



Commonwealth Games 2018

...as seen by an ITO

With sleeping patterns still a little erratic, I look back on a memorable Commonwealth Games experience. The stand out memories are the camaraderie amongst all 42 Technical Officials, the relaxed way of life – I slowed my walking pace down to Aussie time, and the fantastic competition played in an atmosphere not witnessed anywhere else in the sport of Bowls.

THE location of the Commonwealth Lawn Bowls competition was the Broadbeach Bowls Club complete with its impressive and expansive clubhouse overlooking the four immaculate greens.

The temporary stands were huge and capable of seating more than 2,500 spectators and on many occasions it was full.

The Technical Officials converged on the Gold Coast from all corners of the globe with 50 per cent being selected from Australia and the other half from other countries. It was great to meet up with old friends and make new acquaintances. To the envy of players, we were housed in an apartment block just across the road and overlooking the venue. Superbly appointed, huge shared apartments which were comfortable and homely – we really were spoilt this year!

Most of the ITOs arrived on April 2 and for those of us travelling from the northern hemisphere our arrival at

Brisbane airport was early morning. The rest of the first day was spent trying to remain awake. We settled into our apartments – I was sharing with WBT colleague Dan Bluett, and were then escorted to the Uniform and Accreditation Centre or UAC.



The accreditation process was slick and so should the collection of uniforms be but unfortunately there was a lot missing. The majority of us walked away missing some items of our uniform but we had sufficient to get us started on the first day of competition. It did put a little bit of a dampener on the organisation of the games and I imagine was a little embarrassing for Australia.

The two days preceding competition were spent familiarising ourselves with the venue, the umpires kits, the specifics of the event and each other.

Former Australian squad member, Mark Casey was the competition manager and what an incredible job he and his team did throughout the whole period leading up to the games and during the event itself.

We attended an ITO meeting which was our opportunity to hear about the event specifics and meet each other. We were presented with our commemorative medal and certificate by the Sport Technical Delegate and World Bowls Laws Committee Chair, Kerry Clark.

Above: The impressive venue

Below: Allan Thornhill in action, Pic Alis Butten

We had a little bit of time to get to know the immediate area of Broadbeach and it was very impressive- all dressed up for the festival, indeed throughout the whole period of the games the town was buzzing with live shows and bands in a safe and social atmosphere.

DOWN TO BUSINESS

Our first day of competition started early on April 5. Each of the four daily sessions in the first few days would require a good number of ITO's – two umpires per green, a time keeper per green, one rover covering two greens and paddle holders for each of the team games. It was all hands on deck.

Being late Summer, early Autumn, the weather was a little changeable. Temperatures hovered around the high 20's to mid 30's but there were short heavy downpours erratically appearing and lasting for 20 minutes or so.

I was marking a Ladies Singles match between Catherine Beattie of Ireland and Colleen Piketh of South Africa on one of the TV rinks when one such downpour occurred.

The wind picked up halfway through the game and started blowing the rink side advertising boarding around the green and then the rain came. It was torrential and within five minutes had flooded the green and soaked us all to the core. However, the green drained incredibly fast and within 30 minutes we were back on the rink playing again. It all added to the fun of the event although I am sure it had a detrimental effect on the players.

As the week progressed and we started to get to the nitty gritty end of competition, the crowds grew.

There was already a great atmosphere in the venue as music was being played constantly at low level and then when the crowd moved in it was electric. The vocal support for certain countries and players was loud and good spirited, no doubt aided by beverages of the alcoholic type.

I personally didn't notice any effect or complaints from the players but I understand on some occasions the barracking got a little out of hand. It certainly raises that age old question about background noise in our sport versus deathly silence – I certainly prefer the former even if it did make marking challenging at times.

It became clear from social media outlets that the lack of TV coverage of the bowls back home in blighty was raising some complaints. It would appear that dear old Aunty Beeb were showing very little if any of the excellent games played on the two TV rinks. Again, it is a real shame that our national broadcaster

and media fail to recognise Lawn Bowls as a sport of interest to many at these multi-sport events. This was an absolute showcase of what our sport can do best and again it was a missed opportunity. Thankfully social media can come to the rescue and not everyone missed out on watching the spectacle.

Midway through the competition the four English ITO's, myself, Ray Keen, Angie Thompson and Dan Bluett had a day off and so we hired a car and disappeared into the nearby National Park. An amazing day out finished off with dinner at the most incredible bowls club at Tweed Heads – a world away from what we are used to.

At any event as big as this it is always pleasing when we all get through it without any controversies. This event ran extremely smoothly and all ITO's did themselves proud. Huge thanks go to Sandy Wallace from South Australia who did a sterling job as Chief Technical Official, sometimes under challenging circumstances. I am sure it must have been like herding cats sometimes.

There was just one area of discussion arising from some discontent from the greens staff about the pace of the greens that the ITOs were measuring. For those familiar with the laws of the sport the pace of the green is determined as the time taken for a bowl to come to rest at a distance of 27 metres from the mat. Before each session it was our job to throw some bowls to 27 metres and measure the time taken. The majority of the greens were measured at 14-15 seconds. However, in Australia the

LASTING MEMORIES

History was being made throughout the event but in my opinion the most notable achievement has to be that of Alex Marshall. Securing a gold medal in the fours by defeating the host nation made him the most decorated Scottish Commonwealth athlete in history, surpassing Alan Well's previous record. An incredible achievement.

So another Commonwealth Games drew to a close with new friendships being made, old friendships from around the World rekindled and a few new Facebook friends added.

I must praise my English colleagues for superb performances on the greens and fantastic friendship, especially to Dan Bluett at his first Games - they should be proud of themselves.

I booked a few extra days to relax after the games and ventured into the National Parks to enjoy the Australian countryside before the long journey home to reality. Let's look forward to see what Birmingham can offer as again the UK hosts the Commonwealth Games in 2022.

normal method of measuring the pace is slightly different and often results in readings some 1-2 seconds faster. A gentle reminder that we were playing to the Laws of the Sport and thus having to time over 27 metres resolved the issue and we continued as we were. I have to say that the greens staff did an incredible job working all hours from sunrise to long into the night after the games had finished. The surfaces were dead flat with no sign of any bumps, a true testament to their skill and dedication to produce such true surfaces.

Below: Allan with colleagues Angie, Dan and Ray

