

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE WHITE JACK

Very few bowlers could care less!! However, when your eyesight becomes incurably impaired, as mine did (around 2007/8), you take an interest in anything which may be of some help . On the bowling green, I always preferred the bright yellow jack to black, which I could not distinguish from “woods”. Even a yellow jack I had difficulty with in certain light conditions. For some years, it had been rare to see a white jack being used, and I wondered why, as I found that there were times when it was more visible than yellow, after borrowing one from a club friend. Having decided to buy one - and finding that to be impossible, it started me on a quest! Bowls equipment suppliers said white jacks were no longer manufactured, because of their tendency to crack. I could scarcely believe that nowadays, when you see bowlers playing with “woods” of all colours,...including white....manufacturers could not produce a crack-resistant white jack!

My further enquiries lead me in the direction of the British Crown Green Bowling Association, to whom we all have to subscribe. Their Rules book for 2004 had deleted the white jack, because of the splitting problems. Whilst appreciating the need for safety, it still seemed a drastic step to take, for a problem which surely is easily rectifiable.. Not knowing what an ordinary bowler can do about it, I wrote to the Wales representative at BCGBA meetings, asking for help.. In response, I was told that the matter regularly is discussed at meetings, but without any progress. However, I was pleased to be given a couple of old white jacks, which would be legal, provided they passed at a testing centre. I took these along to our testing centre, where one of the jacks duly passed as perfect, and accordingly date-stamped for match use. The testing station were less than complimentary about the rigorous standards imposed on jacks, by the BCGBA, who had appointed a “Jack sub-committee” to specify exacting standards. I got the impression that such “OTT” specifications would antagonise makers!

In the meantime, I had a letter from the Welsh CGBA Referees Society, confirming that my newly acquired jack would be legal to use in match play. During the 2009 season I did use the jack a few times, although not always without some resistance - and one outright refusal!. Afterwards, I decided not to ask again, another reason being that I was acquiring unwanted notoriety!.

In mid-August 2009 I became aware of a national charitable society called “DeafBlind UK”, who have a branch in our area, and I was invited to their bowling mornings, weekly, at the Conwy green. Of course I took my white jack along, which they found of great interest, never having seen one before. When I told them what I knew of the demise of the white jack, and that I had been unable to make any further progress re-changing things, they promised what assistance they could, as their bowling members would benefit.

It occurred to me that it would be interesting to know what manufacturers had to say about this matter, but of course they would have profit-motivated interests to be wary of. Nevertheless, I sent Emails to both Thomas Taylors and Drakes Pride.

Neither company proved to be very forthcoming, Taylors merely replying that “a problem did exist with white powder, but there would not be any problem now” Drakes were even curter saying that they only produce black and yellow jacks, but if the rules were changed, they would have to look at it again as to whether or not they would produce white again”.

I also canvassed the opinion of a major bowls equipment supplier, who surprisingly be-rated the BCGBA sub-committee, saying that “our dealings with them have been less than satisfactory, Taylors, and some testing stations are of the same opinion. They will never allow white jacks”

Towards the end of year2009, I again heard from the DeafBlind society, who said that they had had success in making contact with the hierarchy of the BCGBA, and had been promised that no less than the chairman of the all-powerful “Jack sub-committee” would be contacting me by Email. Incredibly, shortly before Christmas, a 3-page Email did arrive.

Nearly a whole page of this is clearly directed at contradicting my case that a white jack can be beneficial to sight-impaired bowlers, citing some events and competitions in which yellow is deemed superior (DeafBlind have no knowledge of the competition referred to).

Over a further half-page is given to telling me the procedure for re-instatement of the white jack into the rule-book. This by progressing through levels, club, League, Country etc(taking about 5 years)bringing it to the stage of the BCGBA Jack sub-committee, “who would be totally opposed” !!!

Precious little is actually devoted to the detail concerning how the white jack met its fate. The banning decision was made at the 2004 AGM of the BCGBA. This because towards the end of the nineties, cracking problems gave white jacks a bad reputation, hence possible splitting and flying fragmentation had to be confronted. A total ban was not imposed, those jacks in use at the time would be allowed continued use, as the cracking only affected some. Talks with the manufacturers had got nowhere, and could only therefore reach a mutual agreement to halt manufacture. As this decision was made without any further attempt of a review, it certainly ‘smacks’ to me, as being announced with some acrimony. As I “read between the lines” elsewhere, disagreement in production seems to be the real reason why we will never again have the option of having a white jack to play with.

There can be no doubt that the splitting problem had to be resolved with the manufacturers. Not ALL white jacks were affected, so was it just one bad batch from one maker....this is not mentioned. Even so, it is inconceivable that it was an unsurmountable problem, and it is sad that the game of bowls should be denied something which can be of benefit..

Now then.....why does the jack not have a dimple??.....!!!!

Roger Dickinson
Vardre CGBC
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