

SPORTSMANSHIP GAMES - THE HOTTEST TOURNAMENT IN HISTORY!

The Sportsmanship Games is a hot tournament - and that's official.

Every year, when the Games come around, the sun usually has his hat firmly on. This year, on the weekend of August 9th & 10th was no exception. In fact it was exceptional as AMF Nottingham played host, it was the hottest weekend in history.

The top deck at Nottingham, so often home to the cream of British bowling became the home of some of the friendliest people you would want to meet. Twenty-four, six person teams, plus guests descended on the Midlands centre in the hope of maybe winning a medal but mainly to enjoy themselves and by the end of Sunday, there ambitions were realised.

Anyone who has been to Nottingham recently will know about the parking, or should I say, lack of it. All teams were strongly advised to leave their cars at the Moat House (the designated tournament hotel) and commute by taxi. I believe everyone did, apart from the local "Spare Parts" team. During the singles event I was forced to make an announcement regarding a Honda 4x4 that was about to be hoisted on to a council tow truck! There was a sudden rush through the door as Bill Nichols ran to prevent his vehicle from being whisked away. He succeeded and I believe he even managed to get them to agree to cancel his "ticket".

That excitement over with, the singles continued on schedule with Jo Marshall from Breadsall (last year's 300 game) taking gold in scratch. Jo finished just 2 pins ahead of her husband Simon, bowling for rival Derby team, SCAGMA. Simon needed to strike out to draw but had an 8 with his final ball. In the handicap section, bowling with someone else's ball, it was Steve Legge of Team Wantz who finished top.

Nottingham has some very good air-conditioning but with the temperature outside soaring, the bodies in the building and the machines running flat out, it still got very hot. With the singles event over, there was a break for lane maintenance and everyone took the opportunity to top up on fluids with various degrees of alcoholic content. Some ventured outside but were happy to return to the centre that was cool in comparison.

The doubles event followed and, with the sun moving round the building, the temperature continued to rise. So much so that on one particular pair of lanes, the underlane ball track started to buckle - a fault chief tech Ron Garton had not witnessed in nearly 40 years in the business! With super-glue and strategic pieces of wood, it was overcome and the end of a very hot day could not come soon enough. It was the current record holders, Andy Fraser and Laura Ivory of Happy Hedgehog who lifted the gold medal in the scratch event, with Alan Dickenson & Danny Cox from Pin Action taking the honours in the handicap section.

With the first day's play over, everyone headed back to the hotel and I'm sure (like me) the first thing they did was to get out of their sweaty clothes and straight into a cool shower.

Within 45 minutes I was cleansed, tarted up and ferrying the raffle prizes down to the "Regent Suite". And what a relief - it was the first place that had

proper air-conditioning. It was beautifully cool, all night and I wished I could have set my bed up in there!

Each year I try and introduce a new element to the event and this time there was to be a music

quiz early on the Saturday night. I spent a lot of time preparing and publicising it. Quite a few people organised their evening meal around it but it turned out to be a non-event. Plans A, B and C were put into effect but, to cut a long story short, the DJ wiped the cassette, with a tape deck that he was not familiar with.

I had quite a few things planned relating to the quiz but time was getting on, so I launched into the raffle. When all the regular prizes were claimed the non-winners were still in with a chance of a prize. Those who were definitely not going to Paris had to guess where Robin Hood actually came from. Sylvia Heatley from the Stockport Rams party answered Yorkshire and won her and presumably husband David a weekend break in Harrogate, courtesy of the Moat House Hotel group.

Remaining non-winners who were going to Paris were asked which district they would find AMF Bowling de Paris. Out of the correct answers (16th), it was Lyn O'Brien from Friends who won 6 free tickets to a show at the Moulin Rouge.

Following the raffle, plan "D" came into action - i.e. Drink and Dance. The DJ was forgiven for his earlier sins as he played an excellent mix of tunes that kept the dance floor filled until 2 am. As everyone finished up their drinks, those remaining filtered their way downstairs to the residents bar. I was invited but reluctantly declined, knowing full well of the possible consequences.

The heat was not conducive to a good night's sleep but the bevvies helped to launch me into the land of nod. After 4 hours of sleep, I topped up on a good English breakfast, cleaned my teeth, scrubbed my tongue, gargled with loads of mouthwash and set off for the bowl.

As usual, despite the state they got into the night before, everyone was there for the informal registration. However, before the second set of trios could get under way, it became apparent that Chris Williams from Panthers was not going to make it. He spent the morning shouting at Hughie and Ruth and his captain was so concerned that medical advice was sought. He turned out to be OK but Steve Buchanan, travelling with the Border Reivers party from Carlisle, stepped in as a sub, despite feeling very fragile himself.

The line-up of Pete Sampson, Ian Tucker and Lee Pulham took the scratch gold medal. The Brooklyn Heights trio of John Moore, Dave Butler and Dave Heaton won the handicap section.

Following lane maintenance, the 6th man event saw John Rourke from Pin Action victorious in the scratch section. Virgin to the tournament, Trish McLeachie, bowling for new team Yehbutz, won her first ever prize and the gold medal in the handicap section.

Before the team event went on, Deputy Manager Nikki Hart presented every team with commemorative certificates and had team photographs taken. The next three games saw Border Reivers take the scratch title and Aylesbury Aces the handicap.

With all bowling out of the way, it gave the chance for everyone to grab some sustenance from the buffet while the final results were calculated.

Individually, it was Dave Heaton who finished top in the scratch section, averaging just over 206 for his 12 games and Jo Marshall took gold in the handicap.

SCAGMA (a combination of first name initials) Derby took first honours in scratch team all events, with perennial Aylesbury Aces doing same in handicap.

The final award is always for the "Good Sport of the Games". Not given lightly, it is given to the person who has personified the spirit of the games. This time it went to Rob Williams.

Rob saw the website, liked the sound of the tournament and contacted me via e-mail. He was a last minute reserve who stepped in for Laura Ivory who needed to play a tournament in Aylesbury in order to make the national Y.A.C. team.

Laura is an up and coming star that realises that there is more to bowling than just winning. She did not want to miss her annual trip to the Games so she bowled on Saturday, attended the disco until very late and then got up very early to travel to Aylesbury to fulfil her YAC duties. I heard that she bowled well enough to make the team - I hope she continues to keep her priorities in order!

Getting back to Rob - he was an individual who, having visited the website, contacted me and said he wanted to play in the tournament. At short notice, he was given the opportunity to replace Laura on Sunday. He accepted and also said he wanted to play Paris.

He arrived at the bowl on Saturday and I introduced him to Captain John Fraser and the rest of the Happy Hedgehog team, in order that they may get acquainted. A little later on I also introduced him to the Conpissed-Again team who were looking for a bowler to replace Lee Pulham, who cannot make it to Paris. Everyone seemed to get on well together and arrangements were put into the planning stage.

On Sunday, Rob picked up a bronze medal in the trios (scratch) and, after his set in the 6th Man event, was more than willing to be a gofer when the team event was on, encouraging the rest of the guys from behind the lanes.

Rob is an American serviceman based in the East, bowling at Peterborough and RAF Alconbury but he is one other thing and that is the "Good Sport" of 2003. I can think of very few people who would have the bowling balls to commit to a tournament and bowl with two sets of complete strangers. But Rob did and, did I forget to mention he was a really nice guy and a very popular recipient.

And then the tournament was over for another year. The final tune that played out through the speakers was Basement Jaxx's Rendez-vu and that's what it will be, in Paris next year.