as the assistance is approved by the Governing Body for partially sighted and blind bowlers in the country in which the player is playing.”**

The Law quoted above states ‘Any form of assistance necessary ………………. as long as the assistance is approved by the Governing Body ……’ Many partially sighted and/or blind bowlers play regularly in clubs with sighted colleagues and the following guidelines are to advise clubs on the reasonable adaptations they should allow to support the inclusion of visually impaired bowlers – ***should those bowlers wish to use them***. As is often the case, the Laws of the Sport of Bowls are not always absolutely definitive and are subject to interpretation. For example: the ‘white, breakable string’ referred to in Law 41.3 above, gives no guidance on thickness of string, nor on the force required to make it break. The guiding principle applied by Visually Impaired Bowls England is that the string should be thin enough to allow a bowl to cross it without deflection whilst being thick enough to be visible by the bowler. It is not really possible to give a prescribed string for use but a suitable string might be found by searching ‘kite string’ on Ebay - an example being: <https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/100M-Twisted-String-Line-Red-Wheel-Kite-Reel-Winder-Y6Y6-R8/273311606547?ssPageName=STRK%3AMEBIDX%3AIT&_trksid=p2060353.m2749.l2649> Some visually impaired bowlers (hereinafter referred to as VI bowlers), find that the string is more – or less – visible under different lighting conditions, and where the VI bowler finds it difficult to see the string, a narrow, white piece of plastic (e.g. a garden plant marker) or a folded piece of paper might be placed under the string. (This should be removed after each delivery and replaced prior to the next delivery in order not to distract the opposing bowler.)

Another piece of equipment often used by VI bowlers is a monocular which can be used to identify the aiming point for delivery, to follow a bowl on its course into the head and to assess the head or see the Skip’s gestures/indications in order to make shot selection. There is no legislation regarding the magnification power allowed and the choice of monocular is a matter of personal preference. Some modern monoculars include a range-finder and, whereas sighted players judge weight through eye-hand co-ordination, many VI bowlers judge their ‘weight’ purely by the green conditions and the length of the jack and because they may not be able to see the jack with unaided vision, it is reasonable that the bowler should be able to ascertain an accurate jack length, should they so wish. Skips can assist in this regard by stepping out the distance the jack has travelled beyond the 23m metre mark and calling this back to the VI player (e.g. ‘five over’ would indicate the jack was at 28m – assuming the mat was on the 2m mark from the back ditch). An alternative to a monocular is binoculars – but with one lens blacked out.

On indoor greens, the ‘T’ is marked and, on most, further dots are placed up the green and these are helpful to VI bowlers and their assistants (sometimes referred to as ‘helpers’, ‘coaches’ or ‘directors’). Outdoors, a flat-headed, white pin can be placed on the string and pushed into the green so that it is flush with the green’s surface, 2m from the front and back ditches to assist the VI bowler in positioning the mat at (at least) the minimum required distance from the ditch.

Some B1 (totally blind) bowlers find it helpful to have a small ‘V’ cut out of the centre of the front and back edges of the mat as this helps them locate the mat straight on the string and assists in the positioning of their feet, thereby helping in getting their ‘line’.

Although not ‘equipment’ as such, VI bowlers are allowed ‘front coaching’ whereby their assistant (‘director’) will stand in front of them and indicate the ‘green’ to be taken by, for example, placing a foot ‘on the line’. When ‘front coaching’ is used in VIBE competitions and VI National and International events, the ‘director’ cannot be more than 5 metres in front of the bowler but, when VI bowlers are playing in ‘sighted’ games, this restriction does not apply.

Some VI bowlers find it extremely helpful if the position of bowls in the head are ‘called by the clock’ as this allows them to build up a mental picture of the head. Whilst in the ‘sighted’ game, possession of the rink immediately passes to the opposition when the player’s bowl comes to rest, it can be helpful if sufficient time is allowed for bowls to be ‘called’ as they come to rest, before the next player takes possession of the mat. Not all VI players will want all bowls ‘called’ – indeed some VI bowlers don’t have an assistant and neither do they benefit from having a skip (or another on the rink) who can ‘call the head’.

Should there be any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact Visually Impaired Bowls England. Contact details can be found at: vibowlsengland.co.uk

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