



A young Desmond and his proud family

for him. I believe that he will come back stronger in the coming years."

Desmond's mother Louisa said: "We are happy to see Desmond's enjoyment and commitment in his beloved sports. His development has been fully supported by everyone he has met in his bowling career, including but not limited to, coaches, teammates, opponent bowlers, event organisers, lawn bowl friends. All are so generous to share and teach Desmond how to be a model bowler: playing good bowls and observing etiquette; both on and off the green.

"Desmond has received organisational support from Lawn Bowls Association of Hong Kong, China, and his school - Ho Fung College (sponsored by Sik Sik Yuen) are indispensable for Desmond's past and future development.

"Our family highly appreciates and cherishes everyone's love and support to Desmond and hope same support to be extended to all youth bowlers in Hong Kong and worldwide."

#### DESMOND'S MAJOR LOCAL ACHIEVEMENTS (SINCE YEAR 2021)

- **Men's Open 2023 Novice Singles** (*runner-up*)
- **Men's Open 2023 Novice Pairs** (*champion or first runner-up, to be played on February 18, 2024*)
- **2023 national triples** (*quarter-finalist*)
- **2023 national fours** (*2nd runner-up*)
- **Youth Open Age Group Competition** (*pairs, aged 12-14*)  
2023 (*first runner-up*); 2022 (*champion*); 2021 (*champion*)
- **2023 Inter-school Competition - champion** (*pairs, secondary school*)
- **2023 Youth Novice Competition - second runner-up** (*open triple*)
- **2022 Youth Novice Competition - quarter-finalist** (*open pairs*)
- **2021 Under 25 singles - quarter-finalist**

# The highs and lows - team work is key

You know this umpiring and marking business is dead easy. Wander around for a bit during a game, maybe make a couple of decisions and do a few of simple measures. Keep a scorecard, chalk some touchers and centre the Jack. How hard can it be? Well after 35 years of officiating, 25 of which have been at international level, I can say that it is not as easy as it sounds. That old adage 'we are only human' is often true when it comes to the odd slip up. But when it all goes to plan, well that's when you get the buzz accompanied with a big broad smile and in some cases a high five from your teammates (writes **Allan Thornhill**)

At the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham 2022, I had the honour of leading a fabulous team of 35 ITOs from eight nations. Everyone worked well together but that did not mean we were always together as a group. It is inevitable that small groups of friends or countryfolk split off and socialise together, that is natural. What counts is when they get onto the greens and have to work together in a team. There were no real issues to worry about in Birmingham, couple of little pointers in the right direction and corrections on procedure but apart from that no major disasters. The team worked well together - I would like to say under good leadership, but others may disagree!

At the recent World Indoor Championships, there were highs and there were lows, as there has been pretty much every year. For an official, it is unlike any other event we get involved in. Yes, there are the biggies like the Commonwealth Games and the national championships but arguably you are not as exposed as you are on a single rink in the middle of 1,000 beady eyes. Teamwork is absolutely vital.

I would like to think that after 25 years, I know what I am doing, but there are always going to be curveballs and things that test your ability to remain focused on what you should be doing. Standing on the portable rink, we want to do our very best for the players, that

is the sole aim of the job. The presentation side of things such as announcing the results of the ends, announcing the end of sets and tie breaks doesn't come naturally to everyone when they first start out. We have a set phraseology that we like to use so that we are consistent, but sometimes what you think you are about to say and what actually comes out across the microphone are slightly different. It is not something that we worry too much about, but it is very embarrassing. As part of a close-knit team the banter and mickey taking that occurs following such verbal blunders is what holds us together.

Over the last few years, we have welcomed new faces to the team, all of who are accomplished international officials in their own right. Whilst they are competent at what they do in the field, when stepping onto that rink on the first few occasions it can be a daunting experience and the very basics can slip the mind and little mistakes can turn into big ones quite quickly. It takes a while for new officials to earn the confidence of the players. Taking a consistent and confident approach when on the rink goes a long way to help that. Things that can be demonstrated and taught are easy and we rely on individuals taking in that information and using it themselves when on the rink. We always say: "Just sit and watch, then go and repeat.". What can't be taught is the ability to gel in a team of established >>>





The umpiring team during the final TV week standing Neill Bryce (left) and Francis Fletcher and front, Allan Thornhill and Dan Bluett

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officials. That has to come naturally and sometimes it doesn't. What's the old adage: "Your face doesn't fit." It's perhaps not as harsh as that but everyone has to gel and support each other.

**POTTERS REFLECTIONS**

Let me give a couple of examples from January's event. One of our new officials had a bit of a loss of concentration and picked a live jack out of the ditch and re-spotted it. One of those examples where the occasion and the volume of things to think about overtook the basics. I was the off-rink official or umpire and whenever drive shots are played, we stand by the side of the rink and offer another set of eyes to the marker. Their sole duty is to watch for touchers in these situations and not worry about anything else, that is the umpire's job. The toucher was identified but the jack had found its way right over towards the far boundary in the ditch. It was hard from my position to see if the jack was live or not. I

focused on offering support to the marker to make sure that everything was done in the correct sequence. The jack was lifted and placed on the re-spot and I thought OK must have been out then, only for a player to point to where it was and ask for it to be replaced. Luckily, it went back in the correct position and the result of the end was definitive. It is not the first time that has happened, and I am sure it won't be the last, but being able to talk to each other after the game and offer words of wisdom and consolation are the key to being a good team.

Unfortunately, our colleague Neill Bryce was taken ill on the morning of quarter-final Friday. Luckily, myself, Dan Bluett and Francis Fletcher were all at breakfast when he felt poorly. Francis had the morning session off but thankfully had not gone on a long walk

up the coast. Naturally, we rallied round and covered Neill's duties that day. Things didn't improve and on Saturday Neill was still unwell. We had made a plan the night before for that eventuality and ironically the Saturday schedule had five games, not a challenge in itself as we were used to up to eight games in previous International Opens. We arranged for Tom Weir, the tournament director to take care of the shot clock duties for the first two games to give Francis and Dan one game off. We then rotated for the semi-final matches and the final of the Under 25 singles. Essentially, we worked together with no fuss and no question of not supporting each other and got through the day. Thankfully, Neill was well enough to officiate in the open singles final on Sunday. Great teamwork.

There have been several occasions where serious mistakes have been made and indeed times when I just wanted to walk away from it all because of those mistakes. It has taken the support and friendship of my colleagues to see me through those dark times. We discuss everything. If something goes wrong, then we put in place a mechanism to try and prevent it happening again. The reason we now have a spare scorecard completed by the third official during each game is as a result of me calling a game early because I had made a mistake on the card a few years ago. That was one occasion when I wanted to walk away. Thankfully, touching as much wood as I can find, these lows are extremely rare and that is in part due to the support that we give each other and the confidence we have in each other's ability. If one of us messes up, then it affects us all.

So, to the successes of yet another amazing World Indoor Championships, we work together as a team to take these forward and improve where we can and where various constraints outside of our control allow us. Things we are discussing as we leave this event are a few little amendments to the conditions of play and the option to trial electronic scorecards, watch this space.

Onwards now to look forward to the incoming outdoor season in the UK. Thankfully, this year is not so busy as last and I get a chance to spend a bit more time on family holidays. The IIBC World Indoor Championships will be held in Guernsey next month and again I am delighted to be working with a fabulous team of three ITOs and several excellent markers from the Guernsey Indoor Association.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

It is often said that the success of an umpire is strongly linked to how well the umpire

manages and gets on with people in the sporting community. Sport at community level involves many people undertaking a range of roles, including fellow officials, coaches, administrators, players, parents and passionate supporters.

One of the most important aspects of an official's role is to relate well with participants and others prior to, during and following competition. The adage of 'treating people as you would like to be treated' provides an appropriate model for relating to others in the sporting environment.

An official's style and manner will have an impact on the relationship with whom they are engaging. All participants and others associated with the sport should be treated with respect and, where appropriate, empathy. An inclusive approach and style, regardless of the participant's gender, race, disability, religion or age is vital.

Each umpire becomes the 'face' of officiating at competitions. People often judge all umpires by how an individual umpire behaves, hence the need for professional and responsible approaches when dealing with everyone involved in the sport including your officiating team members.



Allan with open singles winner Stewart Anderson (left) and runner-up Alex Marshall MBE

**Silver presentations**



During the World Indoor Bowls Championships, WBT officials Mike Davies (photo left) and Allan Thornhill (photo right) received special presentations in recognition of their 25 years' service to the World Bowls Tour