



WBT OFFICIALS

...Behind the Scenes

With every one of the 67 matches being streamed live on Youtube and Facebook and with more hours on BBC TV and Red Button, there was plenty for the most dedicated bowls spectator to enjoy. The 17 day World Indoor Bowls Championships held at Potters Leisure Resort in January produced some amazing spectacles and some memorable moments. Our little team of Officials were there to see it all. So what goes on behind the scenes with us officials?

Many an astute viewer noticed that there were some new faces appearing on the famous blue rink during the first five days play. Yes, three willing victims... sorry volunteers, took their place on the rink looking like rabbits in headlights and experienced their first World Bowls Tour event.

Dominic Simcoe and Bernie Hill from England were joined by Neill Brice, a World Bowls International Technical Official from Northern Ireland, as try outs for the Officiating Team.

They had the added benefit of a couple of days acclimatisation at the imposing resort prior to the first games on the portable rink. Each had a roughly equal chance to experience the role of Umpire and Marker and, when the first rounds of the singles commenced, Shotclock operator.

We are constantly asked by Umpires what the process

is to get on the TV. Simple answer is that there is no simple answer!

Talent scouting, head hunting and recommendations are how these three found their way to the rink for the first time.

Okay, I may accept that looking at the roles on face value it must be a piece of cake. After all the Umpire just sits at a desk eating Jelly Babies and occasionally steps onto the rink to do a bit of measuring.

The Marker, well they have a bit more exposure and have

to look nice for the TV cameras but at the end of the day all they are doing is chalking a few touchers and calling the scores at the close of each end.

As for the Shot Clock operator – how hard can it be to press three buttons repeatedly for the duration of a match?

STEPPING UP

Well, I think you could ask any of those that have stepped into that arena and they will say it is unlike any other officiating duty they have been involved in.

If the basic skills and knowledge are not ingrained and automatic then the

specifics cannot be taught and picked up. Neill, Bernie and Dominic were like sponges, absorbing every experience and nugget of guidance they were given and it paid off. Here's what our three intrepid triallists had to say after stepping onto the blue rink for the first time:

"It's an exhilarating feeling that blew my mind. Unlike anything experienced before and will never be matched. I feel extremely privileged to have had the opportunity" – Dominic Simcoe

"What an honour and pleasure it was to be part of the WBT at the World Championships. The support and encouragement of the officials team was first class. A fantastic opportunity to work with an excellent team. I can't wait to do it again" - Bernie Hill

"Whilst working with the players was not unfamiliar, being in an arena normally seen only on TV was an altogether different experience.

I was able to see just how seamless my

colleagues interacted with each other and I can't wait to be part of that team again" – Neill Brice

As head official for WBT, I was absolutely delighted to see how well Neill, Bernie and Dominic did and it was a huge pleasure to inform them that they would be accepted on to the team for next season.

My colleagues, Dan Bluett and Francis Fletcher really put them through their paces coaching them and steering them in the right direction.

Their enthusiasm was infectious and most of all they fitted right into the team as if they had been working with us for years. With a bit of spit and polish they will be excellent additions to our small team.

YEARS OF MEMORIES

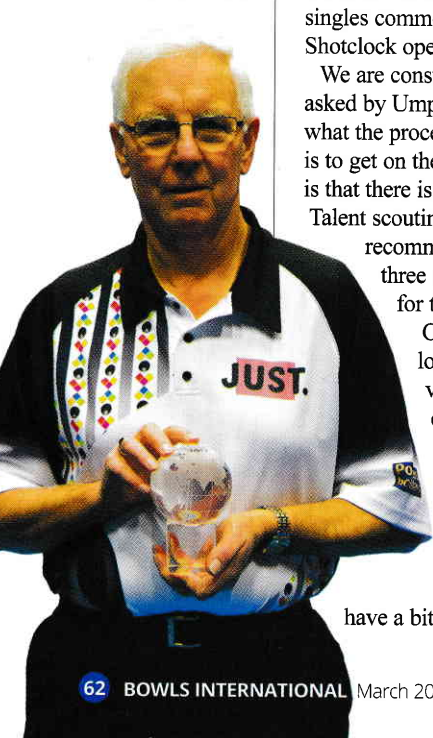
It was time for new blood to bolster our numbers. Getting time off work for all the events that we are involved in with WBT and other governing bodies is challenging and with only four of us, we were vulnerable if one of us was poorly or had run out of annual leave.

We are not getting any younger either and succession planning is essential, especially as it could take a few years for new recruits to get really comfortable on the rink whilst dealing with the challenges of live TV.

Mike Davies and I were surprised and proud to receive from World Bowls Tour a small token in recognition of 20 years' service as officials.

I was presented with mine at the Awards Night on the first Saturday and Mike received his when he arrived mid-week in the Arena in front of a packed stand. The memories, good times, bad times, laughter and tears we have seen in those 20 years are worthy of a book.

Below: Mike Davies with his award





Left: The team- Francis, Dan, Mike, Allan and Tom

So the 2019 World Championships have come and gone and actually passed off without major incident from our point of view.

Considering we had transitioned from the WIBC Indoor Laws to the Laws of the Sport of Bowls Crystal Mark 3rd Edition, I was surprised how smoothly things went for us.

The World Bowls Tour has a revised set of Conditions of Play just like any other tournament backed up by the aforementioned Laws.

WBT Officials are expected to assist with Question and Answer sessions periodically during the event, usually together with a player and the Tournament Director or the Assistant Tournament Director.

We get the usual questions, generally from a knowledgeable group of interested spectators and we enjoy answering them and passing on our experiences and knowledge.

Questions are normally born from events happening on the portable rink and with very few contentious issues a couple of the Q&A sessions fell a bit flat.

However, that all changed following an incident in the Ladies Singles which is extremely rare on the portable rink but more common in every day play – A Displacement of a Bowl.

I think we missed our lunch that afternoon as we spent time answering all the questions. Mind you missing the occasional lunch is not a bad thing when you can eat four cooked meals a day at Potters!

Ellen Falkner, during her match against Alison Merrien, inadvertently scooped up an outlying bowl thinking the end was complete.

She immediately realised that she still had a bowl to play, by which time Alison's stray bowl was nestled between Ellen's feet. It was time for the Umpire,

Dan Bluett, to put down the Jelly Babies and explain to the players what to do.

Alison, being a qualified Umpire, knew the drill and ably assisted by Dan and Marker Francis Fletcher they proceeded to replace the bowl as near as possible to where Alison thought it was before Ellen got hold of it. Job done, no dramas and Ellen could play her last bowl.

Like buses, nothing happens then two turn up at the same time. Another rarity is a player dressed in red picking up a green bowl, stepping on the mat and almost delivering it.

It was the spectators that alerted Katherine Rednall to the wrong bowl in her hands and she was so focused on her game she was taken by surprise when she realised.

That raised a few questions along the lines of what would have happened if she had delivered it, with the answer being it would have simply been carefully replaced with the correct bowl.

We don't see wrong biases very often on the portable rink and no one was as surprised as me when marking for the eventual Ladies World Singles Champion to see her throw one into the side ditch. It took me a little while to register that I had to go half way up the rink and collect it. Yes, even the best of them can do it.

Those of you that have watched many hours of World Bowls over the years may have noticed the absence of a "modern" piece of umpiring equipment and its replacement with an "old-fashioned" bit of string!

Yes the Boundary Scope has been condemned to a life in a tatty cardboard box to be replaced with a length of Day-Glo Orange fishing cord and a set square.

Its use certainly raised a lot of questions from spectators and online viewers

with many calling it a step backwards compared to a boundary scope.

Well readers, it is time to let you in on a little secret – the boundary scope is not that accurate, takes ages to set up, and was held together by insulation tape!

Its use was debated long and hard amongst us officials and the Tournament team including players a couple of years ago. We trialled the string in 2018 and this year is really proved its worth with some extremely close calls which players could see for themselves.

The outside boundary of the portable rink is marked with a few small chalk dots on the seams of the carpet to aid the Marker when determining if a bowl or the jack is outside the boundary or not – it saves us walking to the other end to have a look.

With three officials now working every game, we can react immediately to a boundary call from the Marker and have the string run and set square against the object much faster than setting up the boundary scope and "guessing". Some of the margins we encountered in the fortnight were literally millimetres live or dead.

Thank you all for watching whether on BBC, Red Button, YouTube or Facebook Live. Feel free to send your questions and comments as always for answering in future issues. Next stop – the Atlantic Championships in Cardiff, Wales in May.

Below: The friends and colleagues share many laughs during the tournaments

