



An ITOs perspective



Well, the numbers speak for themselves. The largest World Championships ever staged and along with that the demand for the largest number of International Technical Officials (ITOs) assembled at a single event (writes our Ask the umpire expert **Allan Thornhill**)

Fifty individuals were in attendance from seven nations appointed to almost 1,100 duties across the 12 days of competition. It was a scheduling nightmare. Aside from the obvious marking and umpiring duties, ITOs were also appointed as roving umpires, timekeepers, paddle holders on broadcast rinks and scoreboard turners in the knockout stages. Four of us were even appointed as flag bearers in the medal ceremonies.

My personal journey started from London Heathrow on August 25 flying via Hong Kong and arriving in Brisbane around midnight the following evening. This schedule seemed to work fine as I was able to get a great night's sleep as soon as I arrived and therefore fall straight into the time zone with no jetlag. A leisurely day followed on the Sunday travelling down to Broadbeach and settling into

our accommodation. ITOs were housed in apartments of three sharing and located just a few minutes from the Broadbeach Bowling Club and, in some lucky cases, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The rest of the day was spent at leisure meeting old friends and meeting new ITOs for the first time. Of course, there

“Especially pleasing was seeing the smaller nations back on the world scene and competing on equal terms to the larger more established bowling nations”

may have been a glass or two of beer to be enjoyed as well.

The next day was day zero for us as we all met for the first time as a group at the Broadbeach club for the ITO briefing. This meeting is held at any major event and is an opportunity for the event management to introduce themselves and explain

the organisation of the event. It was also an opportunity to run through any conditions of play that needed clarification. Each ITO collected their uniforms of two polo shirts, a water-resistant jacket and a hat.

At this championship, I was one of four Deputy Chief Technical Officials (DCTOs) appointed to

one of the venues and reporting into the Chief Technical Official (CTO), John Roberts and the technical delegate, Mark Cowan. Our role as DCTOs was to liaise closely with the event management and the coordinators assigned to each venue. We were responsible for ensuring that all of the ITOs

Above: The team of ITOs

assigned to those venues on a particular day were looked after, fed, watered and most importantly on the bus at the start and end of the day. We also had ITO assessments to carry out as well as perform our normal duties as umpires and markers.

Following our briefing, it was a great opportunity to spend some time on the rinks at Broadbeach checking out the umpire kits and equipment being used. For this event we were trialling the use of Laser measures for the first time at this level. They have not yet made it into the standard kit for officials around the world and do not yet form part of the ITO accreditation process. Their use is a little more common in Australia and it was agreed that they would only be used by those that were competent to do so. This practice day was an ideal time for





LASER MEASURES

I mentioned the use of Laser measures earlier and I had the opportunity to watch some measures being carried out at close quarters. I was one of the sceptics but realise that there must be a way forward with this. Unfortunately, I witnessed some aborted measures in the first few days which didn't boost my confidence in their use. However, after some good discussions and seeing some excellent examples of their use over the second week, my opinion was slowly changed. There is still some way to go before we see them in mainstream use, and I believe we may not see a time where they replace the trusty box measure. The main hurdles in my mind are gaining competency in their use – but that applies to any measure, and the cost.

ITO assessments are an initiative developed by World Bowls to assess the performance of their ITOs whilst at these major events. It's a great tool for identifying areas of improvement but also for noting excellent performances. They are not a stick for beating the ITO. Each ITO received three assessments as umpire and three as marker and were conducted by the DCTOs at each venue. Ratings are provided for several criteria which range from one, below standard and three, above standard. The standards set down by the World Bowls officiating document and selection criteria are used. As I hope you expect, there are very few issues to note but we do have some ITOs attending for the very first time at a world event and it's great to be able to offer constructive feedback to them. The results from each

ITOs that had not used them to be shown how to and inevitably there was a great deal of interest and indeed some scepticism from some.

We all attended the opening ceremony at Helensvale BC and what a superb venue it was. There was an opportunity after the ceremony for nibbles and drinks and to mingle with the players and officials. It was a great atmosphere with an air of

excitement and anticipation for the coming days of competition.

Day one had arrived and the alarm sounded at 5.30am, we were certainly not on holiday now. Buses departed the Broadbeach club at 6.30am to take us to the four venues with Helensvale being the furthest. I was the DCTO based at Helensvale. On the way, we dropped a team of officials at Musgrave Hill and continued on

to Helensvale, a total journey time of 40 minutes. On arrival, we had around an hour to get the umpires kits sorted out, green speed checked and scorecards organised.

The championships were finally underway after many years of preparation and waiting for the global pandemic to pass. Each ITO settled into their roles straight away and it was fantastic to see the players back on the

rinks at a world event. Especially pleasing was seeing the smaller nations back on the world scene and competing on equal terms to the larger more established bowling nations.

Day one was full on but very enjoyable. I was working alongside a fantastic club coordinator, Paul Holtschke, and we got on with the job at hand efficiently and without fuss. Paul and I shared the timing role

through the two weeks. I started the day with announcement on the order of play for the day and Paul would start the games with an airhorn. There were lots of discussions about all aspects of the event, the club and the quality of the greens and a good chance to get to know each other. End of day one came along and with sore feet and some burnt noses we staggered to the coach to take us back to Broadbeach. The four DCTOs from each venue met for a short debrief with the CTO and TD.

There were no issues at Helensvale, a quiet word with a team manager about the number of coaches at the end of the rink and also a spot of rink possession and that was about it. There were a couple of issues a one venue that were handled very well by the DCTO. They also had a flooded green at one point as the heavens opened but it was all drained within 20 minutes and play resumed. The great thing about sub-tropical rains showers is they rarely last long, and you are all dried out within the hour. It is the lightning storms that are of most concern and on one afternoon it was touch a go whether we should stop play. Bed at 9.30 shattered. Up at 5.30 again for day two. The next few days were much the same: alarm, bus, officiate, bus, eat, sleep, repeat.

BOWLS GLITCH

No event of this magnitude passes without a few glitches. Thankfully there were no major issues that could not be dealt with when they occurred. Probably the most problematic was a team not arriving in Australia for the first week. This meant that byes had to be awarded to their opponents. World Bowls have now specified the use of red and blue bowls at last year's Commonwealth Games in Birmingham and now the World Championships. In nearly all cases this has not presented a problem, but it wasn't until day two that some issues started appearing. Namely one or two teams only arriving with one colour or indeed in one case no bowls at all. Local supplies of

bowls from manufacturers and clubs were exhausted prior to day one and so some creative thinking was required in some games. Thankfully most were resolved by simply swapping the colours that the teams were allocated to play with or borrowing another teams bowls.

“The highlight of this week was arguably witnessing some of the smaller nations picking up good scores and indeed winning a few matches against the titan nations”

The finals for week one were staged at Helensvale and it was fantastic to see the rinks dressed up for broadcast. There were many comments about the poor quality of the broadcast rinks in Birmingham 2022 and especially the fact they were end rinks. These greens? Not a problem. Just put the cameras on the green

and use the middle rinks. The greens were so hard they could easily cope with cameras and indeed at Broadbeach two huge seating stands as well.

Most evenings were spent back at Broadbeach club for a bite to eat or a wander into town to eat. We were certainly

not late back. The Monday after the first week of finals we had a day off. I had decided to hire a car and five of us headed up into the mountains and spent the day exploring the wonderful Hinterland. We also took the opportunity to drive down the coast to Tweed Heads and have an evening meal in the incredible



Allan was one of four Deputy Chief Technical Officials

Club Tweeds, the home of the Australian Indoor Championships and the prestigious Golden Nugget tournament.

Week two was more of the same back at Helensvale for me. The week was quite relaxed and stress free in terms of officiating with no issues of concern and Paul and I had got into a good routine. The highlight of this week was arguably witnessing some of the smaller nations picking up good scores and indeed winning a few matches against the titan nations. Of course, I had to remain impartial, but I could not help being secretly pleased and proud of the three players from the Falkland Islands for improving every game they played.

On Friday, after finishing early with the two quarter and semi-final sessions we held the all-important officials Trashes Trophy match at Broadbeach. The Trashes (a play on the Ashes) started at the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games as an Australia versus England single rink challenge match. We have contested the Trashes at each Commonwealth Games and World Championships since then. Needless to say, the Aussies struggle on our heavier greens and we struggle on their faster surfaces and so the results have reflected the north v south hemisphere venues. I won't share the score; it was too embarrassing!

The final weekend of finals had me umpiring the women's triples, an uneventful but enjoyable experience with Australia clinching Gold against New Zealand. This was followed by the men's singles between Ireland and Canada and I was so pleased to see Ryan Bester finally take the gold medal. I had the honour of marking the final between Ryan and Shannon McIlroy in Christchurch, New Zealand, seven years earlier when Shannon took the gold.

And so it was all over. Fond farewell to all the old friends and the many new friends and it was back on the long trek home with some lasting memories of a great championships and a beautiful country.