



# BIRMINGHAM 2022

## ...an ITO perspective

'Fantastic event, fantastic team and the sun shone on us as well.' That pretty much summed up the 22nd Commonwealth Games in glorious Royal Leamington Spa for our umpiring expert **Allan Thornhill** who was honoured to lead a team of 35 experienced international technical officials representing nine countries for his sixth games. Here Allan reflects on his Games story



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After arriving at the Welcome Centre in the NEC Birmingham, we queued and waited and queued and waited a bit longer as we were put through the COVID-19 testing and accreditation process. As a team, we had mixed experiences which led to us eventually being two men down with positive tests and having to be isolated – not the start we had wished for.

On arrival at our hotel in Royal Leamington Spa, the friendship and camaraderie was immediately evident. Several of the officials were attending a Commonwealth Games for the first time, but they were made so welcome by those that had experienced this team spirit at previous games. We were due to have an informal get together on the first evening, but due to the delays at the Welcome Centre and transportation, we opted for a more relaxed start for the following morning.

Selection of the 35 had been a challenging process with many criteria to meet. With over 80 applications, it was inevitable that there would be some disappointed ITOs. The Commonwealth Games Federation desire to achieve gender parity added

an additional criteria, but as a sport, we are proud to have achieved that with a 50:50 gender split. Those that were fortunate enough to attend performed superbly and more than justified their positions in the team.

Day one for us was scheduled to be a venue familiarisation day. We started with a relaxed morning and a get together at the hotel to go through any questions, processes and arrangements. To prove what a fantastic group of people I was working with they even surprised me with a birthday cake and a card. It was such a lovely surprise.

We were due to be collected from the hotel at 1pm by bus. We waited, waited a little longer and after a number of 'phone calls and the realisation that buses were not going to arrive, we walked. It knocked us back a bit and meant that we had less time to become familiar with the venue layout.

We discovered on arrival that the umpire kits were severely lacking in approved equipment. Despite spending many hours working through the comprehensive list of what we required and submitting photographs of each item, it seemed

the procurement team did not get the memo unfortunately.

However, umpires are a resourceful bunch and a mini team coordinated the collation of various items of equipment that everyone had bought with them to create the eight complete kits we needed. It just demonstrated so well how they can work together as a team to manage a stressful and quite embarrassing situation.

In the afternoon, myself and technical delegate Gary Smith were involved in the technical meeting. This is an opportunity to run through, in detail, the arrangements, conditions of play and answer questions from the team managers and representatives. As my first technical meeting, it was an interesting one with some detailed questions and small challenges that needed resolving and clarification before the start of competition. There were only a couple of immediate issues to resolve and this was done the following day to the satisfaction of the teams involved.

## THE BEGINNING

We were playing catch-up on day two and awaiting some Amazon deliveries of equipment which was missing. Again, the buses failed to show and by this point we were beginning to realise there was a bit of a serious issue across the board. Our assistant competition manager did an amazing job at arranging taxis for us all and that is what we eventually relied on throughout the event with the odd sporadic bus thrown in just to tease us. Most of us attended the spectacular opening ceremony at the Alexander Stadium in Birmingham. It was a late night, getting back to the hotel at gone midnight. Alarms were set early for the first day of competition with us being on venue at around 7am. Again, we relied on taxis and walking.

The first day of competition had arrived and there was the usual nervous anticipation of what was to come. It was all hands on deck at 7am to get the four greens prepared in just 45 minutes. We inserted small plastic strips into the green at the two-metre T position and re-spot position on each rink and timed the greens. Throughout the event, they were timed at between ten and 12 seconds, but the pace picked up a bit during the day with the warm dry weather we experienced. This was to be our routine for every morning before play. Unfortunately, in the northern hemisphere, it is quite rare to mark centre lines on outdoor rinks and this was something that was picked up by viewers of the TV

broadcast. It would have made centring the mat and the jack a lot quicker.

Maybe something to think about for future major events? I certainly think marking the two-metre positions was a good step forward, certainly in England where it is rarely seen. I can't imagine the chaos that would have been caused having two-metre sticks laying around the field of play.

There were two games per session and two sessions per day with each game on a time limit of two hours 15 minutes in the sectional rounds. During the knockout stages, time-limits were not applied. On the whole, the timings worked pretty well. We had assigned time keepers on each game and they monitored the number of ends being played and advised myself and the technical delegate of any likely slow play issues. There were only a couple to deal with and ironically on that first day we called upon the timekeeper to time a game of singles.



***“Those that were fortunate enough to attend performed superbly and more than justified their positions in the team”***

Working out the schedules for the officials on each day was a long and complex task. I wanted to be as fair as possible in allocating the various duties through the event. On each game, I allocated two umpires on each green, one spare umpire between two greens, two time-keepers and of course the singles markers. I also wanted to take advantage of the gender parity within these roles. I was keen to move away from the usual tradition of men marking for men and ladies marking for ladies. The schedule went to plan despite some last minute changes in

rink allocations and also being one man down with COVID-19 on day one.

So the competition got underway and I was so pleased with how the officials worked as a team, how the more experienced officials worked with the debutants and how they all pulled together to resolve any issues so that it didn't escalate into a major problem. I am so proud of them all for the smooth running of our aspect of the sport. There were issues to resolve, but they were done quickly, efficiently and without fuss and hopefully without anyone really knowing. I must admit I certainly walked some miles that first day, but as the week went on the routine became easier and my feet got a bit of a rest.

I worked closely with the competition and operation managers and with Gary Smith during each game ensuring everything ran smoothly, scorecards were collated, checked and double checked before being sent to the official scoring team. They were a great team to work with.

## THE TRASHES TROPHY!

There was a small matter of an extremely important match to rival any gold medal at the Commonwealth Games – the Trashes Trophy! It has been a tradition every two years since the Melbourne Games in 2006 for four English officials to play against four Australian officials in a one hour match. Trust me, the standard is not great, but it's a lot of fun and maintains that strong bond and rivalry between us. I am pleased to report that the Trashes returned to English soil and we are now peels at four wins each. There's all to play for in 2023 on the Gold Coast.

I must congratulate all of the ITOs for their hard work over the nine days of competition. To those that were selected to officiate the medal matches, you did the team and our sport proud. To all competitors for their amazing sportsmanship and friendship and of course to all the medal winners, congratulations.

So, my sixth Commonwealth Games came to an end with fond memories, a team of officials I was so proud to work with, new friends from around the world and a few blisters from around 190,000 steps I walked. Whilst I missed the thrill of marking and umpiring for some of the world's top athletes, the chance to lead the team of ITOs and be part of the organisation team was an incredible experience and one I am honoured to have undertaken.

Thank you all for your dedication to the sport.

**Opposite page (top):**  
The team of ITOs with technical delegate Gary Smith (front right)

**Left:**  
The Trashes Trophy winners from left: Dan Bluett, Allan Thornhill, Angie Thompson and Bernie Hill

## INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL OFFICERS

Malcolm Ramage, Arthur Gammack, Bob Dalziel, Dan Bluett, Andy Armstrong, Alastair Douglas, Graham Senff, Bob Penny, Paul Watkins, Neill Brice, Anne Summerhill, Martyn Jenkins, Wendy Suttie, Huw Jones, Alistair Cummings, Sue Wey, Sue Hogg, Shubhra Kathura, Roger Black, Tony Hatch, Mark Cowan, Angie Thompson, Lorraine Dowson, Pat Gammack, Bernie Hill, Erica Wong, Jacqueline Neill, Pauline Kirkpatrick, Fiona Kerr, Mary McGroarty, Rita Shek, Sue Mates, Vicki Eva, Allan Thornhill, Gary Smith.