



TOKYO 2020



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I have great pleasure in presenting a report for my appointment to the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan – July 23<sup>rd</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> 2021.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to begin by sincerely thanking the following people and organisations for their assistance and support.

- Softball New Zealand, in particular Tony Giles
- North Harbour Softball
- NZOC, in particular Libby Davenport
- The National Umpire Staff
- Bob Stanton and all the staff of the WBSC Office
- My employer, the ANZ Bank
- Dynasty Sports, for providing clothing & bags
- The WBSC Umpiring Crew
- Liaison umpires (Taka & Nori)
- The hundreds of volunteers at the games
- The players and coaches
- My wife Karen, family and friends for their support

## **TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS, ACCOMMODATION, LAUNDRY & TRANSPORT**

The travel arrangements were all dealt with by the WBSC office. Upon acceptance of my appointment in January 2020 my tickets arrived the following day. With the postponement of the games and the difficulty of arranging flights my tickets were altered another three times before I departed. Luggage allowance was a suitable 30kgs. In addition to the tournament transport and accommodation, it was also necessary to arrange COVID-19 vaccinations and book MIQ for my return to NZ. For this I wish to thank the NZOC who provided guidance and assistance throughout. They assisted all NZ officials, not part of the Olympic team, including arranging priority vaccination approval and explained how the MIQ process worked. It should be noted however that I had to organise my own MIQ booking. Additionally, I had to purchase standard Travel Insurance (thank you SNZ), although COVID cover was to be met by Tokyo 2020. Accommodation in Fukushima was at a ski resort about 35 minutes bus ride from the stadium. The accommodation in Yokohama was about 10-minute bus ride from the stadium. Both hotels were high class with suitable eating and limited but sufficient laundry facilities. All umpires were in single rooms. Breakfast was included in the room rate with lunches taken at the park. Dinners were at our own cost.

Transport from Narita Airport to Fukushima was a bus ride from the airport to a central bus station and then by individual taxis to the hotel in Fukushima – about a four-hour drive at a cost of approximately USD\$1,200! It should be noted that my taxi driver did get lost and he had no English.

### ***PARKS & FACILITIES***

The Olympics were played at two separate parks. The first two playing days were in Fukushima with the rest of the games played in Yokohama. Both stadiums were large baseball stadiums converted to softball for the Olympic Games. Both were full AstroTurf with natural dirt batter's boxes. Fukushima held ~17,000 fans and Yokohama ~35,000. No spectators were allowed. Both diamonds were top quality with no ground rule issues evident. Changing facilities for the umpires were adequate but not great. Other facilities e.g. Clock Rooms, WBSC office, dining areas etc. were very good. Shade for the players was marginal but support for the umpires e.g. water, ball returns etc. were exceptional. It should be noted that balls were alternated each half inning to maintain hygiene protocols. Food supplied at the park was excellent with plenty of variety, including snacks and hydration products – water, isotonic drinks, coke etc. The volunteers supporting the umpires each game did a fantastic job.

### ***THE UMPIRE CREW***

There were 13 umpires appointed to the Olympic Games plus 1 supervisor.

#### **UMPIRE SUPERVISOR:**

Robert STANTON, Umpire-in-Chief.

#### **UMPIRE CREW:**

Frankie BILLINGSLEY (Canada F),  
Jose CHAPARRO (Puerto Rico M),  
Kyira COX (Australia F),  
Christina DRUMM (United States of America F),  
Geneviève GAIDREAU (Canada F),  
Ayako SASAJIMA (Japan F),  
Mitsunori KUSAMOTO (Japan M),  
GianLuca MAGNANI (Italy M),  
Mark PORTEOUS (New Zealand M),  
Mariana PRINS (Netherlands F),  
Manuel TOVAR (Venezuela M),  
Miki YABE (Japan F)  
Zhiling YU (China F)

This was the best most prepared crews I have ever worked with. Having most of us attend the U18's in Palmerston North meant that all but two of the crew knew each other and had worked together. We then commenced preparation for the Olympics after that tournament by doing weekly reports back to Bob as well as Zoom meetings. When the Olympics were postponed we continued with the reports fortnightly (these reports included game numbers, umpire administration, mental & physical preparation notes etc.). We also held Zoom meetings about every six weeks as well as completing case plays and rule reviews. This meant that by the time we arrived in Japan we were very prepared both physically and mentally and knew more about each other than I have ever known about my colleagues in

the past. Upon arrival we also shared openly any barriers to performance at the games to ensure everyone had each other's backs. The crew was well led by Bob Stanton in his final tournament before he retires as World Chief Umpire. I had 10 assignments. 1 plate, 5 base and 4 off-field. I was fortunate enough to be appointed to the Bronze Medal game between Canada and Mexico. My final evaluation was very pleasing and can be put down to the preparation over recent times both physically, mentally and emotionally.

### ***POINTS OF EMPHASIS***

We had gone over potential issues many times in our various Zoom meetings etc. and there was nothing too unusual at the Olympics. There was some focus on the 2 second pause and clock violations. However the key point was probably a more toned down communication with coaches. If we were asked to check with our colleagues, no matter how certain we may have been with our calls, we were to do so. Given the stage we were on there was an expectation that we would communicate calmly and not get in to any altercations with coaches or players. This was emphasised in the Canada v Japan game where, despite clearly having the rule book on our side the approach was taken to allow the change to occur to "get on with the game". An expletive that came from the a coach that would possibly normally result in consequences was handled without him being ejected.

### ***SUMMARY***

To say that the Olympic Games was an unusual event is a massive understatement. COVID-19 meant that the games were played without spectators. Health and hygiene protocols placed heavy responsibility on everyone involved. Prior to arrival in Japan we were all required to provide negative COVID tests. In addition, we had to download apps on our phones for daily health checks as well as to track and trace our movements. In addition to daily saliva COVID tests we were not allowed to congregate and when not alone had to maintain social distancing and wear masks. Plate umpires were also required to wear face masks during games but when we were on bases we could remove them. All interactions with coaches or players meant putting masks back on. Our movements were literally hotel to stadium and back again. We were allowed to walk a small distance to a convenience store in the mall below our hotel to purchase some items e.g. snacks and refreshments. Interactions with colleagues were kept to a minimum. I suspect that at no time were there more than ten of us together without maintaining social distance. An example of this is that one evening Michael Schmidt provided some refreshments and said to go to the office, grab a couple and take them back to your room. Notwithstanding these issues the standard of facilities, operation of the tournament and quality of most of the games was first class. The crew strictly maintained protocols throughout. The success of the games was a testament to the leadership shown by WBSC and their staff. Not only with travel arrangements but also wardrobe, uniforms, completion of health checks etc. We also has the services of Victor Isola a dedicated COVID Liason Officer for all of the umpires, Technical Officials and WBSC staff. What a journey that was. Strange but unforgettable

**Mark Porteous**  
**Olympic Umpire**

# PHOTOS

