

News.

Welsh National Finals

The Welsh National Finals took place at Llandrindod Wells Bowling Club from 11-21st August 2023.

This is the time when semi-finals and finals are completed and Wales' best bowlers that year come together on some of the best greens in Wales to compete against each other.

It was also an opportunity to celebrate how truly inclusive bowls can and should be.

During these 10 days, members of Disability Bowls Wales squad played on these wonderful greens in a variety of different competitions. They competed alongside their Club mates in different competitions in the men's and ladies' competitions:

Julie Thomas (VI) represented West Glamorgan County in the Super 10 final (beating Ceredigion).





Photos: Super 10 Team West Glamorgan: Sue Jones (PD) represented Builth Wells in the Mixed Pairs. She reached the final with Ryan Davies. Finished Runners Up.



Photo: Sue Jones & Ryan Davies.

Rob Sawyers (PD) represented West Glamorgan County in the Senior Championship. Finished as runners up.



Photo: West Glamorgan Runners Up.

Paul Brown (PD) represented Mid Glamorgan in the Championship Semi Final. Finished as runners up.

Julie Thomas (VI) represented West Glamorgan County in the Savegar Cup Championship. Finished runners up to Glamorgan.

John Wilson, Para bowls coordinator and Team Manager said, "It's great to have so many of our players involved showing their ability at the highest level of Welsh bowls."

There was also a brand-new event launched this year. This inaugural competition was called the Mixed Ability Triples.

Each triple consisted of a bowler with a vision impairment, a bowler with a physical disability and a bowler with a learning disability. After the early rounds and a tough battle, the finalists headed to Llandrindod to play the final.

The finalists in this event were:

Steffan James (VI)

David Pratt (LD)

Rob Sawyers (PD)

Keith McKnight (PD)

Gwawr Harries (LD)
Steve Whitmore (VI)

The game began with some quality bowls, teams drawing well as they adjusted to the pace of the quality greens. After 8 ends it was 7-5 and the game was close with Steve Whitmore's triple in front after an early lead.

Then Rob Sawyers' triple picked up a big count and the game changed. They moved ahead and never looked back running out winners 17-7



Photo: Winners of Mixed Ability Triples



Photo: Competitors & supporters

The bringing together of a range of para bowlers just demonstrates how amazing bowls is as a sport. It is truly inclusive, and we need to share this message.

John Wilson was delighted with the final and the success of this new event, expressing his thanks and appreciation to all who helped and supported.

He stated, "The bar has been set high for future Para bowls participation (VI, PD & LD) My money is on it increasing as we march further onward to inclusion."

If you are reading this and know of any person who may wish to get involved in Para Bowls please don't hesitate to get in touch with John Wilson for more details: 07970 460257

New Logo

We are delighted to announce we have a brand-new logo.

Thanks to Monddi Design Agency for their excellent work in producing this logo for us. We are thrilled delighted with it. It is a modern and up to date design that will be easy to use in a variety of forms. Really appreciate the time taken by Aaron at the design company.



Image: new WAVIB logo.

East Wales v West Wales

The FIRST EVER East Wales v West Wales Game for the Welsh Para Bowlers went ahead yesterday on Wednesday 19th July at Cross Hands and district community bowls club.

What a great event this was.

Great hospitality, wonderful weather and the game was played in a good competitive spirit.

Mixed ability teams of PD and VI players (rinks & triples) with bowlers of all ages & abilities.

The results were as follows:

E. Wales (Away) v W. Wales (Home)

Rink 1: 12 - 15

East : K. McKnight/V. Chard/T. Warren/C.Spriggs

West : S. James/J. Lloyd/H. Davies/S. Peregrine

Rink 2: 13 - 18

East : A. Hill/S. Jones/J. Cox

West : N. Bowen/S. Ricketts/B. Tear

Rink 3: 29 - 6

East : J. Thomas/M. Davies/R. Sawyers

West : K. Hall(sub Eiragwyn)/M. Roberts/S. Whitmore

Rink 4: 9 - 16

East : D. Livoti/L. Walker/A. Jones

West : B. Hobart/P. Bancroft/G. Harris

Overall results East Wales won 63-55

Well done East Wales plus 8 shots

A return fixture will be arranged.

TM John Wilson said in his message "Thank you again to all players, directors and supporters for your attendance and contribution to making this first ever East Wales v West Wales challenge a successful occasion which will help spread the message of inclusion."









Sponsorship/Working with the Lions

WAVIB are delighted to welcome two new members on board to work with us:

Clive & Bernie Robinson

Clive & Bernie have long been friends of the organisation and we know they will be real assets to all our members. We are absolutely thrilled to have them join us and know they will bring a wealth of knowledge, expertise and fun with them in their fundraising endeavours.

For those who do not know them, a little bit of background.

Clive was previously a member of V. I.B. E. (Visually Impaired Bowls England) from 2008 right up until May this year as both a bowler and member of the committee.

As part of his work Clive became founder of the Weston V. I. Open tournament (a long running event) where he introduced the Lions (a vast service club organisation who love to help others and make things happen) to VI Bowls.

What a success this turned out to be and the Lions association with VI Bowls has been remarkable.

Clive Robinson was instrumental in this.

In 2016 Clive became President of V. I. B. E. until 2023 and he and Bernie have raised an average of £18,000 per annum (except during covid) just from one fundraising scheme they run for VI bowls.

Clive is also a qualified coach, President of the Worle Lions and an experienced VI Director having directed bowlers to Gold/silver medals at National & World Championships.

Bernie is always alongside him supporting in every way. Whether it's driving, organising, or doing raffles.

Every Weston V I Tournament since it started Bernie has organised a raffle over the 4-day event raising about £1500.00 which keeps the tournament running. No mean feat.

She is also a Lion and was made fund raising Director 2022/23. A very busy and successful year.

Both Clive and Bernie report "We are excited to be raising funds for the Welsh team and have been looking forward to the new challenge this will offer.

We are both keen to see what we can bring to the association and look forward to working and supporting WAVIB with the help of our fellow Lions."

WAVIB feel very lucky to have them both as part of our team and look forward to a long and successful partnership with them and their fellow Lions.





Photos: Clive & Bernie Robinson

Para Bowls Manager

WAVIB are delighted to announce that John Wilson (their Team Manager) has been appointed to the role of Welsh Para Bowls Coordinator from June 1st.

This will enable much closer harmony working between ourselves and Para Bowls that can only benefit all and continue to move our sport forward.

For those of you who do not know John Wilson a very brief background:

John comes from a background in the Fire Service. He served as a fire officer and later managed and trained officers. It's no wonder he is always calm and very clear with his communication.

From the fire service he put his skills to great use in the bowls arena. Working for the Welsh Bowls Federation; becoming a coach and helping as many clubs and individuals as he could.

He became WAVIB team manager and set up the para bowls programme in Wales with Gerwyn Owen and Jon Morgan back in 2015.

3 commonwealth games under his belt (with 2 CWG medals for being a Director as well as TM for two of them); Welsh Coach of the year in 2016 (for athletes with a disability) as well as coaching numerous athletes to medal success each and every year.

It was a sad (but completely understandable) day for everyone when John needed to take a step back for a few years for a health-related issue.

Since returning to the post of Team Manager in January 2023 he has made an enormous impact.

We are 100% sure he will do the same as Para Bowls Coordinator.

We asked John how he feels about this appointment and for his plans moving forward. He states that "I feel immensely proud to take on this role and look forward to increasing the opportunities and inclusion for persons of all Abilities to play this wonderful sport of Lawn Bowls."

He adds that he was looking forward to making some real changes to the ways training, development and selection are currently done. Introducing more competitions, involving ALL ability champions and lots more.

John continued "I am excited for the future. I have never seen disability I just see people, and this is a role that I relish. There is so much to do and it's a great time to be involved with the sport implementing some real changes "

Congratulations John on your appointment. We wish you every success.

New and returning players are welcome. If any club or individual would like to get involved please get in touch: contact WAVIB through our website www.welshvibowls.org.uk or John Wilson on 07970 460257 if you would like to find out more







Photos: Some throwback photos of taster events.

Welsh VI Pairs Tournament

A fabulous 2-day Welsh VI Pairs tournament (WAVIB) was held on 11/12th April at Port Talbot IBC.

It was great to have the stadium full of VI pairs from all the classifications (B1-4) playing throughout the day. Play started at 10.30am on Day 1; the group stages.

There were some tough battles resulting in some draw games, some surprises (that's what makes bowls such a super sport) and some very strong wins.

After the first day of competition results the players have been put into seeded quarter finals draws for the knockout stages.

Only 2 pairs had a clear sheet from Day 1, Julie Thomas & Jon Cox and Gareth Rowe & Gordon Harries. But all to play for tomorrow as the knockout begins.

Q/F draws:

QF1 J. Thomas/J. Cox v Z. Cooper/B. Hobart

QF2 G.Rowe/G. Harries v G.Thomas/M.Roberts

QF3 J. Lloyd/S.Whitmore v D.Livoti/A.Jones

QF4 V.Chard/T.Warren v M.Jones/M.Davies

So Day 2: the knockout stages of the Inaugural Welsh pairs tournament.

There was certainly a slightly different atmosphere today as we entered the business end of the tournament. There would be no second chances today and the remaining pairs meant business.

Some of our Q/F's were straightforward wins but others were very tightly contested with results decided on the last end. It led to:

S/F 1:

J. Thomas/J. Cox v M.Jones/M.Davies

S/F 2:

G.Rowe/G. Harries v J. Lloyd/S.Whitmore

What a tense affair in S/F 2. A real nail biter. Right down to the final end. It could have gone either way.

S/F 1 a much smoother route into the final.

Final :

J. Thomas/J. Cox v J. Lloyd/ S. Whitmore

Final result: J.Thomas/J.Cox defeated J.Lloyd/S.Whitmore

Well done to all players on reaching the final after 2 days of full competition.

The final was enjoyed by all the spectators with some great bowls. The results:

Winners : Julie Thomas & John Cox with their directors Marilyn Darney & Chris Maggs.
Runners up Jack Lloyd with Director Haydn Davies & Steve Whitmore.

A great competition with some quality bowling on display during the two days.

Thank you to all our WAVIB organisers for their hard work; our Team Manager John Wilson for being the instigator of the tournament (plus stand in Director x2, plus time keeper) and to our supporters and lastly to Martin Johnson & Christine who looked after us so well.



Photo: L-R John Wilson, Chris Maggs, Jon Cox, Denver Williams, Julie Thomas, Marilyn Darney, Steve Whitmore, Haydn Davies, Jack Lloyd.



Photo: Jon Cox & Julie Thomas Winners

Here's to our next Tournament.

Click to Download: [Welsh Pairs 2023.mov](#)

Click to Download: [Welsh Pairs 2023.mov](#)

Meet our new Team Manager

Since successfully stepping in to manage the Team for our October International in Glasgow, WAVIB (Welsh Association of Visually Impaired Bowlers) appointed John Wilson as the permanent Team Manager.

With a wealth of experience, from being Team manager previously; setting up the para bowls programme in Wales with Gerwyn Owen and Jon Morgan; 3 commonwealth games under his belt; Welsh Coach of the year in 2016 (for athletes with a disability) as well as coaching numerous athletes to medal success, we knew this was undoubtedly the right man for the post.



Photo: John Wilson

What an impact he has made already in such a short while. There have been 3 taster sessions already since he has been in post and new bowlers identified for inclusion into a development squad. He organised a Get together session and is currently about to hold a 2-day Welsh Pairs event.

A new club has started in Cardiff and although this is in its early stages he is delighted by the enthusiasm of all involved. Potential new clubs are also looking promising for Newport and Taff Ely and we as an organisation look forward to helping them grow. The difference the right appointment makes is clear.

Sight loss is not a barrier to you playing bowls so please give bowls a try. New players or those who stopped due to failing vision are always welcome. Please contact WAVIB through our website www.welshvibowls.org.uk or John Wilson on 07970 460257 if you would like to find out more.

BBC Sports Personality of the Year (SPOTY)

The 2022 BBC Sports Personality of the Year Awards were held on Wednesday 21st December live in Manchester. It was a real pleasure that some of our CWG silver medallists

(including GDYoko of course) received a VIP invite to the event along with a few other members of the Welsh CWG bowls Team.



[Photo]

The evening was packed full of some of the UK's great sporting elite past and present as well as some truly inspirational people.

"You couldn't help but feel moved at the courage, determination and friendship that was displayed by Rob Burrow & Kevin Sinfield on receipt of their awards. A truly wonderful moment that brought an emotional reaction from not only myself but you could feel an audience reaction to go with a standing ovation" said Julie Thomas "An amazing evening that was enjoyed by all."



[photo: Julie Thomas, Gordon Llewellyn, John Wilson & GD Yoko]

The VIP guests were treated to a montage of exciting clips, footage and live action as well as a pre and post reception. A packed evening evening of entertainment amongst some wonderful guests.

"Thanks BBC it was a real pleasure to be invited, we really enjoyed it," stated Julie Thomas "Having Yoko with me made the event so much easier as she wove her way through the crowds of people with ease. Amazingly people just move out of the way. She was superb. Despite the loud music, Yoko just laid down and had a snooze. She is one chilled dog. The only disappointment was that Yoko didn't get to meet Clare Balding as I understand she's a real dog lover and I'm sure she would have loved her."



[Photo: Julie Thomas and her guide dog, Yoko]

Medal Success at Glasgow UK Singles.

West of Scotland Bowls Club, Glasgow kindly stepped in to host the UK Visually Impaired Singles Championship on behalf of England due to a clash of dates from October 19-21st 2022.

John Wilson stepped in at very short notice to manage our team due to illness of our temporary Team Manager Steve Rees and it couldn't have been in safer hands. WAVIB remain incredibly appreciative of the dedication shown by John as our former Team Manager and we would again thank him for his support.

Wales sent a smaller team to this event due to a variety of factors with 8 players and 7 directors. This would effectively rule us out of any team trophy. Over the three days of competition, there was some high quality bowling, tight matches and the Welsh team needed to rise to the challenge.

John Wilson instilled a real sense of togetherness in the Team, leading from the front and even directed two different players. The results speak for themselves and it was a very successful championship.

"Although Wales had less than 50% of the number of competitors, we only missed out on second place overall by a few points to England. (We were not even considering the team trophy!) What a superb effort. This was due to the success of our small team who won 5 out of a possible 8 medals." the Team Manager, John Wilson explained.

He continued "There were some excellent individual results achieved which produced an array of Gold, Silver and Bronze medals. Without question the shot of the Championship had to go to Jonathan Cox who played an inch perfect bowl to secure silver.

I am delighted to have been able to step in and manage this team. Everyone behaved impeccably and were a credit to Welsh sport. As a Manager I am very proud of everyone who came to Glasgow both on and off the green."



[Photo: Welsh Medallists (Players & Directors)]

Gold Medal:

Allan Jones (B2) Directed by Murray MacDonald

Silver Medal:

Jack Lloyd (B1) Directed by Ray Lillicrop

Matt Thorne (B3) Directed by John Wilson

Jonathan Cox (B4) Directed by John Wilson

Bronze Medal:

Gordon Harries (B3) Directed by Olwyn Whitmore

Home Nations

The Para Home Nations Championships was held at Clarence BC, Weston-Super-Mare, Friday 2nd-4th September 2022. The team consisted of 4 VI players and 8 PD players playing a mix of disciplines from singles to triples.



[Photo: Home Nations graphic.]

An end to an exciting summer of competition and an opportunity for some new directors to learn the ropes and some of the newer squad members to gain some valuable International experience.

Summer Success.

The summer season began early with success at the Weston VI Tournament in May where Clarence Park BC hosted a VI Open Singles 5-8th May. West Glam players hold an

impressive record of wins in this event and this year was no exception. Toby Warren and Jon Cox were both undefeated with both players winning 8/8 of their games. Toby Warren claimed the victory on shot difference.

What a wonderful achievement by both players and yet another year that West Glamorgan (and Welsh Internationals) have claimed the cup.



[Photo: Toby Warren and Jon Cox with trophy and medal]

The Memorial Game at Rhiwbina Bowls Club was once again a fantastic day. The competition was excellent and the club put on a marvellous day for all, truly celebrating the spirit of the day. Members from clubs across Wales took part in this day and contributed to the occasion. The date is in the diary for next year and the occasion is one that is looked forward to by all.

Many members are active players in sighted clubs and took part in their club competitions over the summer with some great results.

Toby Warren won the Club Triples competition as well as being part of the Swansea BC Double 4's team that shared the trophy with Carmarthen after the final was tied (first time that has ever happened).

Byron John one of our Directors was in the Carmarthen team. Byron was also successful at County level winning the Carmarthenshire Senior Pairs with another of our Directors John Wilson.



[Photo: Byron Jones and John Wilson.]

Talking of County Success Julie Thomas of Port Talbot Ladies had a summer of exciting County Competition. Savegar Cup games against top county teams led to a final at Llandrindod Wells against Glamorgan. Whilst Julie and her rink won their game it led to a

narrow defeat with 3 rinks up and 3 down. But a win for Vi bowls as a superb showcase for inclusive bowls at the home of Welsh bowls.

Julie plays lead for Port Talbot Ladies and in County competitions reached 2 finals; in the Triples and Fours. Semi final wins led to County final showdowns against Blue Anchor and Ynys. The final against Ynys in the triples was particularly tough and exciting. Well done everyone. A great 2 victories for Port Talbot and both games played in good spirits.



[Photo: Port Talbot Ladies with 2 County Trophies]

Commonwealth Games Build Up & Event: Birmingham 2022

It had come around so quickly. 4 years had passed and #Birmingham2022 had arrived. Despite the covid restrictions and less planning time than usual, this Commonwealth Games would showcase 19 events over 11 days.

As members of Team Wales there had been a great deal of preparation training and support ahead of this event and excitement and expectation had been building up for months.

It began in earnest with a test event at Leamington itself against England and Australia in May 2022.



A great way to learn first hand the differences between the 5 greens, how they were bowling and get some practice at the venue itself with the many alterations that had been put in place. Great experience for Gordon and Mark who had only entered the International arena the year before.

The build up continued with preparation games and training sessions but the excitement really ramped up with the kit launch and the Queens Baton Relay.

It was fantastic to have one of our CWG athletes involved in the kit launch. It made it so real.



Team Wales organised a fantastic day in June and the finished media clip was amazing. The kit was absolutely brilliant, with design input from the athletes commission. Using the topography of Snowdon combined with the sports know how of Nike made the kit itself truly next level. Performances would definitely need to deliver too.

[Clip available here.](#)

The excitement was really building for everyone.

So with Team Wales and CG Federation counting down the days until the Opening ceremony; the Queen's Baton Relay arrived in Wales on the 29th June-3rd July (with less than 30 days to go). Not long now. The team were honoured to find out that many of them were going to be involved as Baton bearers too. What an exciting and powerful way to get into the Commonwealth spirit.



So departure day finally arrived and the team met up at Sports Wales for a great send off to CWG Warrington, our village for the next few weeks.



[Photo: Welsh Bowls Team]

A warm welcome afforded to all by the games makers, our Chef de Mission and some very friendly Australians next door. After settling into the accommodation, putting up numerous Welsh flags and a village tour, training began in earnest. This allowed the opportunity to get used to the different greens (so different to May); the red and blue sets of bowls needed for television coverage; navigating the transport system designated for athletes; (a little unreliable) as well as checking in and out of an airport style security system for each journey. All these things needed to be factored in and taken in your stride (often making for longer days and some very early and late sessions) to enable everyone to deliver quality bowls at the right time.



The team practised hard and time soon arrived for the opening ceremony. For Team Wales, a stirring Team Wales Get Together with a Welsh choir, the National Anthem and a speech from our Captain Anwen Butten provided that extra hwyl and passion ahead of the start to competition.



[Photo: Team Wales]

Competition began in earnest with games every day for the first stage. It was crucial to finish in the top four to progress to the semi finals. All the teams had pre qualified so every game was tough. Each team has the capability of beating each other on the day. That's what makes this sport so exciting. Some games were close, decided on the last end with only a shot in it. Others were more decisive. It was a tough competition. Support was appreciated and well received.



The team played hard and reached the semi finals. Finishing in 3rd place Now to fight for a medal. Playing Australia in the semi finals. It was going to be a tough game. The Gold medallists from 2018. They had beaten us in the round robin but we had not played our best at all. We believed we could do it. The game was full of quality bowls. We had changed greens and the pace was substantially quicker. With 8 shots up going into the last 2 ends, Australia were attacking every bowl. Tactics were needed to protect shots as well as play.

A superb bowl from the Australian skip enabled him to make a 4.

This made the last end more tense for spectators. Pressure was on to make the first bowl count for the lead. But what a first bowl. A back toucher. The bowl that every lead and skip dreams of in that situation. More positional bowls and the game was over. Emotions were high. Into the final with a guaranteed medal. What a fantastic achievement by the team.



It must have felt like the games were already won. Gordon was overcome with emotion. Preparing for that final match must have been a strange feeling but a great proposition to be in.

Playing Scotland in the final was rather déjà vu. The medal matches in 2018 CWG had been Wales against Scotland but for the bronze medal. This was much better for both teams. Wales won on that occasion winning the bronze on the last bowl of an extra end but games are often tightly contested.

This was no different and for much of the game it was a tight affair, the lead changing hands until the last few ends when Scotland took the lead winning out by several shots. Congratulations to both teams.



What an occasion, supporters and family were cheering from the stands. The rest of the team and Yoko (Julie's Guide dog) all delighted and there with congratulations.



The Medal ceremony followed, a proud moment, one that will always be remembered. A second medal for Julie and John (even more special) and a first for Gordon and Mark.



[Photo: Silver medalists]

A wonderful games, proud to be part of Team Wales thanks to everyone who supported us as a team and made this possible both before, and when we were there.

Commonwealth Silver for Wales.



[Photo: Julie and Gordon]

Julie Thomas and partner Gordon Llewellyn win Silver Medals in the Mixed B2/B3 Pairs Bowls at the Commonwealth Games. Directors John Wilson with Mark Adams guided them to a success against Australia in the semi finals to claim that medal, losing to Scotland in the final.

Two medals in the last two games, a great advertisement for Welsh VI Bowls. Here's to Victoria in 4 years.

Home Nations Championships

From the 22 to 24 April 2022 England managed to host the Home Nations Championships at Solihull Indoor Bowling Club. Having been cancelled previously due to Covid it was good to be able to get the competition underway.

The format had been revised to include B4 bowlers as it had originally done when it started in 2016. This is positive news as it enables opportunities for quality international experience for a wider range of players.

VI teams would consist of 2 teams of Pairs with a classification total of 6.

PD teams would consist of 2 teams of 4 with classifications from B6-8.

All combinations would play a Pairs session against each nation as this is the CWG discipline. There would also be opportunities for triples and some singles play.

VI Bowlers:

- John Cox
- Jack Lloyd
- Allan Jones
- Toby Warren

Directors:

- Mark Adams
- Richard Parker
- Murray MacDonald
- Steve Rees

PD Bowlers:

- Kevin Woolmore
- Barbara Woolmore
- Ben Tear
- Raymond Lillicrop
- Shaun Peregrine
- Chris Spriggs
- Robbie Jones
- Robert Sawyers

Following a recruitment drive over the last couple of years there were some strong performances in the squad. The team proved to be competitive and played some quality games. It was positive to see that some of the new caps have developed well.

Although finishing 3rd it was by only 1 point. With several of our CWG players missing a very encouraging performance.

Well done to all the team. We have been 2nd in 2016 so let's aim for a win



Photo: team lineup.

Team Wales podcast 100 days to go.

POD #tîmcymru ALLAN NAWR

As part of the Team Wales podcast series Cathy Williams, Head of Comms, Media & Engagement for Team Wales came to visit Julie to chat about life challenges, Commonwealth aspirations and her new companion, her Guide Dog Yoko. A fascinating podcast and well worth a listen.

Gwrandewch buff.ly/3rGrrCN



Photo: Julie Thomas

[Hear the podcast on Spotify](#)

WAVIB Development Officer Post.

The Welsh Association of Visually Impaired Bowlers is seeking a passionate and hands-on individual to fulfil the role of development officer to oversee the promotion, growth and participation in the game of bowls for blind and partially sighted people across Wales.

Whilst an active network of clubs across Swansea and the West of Wales already exists, development is needed in all areas of Wales, especially South and South East Wales.

Sight loss training will be provided, as well as safeguarding.

This is a 3-year contract (£5,000 per year). You will need to be flexible and willing to travel. A fuller description of the role is attached. If you feel that you have the skills to help establish new clubs and grow our game, we would love to hear from you.

For more information, contact Owen Williams via owen@wcb-ccd.org.uk or telephone 029 20 473 954.

Welsh Inaugural Disability Pairs.

On Thursday 16th September Julie Thomas & Paul Brown win inaugural Welsh Disability Pairs competition at Llandrindod Wells.

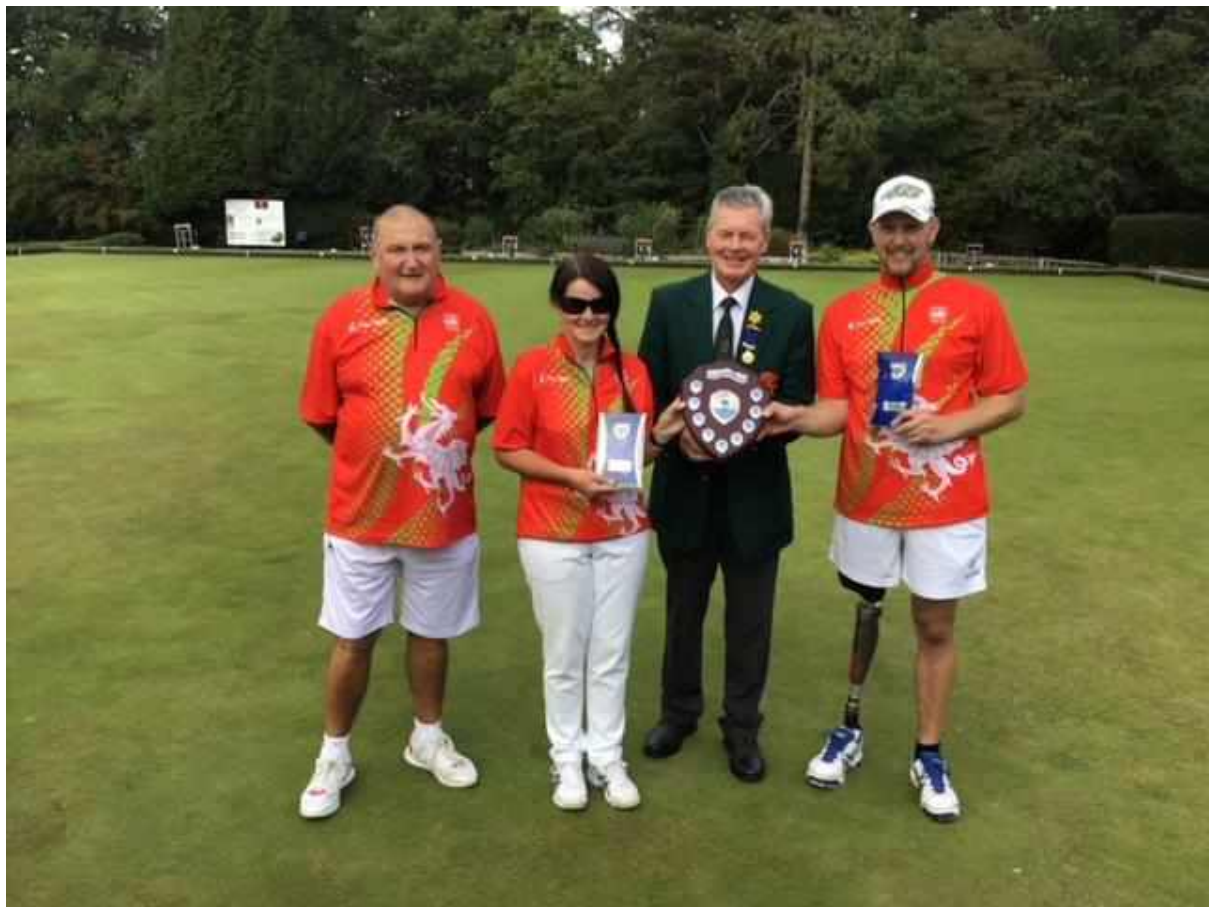


Photo: Steve Rees(Director) Julie Thomas, WBA President Paul Watkins, Paul Brown

There are two reasons in particular this is worthy of a special mention.

Firstly this was a new competition launched way back in July with the pairs consisting of players who have been classified with a vision impairment (VI) , a physical disability (PD) or a learning disability (LD)

Secondly, this was the first time that a Para Bowls Final had been played during National Final Week.

This competition began its group stages back in July. Following the group knock out and

quarter finals the semi finals came down to a match up between:

Chris Spriggs/Dylan Williams v Ann Marie Coles/Simon Bould
Julie Thomas/Paul Brown v Robbie Jones/Robert Sawyers. These matches were kindly hosted at Ynysmaerdy Green in Briton Ferry.

The final was held at Llandrindod Wells on September 16th alongside other National finals. This was something that signified a real achievement for our National final. Congratulations to all the players who played in this event.

All National finals are played at Llandrindod and we were delighted to be able to play there. Some of our squad play in either the Men or Women's County Teams and enter the Welsh competitions. They can play at Llandrindod in those competitions and now also in their own National Finals. A positive step forward.

With the Commonwealth Games next year, the pinnacle of integrated Para sport, it was an amazing opportunity to show how bowls can be a sport that is inclusive, where ability counts.



Photo: General view of green.

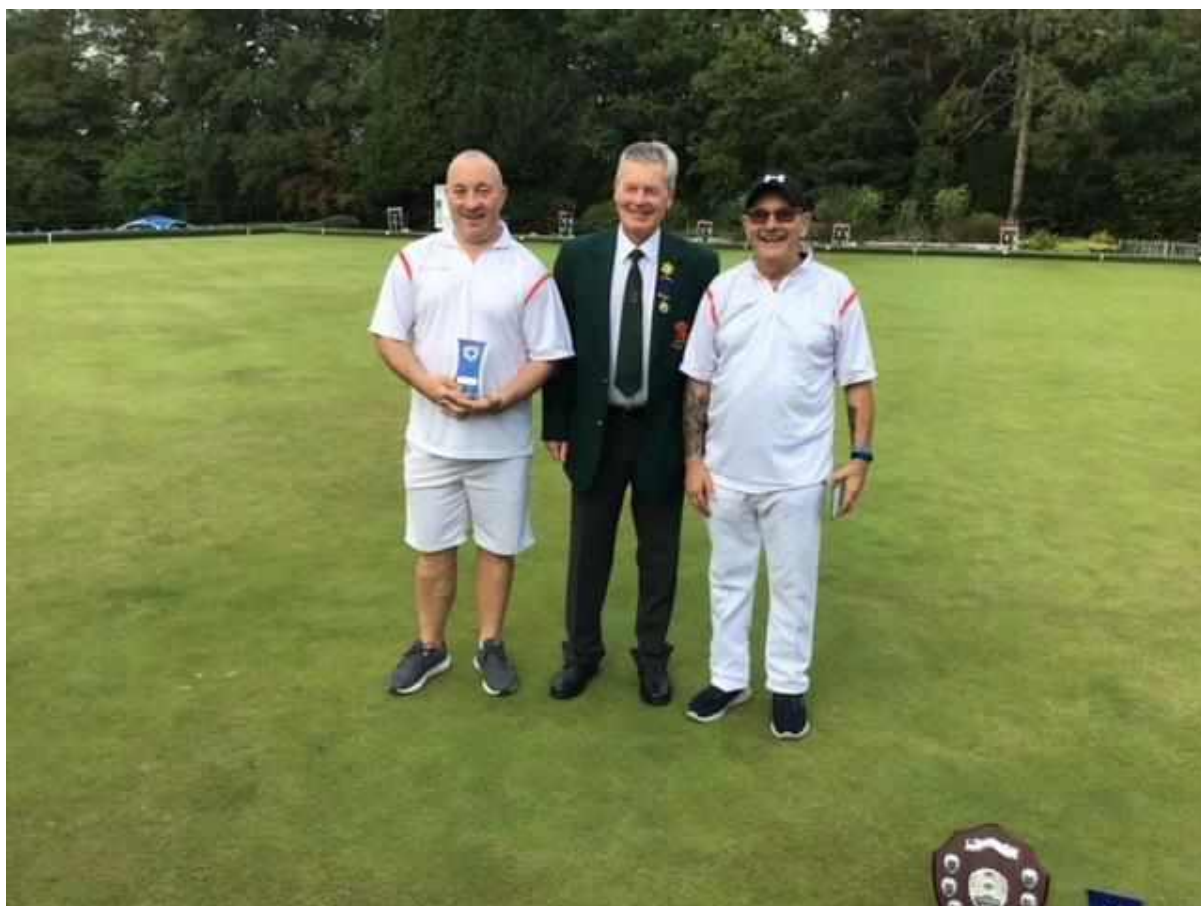


Photo: Runners Up Chris Spriggs, WBA President Paul Watkins, Dylan Williams

Para Bowls Preparation Events.

Two Test Series took place during the summer as preparation events for the Commonwealth Games. The first opportunity in Leamington provided a chance to try out the actual CWG greens in Leamington and was the first competitive opportunity for the Welsh Para Bowls squad since 2019 due to Covid. The squad is made up of VI and PD players. These were mostly newly capped players and Directors. It was great to be back on the greens and returning to full competition. Pity about the weather though! A very wet few days.

September 2-5th saw a trip to Ayr, Northfield Bowling Club for a series hosted by Scotland. Some superb play on lovely greens. The mini heatwave had set the greens up well and they were running beautifully. Great preparation for the CWG and it has certainly made the selectors job more of a challenge with some great wins and a few nail biters.

Julie Thomas, Gordon Llewelyn, Paul Brown, Dylan Williams, Chris Spriggs & Robbie Jones were the members of the Elite squad selected for these two events. Director Mark Adams, PD coach Marion Purcell, Team Manager Steve Rees . Many thanks to the Team Support Debra Roberts in Leamington & Julie Lewis in Ayr plus Yoko.

A super summer of competitive bowls.



Photo: Julie Thomas, Mark Adams, Steve Rees, Gordon Llewellyn.



Photo: Dylan Williams, Paul Brown, Chris Spriggs, Robbie Jones, Marion Purcell.

Good to be Back!

Preparations for the Commonwealth Games enable the Para bowls squad to follow a selected training schedule and return to play. This includes VI players eligible for selection in the Mixed Pairs event.

A varied and challenging timetable of training and trial events will test everyone and lead to selection for a Test Series in Leamington Spa at the end of July and another Test Series in September in Ayr.



Photo: At Barry Athletic.



Photo: Ynysmaerdy Bowls Club.



Covid-19

2020 was sadly almost non-existent for bowls as Covid-19 took hold. Cancellations, stay at home restrictions and self-isolating became the norm. We looked forward, ever hopeful to a positive 2021 and a return to the bowls green.

Rotary Triples 2019.

September 29th saw another Rotary Triples Tournament hosted at Sophia Gardens Indoor Bowls Club. 10 teams from Gwent to Pembroke gathered to compete in a day's competition. It was a well-organised day and many thanks to all the volunteer markers who assisted. It was particularly good to see Ammanford continue to grow in strength and depth and West Glam who have been a stalwart of this competition with new bowlers to gain experience of a competitive but friendly environment.



Pembroke fielded a strong team of B4 bowlers winning all 3 games. Well done guys great bowling. Pembroke team : Madeline Roberts, Richard Parker and Steve Whitmore.



West Glam were runners up, also winning all their games but with less shots. Well done to all and particular mention to Craig who dug deep to play when feeling under the weather. West Glam Team: Gordon Llewelyn, Craig Harries & Donna Livoti-Green

Wales Host Para Bowls Tournament.

Wales were delighted to host the Para Bowls Home Internationals at Rhiwbina Bowls Club in conjunction with Disability Sport Wales. From the 13-15th September some of the best para bowlers from across Wales, England and Scotland contested this event including Commonwealth Games medallists and some rising stars.



[Photo: England, Scotland and Wales teams at Rhiwbina Bowls Club, Cardiff]

The weather was glorious, almost tropical and after a warm welcome from the club and Deputy Lord Mayor of Cardiff at the Opening Ceremony and rousing anthems, three days of intense and quality bowls began.

The teams were split into VI and PD teams and the format was designed to follow the commonwealth games model.

The VI mixed pairs team:

Julie Thomas, Allan Jones played Scotland and England Pairs Teams.

Wales v Scotland. 17-5 W

Wales v England 16-12 W

They then each went on to play singles games. Julie recorded 2 wins, Allan 2 losses.

The B team of Marion Jones and Sheila Kinch were a development team for experience as they did not fully meet the Mixed B2/3 criteria.



[Photo: Wales PD team]

The PD team had some experienced players and some new developing stars in preparation for 2022. Great preparation and some exciting games with Jonathan Hubbard and Ray Lillicrop recording a win against England in the Pairs.

Thank you to all the many volunteers, supporters and players for making it a superb tournament and to Rhiwbina for being such great hosts.

Our next Home Nations will be indoors at Potters, the home of World Bowls in March 2020.

The Jackaroos Are Coming To Wales.

Wales were delighted to welcome the Jackaroos to Cardiff Bowling club on the 15th and 16th of July and to Berriew Bowling Club on the 18th and 19th July. Wales will field a ladies, man's, VI and PD Team as Australia start their preparations for the next Commonwealth Games in 2022.



[Photo: Wales and Australia test teams at Sophia Gardens, Cardiff]

The Para Team selected will consist of some experienced players with Commonwealth Bronze medalist Julie Thomas leading in the VI Pairs with Allan Jones and Gordon Harries selected to play with her to gain valuable experience playing against the commonwealth Gold medalists. In addition Jonathan Hubbard and Ray Lillicrop who went to the Gold Coast in 2018 will also be playing in the PD team. This will be superb preparation ahead of up and coming events.

VI Teams:

Cardiff: Julie Thomas, Allan Jones

Berriew: Julie Thomas, Gordon Harries

PD Teams:

Cardiff: Ben Hopkins, Ben Tear, Jonathan Hubbard, Raymond Lillicrop

Berriew: Matthew Williams, Ian Cole, Erica Price, Norman Dole.

Tough competition planned with 2 or 3 games a day scheduled.



[Photo: Julie Thomas and director, Owen Williams]

The weather In Cardiff was beautiful and the games could not have been tighter for the VI's with 3/4 games coming down to a last end, last bowl shoot out. Great preparation, well done everyone.

Due to a change of circumstances, the VI team did not travel to Berriew.

Looking forward to the Jackaroos returning next year.



[Photo: Alan Jones and director, Chris Price]

National Award Winner.

More than 500 people attended the fourth Womenspire National Awards ceremony at St. Fagans National Museum, Cardiff on July 4th. Organised by Chwarae Teg, the event recognises and showcases the achievements of extraordinary women in all aspects of life.

Cerys Furlong the organisations Chief Executive says "There is no end to the amazing stories out there from women of all ages, backgrounds and walks of life."

Julie Thomas was crowned The overall Womenspire champion of champions 2019. Julie was also the women in sport category winner.

Cerys Furlong the chief said " Julie epitomises what Womenspire is all about. Someone remarkable who just sees herself as getting on with things and making the best of the situation, when in fact she does much more and has achieved things most sighted people would not do."

The award was given for community work, excelling in bowls and inspiring others. What an amazing achievement and an amazing honour for Julie.



[Photo: article in Bowls International]

Only a few days later Julie was announced the winner of another National Award from Disability Sport Wales. This award was a new introduction entitled 'Inspiring My Journey' award. It was an opportunity to celebrate and recognise Julie's inspiring journey from a novice bowler to a Commonwealth medalist together with the team of people who inspired and supported her. The recipients of the award shared with Julie were of course John Wilson, the man who she attributes "transformed her life"; Linda Evans; Port Talbot BC & Marilyn Darney.

This link has a great video clip of the interview with the recipients

<https://youtu.be/-Ck0b0TncaQ>

The award was presented at The Senedd on July 17th where Julie spoke to a full audience about ability not disability and inclusion in sport. A wonderful celebration evening.

Summer Success.

The summer season was enjoyed by all our members with tournaments, club competitions and friendlies.

Early success in May began at Weston VI Tournament where once again West Glam proved a strong force to be reckoned with, winning the cup for another year. This time it was with Toby Warren. Although a closely fought competition with the top 3 finishers all winning 8/8 games played, Toby won the on shot difference. Gilbert Miles placed third.



[Photo: Toby receives his trophy]

Continuing with two mixed Para Friendlies (VI & PD players) at the Melyn BC in June and later on at Bryn Road BC in August. Warm welcomes, competitive games and an opportunity to show how successful and inclusive bowls is. The fact we also secured two wins was a bonus.

The Memorial Game at Rhiwbina Bowls Club, now in its 5th year was once again a fantastic day. The competition was excellent and the club put on a marvellous day for all, truly celebrating the spirit of the day. We recorded a win, coming away with the trophy made by one of our past members, Peter Williams. Members from clubs across Wales took part in this day and contributed to the occasion. The date is in the diary for next year.

Many members are active players in sighted clubs and took part in their club competitions over the summer with some great results.

Gordon Harries with his partner Brian Evans won the pairs at Aberaeron Bowls Club.

Bryn Road have an active Club Competition Schedule. Two members took part in these competitions over the summer with great results.

Donna Livoti-Green partnered with Rob Tric won the mixed pairs event. This is Donna's first year at Bryn Road.

Toby Warren partnered with Alan Walters won the Open Pairs Tournament with a dramatic final end 'bowl off'. He also won the 2 wood club singles tournament. He was also involved in the Double 4's team that won the Private Greens Double Fours event. Sounds like a busy summer.

Owen Williams as part of Machen Bowls Club reached 3 South Monmouthshire District finals, winning the pairs on an extra end. Owen was runner up in the triples and rinks, losing on the last end in a tightly contested game. All 3 finals played in one day, 68 ends in 9 hours, the last game completed in almost complete darkness.

Well done everyone, a super summer of Club and District successes.

County Success.

One of our members Julie Thomas of Port Talbot Ladies had a summer of exciting County Competition. Savegar Cup games against top county teams as well as County competitions to reach the West Glamorgan County rink finals for her third final in 3 years. Julie plays lead against tough (sighted) opposition. An exciting Semi-final win against Blue Anchor put Port Talbot into the final against Brynhyfryd. A decisive victory saw them lift the trophy after 19 ends. Bowls is such an inclusive sport and this should encourage us all. Well done everyone.



[Photo: Port Talbot Ladies with trophy]

Medals at Glasgow UK Singles.

West of Scotland Bowls Club, Glasgow hosted the UK Visually Impaired Singles Championship from April 23-25 2019. This event was one of the first events in the rebuilding towards the next World and Commonwealth Games cycles.

Welsh Team Manager Byron John said "This event offers an opportunity to introduce new and developing players into the International stage. Our team reflects this with a mixture of experienced and new players.

"This is my first UK Singles as Team Manager and the challenges of last minute withdrawals were sent to test me on my first run out. It was hugely disappointing that Julie Thomas was unable to compete and Lyn Thomas (a new cap) broke a bone. But Jack Lloyd fought back from knee surgery to make it onto the green and we have a team that if they reach their potential are capable of medal winning results."

Over the three days of competition, the standard of bowling was very high. Wales started extremely well and after the first two days were in potential medal winning positions in six of the seven categories entered. It seemed Byron's remarks were certainly justified.



Photo: Welsh Team (Players & Directors)

Day 3 saw a slightly less favourable result for a few players and with the scoring so tight at the top, several players missed out on shot difference. Team Manager Byron John said “After such a promising first two days it was disappointing for several players to drop out of medal positions on the final day. For some this was tight scheduling, inexperience or just concentration. All factors to be worked on. Some superb individual performances and some promising potential. Well done all and congratulations to the medal winners”



Photo: Medal Winners (Players & Directors)

Silver Medal:

Toby Warren (B4)

Bronze Medal:

Zena Cooper (B1) Directed by Steve Hill

Gilbert Miles (B2) Directed by Kerry Thomas

Gordon Harries (B3) Directed by Andrew Windsor

Madeleine Roberts (B4) Directed by Ken Watson

Inclusive Bowls



As the Indoor Season draws to a close it's worth remembering and encouraging all our members and clubs to participate as fully as they can in all the elements of bowls. If you are a member of an IBC join a league, play in the competitions you never know what you can do? Many of our players do so in Swansea and Milford Haven.

This year Julie Thomas played lead in the Ladies Open Fours Competition with Joyce Amos, Joyce Mitchell and Lynda James. After going through the rounds they reached the final to be played during finals week. A full 21 ends on the 3/4/19. A last minute substitution was needed and Marilyn Darney was able to stand in at the last minute. After a lengthy 21 ends and some quality bowls they emerged as the 2019 Champions. A great achievement and just shows how inclusive bowls is. Julie intends to enter Welsh Indoor competitions next year, as it went so well outdoor last year.

Para Bowls Home Nations

From the 22 to 24 March 2019 Scotland hosted the Home Nations Championships at Glasgow Indoor Bowling Club, in what was the first of a revised format of the competition series. Going forward there will be two Home Nations competitions per annum, one indoor, and one outdoor; with a focus on the Commonwealth Games disciplines of B2/B3 Mixed Pairs and B6/B7/B8 Open Triples. However, there was also the added singles element as part of the home nations programme.



VI Bowlers:

Julie Thomas
Sheila Kinch
Allan Jones
Gordon Harries

Directors:

Anita Williams
Byron John
Stan Tear
Chris Price

PD Bowlers:

Jonathan Hubbard,
Ben Hopkin
Liam Walker
Ian Cole
Ben Tear
Raymond Lillycrop,

This was the first Para Bowls event following on from Wales' Medal success at the Commonwealth Games and with some new combinations and new caps it was going to be a great learning experience for all. Some very encouraging individual performances at the start of the new cycle of preparation.



Stewart Anderson was on hand to open the event and to encourage and show the World Indoor trophy he won at Potters earlier in the year.

Wales are due to host the outdoor event later this year with September 13-15th having been earmarked in the Cardiff area.

Swansea Sport Awards

Swansea Sports Awards came around again on March 13th at the Brangwyn Hall.

West Glam VI Bowls Club were again well represented as the team that won Bronze in the Commonwealth Games of Julie Thomas, John Wilson, Gilbert Miles & Byron John were finalists for the Senior Team of the Year.

They were also represented in the Sportsperson of the Year with a Disability Category. Both Julie and Gilbert were finalists. We are thoroughly delighted to be represented in this way, with two members of our club as finalists.

Julie won this award last year and she has continued to have amazing success. She reached two Welsh (sighted) Finals and became the first completely blind lady to be invited to trial for the Welsh Women's Team. A phenomenal achievement! Gilbert who was the oldest member of the commonwealth games team certainly rose to the occasion on the last day. Under pressure he probably played the best three bowls of his entire life. It proved to be a very exciting final and what a result for us all.

The Team award came first and after being nominated last year as finalists, this year the West Glam Commonwealth Team won. Well done to everyone. Gilbert then won Sportsperson with a Disability, making it two years in a row for the Club and bowls. Gilbert was delighted with the award.

Well done everyone. A good night for West Glam.

Friendly Round Up

The indoor season amongst all our member clubs has continued to flourish and develop. We are keen to promote this and urge all our clubs and members to participate and enjoy the game of bowls. It can only improve the standard of bowls you play at as well as help as spread the message of inclusive sport. Friendlies were held at Earlswood IBC against 4 rinks they put out. West Glam VI bowlers played really well against their sighted opposition winning on all 4 rinks with a final score of 58-18. What a great showcase opportunity, they have been invited back and Outdoor games have also been organised.



A friendly Triples game between Ammanford VI and West Glam Vi was also held on the 2/3/19. A great opportunity for some new bowlers to play against other opposition in a different stadium. West Glam winning 25-8 but some quality bowls from both teams. The first of many it is hoped.



Rotary Triples.

September 23rd saw another Rotary Triples Tournament hosted at Sophia Gardens Indoor Bowls Club. 12 teams from Gwent to Pembroke gathered to compete in a days competition. It was a well organised day and many thanks to all the volunteer markers who assisted. It was particularly good to see the clubs of Ammanford and Llanelli fielding multiple teams as they grow in strength and depth.

West Glam Team of Craig Harries, Maxine Jacobs and Gilbert Miles won the title this year. West Glam managing to retain the trophy for another year. Some great bowling, guys.



Pembroke putting up a strong fight were runners up. It came down to a deciding game between the two teams and the winner of the game won the trophy. West Glam won by a couple of shots. Good bowling all around.

Pembroke team : Madeline Roberts, Jack Lloyd and Steve Whitmore.



Another Summer of Success

The summer season was a real scorcher with such beautiful weather. Our members enjoyed success at club, county and Welsh tournaments as well as several friendlies.

Competitions began right from early May and many WAVIB members from West Glam and Newport travelled to Weston to play on quality greens early in the season.

A yearly Memorial Game held at Rhiwbina, now in its 4th year was once again a fantastic day. The competition was very close and the club put on a marvellous day for all, truly celebrating the spirit of the day. Members from across Wales took part and several para bowlers too who contributed to the occasion.

More members than ever are active players in sighted clubs and play socially. This is a real sign of improving inclusion. Several took part in their club competitions and Toby Warren successfully won the Club Singles and Pairs at his club Bryn Road. Well done

County Success:

One of our members Julie Thomas of Port Talbot Ladies reached West Glamorgan County rink finals for the second year. Julie played lead against tough (sighted) opposition. Bowls is such an inclusive sport and this should encourage us all. The Rink finished Runners Up

Welsh Success One of our members Julie Thomas of Port Talbot Ladies entered Welsh competitions (sighted) this year. These are hard fought competitions, playing some of the best elite bowlers Wales has to offer. She played in the Pairs with Bethan Russ and in the Rinks as lead.

She reached the finals weekend held at Carmarthen 25/26 August in both disciplines. What an amazing achievement, making history as the first blind bowler to reach the finals of the Sighted Welsh Finals. Well done Julie.



- *The amazing Julie Thomas in action at Carmethan.*
-

And special mention must also be made of Julie Thomas, who is totally blind and made history by reaching the semi-finals of the fours and final of the pairs.

She was not finished there. The Rinks lost by a few shots in the semi final but Bethan and Julie won their semi final and reach the final. Runners up in Welsh Pairs, amazing achievement.



[Julie Thomas & Bethan Russ]

Due to her fantastic summer success Julie was selected for a full Welsh Trial. History making.

British Isles (UK) Singles.

Llandrindod Wells BC set in the very heartlands of Wales was the venue for the British Isles Visually Impaired (VI) Singles from the 13th-16th June.

For several of the players on all teams, this was the next major competition following the Gold coast and the Commonwealth Games. Although we may not be in the Southern Hemisphere we were confident of quality fast greens and hopeful that the weather would be kind (if not Australian!)

On the morning of the 14th all nations assembled ahead of the Opening Ceremony where the visiting dignitaries led by the Mayor of Llandrindod, John Williams warmly welcomed everyone to the wonderful venue and wished us all good bowling, pob lwc a bowlïo da i bawb.



[Welsh team]

For the next 3 days, the competition was intense with titles and medals fiercely contested. What a wonderful sight to have the three greens full of top quality bowlers. The ring of 'umpire' could be regularly heard and our thanks go to Eddie Williams for organising our valued team of umpires over the 3 days.

For Wales, it was great to have several new players receiving their first Welsh Cap. Val Chard, Donna Livoti-Green, Gordon Harries (first outdoor cap) and Steve Whitmore (first outdoor cap). They all showed their potential with a bronze medal for Steve Whitmore.

Team manager John Wilson said "I was delighted with the improvement and potential shown by all players involved. There is no mistaking this developing team has a promising future "

With Wales securing its best results in this competition for 20 years, finishing runners up in the overall Team Trophy (albeit with a smaller team) his comments are justified.

He adds, "Toby Warren who achieved a Silver medal in a very strong field was among the pick of results along with the magnificent achievement of Julie Thomas winning all her games with a 57 shots difference to the runner up, incredible. She now has the remarkable honour of having retained both the indoor & outdoor UK B2 Ladies singles titles. Managing a team of this calibre and potential makes me very proud. They all did themselves, their country and me very proud "



[Julie Thomas and Director John Wilson]

Five medals were achieved in total:

GOLD:

Julie Thomas (B2) with
Director John Wilson

SILVER:

Toby Warren (B4)

BRONZE:

Sheila Kinch (B3)
Madeline Roberts (B4) with

Director Geoff John
Steve Whitmore (B3) with
Director Olwyn Whitmore.



[Medallists Steve, Shiela, Madeline, Julie and Toby].

The closing presentation led by the Mayor John Williams and other dignitaries brought to an end a fantastic tournament. John Wilson wishes to place on record his gratitude for the support given in organising the event to Ken Price, President of Llandrindod Wells club and to all the officers, members and volunteers who so ably assisted us. It was a pleasure to host this event and what an event it was.

Commonwealth Games: Gold Coast 2018

It was hard to believe but the day had finally arrived when we would begin our journey out to the Gold Coast, Australia for the start of the Commonwealth Games (CG). As member of Team Wales there had been a great deal of preparation training and support ahead of this day and both excitement and nervousness had been building for months.

Why excitement? Well we were going to the other side of the world and representing our country in the pinnacle of our sport. What an honour.

And Australia, just Wow?

Nervousness? Well, it's good to be nervous, a massive occasion and we just wanted to do our best. For us an added challenge, Wales had the oldest competitor at the games and the only blind competitor at the games. Both in the same sport (us) we love a challenge.



[Team Wales]

Anyway we set off for Heathrow by Team Coach on Tuesday 27th March. A lovely send off at Cardiff by supporters with flags, banners and lots of cheers. Thursday 29th March (it's a very long way) we arrived in Australia. A warm welcome to our tired group of athletes by games makers, our Deputy Chef de Mission and some very friendly Australians was very warmly received and straight on to a coach to head for the Athletes Village. You will never guess, but for the journey to the Village it rained, absolute torrents. Welcome to Australia.

We settled into our accommodation, put up our Welsh flags and got our bearings. Everyone was so friendly. The Athletes Village was just like a village. Roads, medical centre, high rise apartments, shop, it was absolutely enormous. Training began in earnest and getting used to the extremely different conditions. Both John Wilson (Team Manager) and Byron John the directors had planned our sessions at different times of the day to take into account changing conditions and heat. Several sessions a day but concentrating on specific aspects.



[Julie Thomas]

The greens are so different, the climate, the atmosphere, security so much to adjust too. In order to get to the bowls green you have to travel, check in and out of an airport style security it's all things you have to prepare for and take in your stride. Different bowls and surfaces take some adjusting too but the greens are fantastic, so quick. It doesn't seem like grass but it is. The wind is another factor. We practised hard, adapted to bomb and bag checks and time soon arrived for the start of the competition.

Opening ceremony first and boy did we make a splash. Our Hawaiian style "Welsh" themed shirts certainly had impact. A great opening ceremony and the games had really begun.

Competition began in earnest and games every day of the first stage. Needed to finish in the top four to progress to the semi finals. All the teams had pre qualified the year before so every game was tough. Some games were decided on the last end with only a shot in it. It was a tough competition.

The atmosphere was like nothing we had ever encountered before. Music, chanting, it was like being at a football match. Gamesmakers led chants and cheers. It was something incredible and special.

We played hard and reached the semi finals. Now to fight for a medal. Playing South Africa in the semi finals. It was nip and tuck all the way through. 10-8 to SA with 2 ends to go. We are holding a 3, one bowl left from Gili. We end up picking up a 1 to go 10-9 into last end. We are holding 2 for game with just skips to go. Nothing changes for next 5 bowls nerves jangling. Last bowl of the game from SA skip he hits their bowl up to take shot. They win 11-9 on last bowl. We are now in bronze medal match against Scotland.

What a match. Green was so different. So much slower than anything we had played on in the three weeks. But what a match. Both teams fighting for one medal. We had beaten Scotland in the rounds. Could we do it again?



[Wales' Commonwealth bowlers]

12-11 after 14 ends wales holding 1 both skips trying to change. Wales trying to add 1, Scotland knocking it out. Nerves jangling again. Final score 12-12 after 15 ends extra end. What an end. It changed on every bowl. Scotland holding after first two bowls then Wales holding after leads had played. Now down to the skips. It changed each bowl. Gili bowled the best three bowls he has probably ever bowled or will ever bowl in his life. He was inspired from somewhere. On his last bowl he took it back and Wales took bronze. What a night?



[Victory!]

Cheers and shouts around the stadium, it seemed that the excitement of the game had gripped the crowd and the crowd had turned Welsh.

Medal ceremony followed, a proud moment, one we will always remember and treasure. Our bowls team Julie Thomas directed by John Wilson, Gilbert Miles directed by Byron John.



[Bronze medalists]

A wonderful games, proud to be part of Team Wales thanks to everyone who supported us and made this possible both before we went and out there.

Commonwealth Bronze for Wales.



Julie Thomas and partner Gilbert Miles win Bronze Medals in the Mixed B2/B3 Pairs Bowls at the Commonwealth Games. Directors John Wilson and Byron John guided them to a success against Scotland.

A fantastic medal match which went to a thrilling extra end that was decided with Gilbert's last bowl. What a great advertisement for VI Bowls.

Meet the Team.

Wales' B2/3 VI Mixed Pairs.



With the Commonwealth Games 2018 hosting the largest para-sport programme in its history, the sport of bowls is delighted to be represented in the Visually Impaired (VI) competition by medal hopefuls, Julie Thomas and Gilbert Miles, directed by John Wilson and Byron John respectively.

Ten years ago, Julie was a headteacher, but her life completely changed when she lost her sight and was suddenly faced with the challenge of rebuilding her life.

It was in 2014, when someone suggested she tried bowls, and as Julie explained this had a positive impact,

‘Taking up bowls was the best decision I ever made. Having participated in a few taster sessions I was hooked.’

Thomas was lucky enough to be partnered with John Wilson who will be with her at the Games. He taught her to bowl and, as she explained gave so much more,

‘John and bowls have transformed my life. Together we have worked out successful ways to bowl and communicate.

Sport is amazing and has definitely been life changing.’

Julie and John had been working towards the Commonwealth Games for a number of years, so on hearing she had been selected she said,

‘It seemed a little surreal, as if it wasn’t really happening.

Now it has sunk in I’m absolutely delighted, it is a real honour and a dream come true.’

Having played on the greens in the Gold Coast in 2017, both Julie and John know what to expect,

‘We have been playing on fast indoor surfaces, carrying out particular drills and techniques to help with preparation.’

These dedicated bowls sessions have been combined with a mixture of individual and pairs practices, as well as Para Squad sessions and numerous Team Wales days,

‘It has been good to play across all disciplines. The sessions we have had have been very focused and have really sharpened our games.’

As well as her bowls practice, Thomas has been working hard to improve nutrition and fitness. This has entailed many weekly yoga sessions, combined with complimentary treatments such as reflexology and acupuncture.

All this hard work, combined with the wonderful relationship with her Director and great playing record, Julie will certainly be one to watch at the games .

The link between the director and player is so important in VI Bowls. They play as a team with the director on the green providing support, information and advice to the athlete throughout the match.

In 1959 when VI bowls was first introduced, the bowler would be placed on the mat and bowl to the sound of a voice, the clapping of hands or the ringing of a bell from behind the jack.

Now, a clock system is used to help the player achieve a mental picture of play. This, along with a fine white centre string which runs under the mat and fixed at both ends of the rink, helps the bowler judge the angle for the amount of green required.

Gilbert Miles is one of the privileged few to have the chance to represent his country for a second time at the Commonwealth Games, having competed in Glasgow in 2014.

Having began playing bowls in the early 1990's, what began as a social game with friends turned into a very competitive sport in no time, Gilbert explained,

‘I was encouraged by my friends to have a game one weekend when they were short of players and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

I became a member of my local club and have never looked back.’

Having previously played competitively at many different levels, Gilbert was not going to let the deterioration in his sight stop him.

He has a huge collection of Welsh titles spanning singles, pairs and triples events and he has been a runner up in the British Isles singles on three occasions.

Not surprisingly Gilbert was selected to play at the 2014 Games where he partnered Rosa Crean. Now, four years on Miles explained how it feels to be selected a second time,

‘I was quite choked when I was given the news and now I am really excited. I was proud to achieve selection for my first Games so to do it for a second time is the icing on the cake.’

This time round he is partnered by Julie Thomas and Directed by his coach Byron John.

Training has stepped up a level with a varied programme of individual and pairs practices as well as Para Team squad sessions and Team Wales away days.

In addition to his bowls training, Gilbert has been working hard to get fitter and healthier,

‘In readiness for the games I have been walk- ing every day and have made real changes to my nutrition.’

He concluded,

‘I’m pleased how things are going at this busy time.’

Swansea Sports Awards

Swansea held its Annual Sports Awards at the Brangwyn Hall on the 14th March. West Glam VI Bowls Club were well presented as they and their members were finalists in three awards, a phenomenal achievement showing what a superb year had been had by all and how much effort went in.

John Wilson - Volunteer of the Year.

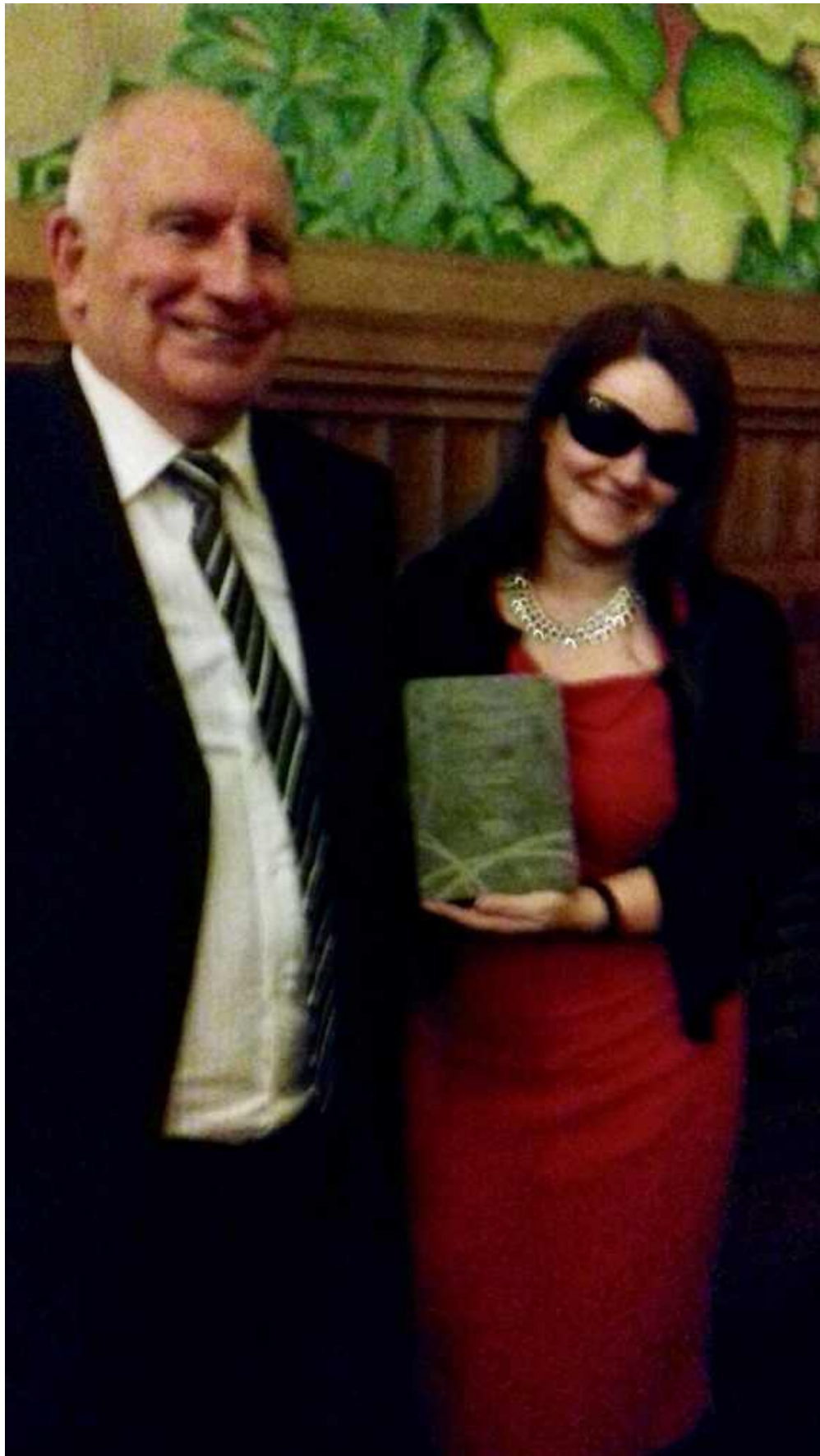
John Wilson, Julie Thomas, Byron John, Gilbert Miles - Senior Team of the Year.

Julie Thomas - Sportsperson of the Year with a Disability.

Swansea has a tremendous tradition of sport and there were so many talented clubs, schools and teams sharing an evening of rich sporting achievements.

John Wilson took to the stage to share his pride at his selection to the role of Team Manager for the Commonwealth Games and how he was looking forward to the experience of the Gold Coast.

Julie won the award for Sportsperson of the Year and was treated to an amazing reception. She spoke of her immense pride in her sport and representing her country and thanked John, her coach for changing her life. She said it was a joint award.



DSW Awards Night.

The Commonwealth Games Para Athletes were invited to an evening of celebration and achievement at the Vale Resort, Hensol for the DSW Awards. The evening was full of inspiration, amazing achievements and real dedication from athletes, coaches, clubs and volunteers. Welsh sport has a great deal to be proud of.



Members of the Para Bowls Team: John Wilson (Coach/Manager) Margaret Wilson (Team Official) Julie Thomas (athlete) Raymond Lillycrop (athlete) Pauline Wilson (athlete) Jonathan Hubbard (athlete)



Welcome to the stage our Gold Coast Para Athletes, Coaches, Officials & Guests.

Sport can transform lives.

The three-times British sight-impaired champion from Bridgend plays at high levels in both sighted and visually-impaired competitions, travelling across the UK and the world to compete.

But she only picked up her first bowl three years ago, seven years after experiencing sudden and unexpected sight loss.'

A reporter Abby Bolter met up with Julie and her coach John Wilson to find out how sport had transformed her life. A great story published in several papers across Wales and on Wales Online. The story can be found here:

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/completely-blind-bowler-takes-sighted-13972970>

Warm Welcome At Bro Myrddin.



John Wilson was delighted to take some of the Commonwealth Games Para Bowls Team along to Bro Myrddin Bowls Club in December.

Combining a demonstration with a training session for the squad John was keen to show both Club members and potential players just what can be achieved.

"The opportunity to chat with players themselves always makes a real difference and serves to inspire" said John Wilson (Welsh VI Team Manager & Para Bowls Commonwealth Games Manager).

"For example, Julie Thomas has no sight (B1) so it always encourages others, whatever level of sight they have to feel they too can also give it a try when they talk to Julie. and she gives a demonstration."

The club are looking for partially sighted bowlers to form a team at the club to play possible fixtures. Sessions are held every Thursday 1-2pm.

Please contact Jackie at the club on 01267 236249 for further information.

Commonwealth Selection.

Visually-impaired bowler Julie Thomas tells BBC Sport Wales she can't believe her call-up to the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Thomas, from Cardiff, was a headteacher until she suddenly lost her sight ten years ago.

In 2014 she took up bowls and has since won Welsh and British titles - as well as competing in a fully sighted county bowls league.

She says after her traumatic loss of sight, the sport of bowls has 'transformed her life'.

Super interview here <https://t.co/Ay5AX4fEdp>



Julie will compete in B2 mixed pairs with Director John Wilson & Gilbert Miles with Byron John.

John Wilson, Para Team Manager says "I am delighted at the inclusion of our para athletes in the Games. We proved we were in contention in the test series in June this year where both teams won a bronze medal.



"Hard work continues and we are aiming high with a view to improve on earlier performances.

"If our athletes play to their full potential, I am sure success will follow"

John will be both Director to Julie as well as Team Manager for Para Bowls.

Team Wales Announce Commonwealth Games Selection.

Commonwealth Games Wales have today revealed the names of more Welsh athletes selected to compete for Team Wales in the para-sports featured at next year's Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, Australia.

The latest 2018 Team Wales athletes to be confirmed will be competing in para-lawn bowls. These athletes are:

Julie Thomas and Gilbert Miles in the visually impaired mixed pairs (B2/B3) event, directed by John Wilson and Byron John respectively. Pauline Wilson, Raymond Lillycrop and Jonathan Hubbard will compete in the open triples (B6/B7/B8) event.



The Commonwealth Games is the only international multi-sport event which features an integrated para-sport programme. 2018 will see the largest para-sport programme in the history of the Games.

Helen Phillips, Chair of the Commonwealth Games Wales Board who confirmed the selections, said: "Congratulations to all of the Welsh para-athletes who have been selected to represent Team Wales at the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. They have all achieved great results on the international sporting stage, and we look forward to seeing them make Wales proud once again next year. Being chosen for Team Wales is testament to their commitment, passion and dedication and also the excellent support of their coaches, families, Disability Sport Wales and their national governing body."

Disability Sport Wales CEO, Fiona Reid said: "Disability Sport Wales are delighted to see the inclusion of these para-athletes within Team Wales. The Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games will showcase the highest number of para-sport events ever at a Commonwealth Games. I'm absolutely thrilled to see a strong team of para-athletes selected, it shows the strength in the para-athlete development we have in here in Wales

Hazel Wilson, Team Manager for Lawn Bowls in Wales: "I am delighted that Wales Para Bowls have been nominated to take part in the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. It is a fantastic opportunity and I am sure the whole of Wales will be behind the team. We have a really strong squad and, based on their Bronze medal success for both the visually impaired and para teams in a test event on the Commonwealth Games bowling greens earlier this year, Wales has a brilliant chance of medal success."

Pembrokeshire Sport Awards.



Pembrokeshire held its annual Sport Awards at Folly Farm on the 14/11/17. Two bowlers were in the running for the Disability Sport Award, Jack Lloyd & Raymond Lillycrop.

Jack recently won a Gold medal at the British Isles Championship in Glasgow & Ray had won a bronze medal at International multi nations Test Event in Australia in June.

It is fantastic to see bowls celebrated so well. Congratulations to Jack who won this award & Ray was runner up. Another triumph in a good year.

Wales Medal Success.

Glasgow Indoor Bowls Club hosted the British Isles visually impaired Bowls championship from 6 to 8 October. This event was marked as one of the final selection events ahead of the Commonwealth Games and so performance was crucial.

Welsh Team Manager John Wilson said " Although we have a much smaller team than England and Scotland, it is a side full of quality bowlers and potential is high. I am confident that we will secure medals and punch well above our weight. The players are contesting for places and will show their quality."

Over the three days of competition, the standard of bowling was very high. Two of our players, Julie Thomas and Jack Lloyd won every one of their games and secured Gold medals. Julie retained her title for the second time and Jack won his first title.



[Photo: Julie Thomas with Director John Wilson.]

Julie Thomas with Director John Wilson

Wales entered 7 categories for medals and came away with 6. An amazing achievement and certainly sets out the case for many players for possible commonwealth consideration. Wales won:

Gold:

Julie Thomas, Director John Wilson;
Jack Lloyd, Director Geoff John.

Silver:

Allan Jones, Director Byron John;
Sheila Kinch, Director Jamie Jones;
Toby Warren.

Bronze:

Madeline Roberts, Director Ken Watson.



[Photo: Medal winners.]

Medal Winners.

John Wilson, Team Manager said "I am elated by the team performances and bringing home six medals out of seven categories entered. There were some outstanding performances and still more potential. Julie retaining her title is an amazing feat, always harder second time around and new medal winning performances have made me immensely proud of the whole Team. Well done all"

Rotary Triples.

September 24th Sophia Gardens Indoor Bowls Club hosted the Rotary Triples for another year. 10 teams from Gwent to Pembroke gathered to compete in a days competition. It was a well organised day and many thanks to all the volunteer markers who assisted.

West Glam Team of Julie Thomas, Lead (directed by John Wilson), Jonathan Cox and Toby Warren won the title holding on to the trophy for another year. Some great bowling, guys.



[Photo: runners up.]

Runners up also from West Glam were Sheila Kinch, Allan Jones, Donna Livoti & Craig Harries with Director Byron John.



[Photo: Runners up.]

Looking forward to next year. If you wish to get involved please get in touch.

Summer Success.

The summer season was enjoyed by all our members with tournaments, club competitions and friendlies.

From its early success in May at Weston where once again West Glam proved a strong force to be reckoned with, winning the cup for a second year in a row with Jonathan Cox.



[Photo: Jonathan Cox wins Weston.]

Continuing with the Memorial Game at Rhiwbina Bowls Club. Now in its 3rd year, it was once again a fantastic day. The competition was very close and the club put on a marvellous day for all, truly celebrating the spirit of the day. Members from across Wales took part and contributed to the occasion.

Many members are active players in sighted clubs and took part in their club competitions and Toby Warren successfully won the Triples at his club Bryn Road, and was Runner Up in the Singles. Gordon Harries reached the final of his Club Pairs. Well done to both.

County Success:

One of our members Julie Thomas of Port Talbot Ladies reached West Glamorgan County

rink finals in her first year of County competitions. The rink then went on to win this title. What a great achievement. Julie played lead against tough (sighted) opposition. Bowls is such an inclusive sport and this should encourage us all.



[Photo: Port Talbot ladies win County Rink.]

Two of our coaches also reached County Rink Finals, John Wilson and Byron John in Carmarthenshire County. Well done both, shows the quality of coaches we have.

Owen Williams won Monmouthshire County Pairs final. Well done.

Gold Coast Test Event

May 31 to June 11 saw quite a remarkable achievement. A multi nations test series was held on the Gold Coast, Australia as part of a qualification event for the Commonwealth Games 2018.

The full Welsh team headed out to participate in this event along with Australia, New Zealand Malaysia, Scotland, England to name but a few.

As part of this event a recently selected and quite newly formed visually impaired and para bowls squad fully supported by Disability Sport Wales headed out to quite unknown territory. This squad, the majority of them having never played at international level before and certainly not on greens of this type and speed were certainly up for the challenge of qualification.

The squad play in two disciplines:
Mixed Pairs (visually impaired)
Julie Thomas
(Director John Wilson)
Gilbert Miles
(Director Byron John)



Open Triples (Parabowlers)
Jonathan Hubbard

Raymond Lillycrop
Pauline Wilson

After a very long and tiring journey, there was very little time to adjust to these amazingly fast and challenging surfaces before the competition began. The first few games took a little getting used to but the teams soon got into their stride and began to find their form.

"Securing a bronze medal playoff after the round robin was an amazing achievement, we just needed to really focus and deliver what I know we can" said Team Manager John Wilson. He continues

"The morning of the medal game was exciting and the team performances were extraordinary. The Mixed Pairs (VI) team went up another gear they really found their form and played as I know they can beating New Zealand 24-7. The Triples also tightened up and held their nerve when it mattered to beat England 13-8. Two Bronze medals on an International debut, I am incredibly proud. This is a step closer to Commonwealth Games Qualification.



The trip was undoubtedly a success as medals were obtained. Julie Thomas, was delighted with her medal and felt it showed real potential for the future.

"I was thrilled with how I played against New Zealand to win the bronze medal. It is wonderful to be able to show the coaches and Disability Sport Wales that they are right to believe in us, thank you. I was thrilled to show exactly how I can play, it just took me a bit too long to get there. It has been a really valuable learning experience and I now know what to expect and will be better prepared next time. The place is wonderful and I hopefully look forward to returning in the future"

'Visually-impaired bowls changed my life'

Former headteacher Julie Thomas lost her sight 10 years ago but could now go to the Commonwealth Games.

Thomas represents Wales at visually-impaired bowls and is a two-time Welsh champion.

She told BBC Wales Sport that taking up bowls helped "transform her life" and hopes to represent Wales in para-bowls at next year's Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast in Australia. Get the interview [here](#).

The International Blind Bowls Association (IBBA) World Championships.

The International Blind Bowls Association (IBBA) World Championships recently took place at the Western Province Cricket Club in Cape Town, South Africa from 20-28 March 2017.

It was unfortunate that Wales were not able to send a team to contest these championships on this occasion but look forward to being involved in Broadbeach Australia in 2021.

However, this being said Wales Team Manager was delighted that Toby Warren decided to be the sole representative from Wales to participate and stated " I am very proud of Toby for standing up to be counted and this tremendous experience can only benefit him further."

Over 130 players and directors across B1-4 categories were involved. What a great occasion.



The team event was won by South Africa who retained their title from the last World Championships in Worthing, England in 2013, , with Australia second and Israel third.



Toby Warren who competed in the B4 Mens Singles section said on his return "What an amazing experience. I really enjoyed it. The facilities, organisation, greens and hospitality were absolutely brilliant. They could not have done any more for us and the organisers deserve an awful lot of credit for the event that was staged. The standard of bowls was extremely high, definitely World Class and the conditions made it very testing. Some days temperatures exceeded 35 degrees C, whilst on other days conditions were really gusty! It was incredible and I would love to compete in future championships too."

Inter-stadia competition.

Tuesday 11th April saw the first ever VI inter stadia match in Wales. It was held at Dinefwr IBC Ammanford. Four clubs involved in this milestone event showing a clear progression in the growth and development of this VI sport.

Ammanford and Llanelli the more recently established of the four clubs have continued to go from strength to strength and it was wonderful to be able to hold this event for the first time.



Some quality bowling ensued and for some of the newer bowlers it was an opportunity to experience competition for the first time. It may be true to say, some bowlers said they felt nerves, while others revelled in the thrill of competition.

John Wilson, Welsh Team Manager said "I have been delighted by this occasion. The green is full of VI bowlers, all showing why this sport is truly amazing. I have seen real quality as well as emerging potential and I look forward to this becoming a regular event"



The competition was won by West Glamorgan, the winning rink was Julie Thomas, John Wilson (Director) Allan Jones (skip) and Donna (a new bowler to West Glam. only having played a few weeks and experiencing her first competition.

Bowls makes the stage of the Disability Sport Wales Awards.



Great news that once again Bowls has been highlighted as a successful sport. In a Paralympic year, amongst all the Paralympic sports we as a nation are so successful in - bowls was there by the successful nomination of one of our elite bowlers.



Julie Thomas was selected as a finalist for Emerging Athlete of the year at the Disability Sports Awards. Her nomination was well deserved as she has not only won two British Isles titles, she has also achieved selection for the sighted County Team. All this in just over two years. In addition, her nomination stated she goes out of her way to encourage others into the sport and is an excellent role model. Having no sight has not held Julie back. Welsh Team Manager John Wilson states "Julie works very hard and is very dedicated to the sport. She is a very talented bowler and I am very proud of what she already achieved but I know there is still so much more to come."

During the evening, Julie was invited onto the stage to discuss the forthcoming Commonwealth Games with Gerwyn Owen, Deputy Chef de Mission. A positive evening, a great chance for bowls to shine again.



Leamington Home Nations

The Home Nations Tournament this year to decide the VI singles champions for the British Isles took place at Royal Leamington Spa. During the week of 12th September there was extremely high quality competition despite searing hot temperatures.

The green facilities were excellent and it was a pleasure to play on them. Despite the fact we had a very small team, Wales achieved four medals from a possible nine so once again a really strong performance.

Gold: Julie Thomas (B2);
Directed by John Wilson.

Silver: Gilbert Miles (B3);
Directed by John Glover.

Bronze: Jonathan Cox (B4);
Directed by Jamie Jones.

Bronze: Jack Lloyd (B1);
Directed by Geoff John.

Julie won all her games to win this title. Her coach John Wilson said "I am delighted at the way Julie played, she now holds both the indoor and outdoor UK titles at the same time, a fantastic achievement and I am very proud of her."



Wales played well, demonstrating some superb bowls. At the next indoor tournament, due to the new clubs that have started to play, it is expected that Wales will field a much larger team.



The future looks bright. If you have not considered playing bowls and would like to start please get in touch. It is an amazing sport and what ever your level of sight loss this sport is truly accessible.





Welsh pairs.

September 5th saw a Welsh pairs competition held at Coedbach Bowls club, Pontarddulais. It was an opportunity for players across Wales to come together and participate in a pairs competition. Pairs were randomly selected in open category and resulted in two pool sections and then a final. It was especially good to welcome several players from the new clubs of Ammanford and Llanelli.



Winners were Toby Warren(B4) and Val Chard (B4) and the runners up were Julie Thomas (B1) and Gordon Harries (B4)

Julie Thomas featured in Bowls International.

"If I hadn't lost my sight, I might not not have found bowls"

Julie Thomas is a keen bowler. She enjoys the sport, finds it challenging but satisfying, and is extremely ambitious. But, above all, she has an engaging smile – the sort that looks as if it belongs to a recent convert to our very special sport. David Rhys Jones went to meet her.

SHE PLANS for Port Talbot Ladies at Ystradgynlais, one of the most successful Welsh women's bowls clubs, where she numbers among her Welsh bowls teammates as WWA treasure Linda Evans, and well-known stars like Bethan Jones, Carla Davies, Hannah Thomas and Joyce Jones.

One thing that strikes you most forcibly is her energy and her determination – above

anything else. I suppose, I'm talking about her determination to find a place in the Welsh team to play in the Commonwealth Games on Australia Gold

Coast in 2006.

"That really would be a dream come true," she says, flashing that trademark smile.

(Oh, did I mention the fact that Julie is totally blind?)

If it were not so amusing, that little fact would be totally irrelevant. This is the story of how she lost her sight, how she discovered bowls, and how bowls

has given her something to live for. I am sure it will fascinate you, as it fascinated and inspired me.

NO EXPLANATION

Julie was born in Cardiff in 1962, and always wanted to be a teacher.

After studying at Cheltenham

The mother-of-three says that coach (Julie) nature is relaxing

Teachers Training College, and qualifying in 1986, she got a job in Devon, and eventually moved back to Wales, where she became a respected headteacher at a Rhondda Primary School.

While teaching she gained a Masters Degree at Cardiff University.

"I loved teaching, and I loved being a headteacher," Julie said.

"I taught for something like 20 years, but then came the shock that changed my life. I lost my sight."

Julie says she woke up one morning in 2006, and found she could not see properly.

No one could explain what had happened, but her condition got worse, and within six months or so, she was totally blind.

Consultants were – and remain – baffled by her condition. There doesn't seem to be a logical medical explanation, so no treatment is possible.

That, of course, was the end of her teaching career, and, she thought, the end of her life. "I was devastated," she says. "It hit me very hard, and I was unable to see a future for me. In a way, it felt as if I had lost my identity. I simply lost a sense of who I was."

Julie had three teenage children – Owen, Cierrus and Ryan – who were very supportive, but adjusting to life without sight was extremely difficult.

Suddenly, she couldn't drive the kids around, and that was a major problem.

It was very challenging, both physically and psychologically, and there were a lot of practical changes that



had to be made around the house.

"We made adaptations in the bathroom and the kitchen, and I had to develop new strategies for all kinds of things," recalls Julie.

"There were visits from experts in help with rehabilitation, manual cooking in the kitchen was no longer possible, and my electrical appliances, which were fitted with sensors, now beep at me when they're done."

Recent progress in IT means that most of Julie's machines talk to her.

When she speaks in her phone or computer, her words are translated into text form, and when people send her an email or a text, she receives it as an audio translation.

Julie became a driving force in the local Visually Impaired Bowls group, using skills she had employed as a teacher – but, although she enjoyed her work, she found that even this had the effect of somehow defining her by her lack of sight.

It was barely two years ago, in April 2014, that the group looked at various sports, including bowls.

Julie made the arrangements, but was not keen to take part.

However, when she was talked into trying her hand, she took to bowls like a duck to water, and immediately found the sport immensely challenging.

"We did had played bowls, and I remember watching him, but I had never tried it," she explains.

But she liked it immediately, and the sport has clearly surprised her, providing her with vital motivation – and she wants to thank all those people who have helped her come to terms with her impairment.

RIGHT-HAND MAN

Those people include her director, John Wilson, who is the team manager of the Welsh Association for Visually Impaired Bowlers (WVIB), her personal assistant, Jo Morrissey, who shows her whenever she wants to go, points her in the right direction, and gives her moral support, and the members of the Port Talbot club, who have taken her to their hearts.

"John is a marvellous coach," says Julie. "He simplifies things, and explains the situation so well."

He speaks quietly, which fills you with confidence, and he has a sense of humour. He says he is playing the game through me, and he has taught me so much."

As mentioned above, she now represents the Port Talbot ladies club in league matches, when the only concession made to her is to stretch a string down the centre of the rink, so that she can align herself on the mid, and calculate the angle of delivery.

"It's quite amusing," smiles Julie. "If we



Julie at the senior women's international series

bowls is losing, no-one complains, but, if we start winning, I sometimes hear opponents grumbling about the string, and claiming that it's putting them off."

Former Welsh international Linda Evans, who often skips the risk on which Julie is playing, confirms this, but says she gives the critics no time at all.

"I tell them that we all love the string, because we find it a great help – and that usually shuts them up! Linda says:

"There's a myth that people who lose their sight have enhanced hearing, and, while it is not strictly true, Julie feels that, because blind people cannot engage in visual communication, they focus more heavily on sounds in order to make sense of what is going on."

"For example, I always know when it is around, even if she doesn't say anything," Julie protests.

"She wears flip-flops, and I can always hear her crossing. So, yes, I suppose I do tend to use my ears more effectively now than I did when I could see."

COMPETITIVE EDGE

Julie enjoys competing in tournaments for the visually impaired, and, although she has only been playing for a few years, it already is time to be reckoned with.

Because she is totally blind, she is entitled to play in the B1 category, but she prefers to compete at B2 level. "It's more competitive," she says.

In fact, according to the WVIB website,

she is currently the Welsh national champion in the B1, B2, B3 and B4 categories, and, in 2013, in Nottingham, she became the British B2 champion in the UK indoor championships.

More recently, she won the first Lady Bowler award across the four categories at the Visually Impaired Bowls tournament for the visually impaired.

In the Pan-Malby home nations Test series on the Achnagrove greens in Glasgow in June, she helped Wales achieve the runners up spot, and she is looking forward to competing in the UK Visually Impaired B1 singles championship at Royal Leamington Spa this month.

But, being blessed with a keenly competitive nature, she particularly relishes the cut-and-thrust of playing with and against sighted bowlers, and that's why she is so excited about being a member of Port Talbot, where she is treated as just another bowler.

When I met Julie at the women's junior intertowns in Breckford, she told me with pride how she had recently played for West Glamorgan Ladies in a Somerset Cup evening match against Devon & Cornwall at Merthyr Tydfil – and that she was looking forward to representing the county in a friendly fixture with Somerset at the Brynhyfryd club in South.

A few days later, she revealed that, against Somerset, she played lead for West Glamorgan Ladies secretary Wynne Evans, who skipped the best winning risk.

Opposing skip, Alun Midwinter said, "We couldn't believe it, Julie has such a good delivery – and she played so well that we were all envious of her ability."

Wynne added, "Her jack throwing was pin-point, and her bowling was superb. Everyone was in awe of her – and her attitude is so positive. She was certainly one of the best players on the rink that day, and she can play for me again – any day of the week."

Julie says, "I owe so much to bowls – I just love it. The more you practice, the better you get – and I have learnt so much from my coach John (O'Connell), and have so much confidence in him, because he seems to have so much confidence in me."

"It's such a sociable game, and it has given me so much. I'm very lucky to have had the opportunity to take it up – and grateful to all those sighted bowlers who have accepted me on equal terms. I feel they treat me as a bowler – not as a blind bowler."

From my lowest point when I lost my sight, I have come so far. Of course my life is different now, but I feel I have achieved some kind of normality, and I keep thinking, if I hadn't lost my sight, I might never have discovered bowls."



For the second occasion, Rhiwbina Bowls club hosted a memorial game for Meirion Roberts. It was once again a fantastic occasion played in the true spirit of the game. Players from across Wales came together as part of the Welsh visually impaired. Team. Meirion's daughter was lead on the winning rink for the second year running. She said "My dad was a member at this club for many years and there are many friends and colleagues who still play here, it is a wonderful occasion for us to be able to come here and share memories, long may it continue"





Further pictures are available on

<http://www.rhiwbinabowls.co.uk/galleryWAVIB.html>

Julie Thomas selected for Ladies (sighted) County Team.




Julie Thomas, current Welsh & UK Champion was recently selected to play for the County of West Glamorgan in the Ladies (sighted) County Team. John Wilson, Welsh Team Manager stated "I am very proud of Julie and the way she plays. This is a ground breaking achievement and I have no doubt she will continue to be successful."



Blind bowler aiming to hit new heights

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Journal of Internal Medicine 247: 105–112

— Julie Thomas



The newly formed Para team are already punching above their weight, according to John Wilson as they secure second in recent Home Nations Championships. For many players this was their first experience of an international tournament and they did themselves and Wales proud.

Weather conditions were very challenging with bitter winds and really cold temperatures, but Wales rose to the challenge. Looking forward to 2017 when Wales will host the next Championships March/April (indoors).



Para Bowls Home Nations Championship 2016.

The 2016 Para Bowls Home Nations Championships are approaching and Scottish Disability Sport are looking forward to welcoming some of the best Para bowls players to Kelvingrove Lawn Bowls centre in Glasgow on the weekend of 9th of June through to 12th June.

3 nations are competing at this event, Wales, England and Scotland.

Competition Programme involves three teams from each country, a VI Team consisting of five players and 2 teams of physically disabled bowlers (10 players). The disciplines will involve singles, pairs, triples and rinks, please see below:

Friday 10th June

12:00 onwards Training on greens

13:30 Welcome

14:00 1st session

16:45 2nd session

Saturday 11th June

09:30 1st session

13:00 2nd session

15:45 3rd session

Sunday 12th June

10:00 Final session

13:00 Closing Ceremony

Team Selection:

Team Manager: John Wilson

VI Team

Julie Thomas

Alan Jones

Gilbert Miles

Toby Warren

Jack Lloyd

Physically Disabled Team

Jonathan Williams

Jonathan Hubbard

Pauline Wilson

Damian Hallett

Raymond Lillycrop

Dave Powell

Erica Price

Ben Hopkin

Kevin Woolmore

Barbara Woolmore

Wales will be sending a full team and results, photos & updates will follow.

Weston-Super-Mare Tournament.



Wednesday 4th May saw many of our members heading down to Weston-super-Mare to take part in a Bowls tournament at Clarence Park Bowling Green. West Glamorgan were well represented with a minibus of 11 people and there were also a small group from Cardiff.

The tournament is divided into two sections, A B1 section and an OPEN category for all other players. The tournament takes place over four days and there are many games to play. It is a fantastic venue and a great way to start the outdoor season.

The weather was very kind in fact it was extremely hot and sunny. This added to the great atmosphere and must have inspired West Glamorgan to really play well.



After a tough four days of competition, with players coming from all over the UK to compete , West Glamorgan took many of the honours. Gilbert Miles (B2) won the overall cup, Julie Thomas (B1) won the salver for best lady in the open category and Gordon Harries (B4) came third.

Mike Price from Cardiff also placed third in the B1 category.



John Wilson, the Welsh team manager was delighted with the performance of the Welsh players. He said, "there were some outstanding performances during the four days and this was reflected in the success of the players. I am very proud of what they have achieved and certainly put Wales on the map. This is a great start to the season and look forward to continued success"

The players were delighted with their performances and look forward to returning to this tournament next year.

Para bowls development day.

On Saturday 2nd April a Para Bowls Development Day was held in Llandrindod Wells. John Wilson in partnership with Disability Sport Wales had identified that although there have been successes, it was still apparent that large numbers of vision impaired persons residing within our cities, towns, and rural communities have no access to Bowls. It was also determined that the pathway / structure for disabled bowlers could be strengthened to include greater competitive opportunities. As a result the 'open day' for "pan-ability" individuals marked the way forward for existing bowlers, and also as a means for attracting new players to the sport of Bowls.

What a day it turned out to be. It was a resounding success, proving beyond doubt that there is a real appetite and need for this with more than one hundred persons including players coaches and volunteers attending. All six rinks were full from 11am to 3pm, people were enjoying themselves so much they did not want to come off the green. The hospitality shown to us by the club at Llandrindod was second to none.



John Wilson said "It was for me personally a heartwarming occasion that has given me further inspiration to ensure that Bowls is inclusive and available at the majority of bowling clubs throughout Wales. Disability Sport Wales are being very supportive, they have proven to me that they are truly committed to transforming peoples lives through the power of sport."

Moving forward there are plans to repeat this event outdoors in a different venue due to its incredible success. What an amazing day. Following the second event, selections will be made for a Parabowls Test Series in Glasgow in June involving both Visually Impaired and Disabled Bowlers.

With all these great opportunities and exciting developments ahead John Wilson, Welsh Team Manager said of the day "I discovered a number of talented players, previously unknown to myself who are very capable of representing Wales in the future, one of whom is a nine year old boy. Everyone attending the event thoroughly enjoyed the special day, there were indeed very many compliments stating they felt inspired and enthused to participate in the sport from now on. It is my intention to ensure there are opportunities for them to do just that!"

Transforming Lives Award

Many congratulations to John Wilson, Team Manager of the Welsh Association for Vision Impaired Bowlers (WAVIB), who has been named 'Coach of the Year to Disabled People' in the Wales Sport Awards. These annual awards are organised by Sport Wales and BBC Wales to showcase the very best of elite and grassroots sport in Wales.

A great video is now online at [youtube](#).

Another write up is on the [BBC's website](#).

Coach nominated for Welsh Sport Awards.

John Wilson, our Team Manager, has been nominated for the Welsh Sport Awards and he has reached the final, one of 3. This is an amazing achievement and thoroughly deserved for all his dedication and commitment.

Here's the story of our inspirational finalist John Wilson:

<https://t.co/fjaRXRS5Zk?ssr=true>

He has also reached the final 3 of the UK Coach Awards and will be attending a Black tie presentation in Manchester in December to celebrate this achievement.



Julie's success story.

Julie Thomas tells listeners to Insight Radio of her success. [[Interview audio file](#)].

Welsh success in UK Singles.

From the 7th to 10th September 2015 Wales competed in the UK VI singles championships held in Nottingham against a very strong English and Scottish team consisting of several current World champions.

Wales are a small team but full of determined and exciting talent and enjoyed its best ever results at these championships with a total of seven medals & our highest ever points tally. We entered 7 classifications and medalled in each one. We achieved a Gold, 3 silver and 3 Bronze. What an amazing week.



Our Medal winners are:

Gold

Julie Thomas (B2)

Silver

Sheila Kinch (B3)

Jack Lloyd (B1)

Alan Jones (B3)

Bronze

Madeleine Roberts (B4)

Jonathan Cox (B4)

Gilbert Miles (B2)

John Wilson, Welsh Team Manager said "I was very proud to be their manager at Nottingham. Disability Sport Wales have committed to investing in VI Bowls and this has really shown at this tournament. As a team this is our best result yet and shows how we are moving forward

To have won medals in every category is outstanding with the icing on the cake being a Gold medal in Ladies (B2) " sighted" competition by Julie Thomas. She is now the Welsh & UK Champion , an amazing result for a lady who has no sight at all ! I am a very proud coach and Manager"

As a country, we have really done well but always need more bowlers, if you would like to join our medal winners, you need to give it a go please contact Sheila our WAVIB secretary 02920 400897 to find out your nearest club, sight loss is not a barrier to playing VI bowls.