

August 2013



## National UIC's Call

With Tricia Sibraa

Welcome to August's edition of BNOL. This month, we've got a range of articles on state, national and international events for your reading enjoyment.

June and July saw our Australian Women's and Junior Women's teams in North America – read about the umpires' experiences as these events on the starting pages of this edition. Amanda and Phil's journey to the 2013 JWWC can be found on page 2, and Ron's time with at the Canadian Open Fastpitch International starts on page 5.

Thanks to Andrew for his report on the U15 Regional Championships – it certainly seems that the weather didn't dampen the spirit of the Championships, nor the umpiring crew's enjoyment of their time at Lismore.

Congratulations to 4 new Life Members of SUA ACT – Brett, Dick, Mark and Alex, you've done a lot for umpiring in ACT, and this is a well-deserved recognition of your service to our sport. Read about their achievements on page 9.

There's also updates from Queensland and New South Wales on pages 10 and 11 – Queensland have recently held their State Masters Championships and NSW brings us Howard's perspective on being a TCU at the U15 Regional Championships. Thanks for your contributions this month.

As September comes around, the softball calendar picks up its pace – keep an eye out for our next edition, filled with articles about the umpiring events around our country. Until then, good calling!

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# International appointments

2013 ISF X Junior Women's World Championship, Brampton, Canada – Amanda Houison & Phil Waller

A phone call in mid-March started our journey to Brampton and the 2013 X ISF Junior Women's World Championship...

Chet Gray from Softball Australia rang Phil and I, informing us that we had been selected to represent Australia at the 2013 JWWC. And from there, 3 (and a little bit more) months of preparation began... Gym workouts tailored to umpiring, checking equipment with a fine tooth comb, filling in endless order forms for uniforms - both ISF and Australian - umpiring a range of games suited to the level we were expecting and madly trying to think of unique gifts that people would appreciate! The final few days before going into camp were nerve-racking, just making sure that everything was ready for a 3-4 week tour and that no loose ends were going to bring us undone.

But come 19th June, Phil and I arrived at Blacktown, ready to join the Aussie Pride girls. Our journey saw us laden with uniforms and equipment and umpiring 6 games in 3 days - it was supposed to be 8 games in 4 days, but the weather did not agree to those requirements! The Aussie Pride took on our open team, Aussie Spirit, and the games were well-fought and played with a desire to be the best. For Phil and I, it was a chance to brush off any rough edges with the 4-umpire system and spend time (often around a washing machine or dryer!) talking through a variety of scenarios - we wanted to be ready for anything! Our thanks go to Ron Houison, Leanne Gearside, Jay Gibson and Jesse Smith for coming out to Blacktown and calling the games with us; we know you guys enjoyed the games and preparation as much as we did!

Monday, 24th June saw an early start, and what has to be one of the longest days we've ever experienced! From Blacktown to Sydney Airport; boarding a 15 hour flight with Air Canada to Vancouver; a three hour layover (including clearing US Customs, which is an experience!); a five hour flight to Los Angeles Airport; and finally a two+ hour wait for our hire vans, to drive to our accommodation in Irvine, Orange County. And in all of this, it's STILL Monday, 24th June... The drive on LA's infamous freeways was one to remember (a warning to travellers: if you're doing the speed limit, you're going too slow!), but the roundabout outside our hotel was what really got us (backwards, I tell you)! We were taken to dinner by ASA SoCal, who had organised all our practice games, and following the amazing feast, we were ready for bed and the next two days of practice games.



Photo: Phil & Amanda ready to leave



Photo L-R: Amanda, Sue Sawyer, Phil, Laura Head, James Walker, Tom Davis

Over the next two days (25th and 26th June), we called 6 games - Aussie Pride played 6 different teams from SoCal - at Fountain Valley and El Segundo, and made new friends with some of ASA SoCal's umpires: Laura Head, Tom Davis, James Walker and Sue Sawyer. Not only was the practice great for Phil and I; it was great for Laura, who had been selected to umpire at the PanAm games in August. The biggest shock for Phil and I was the non-existence of change rooms; it's common practice in America (and Canada, as it turns

out) for umpires to go to the grounds wearing their skins and undershirts, and then simply changing in or beside your car! By the time we

had got to Canada, we had perfected the skill of parking the team vans to make a temporary "change room!"

At the end of our second day in America, we boarded another flight, and headed to Toronto, and the Aussie Pride base at the Holiday Inn, Brampton. For the next couple of days, this was our home. Two more practice games were scheduled, against Team USA and Team Canada, and it was time for Phil and I to really get focused on the upcoming championship.

Unfortunately, we only played one inning of the game against Team USA; again, the weather was not on our side and both coaches deemed it a bit too dangerous to play. The next day saw a fine start and a really tight game against Team Canada. It was just Phil and I calling these games; it was strange how comfy we felt back on a 2-umpire system!

Our next challenge happened on Saturday, 29th June (all these challenges, and we haven't even got to the JWWC yet!)... We left our home with the Aussie Pride girls, and headed to Brampton's Hilton Garden Inn, ready to meet up with the umpiring crew. Phil and I were some of the earlier arrivals and we sat in the foyer, greeting the somewhat familiar faces (thanks to a pre-tournament competition of "name the umpire") as they arrived. We picked up our ISF uniforms in the afternoon, and then began the trading process... We ended up with the right sized uniforms by the end of the process! About half the crew went out for dinner that night (those who had arrived by that time), and what everyone says about international championships is correct - it only takes a few minutes to realise that umpires are all the same, across the globe, there's just more accents when it comes to an international event! We were laughing and old friends by the end of the evening.

Championship minus one day saw a tour of both venues (the four diamonds were spread over two grounds, about 5 minutes apart by car), and all the formalities - Technical Meeting, Bat Testing and Umpires' Meeting. I was lucky enough to be selected, along with Edwin Cruz-Cruz from Puerto Rico, to be involved in the Bat Testing. Not only is a bat list checked thoroughly, every bat is pressure tested. It was a time consuming process that saw Edwin and I miss the entire Tech Meeting and the majority of the Umpires' Meeting. We did attend the Umpires' Meeting when the ISF President, Don Porter, addressed the crew, encouraging us to umpire at the very best of our



Photo: L-R: Amanda, Brian Van Os (DTCU), Edwin Cruz-Cruz

abilities, as the JWWC was a showcase for the 2020 Olympic Bid - hopefully our small contribution can bring the sport back to the Olympic Programme! Back at the accommodation, we waited nervously for the first day's allocations to be posted... The anticipation was the worst part! Day 1 saw both Phil and I allocated 1st and 3rd bases on our first two World Championship games.

Once the first game was over, we both started to feel a little more "at home". The biggest challenge at this type of championship is really the language barrier, be it with the coaches on diamond, who are asking questions or making changes; or with your crew partners, and trying to resolve a coach's question. Both Phil and I had games where we were the only native English-speaking crew member, and the coaches quickly look to you for assistance!



Photo: Phil on the plate, Brazil vs. Mexico. Base umpires (L-R): Michal Zidek (3rd - Czech Rep.; Susan Strafford (1st - Canada; Brent Chadwick (2nd - Canada)

Phil had a range of highlights from the 2013 JWWC. His biggest highlight was being selected to represent his country at a World Championship; from Phil's perspective, "that is going to take some beating on my list of greatest things ever to happen to me!" The feeling he had when he went out to do his first plate was pretty special, and the new friends that he made over the journey was also a highlight. Phil found the language differences amongst the umpiring crew made things very interesting at times and certainly presented some challenges. Lastly, Phil said that, "I was

lucky that I had Amanda to travel with. It was great to have a friend close by." Phil, I can assure you, this feeling is reciprocated!

For me, there were three highlights: my allocations to the USA vs. Canada plate, the Japan vs. USA play-off plate, and 1st base on the Gold Medal game, which again saw Japan and USA go head-to-head. The USA vs. Canada game was a round game, but sold as a "border battle", and did the crowds come out, along with their voices! There was not a spare seat in the grounds, nor any standing room left around the entire fence line. I have never called a game with such atmosphere, and will be lucky to do so again in the future. The play-off plate saw USA defeat Japan, heading straight into the Gold Medal game, and a new level of intensity from both the players and the coaches.

Obviously, being allocated to the Gold Medal game is the highest allocation I've received in my career, and this game certainly brought challenges - mostly, the weather! With Japan securing the lead in the fifth innings, after some aggressive offensive plays, the heavens opened, putting this game into a two and a half hour delay. The ground crew worked their magic when the rain stopped, and we were able to get back out on the diamond... But again, Mother Nature didn't want us there. After completing 6 innings, Japan were declared the World Champions, with USA receiving the Silver Medal and our Aussie Pride receiving the Bronze.



Photo: Gold Medal Game Crew, L-R: Edwin Ortiz (3rd - Puerto Rico; Munsook Yeon (2nd - Korea), Galip Soenmez (Plate - Germany); Amanda (1st)

Both Phil and I were immensely proud of the Aussie Pride team in earning the Bronze Medal, and we were sad to see the end of the Championship. We've made new friends from all corners of the globe and are incredibly thankful for the opportunities this tour gave us. As the Championship closed, Phil headed home with some of the team; like many of the girls and their families, I stayed on for a short holiday with Ron, then a flight across the North American continent, to see Ron in action on the diamond in Vancouver at the Canadian International Open Fastpitch Championships - you can read about his adventures in his report, also in this BNOL edition!

Phil and I both thank Softball Australia for this appointment and certainly hope there are more appointments of this kind in our near umpiring futures! We also thank the Aussie Pride team - players and management - for their warm reception to us, making us really feel like part of the team throughout all the preparation and lead-up events.



Photo: Brampton Girls Softball, home of the 2013 X ISF Junior Women's World Championship

## Scotiabank Canadian Open Fastpitch International Championship, Vancouver, Canada – Ron Houison

I was a pretty happy guy... Amanda had been appointed to the 2013 Junior Women's World Championship (JWWC) in Brampton, Canada (see her report, page 2) and I was looking forward to seeing her in action online. Then I got the call from Kylie: I, too, was on my way to Canada!

As I found last year, the lead-up to the trip was here and gone faster than I could blink. Also like last year, it took the arrival of my traveling uniform to really cement in my own mind that it was real. In the days prior to the departure of the Aussie Pride and Aussie Spirit teams there was the opportunity for warm-up games at Blacktown International Sportspark. Working with Amanda, Phil Waller, Leanne Gearside, Jay Gibson and Jesse Smith on these games really gave me a great start to the trip.

I headed across to Canada early to see the last few days of the JWWC and was able to see Amanda and Phil in action. After a short break together, we headed to Vancouver and the 2013 Scotiabank Canadian Open Fastpitch International Championship.

Byron, one of five umpire liaisons at the championship, met us in Vancouver. The reason for the large number of liaisons was that this championship had four concurrent divisions running: Showcase (U/16), Futures (U/19), Elite (Open) and International. The nine-member ISF crew ran games in both Elite and International divisions and there were many more Softball Canada umpires in attendance to run games at the three different venues. The management of so many people and venues would have been enormous, but to us guys on the ground everything seemed smooth and very professional.



Photo: Aussie Spirit entering at the Opening Ceremony

The ISF crew had a range of personalities and levels of experience – from very experienced umpires who had Worlds experience and senior UIC positions to Frankie and Scott, who both gained their ISF certification at the clinic held at the beginning of this championship. The crew quickly formed friendships that are typical of (how another umpire phrased it) the “global blue family.”



Photo: International Final Crew: Thomas Lohnert (Germany; 1st Base), Ian Brown (Canada; Plate), Ron Houison (Australia; 3rd Base)

There were many umpiring highlights for me throughout the championship, including appointments to the plate on the USA v Japan round game, plate on the Elite final, and 3rd base on the International final. Also, the size and sound of the crowds was amazing! However, the biggest highlight for a proud Aussie was seeing the success of the Aussie Spirit team, defeating the mighty USA in the Preliminary Final and taking Japan scoreless into extra innings in the Final.



Photo: "Play Ball" - Ron Houison USA v Japan

Thank you SAL and the NUC for the opportunity to umpire at this amazing championship. The bug has well and truly bitten me: I hope I get to do it all again soon!

Thank you also to an awesome crew (see pic; Back Row): Keith Hazel (UIC), Al Strang (Canada), Scott McLaren (Canada), Jim Cole (USA), Terry Richter (Canada), Brian Van Os (Deputy UIC), (Front Row) Ron Houison (Australia), Ian Brown (Canada), Frankie Billingsley (Canada), Thomas Lohnert (Germany) and Aaron Poulin (Canada).



# 2013 Under 15 Regionals

Lismore 9-13 July 2013

In July, while many umpires in the southern states edged a little closer to their fireplaces and reminisced again about the season past, 14 umpires from across New South Wales, Queensland, the ACT and Victoria made the long-ish trip to warmer climates and the 2013 Under 15 Boys and Girls Regional Championships that were held in Lismore.

The tournament was a first for Howard Watt as TCU (Howard's first time in charge at a national event), ably assisted by Darren Sibraa (DTCU) and the north coast dynamic-duo of Jay Gibson and Jesse Smith. For the rest of the crew (with one notable exception) this was to be their first introduction to a national-level event.

The Under 15 Regionals provides a perfect opportunity for umpires wishing to further develop their skills, with the week-long tournament providing a great mix of quality play and random events to keep you on your toes over five consecutive days, while at the same time also having a strong focus on fun.

## **It kicks off**

Everyone arrived in Lismore in high spirits anxious to get on the diamonds. The week kicked off on Monday afternoon with bat inspections. A first for me – who would have thought there were so many different bats! With regard to the bat we did take out of play, you'd have thought the manufacturers warning that hitting a softball in normal gameplay could generate ball speeds that might be dangerous, should have been a clue that something was not quite right. Go figure.

After bat inspections it was off to the formal welcome dinner at the Lismore Workings Club, followed by the first briefing session for the crew.

In the umpires briefing two things became apparent pretty quickly:

First, the week was a great opportunity for the crew to work on anything they wanted, with access to assistance from some of the games' best. Softball Australia had arranged for Howard, Darren, Jesse and Jay to be in Lismore for the week with express instructions to provide support and mentoring to the rest of the crew, both on and off the diamond. Over the full week this worked fantastically well with numerous briefing and de-briefing sessions, and opportunities to implement feedback in gameplay almost immediately.

Second, Howard was looking for a high level of professionalism, which is part-and-parcel of umpiring at a national event. Sure, the week was an opportunity to learn and develop, but the week also represented an opportunity to take our umpiring to a new level. This is when it dawned on many of us (or on me at least) that this was, in fact, a pretty exciting opportunity. I couldn't wait to get going.

## **They were all 'out of control'**

Finally, Jay and Jesse (our local hosts) were not going to let our visit to the sleepy northern rivers pass without a healthy dose of fun. Over the next couple of days and nights, Jay and Jesse quite rightly pointed out to us that most of the players on most of the teams were simply 'out of control', the coaches and spectators were 'out of control' (especially that old bloke retrieving foul balls from the Lantana down near the river), the locals in the pub were 'out of control', and the staff at the Chinese restaurant in the main street, well, to say they were 'out of control' is just an understatement.



### **In the wash up**

The weather during the week came and went (as it does) but most of the rain scooted around the diamonds in Lismore. It was wet here and there, but credit to the grounds staff, the tournament was completed each day, on time and on schedule. At the end of the week both Grand Finals were held in perfect conditions. Alan Walsh was appointed to the boy's plate, with Tony Beard at first and Jay Gibson at third. Lindy White was appointed to the girl's plate, with Andrew Dickson at first and Jesse Smith at third.

In summary, Howard did a fantastic job as TCU and the support provided by Darren, Jay and Jesse was invaluable. Thank you to all four of you. You did a great job. The Regional Championships might be a perfect opportunity for junior umpires to 'cut their teeth' at a national event, but I for one can't wait until next year. I'd be happy to put my hand up again. And yes, they all WERE 'out of control'.

Writer: Andrew Dickson (ACT)



**Photo: 2013 Australian Under 15 Girls and Boys Regional Championship Umpiring Crew**

Back row (L-R): David Crowe (NSW), Sam Bent (QLD), Andrew Dickson (ACT), Howard Watt (TCU), Darren Sibraa (DTCU), Alan Walsh (QLD), Jacob Yates (NSW), Jesse Smith (Assessor)

Front row (L-R): Tony Beard (NSW), Joanne Voltz (QLD), Jay Gibson (Assessor), Lindy White (NSW), Kiri Scott (QLD), Lucy James (VIC)

# Australia Capital Territory

## ACT announces four life members for SUAACT

Softball ACT has just announced four umpires who have received recognition for their service to softball with Life Membership. Congratulations! All four recipients have put a large amount of time and effort into shaping ACT's Umpiring program and making it the success it is today.

These four people join our other active ACT Life Members Dan McKay and Di Kropp in keeping ACT going.

### **Brett Atkinson**

- Joined in 1998, Member for 14 years
- ACT SDU 2007-2009
- Has taken on roles such as vice-president, development officer and umpire coordinator of Saturday league
- Member of Examining Panel 2004-2011
- Level 3 in 2000, Level 4 in 2001, Level 5 in 2005 and Level 6 in 2009

### **Dick Gallagher**

- Joined in 1997, Member for 16 years
- Vice President 2011-2013
- Level 1 1997, Level 2 2001, Level 3 2009
- Senior Umpire Slow Pitch 2008-current
- Umpired in various tournaments over the years including Waverley, ACT Championships, Australia Day

### **Mark Gallagher**

- Joined in 1998, Member 15 years
- ACT SDU 2009-2011
- Member of the Examining Panel 2006- current
- Umpires coordinator, Saturday League 2004-2008
- Level 1 1999, Level 2 2003, Level 3 2004, Level 4 2006, Level 5 2008
- Umpired at numerous National Championships from 2008-current and many other interstate tournaments

### **Alex Turnbull**

- Joined 1995, Member 13 Years (in Victoria from 2006-2011)
- Youngest ever member of SUAACT, joining at the age of 7
- ACT SDU 2011-current
- Examining Panel 2011-current
- Level 1 1997, Level 2 1999, Level 3 2001, Level 4 2003, Level 5 2006, Level 6 2009
- Umpired at numerous National Championships from 2005-current
- Selection to ISF Certification Clinic 2014

Once again, congratulations and well deserved recognition.

# Queensland

## 2013 Softball Queensland Masters

Logan City Softball Association played host to 88 masters' softball teams from across the State on August 3 – 5, for the annual Softball Queensland Masters.

First held in 2000, the tournament has grown from the eight ladies teams that travelled to Redcliffe, to the 89 teams spread across 5 male divisions and 11 female divisions, 19 diamonds and 269 games.

The management crew consisting of Tricia Sibraa (TCU) and Deputy TCUs Ron Yardley and Sally Crawford undertook the massive task of assigning 89 umpires to their respective games. While the allocation of umpires to games at National and State events is less complex because the standard of each umpire is well known, the task at this event is complicated by the number of umpires attending their first event, with or without umpire accreditation. The tournament would struggle to survive without the many junior umpires that put up their hand to assist the senior teams, and a lot of support from the “not so junior” umpires is then required to “protect” the juniors, where necessary.



On-diamond action!

Thankfully, the teams were mindful of the juniors and respectful of their support such that no intervention was necessary. Notwithstanding, the crew appreciated the attendance of interstate umpire David Addlem (Vic) and Tony and Lyn Moncaster (NSW) to bolster their umpiring ranks. We are not sure whether they were motivated by the opportunity to umpire, or to escape the winter in the Southern States for three full days of 24+ degrees.

A full list of the grand final appointments follows:

Division	Plate Umpire	1 <sup>st</sup> Base	3 <sup>rd</sup> Base
M1	David Addlem	Ross Winn	Adam Reddacliff
M2	Alan Walsh	Danny Griffiths	Jeff Hooper
M3	Jamie Harries	Drew Pickwick	
M4	Tony Moncaster	Reece Horsfall	
M5	Marty Erlandson	Michael Pedler	
W1	Kylie Knight	Kiri Scott	Mick Gorman
W2	Elizabeth Brown	Vicianne Crane	
W3	Ian Goodman	James Todd	
W4	Nikki Crook	Bill Buckley	
W5	Sarah Rodgers	Katrina Crane	
W6	James Todd	Matt Allen	
W7	Lyn Moncaster	Erin Blackmore	
W8	Lelia Higgins	Caain Miller	
W9	Nikita Ireland	Rebecca McEachern	
W10	John Jones	Teanne Noonan	
W11	John Dyer	Jason Rogers	

# New South Wales

## Proud moment for Watt – 16 July 2013

On Friday nights Howard Watt pulls on the blues to umpire at his local Association, Far North Coast, in Lismore. But when the Softball Australia U15 Regional Championships came to town, Howard found himself in a different role - UIC of a National Event.

It was a proud moment for Watt to be appointed to a national event, his first as UIC, at his local Association. "It is a nice feeling to be recognised by Softball Australia and be appointed to this role, particularly as the event was hosted in Lismore," Watt said. "I enjoyed the experience and the extra responsibility. It was a great opportunity to develop my management skills and the feedback and help I got from those on the crew was outstanding."

The Regional Championship is a development event for players, coaches, umpires and statisticians - an event that Watt believes is a great way to "open their eyes" to what is expected at the national level.

"The set-up is like an Australian Championship. The protocols, technical meetings, bat inspections and equipment checks were all things that the majority of the umpires had never been exposed to," he said. "These umpires all want to progress through the ranks so this was a great event for them to find their feet and experience what is expected of them on and off the diamond at the national level."

One of the highlights for Watt was the support the event received from the local community. "We had good coverage on NBN, Prime and in the local newspapers which helped to promote the sport and the event amongst our members and the community," Watt said. "From a participation perspective, it is important for the locals to see the opportunities that the sport can provide. It was great to see so many young kids there watching, and even the local junior umpires who were able to come out and see umpiring at this level."

Congratulations to the following umpires on their Grand Final appointments:

- SAL U15 Regional Championship - Boy's: Metro Orange 8 def Metro Green 1 with Plate Allan Walsh, 1<sup>st</sup> base Tony Beard and 3<sup>rd</sup> base Jay Gibson.
- SAL U15 Regional Championship - Girl's: Metro Green 7 def QLD Fire 3 with plate Lindy White, 1<sup>st</sup> base Andrew Dickson and 3<sup>rd</sup> base Jesse Smith.