

The memories from July 2002 are still fresh in my mind. The Manchester Commonwealth Games was the first, and for that reason, probably hold the fondest of memories for me (writes **Allan Thornhill**)

There are other reasons of course from working with a great team of UK and overseas officials for the first time, the ridiculous extremes in weather, the incredible atmosphere in the city, to the ultimate honour of marking the gold medal singles match between Bobby Donnelly, of South Africa, and Jeremy Henry, of Ireland.

Yes, hard to believe that 20 years have passed, and I am about to embark on another, my sixth consecutive Commonwealth Games and I am sure some new experiences that I will remember just as clearly in years to come.

All five of the previous games have been a joy to be part of in many different ways from the heat and the bugs in Delhi to the glitz and glamour of the Broadbeach venue on the Gold Coast.

To try and tease out some of the many memories of the past 20 years, editor at large Ceris Hewlings posed some questions...

BI: What was the first match you officiated at the Commonwealth Games?

AT: Whilst I am struggling to remember the very first match I officiated at the Commonwealth Games, there were some stand out moments for me.

In those days, it was very much men mark for men and women mark for women, which I thought was a shame.

We were in the early sectional rounds of the event, and I was determined to mark a game for the Australian legend Karen Murphy. I was tasked with collecting the scorecards for an afternoon session from the office and noticed that Karen was due to play Kiwi Marlene Castle.

That was an opportunity I couldn't miss, the ultimate battle between Australia and New Zealand.

Strangely the scorecard for that game managed to find its way into my pocket at some point between the office and giving them over to the coordinators to hand out.

It was an incredible game to mark, but it certainly ruffled a few feathers.

BI: What were you called upon to do first?

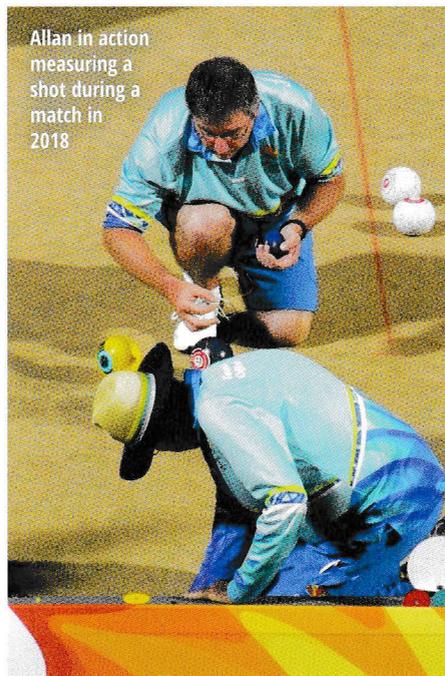
AT: Again, difficult to pinpoint the exact call I had back then, but we were kept very busy.

The Heaton Park venue was an amazing arena with the four greens aligned in a square with stands on three sides.

As umpires we worked in pairs on each of the four greens with two "floating" umpires available to cover all four greens should the need arise.

However, in addition to that we were also used to assist with the para-athletes and helping them get on and off the greens and pushing their wheelchairs up and down.

They had devised a system of ramps which would need to be constructed before the start



of each end from large heavy panels and when all the wheelchairs were on the rink, we had to remove them again.

That role naturally fell to the younger contingent of which there were just a few. It was hard work but incredibly fun.

So, I suspect one of my first duties of the games was to be part of the ramp construction team.

BI: What's been the best match you've officiated over?

AT: There have been many and there have been many criteria for judging the best, but I have to say that really it was marking the gold medal men's singles match in Manchester.

To be honest the match was a total blur. I was so focused that I can remember nothing of the shots played or my surroundings.

Indeed, it took me two ends to realise I had the scorecard in my pocket – it was correct at the end though I hasten to add.

Three things stand out for me during that game – the rain, the amazing scoreboard turner who looked after the scorecard under an umbrella for me, and the final shot and celebration from Bobby Donnelly when he won the gold medal.

BI: What has been the best venue so far?

AT: All five venues have their own unique qualities that make them the best in some way but I think overall it has to be Glasgow in 2014; oh wait, maybe it was Gold Coast 2018. Can I have both?

Glasgow for the incredible setting at Kelvingrove with the imposing university high on the hill.

Gold Coast? Well, it's just the Gold Coast, what is there not to like about it.

BI: What's been the best shot you've seen when you've marked or been on umpiring duty?

AT: I hope you don't mind if I cheat a little on this answer because I was not actually officiating during the game but was watching close by in the stand.

Undoubtedly, the most memorable shot or series of shots you could ever hope to see was in Glasgow in 2014.

It was the final end of the men's pairs semi-final between England and Scotland. Andy Knapper and Sam Tolchard from England were 15 shots to 14 up and holding three shots on the lead/skip crossover.

Then the mighty Alex Marshall MBE steps up and pulls out two of the most incredible bowls in horrendous weather conditions to earn himself and Paul Foster MBE a place in the gold medal match which of course they went on to win as well.

The atmosphere was electric and the famous Marshall celebration will remain as one of my most memorable moments of all the Games.

BI: What was the last match you umpired at Commonwealth level?

AT: Now this is one I do remember as it is obviously the most recent. The last game I officiated was the bronze medal match in the men's singles at the Gold Coast 2018.

It was as if I was back on the portable rink at Potters as the two players were Robert Paxton and Darren Burnett.

It was a good game from what I remember played in great spirit as you would expect, and it was a joy to mark. Robert secured the bronze medal 21 shots to 14.

BI: What are you looking forward to most at Leamington?

AT: Birmingham 2022 is going to be a very different event for me compared to the previous Games.

As chief technical official I will not be out on the rinks officiating. Will I miss that? Yes, probably, but I am incredibly honoured to be given the opportunity to work alongside a fantastic team of officials and competition team.

The Victoria Park venue is unique, at the moment it is very hard to imagine the venue 'dressed' in the Birmingham 2022 branding.

I hope we get good spectator attendance, and it generates a great atmosphere for the athletes to compete in.

In a strange sadistic kind of way I am looking forward to the long days and hard work to play a very small part in making the Games a success I am sure they will be.