

GET OUT

# BOWLED

If you think bowls belongs in the same category as false teeth and blue rinses, think again. The sport is getting an extreme image makeover by two entrepreneurial spirits in Newlands. Dawn Kennedy went to find out how to put the fun into bowls.



I felt like a spring chicken at Western Province bowling green and got more wolf whistles and compliments in 10 minutes than I'd received during a trip to Italy. One rather forward fellow even asked for a hug! Just as I was about to slap him with my handbag the suntanned and muscular Anton van Vlaanderen came to my rescue.

Anton first picked up a bowl five years ago, at the tender age of 25. It proved to be good fun for the whole family. Soon cousins, aunts and uncles got involved and the average age at Western Province bowling green dropped to 55. Friends began to join in and friendly matches were organised. Anton had heard about barefoot bowling in Australia (where there are roughly 50 000 barefoot and jolting bowlers in Sydney alone) and saw the opportunity for profit.

He and his uncle, Tom, founded

Newbie Bowls, initiating a barefoot bowling revolution in South Africa. Newbie Bowls is proving to be a spectacular success. There's either the Full Monty – a two-hour round robin tournament that concludes with semi-finals and finals – or The Harry Casual, which offers two hours of casual play. Newbie Bowls caters for birthdays and hen parties and corporate team-building events. The largest event so far has involved 250 players.

Newbie Bowls is exactly the same as ordinary Bowls except that it's less about winning and more about camaraderie. Secretly the girls tell me there's a dating aspect to the game and many phone numbers are swapped on the green. Beer drinking is an essential component of the experience. Indeed it could be described as the *raison d'être*.

Newbie Bowls is so much fun I could

swear that even the brightly coloured bowling balls have a blast as they roll lazily down the green, accompanied by Elvis blaring from the stereo.

I try to block my ears to the lewd commentary about balls and focus on my technique. A bowling ball is unevenly weighted so it curves in a gentle arc towards the white ball. My first attempt veers wildly off the mark. Tom gives me a few pointers. The secret is to get down low, like a lambada dancer. I duly comply, knees creaking, legs buckling bambi-like.

It seems I have talent. My bowl lands impressively close to the target. But then so does everyone else's! According to Anton, the appeal of bowls is that it is so easy.

I suspect that type A characters might get a bit frustrated when, after a few beers, no one seems too concerned about whose ball goes where.

# OVER



Photos by Dawn Kennedy

Carey van Vlaanderen and Emmylou Rabe have ball skills.



Warren Middleton triumphs.

## Bowling tips

Pick up the ball. Try not to drop it on your foot. Hold tight. Bend down low. Let go.

Contact Tom van Vlaanderen of Newbie Bowls on 087-556-2639 or visit their website [www.newbiebowls.com](http://www.newbiebowls.com)