

European Development Seminar-Glasgow 30 April/1 May 2016

Events-The showcase of our sport

Presenter-Gary Smith, World Bowls Chief Executive & Tournament Director World Bowls Events

As has been said this morning one of the first things the current board resolved to do when they were appointed in 2014 was to survey all of our Member National Authorities. You have already heard what the results revealed in terms of image and marketing of the sport, in these areas the results were generally very negative evidencing that much more needed to be done to raise the image and profile and improve the marketing of our sport across the worldwide bowling community.

The survey also highlighted the importance of world/international events to our members and of course your members.

World/International events are not only vital to showcase our sport but also to meet the aspirations of our most talented individual members.

World Bowls events are vital for the World Bowls brand and raising the profile of our brand.

I am lucky enough to have had a long and, I would like to think, very successful international career and I well remember the first time I received a call to advise me I had been selected to represent my country, England at that time of course, in the Home International Series. The thrill it gave me, my family, my club is a feeling that has stayed with you for life and I am sure the same applies to some of our colleagues in this room. As my international career blossomed I was lucky enough to win World and Commonwealth medals and to play with and against the best players in the world, some sat in this very room.

We are lucky enough to have with us at the seminar Rhona Howie MBE, who reached the pinnacle of achievement in another sport, an Olympic Curling Gold Medal. I certainly remember watching her final stone when I was glued to the TV late into the night. Never was there a more graphic example of showcasing a sport and raising the profile of the sport of curling in the eyes of the world.

The opportunity to play in world and international events throughout the world, in different environment, playing conditions and on different playing surfaces certainly made me a more complete and rounded bowls player.

As an under 25 selector in my own county and with an increasingly popular juniors section in my own club, I now pass on to the next generation of bowlers that enthusiasm and love of the game and highlight the increased opportunities that now present themselves for our young bowlers to represent their country in world and international events like Commonwealth Youth Games and our own World Junior Championships.

At this point, it needs to be said that the lack of representation at our World Junior Championships especially from some of our larger members is not only disappointing but results in many adverse comments from other nations, host authorities and host clubs. We question how any effective player development pathway can exclude the ultimate aspiration for our youth players to represent and hopefully win medals for their country at world level.

We all appreciate that financial considerations greatly affect the ability of some national authorities to send representatives to all World Bowls and other World Bowls sanctioned international events but all I can say is that does not apply to all our members and we at World Bowls consider that representation at ALL World Bowls events needs to come up the priority ladder. As we have quite clearly demonstrated improving the image and marketing of our sport is the major priority. Events showcase the sport, they send a message to broadcasters, media, sponsors, funding agencies and indeed all stakeholders. What message does it send about our sport when major bowling nations are missing from a world event or indeed as we are currently experiencing when countries who qualified for the World Championships withdraw from disciplines for which they qualified. If our members cannot value and support their own World Championships what message does that send?

Late withdrawals from any of our events cause major issues and headaches and are a major concern. They are unacceptable except in extreme cases.

We obviously appreciate the financial situation faced by many of our members but all I can say as a Club Chairman is that my club would raise the money to send one of our youngsters to a world event if they were ever selected and I know most parents would move heaven and earth to raise money to support their children if selected. Let's not deny any opportunities presented to send representatives to these events.

This takes me on nicely to some very positive news regarding International Olympic Committee (IOC) recognition for our sport. World Bowls was required to wait until IOC completed a review of their recognition criteria, which they completed in December 2015. Having received those criteria a couple of months ago we have now formally started the process to apply for IOC recognition. The next step is to complete and submit our IOC Recognition Application file. Here is the 40 page questionnaire that I need to complete and submit to IOC with a host of documents by 31 August 2016. The IOC will then consider our application at their IOC Executive Board meeting 6-8 December 2016. If we are successful in becoming recognised it obviously does not necessarily mean that bowls will be on the Olympic Games Playing Programme in the near future but we know for a fact that such recognition will bring benefits to many of our Member National Authorities opening up avenues for funding.

However, I would say that one of the criteria our application will be judged on is whether we run events for youth so just another important reason for supporting our World Junior Championships which you will be interested to learn that we have resolved to rename as the World Youth Championships. It has been highlighted that this was required not only to aid marketing of the event but also to align with IOC and Commonwealth Games terminology.

Sticking with positive news. Lawn Bowls (including Para Lawn Bowls) will remain a core sport on the Commonwealth Games sports programme in each Games up to and including 2030. I can tell you that World Bowls has an excellent relationship with the Commonwealth Games Federation fostered very much by our Technical Delegate Kerry Clark OBE and myself. We are in a very good place as a sport within the Commonwealth Games movement, we are very highly rated. There was no doubt that the Glasgow Games further enhanced that image and the profile of many players.

I was in New Zealand recently and requested to make a speech to Howick club members. It was interesting to note that the biggest round of applause I received was when I repeated an increasingly common view that if an experienced, older player is still motivated and committed, fit and playing well enough age should not be a barrier to international selection. That reaction reflects the vibes I have picked up over a period of time in my World Bowls role that I consider worth passing on to you

for your own considerations when it comes to player pathways/player development. That is the feeling amongst many players that whilst youth development, identification of youth talent are vital for the future health of the sport it is not the be all and end all and care is required not to over promote players of a younger age and alienate or even write off experienced, committed and still capable players just because of their older age.

I hear too often for my liking 'they are only interested in the youngsters' Whether it be true or not, it is not something any of us can afford to hear especially if we want to attract those retiring from other sports but still keen to compete at the highest levels they may attain nor do we want to drive our better older players away from the game because they can't see the point anymore if their continued commitment and ongoing successes are not being recognised.

It is not only the World Junior Championships where lack of representation from some of our larger nations causes adverse comment and raised eyebrows.

One of the questions we are often asked is 'why are all the events in the southern hemisphere'

Frankly, the answer is simple, in recent years those countries are the only ones who bid to host them. The lack of hosting bids from European countries in particular is an issue of great concern to World Bowls and we consider that this must be addressed by the major European national authorities so that they take their turn. It cannot always be somebody else's role to host events that you need to participate in. Is it too much to ask that say once every twenty years, if not longer, a major nation with all the required facilities hosts their World Championships? In some cases should joint bids be considered where say all the home countries contribute to the World Championships being hosted in one of those countries? Surely you would actually save money with a local hosting.

Think positively, not negatively, think about what hosting a world event could do to raise the profile of the sport and promote the sport and bring legacy benefits for the future health of the sport in your country or countries..

Don't simply throw away requests for expressions of interest to host events in the 'too hard basket'

Of course it takes commitment and organisation to host events but that comes firstly by actually positively desiring to host events and World Bowls needs you desire to host these events.

I would conclude by saying as Tournament Director for World Bowls events that I am very proud of our record of delivering well organised, smooth running events, providing an instant results service on our website, and the excellent relationships we have with host organising authorities and venues. We continue to enhance those events with live-streaming where it can be done to a good standard of broadcast and where financially viable.

It is time for Europe to come to the party for the sport we all love and utilise the opportunities to host World Bowls events to raise the profile of our sport.

Thank you, I trust that you have found this presentation thought provoking and I am sure we can count on you all to provide positive feedback.

Gary Smith

Chief Executive & Tournament Director of World Bowls Events.