



# ISF Junior Men's World Championships, Parana – Argentina 2012

## Travelling Umpire's Report

### Mark Porteous

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I received advice on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2012 that my application to attend the above tournament was successful. In addition Jeremy England was also selected from New Zealand.

We set off on time on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October as we had to be in Parana which was situated 470 km's from Buenos Aires on the 30<sup>th</sup> October and the itinerary required that we spend a night in BA before flying to Sante Fe (about 30km's from Parana) to achieve that.

Upon arrival at BA after a three hour stop-over in Santiago we were transferred to our accommodation at the Polo Suites which was in town and closer to the Domestic Airport for our next flight. The transfer had been organised through the travel agent and was easy to locate. The drive through the city, at what was rush hour and in inclement conditions, was something of an experience especially as we are suddenly on the other side of the road.

After check-in Jeremy and I tried to find somewhere for dinner but by this time the weather had turned very wet so we went in to the first place we saw and despite the fact the waiter spoke no English and we spoke no Spanish we ended up with an excellent meal.

After breakfast the next day we had a couple of hours to wander around the nearby neighbourhood and fortunately the weather had improved considerably. A ten minute taxi ride (another seemingly near death experience) took us to Areoparque Jorge Newberry where we checked in and as expected were hit with excess luggage for this domestic flight. We met up with an umpire from the Czech Republic in the queue and then as we went through the gates Bob Stanton – ISF Chief Umpire together with Laurie Gouthro – ISF Director of Competition along with a few more of the crew who were also on our flight.

Upon arrival at Sante Fe we were met by a couple of volunteer drivers who squeezed all of our gear into too few vehicles and drove us the 45 minutes to our hotel in Parana where we checked in and chatted to our new crew mates with whom we will be spending the next twelve days. Not all of the crew have arrived but those that have are taken to a local establishment for dinner and after our meal we headed back to the hotel. I needed to purchase something down the road so Jose escorts me and I discover that he is a local Policia and has been assigned as our security with all teams being provided with a security detail. Safety, overall, is not a major concern (but it is nice to have) and Jose ends up being fantastic assistance for all of us and ultimately is treated as one of the crew.

Our first full day in Parana is spent looking around the town before heading to the stadium for a walk around. At this point the stadium is looking very incomplete and there are volunteers everywhere doing a multitude of tasks. I must say though that field itself looks to be of good quality. After a photo for the local media we also inspect the second field before having lunch at the park. The catering facility is a little unusual and ultimately does provide some concern for many of the teams but today's lunch is good. Whilst we are there the New Zealand team arrives for their lunch and I manage to catch up with a couple of the players and chat briefly.

We are then back to the hotel for our formal technical meeting where a number of topics are discussed including a review of the points of emphasis for pitching. The meeting is held with a translator for the Spanish speakers and at one point she repeated everything Bob had said in English *in English!* Bob does confirm that most of our uniforms have not arrived but he has been able to manage to get in one shirt and a cap for each of us but the rest of the gear will need to be sent out later. It is nice to know that we will all look alike, in the main, but one shirt for the whole tournament has some of us worried! The meeting takes about 90 minutes.

The crew for the opening game is also announced and Jeremy has the honour of being crew chief for the big game. After the meeting all of the umpires exchange gifts and chat for a while before we all head back to the park for dinner.

Game day has now arrived we are taken to the park and are shown our changing facilities which initially look a little rudimentary but ultimately turn out to be perfectly adequate. We all get changed for the opening ceremony which is held in beautiful evening conditions in front of a crowd of about 5,000. The 7:00pm Opening Ceremony starts at about 7:45 and goes very long with one of the speeches (in Spanish) taking more than 30 minutes! However the whole affair is a lot of fun and full of colour and noise. The 8:30 game starts at 10:00. The crowd is fanatical in support of the local team and the experience had to be daunting for the Czech Republic team and the umpiring crew. Jeremy did very well and said it was one of his greatest thrills in umpiring.

The tournament proper then gets underway the following day and it is nice to finally get some games under my belt. The first few days of the tournament see mostly stronger versus weaker teams and it is not really until day four that the stronger teams meet more regularly. The weather has been very kind although the temperatures are very warm. The mid to late afternoon games are played at about 34 degrees and fluid intake is critical.

I was fortunate enough to experience one of the main games of the tournament on day four with Argentina taking on Japan. Jeremy again had the plate and I was on first base. The din from the 6,000 strong crowd was amazing with drums and whistles, dancing and fireworks going on throughout the game. It was also a great game with the locals winning 2-1.

In general the tournament went without hitch until it came time for the play-offs and after eight days of fantastic weather the heavens opened and day nine ended up being a wash-out placing the tournament scheduling in to chaos. It would require that the final play-off games all be held on the last day of the tournament and in all likelihood the final being delayed by several hours. That plan was also put in to disarray when the morning of the last day was also very wet and the field conditions initially unplayable on both fields.

One game was played but there was no way that field two could be used at that point so the second game was transferred to field one as well. The weather cleared and the log-jam of games was managed albeit there was a further delay when the Australia v Japan "Final" went to three tie-breaker innings with Japan eventually winning 3-2, knocking out the defending four times World Champions. The game lasted over three hours and was arguably the best game of the tournament.

So that set up another blockbuster Grand Final between Argentina and Japan. The crew selected to umpire the Grand Final is Aaron Poulin (Canada) on the Plate, Me at 1<sup>st</sup> Base, Noore Nacerodien (Sth Africa) 2<sup>nd</sup> Base, George Findley (Canada) 3<sup>rd</sup> Base, Jeremy England (NZ) Left Field and Kevin Broomhall (Australia) Right Field. Having two NZ umpires on the final is great kudos for our umpiring programme.

Once again the noise and the support from the Argentinian fans is incredible and it did not stop during the game at all. The crowd was said to be over 7,000 and the game was also broadcast on live TV despite the lateness of the start (about 10:30pm). I have certainly never experienced anything like it on a softball field before and I would venture to suggest that the noise created was more than I have heard at a rugby test in NZ. The home team playing well and winning the Grand Final 5-0 also fuelled the crowd's enthusiasm.

So a very successful tournament is over and we head back to a local restaurant for our finals night dinner and chat about the great times we have had and the fantastic experience it has been for all of us with new and lasting friendships forged. This is certainly an experience that will live long in my memory.

## Summary:

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### **Travel, transport and accommodation:**

The travel arrangements were made via Eugene Gilbert and Tandem Travel. The timing of our travel was dictated by only one airline flying from New Zealand to South America and limited flights from BA to Sante Fe. The flight schedule worked out well though.

Our overnight accommodation in BA at the Polo Suites was very nice and handily located to the domestic airport for our connection to Sante Fe.

Our accommodation in Parana was sorted by ISF at the Hotel Plaza Jardin and whilst the rooms were a little small and there was no fridge in the room the accommodation was adequate. Breakfast was included and was acceptable but it did lack some variety. The hotel included a conference room which was perfect for our formal technical meeting and a conservatory area that was great for relaxing and chatting about the day's events. The staff was accommodating and most had a reasonable level of English and the hotel was handily located to the main town. It was about a ten minute drive by van to the ball park.

A transport schedule to and from the park was set each day. The local drivers do have an interesting concept on keeping to schedules and were often late and in one case did not show up at the hotel at all meaning that a couple of us had to quickly grab a cab to the park for our game. Reliability of the

transport to and from the games is something that several of the guys indicated as being a key concern at any tournament and needs to be dependable.

There was a lack of suitable laundering facilities as well and this is another aspect that needs more attention at all tournaments especially when the weather is very hot and gear needs to be washed regularly or if the weather is inclement and gets wet and dirty.

### **Crew, Technical, Mechanics and Interpretations:**

The crew came together quickly and apart from some language difficulties we bonded well under the leadership of Bob Stanton and Reinaldo (Ray) Lanzavecchia. Points of Emphasis were clearly explained at the initial Technical Meeting and expectations outlined. We were advised from the outset that with the number of teams and the number of umpires that we would be doing six man crews throughout the tournament and that it was probable that most umpires would only get two plate games with the important play-off games being allocated based on strong game management.

There was some initial disappointment that most of the uniforms etc. had not arrived so some latitude would be given for wearing home association shirts and caps etc. but as it turned out most of us were able to use ISF shirts albeit older logos. We also tended to use our home association caps for our plate games.

There were no major issues with any interpretations, protests or illegal pitches with very few illegal pitches called and as far as I am aware there were no protests and only two ejections in the tournament and both of those were "technical" ejections for second offensive conferences.

Allocations were generally fair and most of us were given two games a day. Some of the umpires were not overly keen on doing line allocations but my feeling was I would rather do a line than watch the game from the grand stand.

The clock was used although it was sometimes difficult to see in the harsh sun-light and there was several occasions that it was not started at the correct time. Significant emphasis was placed on keeping batters in the batters box and I am of the opinion that the umpires maintained a reasonable and generally consistent approach. Violations were minimal.

### **Amenities:**

The main field was in very good condition and was maintained throughout the tournament very well. The lights were very good. Field two was also very good although the lights were less effective and the fence was shorter. The only minor complaint for both fields was that there was nowhere to easily keep a drink requiring assistants to bring water to the umpires during the game (they did this very well and consistently though). The umpire's changing facility initially looked very basic but proved to be perfectly adequate, with only some minor leaks when the rain came and a problem with the lock on the door requiring someone to be at the room at all times. We also had the use of a small room at field one for pre-game meetings which proved to be a great spot for two or three of the crew to watch games as well. There was full access to a doctor who was on site throughout the tournament and whilst there were no injuries to any of the crew some of us did need to use the doctor for some "tummy" issues during the tournament. Having that comfort for the duration of the tournament was invaluable. The main food hall was nearby for our lunches and dinner and whilst the food was good the use of this facility diminished as time went on. The food did lack variety after a

couple of days and there was some thoughts that some of the health issues emanated from the food hall. The concession stands for both food and souvenirs at the ground were very good.

## Appointments

Team 1	Team 2	DIA	Plate	U1	U2	U3	LF	RF
<b>Day 2</b>								
SIN	VEN	2	Poulin	Barbosa	Ibaceta	Balser	<b>Porteous</b>	Hawthorne
IND	AUS	1	Diaz	Hawthorne	<b>Porteous</b>	Barbosa	Poulin	Ibaceta
<b>Day 3</b>								
CAN	CZR	1	<b>Porteous</b>	Balser	Rodriguez	England	Hawthorne	Penarroya
MEX	JAP	2	Hawthorne	England	Penarroya	Rodriguez	<b>Porteous</b>	Balser
<b>Day 4</b>								
CRO	CAN	2	Ibaceta	Liss	Diaz	England	Rodriguez	<b>Porteous</b>
ARG	JAP	1	England	<b>Porteous</b>	Nacerodien	Mendez	Hawthorne	Balser
<b>Day 5</b>								
JAP	CAN	1	Diaz	Mendez	Broomhall	<b>Porteous</b>	Balser	England
SIN	DEN	1	<b>Porteous</b>	Mataboge	Hawthorne	Nacerodien	Penarroya	Espinosa
<b>Day 6</b>								
CRO	MEX	1	Fiorini	<b>Porteous</b>	Poulin	Ibaceta	England	Hawthorne
AUS	VEN	1	Hawthorne	Barbosa	<b>Porteous</b>	Diaz	Penarroya	Mataboge
<b>Day 7</b>								
CRO	CZR	1	Mataboge	<b>Porteous</b>	Barbosa	Nacerodien	Findley	England
AUS	USA	1	Findley	Poulin	Rodriguez	<b>Porteous</b>	Fiorini	Nacerodien
<b>Day 8</b>								
CAN	DEN	1	<b>Porteous</b>	Mendez	Liss	Masuda	Broomhall	Barbosa
<b>Day 10</b>								
CAN	USA	1	<b>Porteous</b>	England	Mendez	Liss	Nacerodien	Barbosa
ARG	JAP	1	Poulin	<b>Porteous</b>	Nacerodien	Findley	England	Broomhall

P	U1	U2	U3	LF	RF	Tot
4	4	2	2	1	2	15

AUS	ARG	CAN	CRO	CZR	DEN	IND	JAP	NZ	MEX	SIN	USA	VEN
3	2	5	3	1	2	1	4	0	2	3	2	2

