

Introduction

The 2020 ACTTBA AGM generated very little interest, and that was attributed to the onset of COVID and that the leagues had shut down. However, this year's (2021) AGM showed a similarly low level of interest, despite numerous messages to leagues.

One of the attendees noted that she had asked other leagues if they were attending – and their response was in the negative as they could not see what then TBA does for them.

This response highlights some concerns. In reality, it opens up three questions:

- **What does the TBA do for us?** This is the obvious surface question but is not the problem that the ACTTBA must address.
- **What is the difference between the ACTTBA and the TBA?** This is the not so-obvious question – but an important one, as the invite was to the ACTTBA AGM, not the TBA AGM. An unclear distinction between the organisations only confuses the bowlers and can contribute to a lack of interest in the local efforts.
- **What does the ACTTBA do for us?** This is the question that is the important one, even if it is not the original one asked.

What does the TBA do for us?

TBA is the **National** Sporting Organisation (NSO) and acts as an umbrella for the State Sporting Organisations (SSO). I will let the TBA answer this one for me; you can read for yourself at:

- [About TBA - Tenpin Bowling Australia](#): a high-level description of what the NSO is about.
- [Benefits - Tenpin Bowling Australia](#): Benefits of bowling in an organised sport and some of the individual benefits attached to your TBA sports registration.
- [Sports Registration - Tenpin Bowling Australia](#): Towards the bottom is a list of what TBA is responsible for.

The key takeaway for this post is that, amongst other things (int their own words):

- TBA is the national sporting organisation and is the only body of the sport recognised by Sport Australia.
- TBA is responsible for the development and enforcement of the rules of the sport as governed by World Bowling.
- TBA ensures bowling centres conform with the technical requirements of the sport as governed by the World Bowling.
- TBA partners with government, states/territories, proprietors, sponsors and the media to promote and evolve the sport wherever possible. TBA is responsible for

In other words, TBA may not seem to do much for the individual bowler, but without them there is no sport of tenpin bowling.

What is the difference between the ACTTBA and the TBA?

In a nutshell, the ACTTBA administers tenpin bowling in the ACT.

The TBA is the NSO, The ACTTBA is the SSO (the fact that the ACT is a Territory and not a State is immaterial). The TBA governs the sport as a whole, and the ACTTBA Board governs and runs the sport (on behalf of the NSO) in the ACT.

In a well-run world, bowlers would only interact with the ACTTBA and, when necessary, the ACTTBA Board would lean on (or escalate issues to) the TBA for background support. We don't live in this black and white world, and the fees for being a member of the State Association are actually paid to the National Association.

- The ACTTBA does not levy any additional fees on bowlers to be covered under the SSO. Legally, this is allowed, but any benefits from doing so outweigh the overheads in collecting the fees.

This grey boundary is a good thing for the bowlers, because it means that their membership to the bowling community transfers across States without any question.

The ACTTBA is the bowlers' association and survives only through the interest and participation of all (or at least the majority) of the members. The extension to this is that the ACTTBA Board is the members' Board, it works at the behest and direction of the members (in accordance with the Constitution). Without the members' input, the Association and the Board might as well not exist, which means that bowling as a sport will wither and die in the ACT.

What does the ACTTBA do for us?

Context

In order to address this very important question, I must provide some governance context.

As noted earlier, the ACTTBA refers to the State Sporting Organisation, which is the recognised pre-eminent sporting body in the ACT for tenpin bowling. In other words, if the ACT Government wishes to support tenpin bowling across the ACT, it will do so through the ACTTBA, not the other tenpin bowling associations such as Holt ACT or ATBSO.

To quote the Australian Government ([Structure of Australian Sport | Clearinghouse for Sport](#)):

State Sporting Organisations (SSOs), sometimes also called State Sporting Associations (SSAs), are responsible for developing their sport from community participation to high performance levels in their respective jurisdiction.

They are normally required by state/territory governments to be affiliated with the recognised national governing body for the sport (NSO/NSOD) and to meet required governance standards. SSOs work closely with state/territory departments of sport and recreation, clubs in their jurisdiction, as well as the national body and other state sporting organisations in order to develop their respective sports.

State/Territory departments of sport and recreation normally provide a list of recognised SSOs/SSAs, as well as relevant resources for organisations, on their websites.

In previous years, the ACTTBA was run by what was effectively an operational committee – organising events and activities as required but unable to effectively set a strategic direction. This

was made all the harder by the traditionally low levels of volunteers meaning that the bulk of the work rested on very few shoulders. This was never sustainable and is currently broken as a model.

The quote from the Australian Government noted 'required governance standards'. As an Incorporated Association, the ACTTBA should be governed by a Board who makes the strategic directions with the operational matters handled by at least one Management Committee.

Rule 70 of the Constitution notes that the business of the Association must be managed by or under the direction of a Board. Best practice governance of organisations requires that the strategic direction of an organisation is separated from the execution (day to day running) of the organisation. To this end, the Constitution allows the Board to "appoint and remove staff and/or volunteers (as applicable)" and "establish subcommittees consisting of Members with terms of reference it considers appropriate".

In recognition of best practice, the size of the Board was recently reduced with the aim of strengthening the role of committees and working groups. However, the reduction in size of the Board does not have bearing on this discussion as there are not enough volunteers to even fill the reduced Board.

The question and why very little seems to be done

The question identified earlier is "what does the ACTTBA do for us?". The term 'ACTTBA' references the full association, which is the full membership. The term 'us' references the full membership. So the question is rightly "what can we do for ourselves" to ensure tenpin bowling is a viable and fun sport in the ACT?

Usually, when someone asks that question, they mean "what does the ACTTBA Board do for us?".

- Under proper governance, the answer should be "ensure the long term viability of tenpin bowling as a sport in the ACT", which also implies ensuring that the athletes (bowlers in the ACT) are confident that their sport is here for the long haul.
- Under proper governance, the relevant committee will undertake activities that will directly provide opportunities for the athletes.

The lack of volunteers – the hope that someone else will do all the work – means that in reality the ACTTBA Board can do very little:

- The very few members who have volunteered only have so much time and energy.
- The lack of Committees means that these volunteers are addressing the operational 'bush fires' instead of setting up for future activities. This means that the very few workers are too busy jumping from crisis to crisis rather than planning and preventing the crises in the first place.

Remember, doing things takes time, resources and people. While the ACTTBA has sufficient resources at the moment, the lack of people and thus the lack of available time is preventing real achievements.

What the ACTTBA Board and Committees should be doing for the ACT bowlers

The objectives of the ACTTBA, according to the current Constitution are to:

- Under approval of TBA, conduct, encourage, promote, advance and administer the sport of Tenpin Bowling in the ACT;

- Affiliate and otherwise liaise with TBA and adopt its rule and policy framework to further Tenpin Bowling
- Further develop Tenpin Bowling into an organised institution and foster, regulate, organise and manage examinations, competitions (e.g. local tournaments), coaching and other educational programs, displays and other activities;
- Strive for Government, commercial and public recognition of the Association as the controlling body for Tenpin Bowling in the ACT;
- Act on behalf of, and in the interests of, the Members and Tenpin Bowling in the ACT in any appropriate forum;
- Conduct annual championships in categories determined by the Association from time to time;
- Promote, organise and conduct ACT Representative Team selection events, including the selection of ACT Representative Teams, having provided equally the opportunity to all eligible Members;
- Promulgate, enforce and secure uniformity in the application of the rules of Tenpin Bowling as may be determined from time to time by TBA or the World Tenpin Bowling Association and as may be necessary for the management and control of Tenpin Bowling and related activities in the ACT;
- Act as arbiter (if required) on all matters pertaining to the conduct of Tenpin Bowling in the ACT, including disciplinary matters;
- Encourage good fellowship, good sportsmanship and fair play;

Note that these are the objectives of the Association as a whole, not just the Board. The Board should set the strategies and make sure the resources and funds are obtained to allow the objectives to be achieved. From a people perspective, the human resources to get things done comes from volunteers from the members – the bowling community.

What should the ACTTBA committees (or volunteer/appointed staff/officers) be doing for the ACT bowlers?

- Ensuring communication across the leagues; enabling consistency and compliance.
- Organising tournaments with the aim of participating in the sport of bowling and increasing the profile of the sport to the general public.
- Organising coaching and other sporting development to allow the bowlers to further develop their skills and knowledge.
- Organising annual championships.
- Selecting and managing the ACT Representative Teams.

The lack of volunteers

As noted earlier, that the ACTTBA is not achieving what it intends to achieve is down to a lack of people to do things. This is not unique to the ACTTBA, or to sporting associations in general. This is a problem seen across many volunteer organisations.

The Board has requested support in recent times:

- Request for managers for the State Teams.
 - o At the time of drafting this the ACT only has three accredited managers.
 - o Surprisingly, the two TBA50 teams didn't even volunteer to 'self-manage/coordinate' (noting that none of these bowlers are an accredited manager).
 - o As such, there was no single point of contact for passing messages to the bowlers.

- Request for coaches for the State Teams.
 - o Nil response.
- Request for nominations to be on the ACTTBA Board.
 - o Simply no response.
 - o The impact of this is now being addressed by the one remaining Board member.
- Request for league representatives at the AGM in accordance with the Constitution.
 - o Only one respondent.
 - o There were two additional observers, one of which noted that she could not get agreement from her league to be the official representative.
 - o The president of the two leagues that I am also in sent an e-mail to all bowlers in the league requesting someone to represent (the president was also on the ACTTBA Board so did not feel it right to be triple hatted). Nil response.
- Request for feedback on the idea of an inter-league competition
 - o Nil response
- Request for feedback on the idea of a league committee convention (by any name whatsoever)
 - o Nil response
- Request for League committees to update their information with Zone Bowling
 - o Nil direct response

Compounding this is the lack of up-to-date contact information for league committees and bowlers in general. This is a chicken and an egg problem – contacting people to update their information is hard if you cannot contact them in the first place.

The current ACTTBA Board can only do so much. And if the members are not interested, what can be done?

The bottom line

The ultimate question is “what does the ACTTBA do for us?”. The answer is “nothing” if the members are not interested. The more interested and engaged members, the better the ability to arrange activities.

The Board will try to improve engagement from their end, but their ability to do so is very limited – and it is limited by the very bowlers they are trying to engage.

Alan Dyer

President ACTTBA Board

29 August 2021