

The Inaugural Sportsmanship Games - Derby 1995

After its initial conception (see history), I set to work organising and promoting the event. I knew it would be hard work but, even with all my past experience in running tournaments, I never anticipated how much and how many pitfalls there would be in taking on something of this magnitude. A lot of lessons were learned, I can tell you.

Having decided on the dates and planned the format, I had 6 months to put the thing together (mistake number 1) - more time was needed really. I had A5 flyers professionally printed, advertising the event, which I mailed out to bowlers on my (relatively small) database. I also sent a batch to "tournament friendly" centres and finally, had them inserted into "World of Tenpin". I just had to sit back and wait for the replies to roll in.

Meanwhile, I needed to find a hotel in Derby that could accommodate everyone and have a suitably sized function room. Derby has plenty of large hotels, so that wouldn't be a problem - would it? (mistake number 2). I was already committed to the dates, having advertised them already, so there was no room for negotiation. As I waded through the yellow pages, my heart sank further with every phone call. Her Majesty's Prison Service were having a national conference and they'd only just about booked every bloody hotel room in the City! What was I to do?

Well, what I did was get three hotels and a bus to ferry everyone to the hotel where the function was. Not ideal. Those bowlers booked in to the Oast House and European Hotels were very pleased with their accommodation. One couple even got the honeymoon suite, complete with Jacuzzi! The only hotel available at the time, with a large enough function room was The Friary. Unfortunately, this had only just been saved from receivership and wasn't up to the standard I had hoped for. But I was stuck and had to use it. One or two guests decided to change hotels for themselves, but those who stayed actually had fun with the "Faulty Towers" type lodgings. And to be fair, the staff were excellent - they even came down to the bowling centre on Sunday to cheer on their guests!

Because of all the different events and separate sections, I needed to have a good scoring program. A bowling team-mate told me that he had a program that would be able to cope with the tournament. A week before the tournament I asked him for the program (mistake number 3). I had misunderstood him. He knew of a program but did not have it. Panic set in. Thankfully the centre had just taken on a new trainee manager who had a degree in computer studies. He came to my rescue and whipped up a basic program to do the job. Unfortunately he was not available on the weekend of the tournament (mistake number 4). Loyal helpers and myself were not as computer literate and, with one wrong sort and click of a mouse; we managed to cock-up the all events results. I had to forward the medals in the post, once I had finally sorted out who the winners were.

With this catalogue of errors you would think the tournament was doomed. On the contrary. I managed to attract 17 x 6 person teams on my first attempt and evened things up with a team of pacers. There were four local teams but the others travelled from the like of Manchester, Stevenage, Aylesbury, Grimsby, Newbury, Chelmsford, Swindon, Leicester and Stockport. And everybody had taken the name "Sportsmanship Games" at face value and they were truly all good sports.

The centre had a new, flashy CD music system that I decided to exploit. Pinching an idea from the Irish Open, I was going to play lively music for all the practice sessions and spent considerable time listening to all the albums, selecting appropriate tracks from what was available.

All squads were of reasonable size, with the exception of the very first singles squad. There were just 12 local bowlers, playing at singles pace but quite a lot of the other competitors had arrived for the start. I cranked up my introductory piece of music, to make the welcoming announcements. It was the theme music to Hawaii 5 0. Without any prior knowledge or prompting from me, some of the lads jumped up on to tables and benches and started doing surfing impressions. A feat they would repeat for the next 2 singles squads. And so the mood of the tournament was set. It was about having fun!

The first day of bowling ran very well, with hardly any problems to speak of. Keith Hale who was running "World of Tenpin" arrived about midday. I had asked him to cover the tournament and he dutifully obliged.

Lane conditions were good and everybody seemed happy after the singles and doubles events were concluded. The bowlers and quite a few guests retired to their respective hotels and those not staying at the Friary (perhaps the lucky ones), were transported by coach at 8.00 p.m. for the evening disco.

Earlier in the week the hotel had informed me that the resident DJ was unable to play. However, they had found a replacement in Steve Rouse. STEVE ROUSE! Now that might not mean anything to a lot of people reading this article but it was a major coup. Steve Rouse was one of the top DJ's in the East Midlands if not THE top DJ, in the 70's, when I was a teenager. He had been dragged out of retirement to play my gig. When I saw him, I hardly recognised him. My God he had aged! But was the old magic still there? Yes it was. It didn't take too long before he had that dance floor filled and kept it that way for the night.

The revelling was paused for half an hour or so. I had also asked Keith Hale to be a guest speaker and once again he came up trumps, giving a witty 10 minute rendition of bowling things past, taking care not to "name, names". I had also scrounged up various bits and bobs for a free raffle, from my contacts in the bowling industry. With the raffle concluded, it was back to the serious business of enjoyment. The revelry continued until 2.00 a.m. and beyond for those who sought out the residents lounges.

The morning after the night before, there were quite a few "rough" looking faces. The snack bar did a roaring trade in coffees and **everyone** turned up. Play continued with the trios and 6th man events. Just prior to the fives event, every team was called up to the foul line on their lane and presented with a set of certificates (nobody was going home empty handed). The team event concluded play for the weekend and, while the final results were calculated, everybody retired to the bar (again) for a slap-up buffet.

With all the medals presented and speeches made the tournament was over. However, before I could leave the lanes, centre Manager Marie Burton had arranged for another presentation. My husband Barry (competitor in the tournament and mechanic in the centre) grabbed the microphone and proceeded to embarrass me. He asked all competitors to thank me for my hard work and meanwhile my daughter Natalie appeared with a bouquet of flowers and Marie wheeled in a new double bowling bag for my efforts. The applause was humbling. The tournament had been a great success and I knew there would be another one.