

The Sport That Wouldn't Die

by Kevin V. Brown

*For a game that's been banned and buried,
lawn bowling is doing just fine, thanks.*

THE BOWL used in lawn bowling is shaped like the earth—round at the center and squashed at the top and bottom. When rolled, it follows a long but uneven path.

The history of lawn bowling itself is strangely similar.

Fanatics claim the game has been around almost as long as the earth, and even the dubious admit that, next to

archery, it's probably the oldest sport still played. But its course has been uneven, with periods of passionate popularity followed by attempts to suppress it completely.

Ardent bowlers boast that Sir Francis Drake insisted on finishing a game of bowls before sailing out to battle the Spanish Armada, and that John Calvin invited John Knox to join him on the green for a match before they discussed less earthly joys.

While English nobility popularized it, English commoners vulgarized it—according to the nobility. The commoners built greens near taverns and, worse, they bet upon the outcome. So King Henry VIII condemned the game publicly—but played it privately (and bet upon the outcome). By King Charles I's time, so many nobles had lost their fortunes wagering on the game that it fell into general disrepute.

But lawn bowling survived and came to America with the Pilgrims, and a more patriotic endorsement than that hasn't been found for any game! Today the game is growing in popularity, with more than 100 clubs registered with the American Lawn Bowling Association.

Next Wednesday the Association will sponsor its annual National Open at Seattle, Wash. And once again American commoners will play the game made popular by English kings.



Skill enters when green gets crowded. Bowler must roll carefully, avoiding or striking other bowls as necessary.



Coaching is part of game. Here teammate points out bowl which can be nudged closer to jack with well-placed roll.



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