

If you want to plan your summer holiday and wonder if the weather will be nice, look no further than the bowling calendar. The Sportsmanship Games has an uncanny knack of landing on a hot weekend and this year was no exception.

As the heatwave died down and a blanket of cloud moved in over the UK, the one area unaffected on the weekend of August 5th and 6th was the South coast. Coincidentally, the Games were being staged at AMF Havant, in a very sunny and humid Hampshire.

All 26 six person team spaces were soon snapped up but some illnesses, injuries and a complete team dropping out with a week to go gave me some headaches, I can tell you. Once again though the bowlers came up trumps and, after a day spent mostly on the phone, I managed to fill all the gaps with “good sports” stepping in.

With everything sorted, I set off “down South” on Thursday, carefully avoiding the M1 and M25 which had previously given me headaches on recent sorties. It was a pleasant drive which left me in good spirits, ready for a visit to the centre and a final briefing and sound check. Then it was on to the designated tournament hotel, the Portsmouth Hilton, to check in and an early evening game of tennis. A dip in the pool prior to dinner set me up for some more work in the hotel room – preparing all the welcome packs for the teams arriving the next day.

Friday saw meetings with the hotel management team, making sure everything was in place for the festivities and running through any last minute accommodation changes. Then it was on to the bowling centre to set up all the signage and meet up with Andy Fraser who was running the scoring and results service.

After an early evening meal it was time to “set up stall” in the bar area, to greet team captains, register teams and hand out welcome packs to the early arrivals. Then it was quiz time – a spin-off which has developed over the past three years thanks to the efforts of Pete Fyles. This year’s quiz was far better organised, with the hotel allowing us to use the function room and Pete bringing his own portable PA system in order to be heard.

Everyone who took part in the quiz paid £1 and all proceeds raised were to be donated to charity. The quiz was not quite so hard this year – which meant I was able to answer about four questions! I can claim to be the only person who answered the final question completely correctly – identifying three pictures and the connection. They were Laura Ivory, Pam Hemsall and Brenda Pratt – all of whom had played in the Sportsmanship Games (and represented England). Some people suggested that they were Wimbledon Champions and another suggestion was that they were female murderers! In all fairness, they were not very good pictures.

My team (Tiny Scouse Derby?) didn’t do too badly in joint fifth (I think) but the Winners came from Team Wantz, who elected to have the £70 raised go to Great Ormond Street Hospital. I also presented them with a large bottle of bubbly and a box of Thorntons chocolates. With the quiz finishing around the 11 o’clock mark, many then moved out to the residents bar to take advantage of the 24 hour service. I headed for bed, feeling relatively confident of what was to come.

I arose on Saturday morning to glorious sunshine and a bit of a nervous tummy – which was soon put in order by my portable chemist shop. With my energy levels topped up from the

extensive buffet breakfast, it was off to the centre for the final registrations and time to get the bowling under way.

The centre had not had a tournament in five or six years under its former Bowlplex days, but had played host to the AMF Seniors Club one month prior. I made a point of being at that tournament because I hadn't seen "my seniors" for a while and of course I needed to see how the centre would cope. They had coped admirably and the lane condition set then was to be used for the Games.

The opening speeches were made in conjunction with the classical piece of music "Oh Fortuna" (remember the Old Spice advert?) and then on to the first event – the singles. Practice music (a very important aspect of the tournament) was The Prodigy's, "Everybody in the place". And it wasn't too long before everybody in the place was making their way down to lanes 25 & 26 where Mike "Frosty" Halliwell was stringing strike after strike. Unfortunately I popped up to see the 10th frame and whilst he survived the first shot, the next was just a little too high but none the less a 286 to get tongues wagging.

Meanwhile, "new boy" Greg Pullinger was putting together a set of 699 to set a new tournament record in the singles. Breadsall's Mark Cattell, another debutant, soon eclipsed Greg, shooting 717, before every-present Andy Fraser popped up in the final squad to score 722 and take the singles title in the scratch section. Mark took gold medal in the handicap section.

With lane maintenance carried out to the sounds of music with a nautical theme, it was on to the doubles for the second half of the day, with practice music being Rogue Traders' "Voodoo Child" – not particularly relevant but a lively tune of the times that I quite liked.

The doubles event has proven, over the years, to be **the** event for Andy Fraser and Laura Ivory. Every time they have bowled together they have won Gold, setting records along the way. This time Laura could only watch from the sidelines, as she was injured, sporting stitches in her leg which will keep her out of bowling for a month. With the proverbial door open it wasn't that long before "Frosty" was at it again; this time stringing up a more consistent set of 693. Aided by his "Bertie Johnston Allstars" partner Ray Simpson who shot 653 the pair netted the scratch doubles gold. Husband and wife pairing of Geoff and Jean Gardiner bowling for Sudbury Spinners took the handicap gold.

Bowling had been excellent for the first day and, with no breakdowns to speak of and fast lane maintenance, everything finished in record time. The day closed to the sounds of The Ordinary Boys and "Seaside" and it was back to the hotel to get ready for the evening "do". I cannot remember ever having as much time to get myself sorted and set up with raffle prizes etc.; I actually had time to think.

Next stop, the Mountbatten Suite and time to get down with "Ashley and Sue". The banner read "Ashley Riggs – More than just music – an atmosphere!" Ashley was like a modern day version of Tony Blackburn but not so good. All his tunes were loaded up on to a laptop – so were mine, but I wasn't charging £275 for the privilege. He bit his tongue for so long but then it became a little acerbic, as folks had not yet got up to dance. Well usually Trish & Ian Tucker would have been up jiving but for the very first time they could not make it. (It's not easy when you live in Spain and have problems). Everyone was a little hot, bothered, and still full from their evening meal or

whatever. They were always going to get up and dance, I had told the DJ this fact, so I was a little concerned with his slightly snidey comments.

I interjected with the raffle. A fine array of prizes thanks to AMF Bowling, QubicaAMF, Jez Darvill and a fine supply of alcohol (Hilton – lower your prices), chocs and DVD's, following a jaunt out to the local Asda. When the table was cleared, those who had failed to win anything thus far could have a guess at either the venue or the mileage to the next venue of the Games in 2007.

At this point I roped husband Barry in to collect the guesses and when he had finished, I had everyone sing "Happy Birthday" to him, as he was celebrating (?) his 45th birthday. Only six people guessed correctly and went in to the draw to win their accommodation at the venue – AMF Stirling on August 11th & 12th. It was Fred Willsmer from Team Wantz who bagged the prize worth around £300. All remaining non-winners went into a further draw to win a B&B stay at the Portsmouth Hilton, with Chris Drayton from "Bag of Skittles" claiming the prize.

So, with all the speeches and raffle out of the way, it was time for me to relax for a couple of hours and time for the bowlers to make Ashley eat his words.... It didn't take too long before one and then two park benches appeared. They then became the focal point for photographs, as they were draped with what I assume were table clothes and adorned with various shrubbery and plants. The dancing got hotter as Elliot and Josh from "Pin Action" went into "male stripper" mode – nothing came off, it was just the performance – you had to be there.

Then there was the moonlight trolley racing in the car park. I can't comment too much as I didn't see it all and didn't want to attract the attention of the Management too much. Suffice to say it was all harmless fun and everything was returned from whence it came.

Having spent the latter part of the evening dancing, pogoing and doing the "Macarena", I was ready to hit the hay when the disco finished at 2.00am. Others carried on, but as a result probably suffered – fair credit to them though – everyone showed up on time for their squads the next day. There may have been a few withdrawals prior to the tournament but this year everyone who started managed to play their designated games.

I don't think there were any problems with Sunday's breakfast. There had been a slight problem on Saturday, despite my frank discussion with the restaurant team telling them that that at least 75% would descend upon them at 7.00am. I didn't say it for a laugh you know! So everyone made it out of the hotel in one piece, fully fed and ready to go on day two.

Folk were greeted into the centre to the gentle sounds of Fleetwood Mac's "Albatross" (continuing the nautical theme) before launching into Chocolate Puma's Always & Forever to accompany the trios event.

In the second squad it was "Erotic Hedgehog's" Liz Myers (nee Ivory) who shot 599, with Berni Pash (698) and Steve Parsonage (695) who broke both the scratch record and handicap record (2088). Quizmaster Pete Fyles, together with Doug and Carol Eastall, for "Havant a Chance" took the handicap gold.

As the bowlers took a break for lane maintenance it was time to launch in to my second "waterlude" – another batch of water-related pieces of music. And then for those who, for

whatever reason were not bowling the Team event, it was their time to shine as the “sixth man”.

Berni Pash had made an excellent debut but dropped off slightly on Sunday. Still, his 630 was good enough for the scratch title. Meanwhile it was Josh Hazell from the very happy Mexican waving Bag of Skittles who shot 677 for gold in the handicap.

Before the final team event could take place, it was time to present the bowlers with their commemorative certificates (presented by centre manager Debbie Dunsford) and take team photos (by James Coleman), accompanied by the sounds of Indiana Jones and Star Wars theme music.

Once the teams had concluded their practice to a 12 minute dance mix, it was time to get the final show on the road. Having always been slow starters, Breadsall moved up a gear to lift the scratch title with 2910. In the handicap, all six bowlers shot above average for “In the Mood” to take the gold medal and another new record was set, with 3342.

With all the bowling done and dusted it was time for the bowlers to tuck into their post-tournament buffet, while score-meister Andy Fraser collated the final all events results

In the meantime, the pool competition was reaching its’ finale. Bowlers and guests were all allowed to take part in a basic knock-out competition. I failed at the first hurdle, but it’s the taking part that counts, isn’t it?; The Champion from the Paris event, Lawrie Duncan was in the final again but this time missed out to Colin Thanner of the Carlisle Raiders. As the black ball disappeared down the top right hand pocket, I called everybody to order with the sounds of the “Rocky” theme music.

First of all Dan Rourke who had co-ordinated the pool competition, presented the top four with their alcoholic and cash rewards, with Colin receiving a nice trophy in addition.

Despite copious amounts of liquid and almost OD-ing on chloroseptic throat spray, my vocal chords were threatening to die (again) any second, so I handed the microphone over to husband Barry to announce all the medal winners.

Event by event, bowlers took to the podium to receive their specially designed medals and have their photographs taken for posterity. All winners were already known and displayed on the scoreboard, with the exception of the all events winners, which I asked Andy to hold on to.

One of Andy’s “B” team companions, Bernie Pash from new addition team Erotic Hedgehog played very well and consistently. He averaged 223 to blast into pole position with 2681 for the all events scratch gold and obliterate the record. Both team mate Steve Parsonage and Breadsall’s Mark Cattell broke the old record as well. Berni’s handicap total of 2873 was also a new record but Daniel Drayton from “Bag of Skittles” was awarded the gold in the handicap section, as no player can win medals in both sections of the same event.

Sometimes the team all events is predictable, inasmuch as the team in question has built up so much of a lead that they cannot be caught. Not so this year. It went down to the wire and so created a very exciting atmosphere as the teams waited to hear who would be called up to the podium. No one could have been happier than the Sudbury Spinners combo of Tom Cleverly,

Paul Strudwick, Gill Perkin, Brian Chapman and Jean & Geoff Gardiner. Having thought they might get bronze, they were absolutely over the moon when they were called up to get the coveted gold

In the scratch section there were several teams in the hunt but it was the army buddies of “Bertie Johnston Allstars” who won gold. Graham Brown the regular team captain was missing due to having a serious heart operation earlier in the year. Graham was gutted at not being able to attend and was constantly in touch via phone and text to his team mates. Deputy captain Stuart Wolstenholme, along with Larry Williams, Mike Halliwell, Les & Lawrie Duncan and Ray Simpson certainly will have brought a smile to Graham’s face. They racked up 13876 which also equalled the record.

QubicaAMF, as well as donating prizes to the raffle also supplied a couple of very nice trophy pins. I had these mounted on to plinths and had all previous team winners engraved. Both teams were allowed to have their photos taken with the trophies before I reclaimed them but they will of course be immortalised on the plaque. All bowlers of course received their medals plus another new touch, a commemorative patch each.

And then the very final award – the “Good Sport of the Games”. Once again there were many candidates to be considered and the recipient was to be debated for quite some time. Eventually I gave a very honourable mention (and a bottle of bubbly) to Assistant Manager James Coleman. James had volunteered to work the tournament on top of his regular shifts, thus meaning he was working two “doubles” over the weekend. He helped me with the music and pa systems, updated the plasma screen with results and messages and took all the photographs. He was a very big help and took a lot of pressure off me personally. However, as he continued to work alongside me during the presentations, I called up Andy Fraser to take the trophy and applause he so thoroughly deserved as the Good Sport of the Games. Despite problems going on in his personal life, Andy willingly gave up his time (again) to provide an excellent scoring and results service, second to none and with no thought of reward or payment expected. Of course he was part of the Happy Hedgehog team as well, racking up some medals and a new record to boot. The Committee felt it time he was rewarded and turned into a *very Happy Hedgehog*.

That was almost it until Barry reclaimed the microphone and made a little speech which forced me centre stage. It was bad enough I could hardly speak, without bursting in to tears. I took a deep breath and thanked everyone, to a round of applause you will never hear at any other tournament. I was also presented with countless bouquets of flowers, which must have cleaned Sainsbury’s out in that department.

All that was left was for me to say the very final thank you and goodbye before playing out with the Proclaimers song “500 miles” - which is just about the distance between AMF Havant and AMF Stirling. Until next year....

