

# Sensationalism versus truth

The Oxford Dictionary defines sensationalism as: *The presentation of stories in a way that is intended to provoke public interest or excitement, at the expense of accuracy.*

An independent bowls newsletter *Ditchweight* has in its publication sought to sensationalise certain matters in order to create negative opinion about those involved in the administration of the sport.

Regretfully this sensationalism often comes at the expense of providing readers with the truth.

To put matters in perspective examples of this need to be observed:

A headline sentence in the edition of October 2015 greets readers with 'Misappropriation of funds'.

How dramatic, a statement with implication of impropriety by the executive of Bowls SA. The substance to this goes around taking wives with to a meeting in Cape Town the so-called Bosberaad.

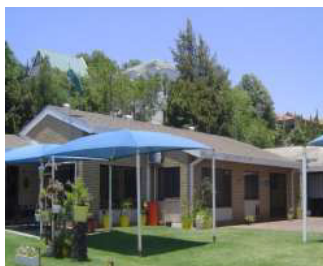
Here are the facts.

## Bosberaad Costs

1. This practice has been in place over a number of years and is well known to many. To suggest this was done surreptitiously is nothing more than seeking sensationalism. The motivation behind it is a simple gesture of recognition for the partners of executive members for the support role they play.
2. The costs for this form part of the annual budget which is presented to and approved by council. It is not, as implied, "hidden away."
3. The costs, as are all our other income and expenditure items, subject to inspection and verification by a firm of registered auditors who have found no evidence of impropriety or misappropriation of funds as alleged.
4. It's ironic in his charges of reckless spending of members' fees the author makes no mention of the honorary service members of the executive give. The executive neither seek nor indeed expect compensation and commit their services, as do all other voluntary office bearers, in the best interest of the sport. To be continually vilified as having no regard for the financial well-being of the organisation does not reflect in the cumulative good governance and healthy financial statements achieved over decades.

## Ivory Tower or White House?

In the November issue the editor of *Ditchweight* posted photos of two offices. The sole object was an underhand creation of a visual impression of opulence in support of his exorbitant spending allegation.



What he doesn't tell his readers is that the first picture (left) is a 180m<sup>2</sup> property, whereas for all its appearances of grandeur within the walls of the second picture is an office of 104m<sup>2</sup>.

What he doesn't tell you is that the office space in the first picture was under threat for unpaid bills by the lessor and a move by the landlord to renegotiate the lease in favour of an education facility.

The implication, falsely created, is that a move was made to the office space shown in the second building based on the lie suggesting need for a more opulent premise.

Reality is the decision was taken to secure tenure for the BSA office - only after investigating options and costs. This decision was made after a full investigation, not at a whim of as suggested.

A question that requires answering is to what extent is the executive empowered? The BSA constitution requires the executive to manage affairs within the confines of an approved budget.

## Back-dating is legal

In the December issue the editor put forth the following:

*"...I just have to share with you what I experienced recently. In the light of BowlsSA Executive Rob Forbes stating at the special General meeting of BowlsSA 's Council recently with the Allen Gordon fiasco, that back-dating documents are legal and common acceptable practice, I tried that trick with SARS after missing my deadline for my tax return. What happened? I still heard them laughing as I left the building..."*

Here is the transcript of what was said at the Special General meeting in November:

*"...Back-dating by itself is not generally, at least with regard to private agreements, illegal. It is the use of the back-dated documents by parties that may violate the law.' This simply means that in law, where a party uses a back-dated document in order to acquire more rights than he has or to deplete a 3rd party's rights, such an act would be unlawful..."*

Now ask yourself where exactly where it was said back-dating a document was legal. What was said that in certain circumstances backdating of a document was not illegal; a huge difference. Once again the editor chose to use words selectively and out of context to deceive his readership on the true meaning. His attempts to back-date documents at SARS would have resulted in the rights of SARS being depleted – radically different from the circumstances he chose to illustrate his deception.

## Officials a contribution or a figurehead?

One of the underlying themes throughout most *Ditchweight* newsletters is continued attack on the competencies and commitment of serving officials at clubs, district and national levels.

The following is a quote from the November issue

*"...A definite culture has developed where club Presidents or club delegates believe they have the right to make decisions or form their personal opinions when going to Council meetings. This further developed into another level of self-acclaimed power, prestige and ego! Ever noticed how Executives adorn themselves with fancy regalia, blazers and shining badges?"*

The implication is clear - presidents are a law unto themselves; their decisions are in their own interest. This is an indictment on the character of every president who gives up their time and resources freely, allegedly that self-interests can be satisfied; not to mention the "...fancy regalia, blazers and shining badges."

To continue his scurrilous attack, in his latest newsletter with regard to a BSA survey document he writes:

*"Will District Presidents do what they are supposed to do? That is to get the survey to every club and will every Club President do the right thing and get every single bowler paying affiliation fees to give their opinion? Or will Presidents once again and as is so often seen, display the arrogance to complete and return the survey based on their personal opinions without consulting the very people they are supposed to represent?..."*

His castigation of and disregard for all those who serve bowls continues:

*"...A President and his Executive committee at all levels, Club, District and National worth his or her salt, should consult with members on all matters that fall out of the day to day running of their office. In other words Club Presidents and/or delegates to Council should for instance consult with their members to obtain opinions and a mandate for the club BEFORE they go to represent a club at a District or national Council meeting. Does this happen? It would appear in the majority of cases the answer is 'NO!..."*

And further:

*"Perhaps the biggest flaw presently in bowls administration that cannot be described other than as a 'cancer' is that voting is 'secret'. So even if the system works 100% as described above, that is members are adequately consulted and informed and give a mandate to a Council delegate to vote, such a delegate when all is done and dusted, could go and vote in line with personal views and opinion! If the vote cast remains secret, who will ever know what he or she voted? It opens the way for voting based on personal bias, irrespective of what the mandate stated and often personalities rule, rather than the merit of the issue..."*

What an indictment on officials. The overriding question is do those in a positions of trust who look after bowls affairs, at every level, do so for their personal interest and against the wish of a majority? Of course not!

## Conflict or Collaboration

The editor talks at length about executives desire with "...knives drawn..." to remove Allan Gordon from office. The editor insinuates allegations of dishonesty over back-dating and no that there was no attempt at investigating the matter. The finding, based on legal opinion, indicates clearly every attempt was made to guarantee clarity and due process and this was made abundantly clear to the special general meeting, attended by the editor of *Ditchweight*.

## Selectors

Not exempt from attack, selectors are seen as villains of the piece when those dissatisfied are not selected. He makes a statement: "...*Last year JBA selected 6 sides for the Inter Districts and 5 of those sides won Gold! The jury is out!* JBA have over the years an enviable record at Inter-Districts and their prowess on the greens is well known. However if you look at the records for 2015 you will find JBA won gold in the Open women and Senior women sections - what a slap in the face for those Districts who won Gold and whilst not distracting from the outstanding achievements of other Districts surely one of the more memorable achievement belongs to one of the smallest districts Sedibeng; their achievement of winning Gold in Men's open doesn't even warrant mention.

## Conclusions

The executive note the continued attack levelled against them by *Ditchweight* and sadly and erroneously many bowlers consider its vitriol as gospel. Incidents where inaccurate reporting has caused misconceptions are cited.

It would appear, according to the newsletter that everyone giving up their service for the game of bowls is lacking in the skills, drive and integrity necessary to run the sport. Club presidents, district presidents and of course BSA executive are all at fault - some more than others. Yet, sadly, nowhere is any recognition given to where would the sport be without such volunteers.

It's a very sad day when so called conflict news gets the headline and becomes the major talking point.

Seems to be it's all too easy to criticize. Something, sadly, that all volunteers of our sport are well accustomed to. The work of hundreds of volunteers is castigated by the editor and it appears to be mostly accepted by readers of the newsletter with glee and as an honest account of facts. The endless contribution volunteers make receive scant recognition. Take away the volunteers and you will have nothing.

The expenditure of every cent of BSA receives and spends is given microscopic inspection to prove inability to manage. Yet look in any club, district or BSA financials and try to find any reward paid for services rendered by officials. Time spent away, often to the detriment of family is freely expected. You will find nothing, no record of hours spent, no record of the benefit many others have been recipients of. The volunteers are just that and give of their time, resources and expertise without any thought of compensation. The critics have one expectation and that is someone else will do it. So long as there's no charge; as long as it's "not me, then I'm OK!"

You might not hear it from other sources, but from Bowls SA there is huge admiration and appreciation for all the work that officials and volunteers do for our sport. We trust your integrity, motives and drive without question and thank you sincerely for unselfish and often unrecognised contributions.

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