

The 3rd Sportsmanship Games - Bushbury 1997

Within six months of the Burton event, I parted company with Burton Bowl and joined AMF Bowling. At my interview, I told them about the Sportsmanship Games and how I wanted to continue running it. My proposition was met with great enthusiasm and the Company even coughed up an additional £500 to pay for the medal to be die-cast. Being based in Wolverhampton (to start with), I had six months (rushing again) to put the tournament together, with the full co-operation of centre manager, Mike Downes.

Given that time was short, I recall that the preparations went very smoothly. The new medals were produced in Spain and looked the "bees knees". The scoring program was no longer a worry, with Steve Mackinder (a veritable I.T. wizard) based at Strykers. I had "acquired" a set of walkie-talkies from AMF Blackpool, to ensure smooth communications and the fancy headset made me feel quite important! Someone likened me to Madonna; mic'd up on her Blonde Ambition Tour. I must say the resemblance stopped at the microphone bit! My daughter Natalie, eager to help, felt very proud with her walkie-talkie. Amongst other things, she was given the job of "Ball Park Monitor" and nobody, and I do mean NOBODY, got past her and into the Ball Park, without producing their tournament pass!

And even the hotel fitted the bill perfectly, well almost. The Britannia charged a reasonable rate, was able to accommodate everybody and had a huge function room. The only criticism was lack of parking - being the last one back to the hotel on Saturday, I found myself parking in another street and felt a little uncomfortable about it. One of the hotels' bars also had a bit of a dodgy clientele (if you know what I mean) but this was more a source of amusement, rather than annoyance.

Although no massive scores were bowled, the players had no cause for complaint. Chief technician "H", revered in bowling circles, was on the case. It was a good, consistent condition with no machine problems to speak of. Everything ran to time, with the exception of one pair of lanes in the last doubles squad. Checking to see what the problem was, I had cause to metaphorically wave the yellow card at one of the bowlers. Having bowled in the first singles squad, he (will remain nameless) had a considerable break before bowling again. He had obviously passed the time quite easily.... in the bar - and was definitely the worse for wear. Duly reprimanded, via his team captain, he finished the game and day one's bowling came to a close. The same bowler was spotted later that evening, roaming the corridors of the Britannia, bouncing off the walls, until finally collapsing in a heap outside some unsuspecting person's room!

Being forced to park my car half a mile from the hotel, I sprinted back to my room, had a quick shower, donned a new outfit, some slap and I was ready for the evening's proceedings. Having scrounged a vast array of prizes for the raffle, I was pleased that my hotel room was very close to the function room, as I carted them through, box by box.

It wasn't too long before all the bowlers started arriving for the evening's frivolities. I felt a little apprehensive, as the DJ didn't seem to be up to much. He was very quiet and, when he did speak, it was very difficult to make out what he was saying. Thankfully there were enough decent tunes in his collection to keep folks on the dance floor.

The dancing was interrupted at about 10 o' clock. I had a guest speaker again, this year it was the turn of Meg Jordache. Meg had been team Manager when I was in the GB squad and had been a good friend to me. She was also a star in her own right, having played for Great Britain and winning All Events Gold Medal in the World Championships. I repaid Meg's kindness by forcing her to give this speech. Well no, I didn't force her; she was gracefully honoured but very nervous. A drink from the bar helped to calm the nerves and then Meg delivered her speech, quite tentatively, about bowling in days of yore. The audience sat quietly captivated and when finished, Meg drew the first raffle ticket and then disappeared back to the bar!

With all the raffle prizes claimed, I had one final announcement. I had started my preparations well in advance this time and I was able to announce where next years Sportsmanship Games would be.....AMF Blackpool. As the oohs and aahs died down, the music started up again and the partying continued until 2.00am

Despite the very late night, I awoke unusually early. At 6.00am I was jogging through the town centre but not as part of a fitness regime. I had visions of my car being vandalised by late night revellers or even stolen, so I felt compelled to go and check on it. But of course it was there, with all four wheels and no scratches, so I sauntered back for an early breakfast.

Sunday morning at the bowling centre, everybody turned up, even the anonymous drunken man, sporting hangovers and ready for another six games a piece. After her "ordeal" the previous evening, it was Meg Jordache's turn to show that she hadn't lost any of the old flair. Shooting 610 and, ably accompanied by husband Allen and Deputy Manager Neil Hannigan, they combined to win the gold medal in the scratch trios event.

The rest of the days' bowling ran like clockwork and before you knew it, it was time for the medal presentations. I was pleased that this year I had commissioned Pete Arnold, a local bowler who had a joinery business, to build a special medal podium. It slotted together perfectly and was positioned at the top of the stairs, leading to the Sega Park. Those winning the medals must surely have felt a sense of great achievement, as they climbed the stairs and then stepped on to the podium.

With the last of the medals presented, it was time to announce the winner of the "Good Sport of the Games". Voted for by all the competitors, the vast majority of them gave it to Natalie Joyce. And she thoroughly deserved it. Natalie was here, there and everywhere during the tournament, helping in every conceivable way. What the bowlers didn't see was all the work she did to help me before the tournament. Natalie was very surprised to receive the award and, as her mother, I was very proud.

That was that for another year and I pressed the button on the tape player. The Three Degrees sang "When will I see you again" and I said "Blackpool in twelve months".