

Sports

Lawn Bowling



It is hard to imagine, but lawn bowling was not always seen as the gentle pastime it is today. With **roots dating back to Ancient Egypt**, it first appeared in England during the 13th century and became popular with the British nobility. Famously, **Sir Francis Drake was playing a game of bowls** in Plymouth Hoe in 1588 when the Spanish Armada was sighted in the English Channel. *“We’ll finish the game and then go out and finish the Spaniards”* Drake announced.

The object of the game is to roll biased bowls so that they are closest to the “jack” or “kitty” (a small white bowl). Over the course of its long history, it has evolved into many forms, including bocce which developed in Italy.

Lawn bowling was brought to Canada by British soldiers in the late 19th century. In 1907, Cobourg's lawn bowling club was formed and a site selected in the heart of town: Victoria Park. **Soon the new grounds boasted four rinks enclosed by chicken wire and lit with gas lamps.** The club, made up of approximately 80 men, played in a league with nearby towns. The following year, women were invited and 21 joined to form a women’s league.

Over the next couple of decades the club grew steadily. At that time there were tennis courts nearby and when it was decided to build a club house in 1925, **the town’s tennis club contributed funds to its construction.** In the 1930s, an addition was built.

More recently, **club members have been making their mark** in the Provincial, National and International world of lawn bowling. Notable achievements include **Victor Foxhall’s 3 Gold Medals** at the first Canada Summer Games, and 3 Ontario Championship wins for his son Martin. Siblings **Dan and Sharyl Ann Milligan** represented Canada at several Commonwealth Games, with Dan leading his men’s fours team to Silver in 1986.

With multiple generations being able to play at one time, it is not surprising that there have been **numerous “dynasties” throughout the club’s history.** In 1990, a junior section was formed and has since developed talented players. In 2015, siblings **Ben and Baylee van Steijn won gold and silver respectively at the Provincial Championships** and went on to rank 5th and 4th in the Nationals. Baylee also earned a spot on Canada’s inaugural youth development team for 2016.

Now entering its 108th year, the club has roughly 100 members aged 8 to 90+ and continues to draw onlookers to its beautiful grounds, arguably **one of the most attractive lawn bowling clubs in Canada.** While it has evolved from its association with the wealthy - lawn bowling is considered a relatively inexpensive sport- it has continued to be a highly social game. In 1992 a club member was quoted in the *Cobourg Daily Star*, *“On a Tuesday evening we play a game and listen to the Cobourg Concert Band. It’s quite enjoyable”.* Sir Francis Drake would understand.



Clubhouse late 1930s- Early 1940s
Picture courtesy Cobourg Lawn Bowling Club



Ben and Baylee van Steijn
Picture courtesy Cobourg Lawn Bowling Club

“Cobourg’s Dan Milligan had a part in making history - without it being known by most Canadians - at the recently completed games when he captained the Canadian men’s four team to a silver medal in the somewhat obscure sport of lawn bowling”

*Layton Dodge,
Cobourg Daily Star
August 8, 1986*

Picture: Drake at Bowls from monument in Tavistock, Devon