

**UMPIRE'S REPORT**  
**IX ISF JUNIOR MEN'S WORLD SOFTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP**  
**PARANA, ARGENTINA**  
**Nov 1 – 10 2012**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Whilst two New Zealand umpires travelled together this report reflects my experiences and thoughts.

In no particular order I wish to thank the following:

- The ISF and Bob Stanton, ISF Director of Umpiring for my selection.
- SNZ for providing the funding for the trip
- WSA for their contribution towards the costs of the travel levy
- Eugene Gilbert, SNZ, who withstood a large number of emails and queries and whose travel plans worked all through the trip.
- All those people who have supported me over a long number of years.

## **TRAVEL TO PARANA.**

My trip started with a late morning flight to Auckland via Jetstar. I then had time up my sleeve before checking in for the flight to Santiago, Chile on LAN Chile. The flight left on time and we arrived in Santiago about 20 mins ahead of schedule. We then had about 3- 4 hours to kill before our next flight to Buenos Aires aboard LAN Argentina. This also all went to schedule.

On arrival in Buenos Aires we went through immigration where we were photographed and electronically thumb printed. Then it was off to get our bags and go through security and into the main terminal.

Waiting for us was our transport to our hotel for the night. After negotiating a money machine in Spanish to get some cash we took off into the rush hour evening traffic in an "interesting" ride to the hotel. This was about an hour in the pouring rain.

We soon learned about Argentine driving habits. We arrived at Polo Suites for the night. After freshening up we went looking for some dinner. So at 9pm and in the rain we found a restaurant. The waiter didn't speak any English and our Spanish wasn't great but we had a great meal.

After a decent sleep we found a cafe next morning for breakfast, negotiating the language barrier. From there we went for a walk through a park before going back to our hotel to arrange our ride to the domestic airport.

The accommodation was adequate for the one night and I know the nights sleep made all the difference for me.

So we arranged our ride who took us on another "interesting" journey to the domestic airport. Road rules don't always seem to be followed in this country.

On arriving at the airport we checked in and met up with the start of our umpiring crew. I had to pay 140 pesos for excess baggage, only about \$40. We met up with some of the crew including Bob in the departure area. We then boarded our flight for a 1 hour flight to Santa Fe. On arrival we were met by some of the locals including the organising committee. We then had a 45 min journey to Parana.

## **ACCOMODATION**

The umpires were accommodated at the Plaza Jardin Hotel. We had 2 to a room. The rooms were fairly small with very small beds. My roommate was Abel Mataboge from Botswana.

From a privacy point of view it would have been nice to have had larger rooms. It was hard to not disturb my roommate or be disturbed as each person has different habits in terms of bed time and waking time. I think this was the experience of most of the crew.

It would have been nice to have had a fridge in the room to keep water cold.

For the crew as a whole I think it would have been nice to have had a common room where we could go to talk and debrief. We took over the hotel's inner courtyard which is for all the guests use.

Bob assisted in the issue of getting laundry done. With no access to using the laundry ourselves we had to pay to get items done. We had the option of using a laundromat a short walk from the hotel. Laundry was also organised by Kevin Broomhall with a local who picked up and dropped off at the park.

The hotel provided breakfast each morning and for me was more than adequate. Some with more exotic tastes ate in restaurants not far from the hotel.

The hotel was in a central location in the city and we were a short walk from eating places and shops. We got to be noticed by locals who saw us each day. The young lady at the corner store soon got familiar with us each morning buying our bottled water. We made sure she got some souvenirs.

## **SECURITY**

All the teams and the umpires were provided with a security person. Our person was Jose, a sergeant in the local Policia. Jose kept an eye on us, facilitated visits to out of way places such as shops and came out with us most nights. He spent each day at the park with us keeping an eye on things. He became photographer and water boy. We taught him a few things and he taught us a few things. He just became one of us, fantastic.

We were quite safe being on the streets, we usually were in groups. Even late at night we didn't have any troubles.

## **PRE TOURNAMENT MEETING**

We had our meeting at the hotel. Bob explained all the usual issues of a tournament. We knew how many games we could expect. Bob explained why the umpires gear hadn't made it to Argentina. A plan B had been hatched and the ISF shirts and caps were handed out at the meeting.

Bob explained that with a crew of 19 umpires we had too many umpires for the tournament due to withdrawals. He confirmed we would operate 6 man teams throughout the tournament to give us 2 games a day.

With regards to mechanics the only change made was we wouldn't use the crew "out" signals during the game. It was felt umpires have other duties to do, I guess the dirty great scoreboard in the outfield also helped.

We exchanged our gifts at this meeting.

At this meeting a group was named to attend the tournament's technical meeting. Their job was to test all the bats, which approx 30 failed through wrong compressions or not being on the approved bat list.

Bob also announced the crew for the opening game, Argentina v Czech Republic. I then heard my name as the plate umpire. So I was first up and no doubt a big crowd.

I also attended a tournament press conference with Bob, Reinaldo and Javier. It was an interesting experience. This was an indication just how important this tournament was to the locals and how serious they were taking it.

## UMPIRING CREW

The crew was as follows:

Bob Stanton ISF UIC

Reinaldo Lanzavecchia ISF Deputy UIC

Javier Penaroya	Arg	Walter Diaz	Arg
Oswaldo Ibaceta	Arg	Kevin Broomhall	Aus
Abel Mataboge	Botswana	Jaime Barbosa	Brazil
George Findley	Can	Aaron Poulin	Can
Art Balsler	Croatia	Vladimir Liss	Czech Rep
Mauro Fiorini	Italy	Kyo Masuda	Jap
Ceferino Espinoza	Mexico	Jeremy England	NZ
Mark Porteous	NZ	Jose Rodriguez	Nicaragua
Noore Nacerodien	South Africa	Eric Hawthorne	USA
Jose Mendez	Venezuela		

## TOURNAMENT VENUE AND FACILITIES

The park was on the edge of town on the highway. It was a short drive from our hotel. A schedule was given each day for van movements to and from the park so those on later games could stay in town if they chose.

Games started 10.30am some days and other days at 1pm. Last game was usually around 8.30pm.

The venue overall was very good with a good sized grandstand and other seating down the lines and out in the outfield. The diamond was excellent and well maintained by the ground staff. The same goes for the second diamond use across the road. The floodlights were as good as anything I've experienced anywhere I've umpired.

The umpires were housed in a big trailer on the road right outside the back of the grandstand. It had plenty of room for 19 umpires. The room also had air conditioning and a fridge, these things we really needed. Temperatures each day hit 35-37 degrees plus humidity and it didn't really get any cooler when the sun went down.

It was so hot that earlier one day I was standing out on the right field line and the sweat was running down the middle of my forehead.

In taking the right precautions we all coped with the conditions.

We didn't have any access to a shower on the park, which some umpires like to use after doing a plate game.

Along with the teams the umpires were provided all our meals across the road from the venue in a big pavilion. Teams were being fed there prior to the tournament and we started there 2 days before the tournament started.

We struck some problems with the food. We heard stories of whole teams being affected by the food and this didn't bode well. A group of us was very badly affected by something we ate which caused some to miss games. We had taken precautions by making sure we only drank bottled water. By about day 3 of the tournament those of us badly affected stopped eating the tournament provided food and paid for our own meals at the park and in the city afterwards. This helped us all to start to recover although in my case that wasn't concluded until I got back to NZ.

My suggestion would be that at ISF tournaments the umpires are provided the per diem rate of US\$50/day so that the umpires can have the responsibility of feeding themselves.

## **THE TOURNAMENT**

The tournament itself was an amazing and unique experience. I got the first taste of this in the opening game. This game was delayed due to the late start and timing of the opening ceremony. Instead of an 8.30pm start it started at 10pm. By this time there was a huge crowd. The Argentine fans made this tournament an almost surreal experience, especially when the home team played. There were drums out on the outfield fence, fireworks, whistles, the chanting. The sound system boomed out music and then there was the South American habit of fans jumping in the stand. This was a football crowd. They were so loud that I had to get up close and shout to coaches rather than just talk to them.

Three nights later I got the plate of Argentina and Japan with an even bigger and noisier crowd. In this game I had to eject the tournament mascot off the diamond and was roundly booed by the fans. To them it was all about the entertainment, the spectacle. It was almost as if the actual game was of secondary importance. The Argentinians certainly know how to have a party. I even got my photo in the paper, centre page spread from this game, a first for me.

So we get to the playoffs on the Thursday. This all goes off without a hitch. Next day the weather decides to change and we're bombed with a massive storm that washes out the days play. So we all go back to the hotel and wait it out for word from Bob as to what will happen next. The decision is that there will be 6 games on the last day, this a better option than deciding the tournament by the rulebook.

So we all go to the park knowing it's going to be a long day and not knowing how many games some would do as it depended on the fate of various teams. There were some fantastic games this day and culminated with the grand final between Argentina and Japan, their third meeting of the tournament.

I was lucky enough to be on the left field line for this game. A huge, noisy crowd got in behind the home time and despite Japan's best intentions Argentina ran out very deserved winners to start huge celebrations for their first ever world title in softball. We walked off the diamond at 12.30am in the morning, a job well done.

### **My games at the tournament were as follows:**

Czech Republic	v	Argentina	Plate
Japan	v	Croatia	2nd base
Canada	v	Czech Republic	3rd base
Mexico	v	Japan	1st base
Japan	v	Canada	Line
Croatia	v	Canada	3rd base
Argentina	v	Japan	Plate
USA	v	Venezuela	1st base
Croatia	v	Mexico	Line
Czech Republic	v	Japan	2nd base
Croatia	v	Czech Republic	Line
Australia	v	Japan	3rd base
Canada	v	USA	1st base

**Argentina v Japan Line Grand Final**

So the tournament came to a close. We finished off the night with a dinner at a restaurant in the town and said our goodbyes. A number of umpires were heading off with teams by bus early that morning.

Five of the crew then headed off to Santa Fe airport later that morning for a flight to Buenos Aires. We were lucky here not to be charged for excess baggage.

On arrival at Buenos Aires we said our goodbyes to each other. I had organised 3 nights in Buenos Aires to see the sights and just have a rest before the trip home.

The trip home was largely uneventful and flights were on time. I hit Auckland domestic terminal at 5am on a Friday morning to find that my 7.15am flight was cancelled. The lady at the desk then proceeded to tell me she couldn't rebook me as I didn't exist in their system. She bailed on me when I produced the ticketing information plus the boarding pass stub from LAN Chile showing the Jetstar

flight. So I had to drag my stuff to another desk. This lady proceeded to tell me the same story and after some words from me booked me on a 10am flight. She then tells me I can't check my bags in till 8am.

So I ring Pip and she's already gone to pick me up. We manage to miss one another as there's confusion caused by Jetstar. She gets my message about the new flight and Jetstar tell her I'm not on it, despite holding a boarding pass in my name. So she thinks I'm on Air NZ. So I arrive at Wellington, get my bags and get a shuttle home. Pip arrives home 2.30pm after waiting for me at Air NZ, an unfortunate finish to a fantastic trip.

This trip and the tournament has been the single greatest experience of my life and I am very thankful I got the opportunity to go. Thanks very much again to Bob, the ISF and SNZ.

**Jeremy England.**