Starting A Short Mat Bowling Club in Herefordshire

Short Mat Bowling is a relatively new sport, only arriving in England in the 1980s having been originally conceived in Ireland. It is an ideal indoor sporting activity for local communities, mainly played in village halls, community centres and similar venues. Players of all ages can enjoy and benefit from both the social and competitive aspects of the game. The sport is played competitively predominantly in the winter period (September to April) but activity does continue across the summer in many clubs.

Organised bowling has taken place in the region since 1992, initially under the auspices of a combined Herefordshire / Gloucestershire association. Success in those early days led to growth which enabled the two counties to establish themselves as separate bodies in 1999 and the Herefordshire Short Mat Bowling Association came into being. We are the recognised body representing short mat bowling in the county and are affiliated to the national governing body, the English Short Mat Bowling Association (ESMBA). We provide support to any individuals or groups interested in the sport of short mat bowling as well as organising leagues, competitions, and county teams to represent the county in national team competitions.

We can provide help that a prospective or established club requires at all stages of progression, including:

* Initial meetings with interested individuals to explore setting up a playing group or club
* Helping to facilitate introductory / taster sessions to gauge participant interest
* Equipment loans to facilitate initial steps
* Advice on equipment purchases and how to formalise a club structure
* Arranging coaching and introductions to the rules of the game
* Contacts for clubs who want to start playing friendly matches
* Information and advice to clubs / individuals who wish to progress to competitive play

More details of the association and its activities can be found on our website www.hsmba.org and initial contact can be made with us via the website or directly to:

HSMBA Chairperson (hsmbachair@gmail.com) or HSMBA Secretary (hsmbasecretary@gmail.com).

Clubs may apply to the Membership Secretary (hsmbamembershipsec@gmail.com) for county membership.

Individual players who wish to play in our leagues or competitions must also register. This registration includes registration with the National Governing Body and confers eligibility to enter all county and national leagues and competitions.

A companion document to this, our Introduction to Short Mat Bowls, provides an introduction to the playing side of the sport.

It is the prime objective of this County Association to promote and develop the game in the best interest of its members. So why not get in touch and see what develops?

Requirements to Establish a Club

There are a few pre-requisites to establishing a short mat bowls club.

Venue & Equipment

The basic requirement for a club is the availability of a hall, with a level floor, capable of taking one or more standard 45' x 6' bowling mats (mats can be shortened if necessary but the shortest mat allowed for competitive play is 40'), together with the associated equipment.

There also needs to be space available for storage of the equipment. Mats can be rolled onto tubes, but bespoke mat rollers can also be purchased to hold one, two or more mats on a single wheeled frame. Rollers can be expensive to purchase and can either address or present storage issues, depending on the nature of the storage space available, but a major benefit is in making it easier for less able-bodied members to roll mats up and move them around. Some clubs have purchased or constructed bespoke solutions for storing mats, for instance, in the space under a hall stage.

The basic equipment required (for each mat) is:

1 Bowling Mat (45' x 6' standard but can be reduced)
2 Wooden Fenders (can be purchased or constructed)
1 Wooden Centre Block (can be purchased or constructed)
1 or 2 Heavyweight (32g) Jacks
2 Standard Foot Mats
1 Scoreboard

Players normally buy their own bowls, but the club may wish to purchase some sets of bowls of different sizes or weights for new members to try before committing to the purchase of their own. These need not necessarily be new bowls as second-hand sets are readily available. The bowls used are the same as used for outdoor and indoor (full length) bowling.

Players should be encouraged to purchase regulation, flat soled bowling shoes at the earliest opportunity. Bowling shoes *must* be worn when playing at any other club in friendly, league and competition games. Flat soled footwear is essential to avoid damage to the mat.

Mats and equipment are available for purchase from a variety of online sources, but the association also has mats and equipment which can be loaned to prospective clubs who may wish to run taster or introductory sessions ahead of committing to equipment purchases.

Some online suppliers of short mat bowling equipment (there are many others):

Bowls World	www.bowlsworld.co.uk
Bowlswear Direct	www.bowlsdirect.com
Duke Bowls	www.dukebowls.com
The Bowls Shop	www.thebowlsshop.com

The closest physical outlet with a reasonable range of bowls clothing and equipment is Pershore Bowls Centre (Unit 18, Pershore Trading Estate, WR10 2DD – but check opening times before travelling).

Insurance

A venue will often require a club to have suitable third-party liability insurance, and this is also a requirement for clubs who wish to affiliate with the Association. An ESMBA recommended insurance policy covering equipment loss / damage and public liability is available to registered clubs through Sutton Winson insurance brokers but a pre-requisite for this is that every member of the club must be registered, not just those choosing to play in leagues or competitions. Other bespoke short mat bowling club insurance policies are available and can be found online.

Club Constitution

A club affiliating with the association is required to have a club constitution in place and this will be lodged with the County Secretary on affiliation. Example components of a club constitution are appended to this document. The constitution should be regularly reviewed. Each year affiliated clubs provide the association with updated information regarding the club's activities, membership, and officers.

Activities of the Association

Management Committee

The Association is governed by a Management Committee which is elected each year at the Annual General Meeting (normally in May) and any registered association members are eligible for nomination. Committee meetings are generally held online using video-conferencing facilities but are occasionally held face-to-face according to circumstances. More details of the association's governance and constitution can be found on the association website.

County Venues

The county's administration is carried out remotely by individual office holders, but our de facto home is the Leominster Indoor Bowling Centre where our equipment is stored, the county team(s) play their home matches and where we hold some of our competitions, particularly those which require greater numbers of mats. Pay-and-play arrangements using our equipment are also in place at Leominster IBC in conjunction with Halo, the venue operators. We use other venues for some of our competitions - primarily Ross-on-Wye Bowling Club but also occasionally other club venues.

County Leagues

We organise separate Winter (October to March) and Summer (May to August) leagues, both of which are open to all affiliated clubs who can accommodate two mats. Clubs may enter one or more teams in either league and both leagues are played on a home and away basis.

The Winter League is played in a 2-Triple format which requires a team of 6 players for each match and is the association's primary, and longest established, league competition. This league currently comprises 22 teams playing across 3 divisions with promotion and relegation.

The Summer League is played in a multi-discipline format (Singles, Pairs, Triples, Fours) which permits teams to play with as few as 5 or as many as 10 players per match. This league is smaller as several clubs play little or no short mat bowls in the Summer, including those based at outdoor bowling clubs whose members primarily play the outdoor format in this period. The league generally comprises between 5 and 10 teams playing in one or two divisions and the teams are drawn into divisions each year based on entries.

Further information can be obtained from the League Secretary (hsmbaleaguesec@gmail.com).

The County Championships

We hold County Championships for various disciplines (currently Singles, Pairs, Over-55 Pairs, Triples and Fours) across the winter season. These competitions are open to all registered players and are generally in the form of a weekend one-day competition at a pre-determined venue. The format is usually a round-robin stage followed by knockouts. Teams generally comprise players from the same club, but this is not a requirement and participants also form cross-club teams to enter.

National Championships Qualifiers

National Championships take place in various disciplines (currently Singles, Under-18 Singles, Pairs, Over-55 Pairs, Triples, Fours, Mixed Fours) at a central venue (currently Solihull or Melton Mowbray) towards the end of the winter season. As a county we have one guaranteed place in each discipline with further places (up to a maximum of 4) being allocated to counties based on the number of entries to their county qualifiers. We hold our National Qualifiers across two weekends in December or January at Leominster IBC.

LEH Two Counties Team of Ten Competition

This competition draws on, and continues to honour, the strong links between the two neighbouring counties of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire and is open to affiliated clubs from either county. The competition runs as a knockout across the season and each tie up to the semi-finals is played on a home and away basis over two legs. The competition follows a multi-discipline format (Singles, Pairs, Triples, Fours) with each player in the 10-player team playing in one of the disciplines in each match. Clubs with fewer than 12 registered members are permitted to combine with another such club and enter as a combined team. The final is played as a one-off match at a neutral venue at the end of the season. The name derives from that of the original sponsor of the competition.

Bromyard Triples Competition

This triples competition differs from the county championships in that entrants represent their club, and each club has one guaranteed entry with additional places being allocated, up to the competition maximum of 16 entries, to clubs wishing to enter additional teams. As a result, where clubs wish to enter multiple teams, they must 'rank' those entries, often by holding preliminary matches within the club. Despite the competition's name it is currently held at Ross-on-Wye Bowling Club.

Macmillan Cancer Support Charity Fours

This charity tournament is played at Leominster IBC in November and is for teams of four. Entries comprise teams not only from Herefordshire but from Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Wales and occasionally further afield. Players do not have to be registered to play in this charity event and all proceeds from the day go to Macmillan Cancer Support. This event is a good opportunity for new clubs / players to get a taste for competition play in a relaxed, social atmosphere. All teams play 4 matches across the day and the emphasis is firmly on socialising and raising money – we regularly raise more than £2,000.

For information about competitions contact the Competition Secretary (hsmbacompetitionsec@gmail.com)

Inter County Championship (ICC)

The ESMBA organises the Inter Counties Championship in which county teams compete at Premier and A team levels across the winter season. The competition starts in regional groups (of 3 or 4 teams) with teams playing each other on a home and away basis (generally between September and early January) to determine qualification for a national knockout competition. Each knockout round is played as a single match at a neutral venue, usually a large indoor bowling arena with multiple matches being played concurrently. A team for each match comprises 20 players playing across 4 disciplines (Singles, Pairs, Triples, Fours). Herefordshire have entered both Premier and A teams at different times, but we currently just enter a Premier team. We hold County Trials in May, following which the County Captain names a squad for the coming season from which teams for individual matches are selected.

County Presentation Evening

All club members are welcome at the annual Presentation Evening, which is currently held in September.

Registration and Competition Entry Fees

Registration and entry fees cover the costs of running competitions (venue hire, refreshments etc.) and providing awards as well as the general running costs of the association. Current fees (2024) are as follows:

Club annual registration	£20
Player annual registration	£7.50 (HSMBA £3, ESMBA £4.50)
Winter League entry	£30 per team
Summer League entry	£5 per team
County Championship entry	£5 per player per discipline
National Qualifiers entry	£8 per player per discipline (HSMBA £5, ESMBA £3)
LEH Competition	£15 per team
Bromyard Triples Competition	£15 per team
Macmillan Charity Fours	£28 per team

Other General Information

Short Mat Bowling Holidays

Bespoke short mat bowling breaks are organised by several providers with the most popular being organised by TLH (Torquay) and Potters Holidays (Hopton-on-Sea, Norfolk). Both offer all-in accommodation, meals and bowling packages and details can be found online. The ESMBA have links with TLH and organise breaks for registered members each year – details are circulated to clubs.

Appendix

Example Club Constitution Components

Name	Contact name, address and phone number and club venue
Aims	Promote the game of Short Mat Bowls Recreational / competitive Affiliation to HSMBA Play under ESMBA rules
Membership	Fees (set at AGM) New member procedures Regulation of the size of membership No discrimination
Committee	Officers – Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Safeguarding Officer, Fixture Secretary / Captain. Number of committee members / election procedures Regularity of meetings Minutes recorded Sub committees Quorum
Finance	Present accounts at meetings and AGM (independently examined) Payment policies Signatories / authorisers
AGM	Notice of AGM to members Receive reports Determine on motions submitted by committee or members Procedures for submitting motions Decide on fees Accounts examiner Elect officers and committee for coming year Quorum
EGM	Period of notice To consider motions from committee or members Quorum
Voting	Proposals to be seconded One vote per member Chairperson to have casting vote in case of tie Number of votes required for a majority
Changes To Constitution	Must be at an AGM or EGM Notice required Votes required for a majority
Dissolution	Must be at EGM Notice required Number of votes required Members only Disposal of assets, after payment of all creditors