

Round 2 Gillies Shield

22nd November 2012 – 25th November 2012

West Beach Adelaide.

The eruption of Tongariro prior to departing for Auckland added to the anxiety of being on time for my flight abroad, the added strain of a lengthy delay on the tarmac at Auckland airport due to aircraft congestion and nowhere to disembark had the blood flowing, and I hadn't even reached the international departure lounge.

Running from domestic to the international terminal and being greeted by the intercom call of "all passengers on flight NZ791 bound for Sydney please board your aircraft through gate 1a, this is your final call" this gave me stress I didn't need.

Rushing down the steps through gate 1a I am thankfully greeted by the coach of the NZ selection team pointing out that the team masseuse was yet to board also and if missing the flight, what was the arrangements to be, but as it turned out all members boarded with seconds to spare.

A six-hour stopover in Sydney to catch a connecting flight to Adelaide gave me valuable time to revise the ISF 3-4 man mechanics again, something that I had done over and over again at home, but wanted to be sure. This time went rather quickly as I played out scenarios of each mechanic I was reading through.

Upgraded to business class on the flight from Sydney to Adelaide was pleasantly surprising but this gave me valuable time to reflect and gather my thoughts for my coming assignment. The words of "don't fall over and don't" lingered in my head, the opportunity to represent my fellow colleagues from home came with nerves, anticipation and excitement all bundled together.

I was met at the airport by Neville Lawrence a local umpire, held in very high esteem within Australia's Softballing ranks and as the tournament progressed, I saw why. We waited for another umpire to arrive (Warren Duff) and together were taken to our accommodation a very short distance from the airport.

Upon arriving at the accommodation, the crew was reminiscing about times they had last time they seen each other and the good times and laughs that had been had prior. The remaining 12-crew members greeted me and made me feel welcome in an instant.

Feeling exhausted, but not wanting to miss out on the conversations being had or looking unsociable I hung in there and slowly made my way through the group, trying to get to know my fellow crew mates and vice versa. My day ended at 2am NZ time, so made for a long day with little sleep had the first night abroad.

Day 1

Allocations posted, my first game was between ACT Diamond's vrs Qld Heat a four-man crew Richard Barrow (plate) Me (1st) Dave Datson (2nd) Warren Duff (3rd) nothing out of the ordinary with Queensland running out the victors 7-3

My second game of the day was Vic Titans vrs Act Diamonds again a four man crew Me (plate) Jay Gibson (1st) Damien McCauley (2nd) David Casey (3rd) and good game, great fielding efforts displays by both teams ACT victorious 4-1

Day 2

Allocated 2 bases for today's rounds back to back. Game 1 saw me running the lines down 1st base in a 3 man crew with Stuart Tyler (plate) and Dave Datson (3rd base) Qld Heat vrs NSW Firestarters the big hitting player Stacey Porter (Australian women's captain) leads off for NSW with the second pitch puts it well over the centre field fence for the first run of the game. 3 automatic homers in the game 2 from NSW and 1 from Qld were beautiful to watch, but as we know there can only be one winner NSW win 4-2

Game 2 SA Starz vrs ACT Diamonds had me on the 3rd base line in a 4-man crew of Trevor Murphy (plate), Jay Gibson (1st) Richard Barrow (2nd). SA packed with junior talent and a force to be reckoned with in the not to distant future, displayed amazing courage but went down 3-0 to a strong defensive display from ACT.

Day 3

The end is drawing near, 2 allocations today a plate first up in a 4 man crew, ACT Diamonds vrs NSW David Casey (1st), Trevor Murphy (2nd) Jay Gibson (3rd), game all tied up at the top of the 7th innings 3 all, ACT at bat 1 out loaded bases and the NSW pitcher called for illegal pitch, 4-3 ACT, NSW pitcher digs in and gets the remaining outs, with NSW final turn at bat and in the strength of their line up, made for an interesting final bat. Once again, the talent of Stacey Porter's strong batting bought in the tying run and eventually crossing home plate for the winning of the game. NSW win 5-4

My final game of this series round saw me running the lines on 3rd base in a 3 man crew with Richard Barrow (plate) and David Casey (1st) NSW vrs NZ Selection. A game that NSW had time against them due to flight times, but to the credit of the NZ management allowing an earlier start time had me feeling proud to be a KIWI, although the NZ team going down 7-0 in 7 innings to the hard hitting NSW team, it was still pleasurable to be out there.

I would like to take this opportunity to firstly thank the NUS and Softball NZ for their faith in my ability to officiate at this tournament. The experience, the knowledge and the friendship gained became priceless, and is and will be something I will treasure for many years to come.

To Deb Grover (TCU) and the crew I would like to again extend a heart felt thank you for everything that you have done for me over the past 4 days and making me feel at home.

A special thank you must go to Jacqui Crater (Umpire Liaison) I can't thank you enough, your efforts throughout the tournament were endless and I know that the entire crew feel the same, you are a gem to the sport and people like are few and far between.

And finally, to my fellow umpires here in NZ, may I extend a warm thank you to you all for allowing me the pleasure and opportunity to represent you as a whole abroad, this experience I believe is invaluable and recommend this to all members, our Australian umpiring whanau are great to work along side and sure know how to look after their visitors.

So once again to you all, a very big THANK YOU.

Darrel Paul