

ISF Certification Clinic & Australian National Championships

John Reid Shield - Redlands Brisbane

Saturday 12th February – Saturday 19th February 2011

Report - Mark Porteous



After last season I was advised that I had been selected to attend the ISF Clinic to be held in Brisbane, Australia. It was with some trepidation that I prepared for this with my allocated mentor, Glen Nalepa, and with additional feedback from the Level 7 group of umpires. There were four umpires from New Zealand in attendance along with nine of our colleagues from around Australia. We arrived in Brisbane on Friday the 11th of February and stepped in to the unknown on Saturday. The clinic itself was run by Bob Stanton, Chief ISF Umpire who was supported by Wayne Saunders, Umpire in Chief Oceania. They were assisted by a group of ISF umpires from Australia. The level of knowledge and understanding of this group was tremendous and significantly contributed to the success of the programme.

Day one started with formal introductions by all of the presenters and participants. What was clear to me from these introductions were the common themes coming through from everyone about their passion for the game and desire to learn and improve. The levels of experience were high and the stories being told were both humorous and inspiring.

Then it was into the work. The agenda started off in usual fashion but I could tell that everyone was nervous about the examination process. Some of these concerns were allayed by Bob & Wayne but the fear of the unknown was always present. After a presentation from Bob on Plate Mechanics it was out to the field to practice what we had just been shown. After lunch we had further presentations on some rule changes and with the weather being very warm and the rooms being extremely hot we had our last session on the veranda with Leigh Evans discussing Obstruction & Interference. Then it was back to the motel for a swim and the group then went out for dinner at a local establishment.

Day two covered base mechanics, game control and the 3 & 4 man umpiring systems with a view to our first examination tomorrow. The afternoon was spent working on field drills and additional discussion on 4 man mechanics. After returning to the motel for a quick swim most of us went for a quick bite to eat in town before returning to study. It was clear that all of us wanted to nail our mechanics exam and around the rooms you could hear discussions going on and lines and arrows being drawn on papers. I for one was very nervous about which play I might get. My room mate, Howard Watt, and I were testing each other for hours on several plays in preparation for tomorrow.

Day three was supposed to start with more presentations but it was clear that no one would be able to concentrate knowing that we had to do our Mechanics Plays and Case Plays in the afternoon. So Bob & Wayne agreed that we should get those over with. I was fortunate to be selected 2nd and got a play that I had studied several times the previous night. I believe that study paid off. It was also clear from everyone else's presentations that they had all worked hard with each play being clearly and concisely explained and presented.

After a break we then did our Case Plays. Again by chance I was selected 2nd (it is great to get it done with quickly) and I received a Case Play that I knew. Again I felt confident that I had presented it well (which turned out to be the case). Everyone again did very well. After they were over and everyone had taken a deep breath we had a couple more presentations from the ISF crew, including a very good one from Scott Rindfliesh on Batting Out Of Order which turned out to be prophetic.

The late afternoon was spent on our Plate mechanic examination with the batting machine. Somehow I managed to draw 3rd this time so again I didn't have to wait around too long to take my turn. Trevor Murphy, Level 6 umpire from Victoria who was observing at the clinic did a great job being the catcher for the batting machine in very hot conditions. That completed the clinic and to celebrate we went back for a swim and then headed out to the nearby RSL for dinner.

Day four was the commencement of the John Reid Shield, Men's National Champs. The weather looked threatening but the 1st game commenced on time and I had 1st base in a game between ACT & NSW. Jason Carter was on the plate. After the 1st batter struck out "time" was called and believe it or not the lead off batter was NOT the lead off batter and we had a Batting Out Of Order! There was some noise that we had been set up but that was not the case. Jason calmly sorted it out and the game proceeded until there were two outs in the 5th inning and the heavens opened. With the game unofficial we had to wait and wait and wait. There was not going to be much play today. After several hours and a change of diamonds we were able to complete that game but I recall that that and one other game were the only ones completed on day one putting the tournament severely behind schedule.

Day five produced more weather delays but most games were completed. I had an early base game (10am) and I was scheduled to have my first plate game and examination game at 9:15pm! With delays etc this did not start until nearly 10pm. By game time I was fizzing. It turned into an unexpectedly close game with Victoria triumphing in the bottom of the 7th over Northern Territory. We had a quick debrief after the game (as we did for all games) and then I got home very late and did have some difficulty getting to sleep.

Day six weather was a lot kinder but with the backlog of games the organisers had decided that rather than playing the Gilley's Shield games at Redlands as proposed they were shifted to Downey Park. This meant that the umpiring crews were also split up. Whilst not ideal it was necessary. In addition we had had injuries to two umpires that further stretched the crews. I had three games today which made the day go a lot quicker and despite the heat I felt I was going OK. A re-schedule meant that my late game had been brought forward so everyone did get home at a reasonable time.

Day seven was again split between the two parks and I stayed at Redlands. The tournament was getting down to the play-offs and it was tight to make the top four. I had my third plate game of the tournament which was between Victoria and NSW and I was told to look out for "fireworks". I was advised that this was the big interstate rivalry. The game was an excellent one and despite NSW having already made the play-offs and Victoria having been eliminated it was played with intensity. Victoria running out winners in a tie-breaker. The tradition of buying a box for a tie-breaker appears to be an international one. My last game of the day and as it turned out the

tournament was the Elimination Semi-Final between NSW and Queensland. I was on third base working with Leigh Evans, Warren Duff and Riki Tourangi. This was an excellent game with the home team running out winners 6-4. It was a great thrill to be allocated to a play-off game in another country.

Day eight was finals day and the Australian umpires worked all the games. We watched the games and it was also great to meet up with a few ex-pats. Just before the men's final we each got the call to go and see Bob & Wayne so they could tell us each our results. It was a bit like being called to the principal's office or tribal council. It was a rather nerve wracking experience but the relief when Bob said I had passed was massive. I didn't quite know how to feel but seeing the emotion and elation on my peers faces brought home to me how important this achievement is. I quickly sent texts to Glen and my wife. I didn't even bother to look at my assessment sheet or certificate I was so stunned. Then to hear that all of the participants had passed made the week particularly special.

After the finals (Women WA over NSW & Men ACT over QLD) and the closing ceremony it was back to the pool (I bought the box) and then out to a local establishment for dinner. The friendship and camaraderie was obvious at dinner expressed in speeches and gifts and then a stirring Haka from Dave Shedlock with assistance from Riki. There was outpouring of emotion and gratitude from everyone involved and memories from the week that will never be forgotten.

Whilst not a late night it was a good night and we returned to the motel to share some more and knock off a bottle of Port I had brought over to celebrate with.

Observations from the tournament:

- We are winning the battle on illegal pitches
- Balls are not a problem here. The umpire brings out balls and the pitchers use them
- The crews, scorers, umpires and ground crews work so well together in both countries

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following:

- Eugene Gilbert for organising my air travel
- Softball NZ and SNZ Umpires for giving me the opportunity
- Glen Nalepa for preparing me
- The NZ Level 7 umpiring group
- Howard Watt for being such a great room mate (and lending me his car)
- Yvonne, Helen and Ian for transporting us back and forth from the ground
- The Queensland Softball Association and Softball Australia
- Bob Stanton, Wayne Saunders and the rest of the umpiring crew and presenters for their knowledge and desire to share with us
- All of the clinic participants. What a great bunch. We will be friends for life
- My wife and family of course
- But I have to make a special note of thanks to Tricia Sibraa. She is such a wonderful person who could not do enough for me or anyone else at the clinic for that matter. Thank you so much!

Games

Team 1	Team 2	DIA	Plate	U1	U2	U3
Day One						
NSW	ACT	7	Jason Carter	Mark Porteous	Howard Watt	Phil Waller
Day Two						
NT	NSW	7	Jeremy England	Kevin Broomhall	Yvonne Kahler	Mark Porteous
NT	VIC	1	Mark Porteous	Ron Houison	Riki Tourangi	Andrew Rindfleish
Day Three						
NT	WA	4	Leigh Evans	Mark Porteous	Ron Houison	Dave Shedlock
NSW	QLD	2	Jeremy England	Mark Porteous		Kevin Broomhall
QLD	WA	1	Mark Porteous	Andrew Rindfleish	Matt	Jeremy England
Day Four						
NT	WA	4	Riki Tourangi	Dave Shedlock	Howard Watt	Mark Porteous
VIC	NSW	2	Mark Porteous	Riki Tourangi		Jason Carter
QLD	NSW	1	Leigh Evans	Warren Duff	Riki Tourangi	Mark Porteous

P	U1	U2	U3
3	3	1	2

ACT	NSW	NT	WA	QLD	VIC
1	5	4	3	3	2

