



## INTRODUCTION

The raw results from the 2014 Games Survey have been circulated to the V&D board and members clubs as well as being posted on the V&D website. The following is a brief interpretation of those results on a question-by-question basis.

Every club responded, which gives a solid foundation on which to base conclusions, although may have been occasional points where individual interpretation may have skewed the responses to some degree. These will be noted where suspected.

One general statistic that was noted was the amount of time taken to complete the survey. Although some respondents took some time to answer the questions as well as provide supplemental information, many respondents were a bit quicker and took a total of less than 4 minutes.

### **Question 1: Which of the following best describes your club**

This question was answered quite accurately. The response can be compared to the number of ways that a club can be seen to be engaged in V&D activities (participating in Pennant League, participating in Top 10 & hosting a V&D Championship). Clubs that self-identified as ‘active’ generally participated in two or three of the above, while clubs that self-identified as ‘social/recreational’ participated in none or one.

Only one club self-identified as ‘mainly social’ (prefer to bowl at the club), which seemed a bit low, as there are a few clubs that are so focused.

### **Question 2: What do your club members consider to be reasons for/barriers to participating in V&D championships?**

This question produced some surprises. It has long been assumed that travel is the major barrier to participation in V&D Championships and much effort has been made to reduce the negative impact of travel throughout the lower mainland. The survey shows that the #1 barrier (far ahead of all others) is a feeling among bowlers that they are not good enough (73%). The #2 barrier (45%) is dis-interest in V&D Championships, while travel difficulties were 3<sup>rd</sup> (32%). This suggests that efforts to increase participation in V&D Championships should be re-directed toward coaching/promotion and, to a certain extent, recruitment. If there is to be a significant increase in participation in V&D Championships, there needs to be active support at the club level, which ideally would include promotion (encouraging participation and creating a culture where participation is the norm, rather than the exception) and coaching (giving bowlers the confidence to bowl outside the club – they already have the ability).

Two respondents suggested that V&D events should be geared more towards seniors and one respondent mentioned that there are lots of club and inter-club events. An answer to the former is that there are three dedicated senior events and 9 total held in the day. 8 events, plus league and Top 10 are evening. The comment about competing events is more significant, since it seems likely that calendars are being filled at the local level, effectively shutting out other, wider events.

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## **Question 3: What do your club members consider to be reasons/barriers to participating in Provincial championships?**

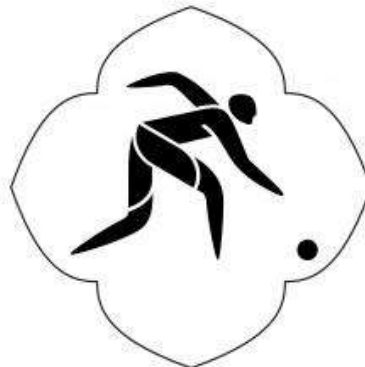
This question was inserted more for the benefit of Bowls BC, but did have the purpose of comparing the V&D and Provincial Championships in bowlers' minds. This did generate unexpected responses. According to the survey, 'not good enough' was still the #1 barrier at exactly the same rate (73%). This means that bowlers consider both events equally 'intimidating', despite the fact that they are very different levels of play. This could be caused by the fact that many V&D bowlers have won national medals and are considered 'too good'. By the same token, travel is an equal barrier to both V&D and Provincial Championships, despite the fact that participation in provincials often involves travel to the island.

One club commented that as the provincials are an open competition and that no one from other clubs invites its members to participate: this, despite the fact that one of their members is a regular participant because he is invited to participate.

## **Question 4: How actively does your club encourage new members to participate in V&D Novice/Colt events?**

This question really gets to the heart of the purpose of the survey – to see how clubs engage their members in V&D level events from the start. Here we have conflicting evidence. The survey shows that over 70% of clubs are quite or very active in encouraging their 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year members to enter the V&D Championships which are solely for them. On the other hand, the Men's Colt and Women's Novice Singles have attracted an average of only 16 participants each. The Men's Colt Pairs, held on the week-end has not had sufficient entries to run for the past three years (on the other hand the Men's Colt Triples averages 12 teams). If the survey is accurate, the suggestion is that clubs are generally unsuccessful in encouraging their new members to participate in new bowler tournaments.

More unfortunate are the six clubs that do not particularly encourage their new members to participate and the two which are 'not at all active'. It is disturbing that clubs might be actively discouraging their new members from participating in wider events presumably for fear that they will not bowl at the club as much as the club feels they should.



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### **Question 5: If a member approached the club executive, expressing an interest in playing in the Monday Pennant League or Top 10, what would the club's response be?**

This is another 'core' question in that it gauges the degree to which clubs, as clubs, are engaged in V&D events. It is difficult to get a clear picture of what is happening at the clubs even after this question. 55% of clubs said they would direct any inquiries to the sign-up sheet, which means they have a posted sign-up sheet. Almost a third of clubs (7) replied that they would suggest the bowler seek other interested members. Two clubs said that it would actively assist the member in trying to form a team, which is encouraging. One question that arises is whether these seven clubs do not post sign-up sheets.

The anecdotal responses are perhaps the most illuminating. Three clubs skipped this question, which might be because they have no interest in Pennant League or Top 10. Three other respondents said that had not heard of these events. This is quite troubling and shows that some clubs are not communicating fully to their members. Again, one reason for this could be a reluctance to have their members playing in 'outside' events, rather than club events.

On the other hand, one club responded that they have a member who organizes the club teams for these two events. If a club claims to offer to its members all the opportunities that the Sport of Bowls provides, this is the ideal approach.

### **Question 6: When your club sets its calendar of the season's activities, does it take into account events outside the club?**

One final measure of how a club is engaged in wider bowls events and the extent to which it is trying to engage its members is whether outside events are taken into account in the club's calendar. The V&D pursues this policy by including provincial and national events in its calendar. There was some surprise that four clubs take the nationals into account, since it impacts local scheduling to such a small degree (unless the V&D is hosting a national event). It is not a good sign that one third of clubs (8) do not take V&D Championships into account and fully two thirds of all clubs do not take Pennant League (14) or Top 10 (15) into account, including clubs that participate in these events! This creates a significant barrier to members participating in V&D events. It is difficult for parent organizations (V&D, BBC, BCB) to do anything for grass-roots bowlers when they are being shut out by clubs.



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## **Questions 7: Please share with us any thoughts, comments, etc. which your club has on the subject of inter-club, V&D and provincial tournaments.**

Some clubs took the opportunity to provide further comments on the topics which this survey introduces. This engagement is a very good sign. The comments themselves offer a wide range of perspectives on the Sport of Bowls and only a few are referred to here.

- One club mentioned that everyone knows the events are there and they can participate if they want. This does not take into account people's natural reluctance to step outside their comfort zone and try something new or different.
- Another club admitted that their better bowlers go on to join other clubs. This should be of great concern to that club (and any other club that has the same situation). Grass roots bowlers are the engine that drives the sport (any sport), but it is the more active bowlers who maintain and steer the engine. More active, more competitive bowlers are sufficiently engaged by the sport to put in the extra time to volunteer. So if a club is losing members in this group, they are losing vital volunteer resources. They are also making it much more difficult for themselves to provide their remaining members with the opportunity to participate in the sport at ALL levels.
- One respondent was concerned that competitive bowlers preferred competitions to club draws. It is interesting that the conversation is never reversed. Instead of asking why competitive bowlers don't play in club draws, why not ask why clubs bowlers don't play in outside events? This same person did refer to there being 'so many outside tournaments'. Perhaps there should be a discussion on this point. Bowls jurisdictions which have large (and very successful) events tend to have fewer events, but those events attract more participants. The V&D has a very large number of much smaller events.
- Finally, one respondent notes that their interclub dates are supplied in November. This is too early to be setting such dates. The best practice is to wait for the dates of the events higher up. So, Bowls Canada waits for the international schedule before setting its National Championships, the provinces then schedule their championships based on the Nationals. The V&D sets its calendar to minimize conflicts with the provincials. It is at this stage that clubs should be setting their interclub and in-club dates. It benefits no one to force member bowlers to choose between conflicting events.

## **Conclusion**

This process has been a fascinating one for me, as I have learned something about our sport (which I always enjoy) and I have hopefully provided member clubs with some useful information and recommendations to help grow the Sport of Bowls.

What I have taken away from this process is that we in the V&D need to be more pro-active, if we want to significantly increase participation in V&D Championships and Leagues. All partners have something they can contribute to this process.

- Bowls BC can offer more upper-level coaching and facilitate training of more intermediate level coaches.
- The V&D can promote its events more at both the club and individual member level. The V&D can also continue in its efforts to minimize the negative impact of travel within Metro Vancouver.
- Clubs can make participation in V&D Championships and Pennant League a higher priority in their programming, creating a culture of 'involvement as the norm'.

Respectfully submitted;

John Aveline