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‘Old Man’s Marbles’
Bryan Oldaker

Bowls! Bowls! How I laughed at the thought of playing ‘Old Man’s Marbles’.

Kevin, our centre-forward, had just informed us that his dad had taken up bowls. We teased him unmercifully as we sat on the changing room benches, waiting for the moment when we would run onto the pitch to play a ‘real’ game. Funny how, some forty years on, I can recall Kevin’s red face but I cannot remember whether we won or lost that game.

How blissfully ignorant I was then. It has taken almost forty years for me to realise how mistaken I was. Now that I have retired I am able to devote time to the game of bowls and to appreciate how challenging and skilful it is. You have to know your woods, how they turn, where the ‘shoulder’ is. You need to be able to read the green so that you can judge the weight and direction in which to bowl. You need to be adept at reading the ‘head’ in order that you make the most of the wood you are about to deliver and, as in all games, you need to be able to judge the strengths and weaknesses of both your own team and your opponents.

Challenging though the game is however, there are definite drawbacks. For example you cannot roll around on the green, in apparent agony if you and an opponent happen to bump into one another. You cannot shout, scream, spit or swear at your opponents, or your team mates for that matter, just because the game is not going your way. Neither is it wise to kick the bowls away if a decision goes against you, as they are much harder and heavier than a soccer ball. But perhaps the most difficult of all is accepting that size, brute strength and an intimidating manner count for nothing on the bowling green. It is skill, pure and simple that counts. It matters little that you are male or female, old or young, very fit or creaking a little in the joints, if you play more skilfully on the day then you will win.

I joined Emsworth Bowling Club as a complete novice two years ago. Although I still have much to learn, I look back with great satisfaction at the advances I have made and recall with much affection the support and friendship that members of the club have afforded me.

If you think, as I did many years ago, that bowls is an easy game, not worth consideration, why not take a risk that you might just be wrong and have a go? You never know, you might have all the attributes necessary to become really good at ‘Old Man’s Marbles’.



*Brian Wells, Peter Harris and Mike Howard
 enjoying a game of bowls at Emsworth Bowling
 Club, Diamond Jubilee Recreation Ground,
 Horndean Road, Emsworth.*

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