

## The 4th Sportsmanship Games - Blackpool 1998

For the first time, I had plenty of time to plan this tournament. Having announced the venue at the previous "Games", it seemed like everybody else was planning early too - turning the event into a mini-holiday at the famous north-west seaside town.

The 36-lane centre was a new acquisition for AMF. It had everything I needed for the event and I received the fullest co-operation from Manager Julie Heaton. They had even poached my husband Barry, to be chief mechanic, so I knew he would be pulling out all the stops in his department. However, Barry was lacking one particular tool - a magic wand!

The pinspotters were, shall we say, ancient - Brunswick A1's and if I were to say they were boded together with bits of string and chewing gum, I wouldn't be far off the mark! This being due to a lot of parts being obsolete. This meant that only 30 of the 36 lanes were up to the job of a busy tournament and with that, I gained an entry of 29 teams (still a record).

The lane conditions were excellent but those pesky pinspotters were a tournament organisers' nightmare. I had failed to realise that they took several seconds more to go through their cycle than say AMF's 82/30's or 82/70's or even Brunswick GS10's and, although a few seconds doesn't sound much, multiplied by the number of bowlers/games/frames it meant that at the end of the day, we finished an hour late.

I was of course the last to leave the centre and by the time I had taken the five-minute drive up the seafront to the Savoy Hotel, their small car park was full. There was a pay and display, council ran car park just across the road that proved to be very profitable, however. Depositing my change and pressing the button had no result but, upon pressing the eject button, I was treated to a refund of £16.40, all in change! With my pockets bulging, I chink, chink, chinked back to the hotel, to get ready for the evening's festivities.

The majority of bowlers had had a good day, scoring well and unconcerned with the minor problems and late finish. From an organiser's point of view, I was bordering on exhaustion and ready to "relax". With no special guest this year, it was down to me to provide the speeches and anecdotes. One of the guests had been playing bingo that day, while their partner bowled. I mentioned that she had won £500 legitimately and also my good fortune on the car park machine. Another bowler piped up, saying that they had "won" £40.00 at the car park! Then, with the raffle out of the way, I announced that next year's "Games" would be at AMF Coventry and then it was time to hit the dance floor and the bar.

There were a few faces missing during the evening. They had gone to Blackpool's Pleasure Beach and were under the misconception that the disco finished at midnight. And it was around about midnight that Barry appeared. He had been working on the machines; ironing out problems that had occurred in the day and making sure everything was as good as it could be for the next day's play. A big cheer greeted him - the bowlers ever appreciative of the hard work going on behind the scenes.

The fun continued until 2.00 a.m. The ladies from "Herts of Gold" had a special "blow-up" guest with them this year, who was passed around from table to table and "danced" with many of the revellers. When the music finally stopped, the majority made their way to bed. There was a hard-core group of a dozen or so, who then ventured into the residents bar until approximately 4.00 a.m. I really, really should not have been one of them!

I awoke the next morning to the sound of the porter hammering on my bedroom door. It was 8.30 a.m. - OH..MY...GOD! Registration on Sunday, all be it very informal, was 8.30 a.m. with bowling commencing at 9.00 There wasn't even time to panic! A very quick shower, clothes on and, with a sweep of the arm, the contents of the dressing table went into my briefcase. Thankfully, there were no police about as I sped at 60 M.P.H. down Blackpool seafront and screeched to halt, outside the centre.

In the meantime, as Barry was unable to wake me from my coma, he had prepared everything in the centre. I ran up the stairs and on to the concourse to be met by a huge cheer. Following a quick (out

of breath) announcement, I started the practice music for the first trios squad (starting bang on time), collapsed in a heap and called for coffee.

My hangover was in good company but was exacerbated by machine faults and slow play (those pinspotters again). The bowlers, however, played on, in good spirits, scoring well and never complaining. In a bid to finish on time, as most people had a long way to travel, everyone happily agreed to chop out the lunchtime lane maintenance. Whilst the team event was in play, the medals were displayed on the presentation table, set in the raised pool table area.

As the bowlers tucked into their after-tournament buffet, Manager Julie Heaton presented the medals. Due to excessive talking, smoking and drinking on the Saturday, my voice finally gave out on me and I was forced to hand over the microphone to Assistant Manager Peter Krane, half way through the presentation. The final award, as had become customary, was for the "Good Sport of the Games" and yet again, it went to a "helper". This time it was young Gary Marcus, Julie's stepson, who had been brilliant throughout the weekend, helping here there and everywhere. He was very surprised to receive the award and of course you could see the pride in Julie's eye's as she handed over the coveted award.

With all the proceedings over with, the thank-you's given and received, there was just one thing left for me to do. I still had to check-out of the hotel, having left rather hurriedly in the morning! Within 48 hours I would be on a beach in Majorca and would have ten days to relax and unwind, before thinking about Coventry!