



Destination Gold Coast

Sun block is packed, passport checked for validity and flights booked. Very soon athletes, officials and volunteers will be descending on the Queensland coastal resort Gold Coast for the XXI Commonwealth Games. The majority of Lawn Bowls athletes from the home countries will be leaving our shores at the end of March whilst we officials leave over the Easter weekend ready for a start of competition on April 5.

It is again a very proud achievement attending my fifth consecutive games but of course it is a proud moment for all officials that are selected to officiate at arguably the most prestigious event in the bowls calendar.

In particular, those attending their first games will be feeling the excitement of this global event and, remembering my first appearance in Manchester 2002, I know how they will be feeling as they step out onto the rinks for the first time.

Manchester in 2002 will be remembered for unusually hot mid-July weather which caught out even those who came from hot countries.

This was followed by more familiar Manchester weather which turned the baked newly laid rinks to muddy tracks and we lost almost two days of competition.

However, the overriding memory for me was the absolute honour of marking the Men's Gold Medal Match between Ireland's Jeremy Henry and the eventual winner, Bobby Donnelly from South Africa.

Four years later and the games were hosted in Melbourne, Australia. The first

opportunity to officiate in the Southern Hemisphere was an exciting prospect.

Whilst there were some very enjoyable moments, the games were marred slightly for the English officials due to a misunderstanding surrounding our selection and the subsequent acrimonious atmosphere that it initially created.

It was all sorted over some frank discussions and a few 'tinnies' and I now count many of the Australian officials among my closest umpire colleagues.

Delhi, in 2010 was a very unique and, at times, challenging experience.

It was the first Games where the newly formed World Bowls International Technical Official qualification had been used to select the officials.

India provided excellent National Officials who were an absolute joy to work with and many of those have now qualified as ITOs.

Delhi will of course be remembered for its temperature, unfinished stadium and on-green wildlife – the moth and beetle invasions. Very fond memories and strengthened friendships will be the legacy of that trip.

Back to the UK in 2014 and the

superbly hosted Glasgow Games. A city that rose to the challenge and proved to be a truly friendly Games.

Who will forget those two bowls from the great Alex Marshall MBE?

For me, Glasgow was about friendship and great team work. It is never easy working as a fully integrated team, especially when there are up to 40 officials.

Not that I can remember much about it, but it was our final evening at the St Vincent Bowling Club that showed what a fantastic team of officials we had in Glasgow – I really don't remember getting back to our rooms that night.

So here I am, 16 years later, about to embark on my fifth Games.

As I reflect on how the officiating aspect of the Lawn Bowls event has change in those years I thought it would be appropriate to give you an insight into the Conditions of Play, or rules, for this upcoming sporting spectacle.

Of course the games will be played under the Crystal Mark Third Edition of the Laws of the Sport but there are some significant format regulations which you may be interested in.



Above:
Unlike the Olympics, the Commonwealth Games features able bodied and para-sport athletes. Pictured is England star Paul Brown, who will be competing at his second Games

Top right:
Allan Thornhill officiating at the 2014 Games in Glasgow



TIME LIMITS

Importantly the games are open to both able bodied and players with disabilities as the Commonwealth Games are fully inclusive for Para-sport athletes, unlike the Olympics!

The Lawn Bowls competitions are in extremely capable hands with the vastly experienced New Zealander, Kerry Clark CNZM OBE, at the helm as Technical Delegate for the International Federation and Bowls Australia Commonwealth and world gold medallist Mark Casey as the competition manager.

All sectional matches will be played to a time limit of two hours and 15 minutes, not including trial ends.

These timings will not apply to knockout matches but there will be slow play regulations in force throughout.

With this time constraint it is inevitable that the number of ends to be played will be reduced.

Pairs and Triples will be played to 18 ends with three and two bowls respectively. Fours, Para-sport mixed pairs and Para-sport triples will be played over 15 ends with the pairs using three bowls each and the fours and triples two bowls. Singles will be played to 21 shots.

Each discipline will start with sectional play with teams drawn in four sections, or two if there are 12 or fewer teams.

In order to keep the games flowing even more there will be restrictions on the movement of players during the games.

In triples the lead and second must stay at the mat end but in fours, 'threes up' may be played.

Singles players may only visit the head

after delivering their third and fourth bowl. In team games the leads cannot visit the head. In triples the seconds and in fours the seconds and thirds cannot visit until they have delivered all of their bowls. The skips, however, can visit after each of their bowls except in pairs where they cannot follow their first bowl up to the head.

SLOW PLAY

Of most significance at this level of play is the use of Slow Play regulations. Players must not delay play and opponents may request the use of a stopwatch to control the pace of play.

Technical Officials will be called on to time each team that has been placed on the clock.

During each end players must deliver all of their bowls in a two minute period, or two minute 15 second period in fours. The clock starts when the jack has been centred, or the non-offending team's first bowl has come to rest, and will stop when the offending teams bowl has been delivered.

It will start again when the offending team take possession of the rink. Any bowls not played in that period will be forfeited and the non-offending team can deliver their remaining bowls.

THE RE-SPOT

Like it or not, re-spots will be in use. I appreciated it is not everybody's cup of tea but on rinks that will be slick and with the quality of players that are likely

to hit in excess of 90 per cent of their drives it is probably the only way we will ensure that more than five ends are played. Crystal Mark respot laws will apply.

A couple of other unique features of the games regulations are the requirements for doping control as directed by the Commonwealth Games Federation and their Anti-Doping standard.

There is also a jury of appeal at this level of sport which will decide on any points not provided for in the conditions of play or appeals on decisions made by officials.

Lawn Bowls continues to be a core sport in the Commonwealth Games portfolio and this has to be applauded.

It is a truly global showcase of our sport and we sincerely hope that it is given the media coverage it deserves.

Of course, in the UK, the majority of games will be played overnight and it is unlikely that the main broadcasters will show much other than highlights.

Social Media looks like it will play a major role in keeping everyone up to date with results and behind the scenes happenings.

I fully appreciate that many grass roots bowlers are less concerned about the successes of our top athletes but I would like to hope that many of you will keep up to date and embrace the biggest lawn bowls event that we have.

I would like to wish players from all nations every success. Also, very best wishes to the team of International Officials that I will have the pleasure to work with, I am looking forward to meeting new faces and to working with colleagues from around the world once again.