

The 8th Sportsmanship Games - Carlisle 2002

When it was announced that Carlisle would be the venue for the 2002 Sportsmanship Games, there were one or two teams who indicated that it would be too far for them to travel. Fair enough but there were still plenty of teams waiting in the wings to take up any vacant spaces, or so I thought.

No, there really were plenty of teams who wanted to play but leading up to the tournament, one by one, player by player, team by team the elements conspired. A clash on the calendar with a Senior event and the Triple Crown removed about four teams from the equation. Then there were injuries, illness, transportation blowing up and even a last minute wedding that required the attendance of a complete team.

All this meant that the final number of six person teams competing was twenty, instead of the anticipated capacity of twenty-four. Quite ironically, on the weekend of the tournament, visiting Pro Shop operator, Brian Sands stated that a group of twenty-four Scottish bowlers cancelled a challenge match because of the tournament being staged. They would have played, if only they had known there were spaces and if only I had known about them!

So, without a full house, quite a few of the "regular" bowlers missing and an influx of new blood, did this have a detrimental effect on the tournament? I have to say, quite emphatically, NO. In fact some of the seasoned campaigners, those who had attended all previous "Games", went as far as saying it was possibly the best one yet!

But what made it so? That would be hard to say. It was a combination of events throughout the weekend, high scores, tournament records, house records, the venue, the party and the ever-present jolly camaraderie, wrapped together with a certain je ne ce quoi.

Like myself, the vast majority of the bowlers and their guests travelled up to Carlisle on the Friday. The weather was cruel, raining heavily and the M6 had heavy traffic. However, as we moved into Cumbria, the traffic thinned and the rain stopped. In fact the weather could not have been better for the weekend - speaking from a bowlers point of view. There was no rain to spoil the jaunts around the City but it was cool enough (for the time of year) to make it not unpleasant to bowl.

Most of the bowlers were housed in the Lakes Court Hotel, with others just across the road in the County Hotel. Both were very conveniently located in the centre, close to a variety of eating and drinking establishments and only a four minute drive (or twenty minute walk for the more energetic) from AMF Carlisle. There were also some that had booked into local guesthouses, in order to extend their stay and take in the sights.

On Saturday morning, with all the teams assembled and registered, it was time to turn the lights down low, get the "Extreme" lights flashing and crank up the music - making my welcoming announcements to the sound of Safri Duo's Bongo Song. *(The same piece of music was used as an introductory piece during the recent Commonwealth Games. I had chosen it a year in advance and smiled to myself as the MC spoke at exactly the same times during the song, as I had rehearsed my speech).*

And so to the first singles squad where local bowler, Steve Armstrong took advantage of the fresh oil and shot 246, 177, 255 for a 678. This proved to be good enough to win him the scratch gold medal and set a new tournament record in the singles event. His handicap score was top of the pile as well, but no player is allowed to win more than one medal in the same event. Therefore handicap gold went to In the Mood's Kim (Totti) Locke, bowling way beyond her 116 average to notch up 732.

Subsequent singles squads saw scores dip, as it became apparent that there was not enough oil out there. A quick word with the chief mechanic saw a new pattern down for the doubles (and all subsequent events) and the scores picked up, even more dramatically.

With all the traumas leading up to the event, I felt sure I had used up my supply of spare bowlers and volunteers, when the Stockport Rams announced that one their players, Antonio Caballero had

returned to the hotel following his singles set. He had gone down with suspected food poisoning (not from the hotel I feel sure, as they served excellent fayre) and would not be returning that day. My plea for a substitute bowler was answered by little nine year old Nathan Blake, whose family made up two thirds of Cleethorpes team, In Spirit. Nathan, a 118 average junior bowler had brought his gear along, in case he could get a practice game and was truly excited at the prospect of being able to play in the tournament, proper. The Rams welcomed him with open arms - such is the spirit of the Games.

With the new pattern in place it was Spare Part's Bill Nichols turn to shine. He rolled 245, 286, 214 for a 745, just narrowly missing the house record. Along with his son Rob, they lifted the gold in the handicap section with 1387. Border Reivers' Mike Halliwell and Paul Richmond took gold in scratch with 1221.

The second doubles squad did produce a house record. Happy Hedgehog's Liz Ivory produced 667 to knock off Brenda Gill's (remember her) long standing record. Together with Hayley Beavis, they lifted the scratch silver medal.

With no prima-donna tactics, or perhaps with thoughts on the evenings festivities, the bowlers finished in record time for the day and retired to their respective hotels for a wash and brush up and to put their dancing shoes on.

It didn't take too long before everyone was assembled in the County Suite and dancing was under way. It was almost a shame to stop the bopping but my special guests the Mayor and Mayoress of Carlisle took time out from their busy schedule to welcome the throng to their City. The Mayor then made the draw for the first winning (free) raffle ticket, which was followed by subsequent draws by each of the lucky winners.

When the extensive range of prizes was exhausted, those who had not won anything had the chance to guess where next years venue would be. All correct entries were entered into one final draw and the winner, Lee Pulham who guessed Nottingham, won a free weekend for two in Carlisle, courtesy of the County Hotel.

My final speech for the evening heralded those who were celebrating birthdays that weekend. In particular, Andy Courtnage from the Breadsall team who had been 21 a couple of days previously and his mother arranged for a cake (I transported it in my car!). The cake was delivered right on cue to a chorus of Happy Birthday and with Andy suitably embarrassed, the lights went down and dancing continued into the wee hours.

Sunday morning brought its usual array of bad heads and dodgy stomachs but everybody was there on time, including me. The pace, very noticeably slowed, but the action heated up.

In the second trios squad, not to be outdone by her sister, Laura Ivory shot 275 (house record), 215, 183 for a 673 (breaking Liz's house record from the previous day). No mean feat but it wasn't enough to help her team win a medal in the trios, nor did either of her newly set records last very long.

A few lanes away, Jo Marshall from Breadsall was grabbing the headlines. Having opened with 193, I got a call on the walkie-talkie that she had the first 9 strikes, all good ones. I have a bit of a reputation for putting the jinx on perfect games, but I just had to watch. The 10th and 11th were a bit iffy, Brooklyn's as I recall, but the final ball was smack in the hole and the centre erupted. Brilliant! The first 300 in the Games' 8 year history, only the second one to be bowled in Carlisle and of course, another ladies house record.

In the next game Jo started with the first three or four strikes and went on to record 241 for a marvellous 734 and beat Laura's record which had stood for about ten minutes! Jo's contribution enabled her team (including Simon Dean and Matt Courtnage), to lift gold in the handicap section with 2048. The other half of the Breadsall six, Andy Courtnage, Alan Hearn and Barry Joyce made it a clean sweep in the trios, taking the scratch gold with 1798.

With a break for lane maintenance and the players nourished and refreshed, the competition resumed with the 6th man event. Scores were not too high - 569 being enough for Rob Nichols to win the scratch gold. The drama however, was being fought out in the handicap section. Very popular regular, Wilma Sustins was playing well above average. On the adjacent lane, Nathan Blake (still playing for the bed-ridden Antonio) was playing his heart out. Both Wilma and Nathan took it in turn encouraging one another and by the end of the set, only 1 pin separated them. Wilma emerging with the gold, was not quite ready to be beaten by a nine-year-old, but I'm sure she wouldn't have minded, really.

Prior to the team event, Centre Manager Marcus Bloomfield presented all teams with their commemorative certificates, whilst Assistant Manager, Andy Aspinall took team photographs. The formalities over with, I called upon everyone to join me singing Happy Birthday to Geoff Rens and Garry Lee, both celebrating their birthdays that day - and of course, everybody obliged.

In the team event, Breadsall continued their good form, shooting 3018 for the scratch gold and another tournament record. (Who says you can't party, have a good time and then bowl well?). Following Wilma's success in the 6th Man, her compatriots in "Conpistadores", husband Harry, Pete Sampson, Lee Pulham and Ian & Trish Tucker complimented with the handicap gold. Ian and Trish, it should be noted, travelled all the way from Spain (hence the team name), where they have made their new home since retiring.

With the bowling running a little late, it didn't matter to too many people, except the Breadsall team. All of them, with the exception of Barry Joyce, were catching the last train out of Carlisle to Derby at 6.50. They had amassed quite a collection of medals, not to mention Jo's 300 and would not be able to stay for the presentation! With the Committee in agreement, a lot of hasty phone calls were made to hotels, family etc. and then Jo and close friend Andy were invited to stay another night with compliments.

The individual all events scratch was won by Bill Nichols (2474), from Laura Ivory (2453) and Andy Courtage (2440). Over in the handicap section, it was Colin Sowerbutts (2770), from Jo Marshall (2726) and Dave Dunstan (2710).

In the team all events, following a stunning Sunday performance, it was Breadsall who took gold (13771) from Happy Hedgehog (13500) and Border Reivers (13452). The handicap section saw Liverpool team, Smash 'n' Grab finish top (15389) from Cumbrian Allsorts (15114) and In the Mood (14973).

With all the regular medals presented, by local Area Secretary Dave Everett, there were two final awards to make. First of all, to Jo Marshall for her memorable 300 game and then finally the "Good Sport of the Games" award. This was voted for by the Tournament Committee but competitors were invited to submit suggestions. And it is always hard to single out an individual at this event, simply because there are so many good sports. However, it was agreed that one young man stood out that little bit more and so the award went to Nathan Blake.

Marcus made the closing speech and then presented me with a lovely bouquet of flowers and a bottle of Champagne (thank you). And then the tournament closed to the sound of Embrace's "All you Good Good People" - and they were, each and every one.

The following morning, as I set off down the M6, the sun was shining and I had a great feeling of contentment. The tournament was a great success and Nottingham was lined up for 2003. And even though I was going on holiday in a couple of days time (to recover?), I couldn't help but find myself thinking about where the 10th anniversary could be in 2004 and how I could make it extra special!!!