



Preview – a new world championship

Members of the impressive City and County of Bristol Indoor Bowls Club are looking forward to hosting a hugely prestigious ‘new’ global event this month (April), when the World Bowls Indoor Championships, organised jointly by World Bowls (WB) and the International Indoor Bowls Council (IIBC) take centre stage from April 25-29, writes **David Rhys Jones**

In 2019, just before we were hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, an historic agreement was reached by World Bowls and the World Indoor Bowls Council (WIBC), settling a controversial and long-standing disagreement as to who governed the global indoor game of bowls.

The two joined forces in 2019, when the WIBC agreed to a change of name, becoming instead the International Indoor Bowls Council. A new event that actually combined two existing tournaments – the WIBC’s World Indoor Championships (held annually in the UK) and the WB’s World Cup (traditionally staged at the Warilla Club in New South Wales – was scheduled for April 2020.

Covid cruelly put a stop to that, and caused it to be cancelled in 2021, so here, at last, the curtain will be raised on an event that, at the time of going to print, had attracted a record number of entries, including the holders of the WIBC titles, Scotland’s Stewart Anderson and Guernsey’s Alison Merrien, and the reigning World Cup winner Gary Kelly, the Australia-based Irish star.

The latest news from World Bowls is that at least 29 countries will be sending representatives. These include the usual suspects, like England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, Australia, South Africa, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Canada. Surprisingly, when we went to print, New Zealand was missing from the list of entries. But, adding spice to the occasion, and boding well for the future, players from Cinderella countries like the Falkland Island, Hungary, Switzerland, Sweden, Pakistan and Jamaica will be strutting their stuff.



Scotland’s Stewart Anderson as IIBC champion will be competing

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In line with the tradition set by the WIBC, competitors will combine (normally with compatriots) in a mixed pairs event, and *Bowls International* understands that it is currently envisaged that the World Bowls Indoor

Championships will occupy a regular spot on the bowls calendar, with the venue alternating annually between the northern and southern hemispheres.

When I caught up with the Bristol club’s chairman, Welsh-born

Bob Griffiths, on a rather damp St. David’s Day, he was working behind the bar – a sure sign that, as in the best of clubs, everyone is ready and willing to, quite literally, put their hands to the pump.

“Yes,” he smiled. “We are that sort of club, and I’m proud to be chairman of it.”

In fact, the club was struggling a few years ago, and nearly went under, but a serious review of how it was run saw members being asked to take an active role in every aspect of the organisation.

“And, as a result, we have a great atmosphere based on hard work, team spirit and co-operation,” said Bob.

He added: “We are certainly looking forward to hosting this unique world event and are relishing the challenge.

“Bringing a world championship to Bristol is a real feather in our cap. Everyone is excited about it. Our members can’t wait to see some of the world’s best bowlers in action, and I know they will give 100 per cent to make it work.”

Rotas are being drawn up for car parking duties, event stewards, volunteer bar staff, plate collectors and cleaners, scoreboard operators, markers, and umpires.

“Almost everything is done by club members on a voluntary basis, and, even though the catering is franchised, most of the kitchen staff are club members and regular bowlers,” says Bob.

Despite the ravages of the pandemic, Bob is upbeat about the future of the club.

“Before Covid, we had a membership of over 800, but we were hit quite badly, and that went down to something like 550,” he explains.

“However, as the lockdown

eased, people seem to have been looking for new pursuits, and I'm proud to say that we have recently recruited 125 new members, and our membership is back up to over 700."

During the world championships, the club will be providing breakfasts and snacks, and a double decker bus has been chartered to run competitors from the Premier Inn accommodation in central Bristol to the club at the end of South Liberty Lane.

STAR-STUDED LINE-UP

So, who are we likely to see parading their skills in this exciting new tournament?

The reigning WIBC (sorry, IIBC) champions, Scotland's Stewart Anderson and Guernsey's Alison Merrien MBE will be there as of right, as will Ireland's Gary Kelly, who won the last World Cup at Warilla. Now living Down Under, Gary was recently ranked number four in Bowls Australia's ranking list, but he will occupy Ireland's singles berth in the Commonwealth Games in July. Sadly, the last winner of the Women's World Cup, New Zealand's legendary Jo Edwards MNZM, has retired from international bowls, and therefore declined the invitation, but the field will still be awash with stars.

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England's Andy Walters has made his mark indoors and out, while Scotland's Mike Stepney is a member of the World Bowls Tour's elite Top 16. Andrew Duncan will be representing Ireland in the men's event, while former England international Robert Chisholm will carry Welsh hopes, and a strong challenge is expected from the Malaysian Mohamad Fairus Abdul Jabal, Canada's highly experienced Hirendra Bhartu and South Africa's Jason Evans.

Stewart Anderson's wife Claire carries Scottish hopes in the women's singles, in a field that also includes Irish star Sandra Bailie and talented Welsh duo Kerry Packwood and Amy Williams. South Africa's Colleen Piketh, who struck gold in the Commonwealth Games women's pairs in Glasgow 2014 and took



Top: Gary Kelly, who won the last World Cup at Warilla, will be in attendance, Jo Edwards MNZM, the last winner of the women's World Cup, has declined the invitation
Bottom left: Guernsey's Alison Merrien MBE is the current IIBC title holder
Bottom right: Bob Griffiths, chairman of the impressive City and County of Bristol Indoor Bowls Club says everyone is excited about the event

a silver medal four years later on the Gold Coast, will be hotly tipped. Other strong contenders include Israeli Ruti Gilor, young Scot Megan Kivlin, who will be representing Jersey, Netherlands' lively Saskia Schaft, and Anne

Nunes, an aeronautical engineer from the USA.

It is hoped that competitors will be able to experience and enjoy some of the local highlights in the historic City of Bristol, like the iconic Clifton Suspension Bridge,

designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, and the Floating Harbour, where the famous SS *Great Britain* is on display.

Chairman Bob is confident that they will find everything at his club 'Ship-shape and Bristol Fashion!'