

My Olympic and Paralympic Experience

Arrival in Stratford ahead of both Games was a few days before Athletics competition started. This time was taken up with collection of uniform, accreditation, various meetings and briefings, stadium orientation as well as technical training. All NTO's (National Technical Officials) for the Olympics were accommodated in the Premier Inn, adjacent to the Westfield Centre, across the road from the Olympic Park. While during the Paralympics we were accommodated in the Paralympic Village.

Access to the Olympic Park involved going through airport style security, with accreditation checked and bags and officials having to go through scanners. These security checks were undertaken by members of the armed forces who carried out their duties efficiently, quickly and with good nature. Once into the park we had to negotiate our way through the thousands of spectators who were lucky enough to have tickets for the venues or who had just come to soak up the atmosphere and watch the action on the giant screen.

For each session, morning or evening, field officials were required to report two hours before their event start time. Once at the stadium one of my first tasks was to inspect the event site before meeting my team and giving the briefing for the session, this included what time they had to be at the event site, which route they would take, the order they would march out, who was required to carry out datum check readings and at what time. As the Games were under international rules (IAAF for the Olympics and IPC for the Paralympics) procedures were established to cover the eventuality of having to measure a distance under protest. All athletes had to be escorted through the 'mixed zone' at the end of competition, for media interviews and doping control. Athletes had to report to First Call, where they were checked in and any banned items confiscated, before being taken to Final Call. As one of the Chief Field Event Judges I had to go into Final Call and brief the athletes on how their event was to operate before escorting them to the event site. The Chief Judge also supervised warm-up.

During the Olympics I was in charge of the Hammer team, although we also officiated on a qualification pool of the women's Long Jump and Pole Vault, as well as one of the men's Decathlon Pole Vault pools. As there was no Hammer in the Paralympics my team were given a range of different events. Of the 18 sessions in the Paralympic athletics programme I worked on 16 of these, which included the men's Club Throw; ambulant and seated Shot, Discus and Javelin competitions; as well as Triple Jump and Long Jump events. Sessions were invariably long, with one of my seated Discus finals lasting 3 hours 49 minutes. After each event, in both Olympic and Paralympic Games, team members were required to stay for thirty minutes after the event result was posted outside TIC (Technical Information Centre) in case of protests.

Both Games were unforgettable experiences, to coin the much used but none the less true expression, 'a once in a lifetime opportunity' to officiate at the highest possible level. I was fortunate enough to be in the stadium as a spectator on the evening of 'Super Saturday' when, within the space of an hour, Team GB won three gold medals through Jessica Ennis, Mo Farah and Greg Rutherford. The volume of noise hit you like a shock wave following an explosion. Both Games placed enormous pressures on the officials, with the Paralympics requiring an additional level of knowledge. Despite that the Paralympics appeared to have a more relaxed atmosphere. Whether that was because we were living with the athletes in the village, or whether the athletes themselves appeared more relaxed.

These Games have left me with so many memories:

The expressions of sheer surprise and delight on the faces of athletes as I escorted them onto the field of play for a 10.00am session to be greeted by a full house of 80,000 cheering people, unheard of before at Paralympic Games.

Having to pause periodically, when delivering a call room briefing to the athletes, so that a Portuguese athlete could translate what I was saying for two Spaniards and two Venezuelans who didn't understand English.

Receiving a round of applause from the athletes following another of my briefings, something I'd not come across before.

Having ten world Paralympic records broken during events I officiated on.

The delight on the face and in the voice of Thomasz, a Polish Discus thrower who spoke very little English, as he tried to explain to me how remarkable his performance was to throw 54m, enough to win the bronze medal, from a standing throw.

These Olympic Games further illustrated to the world the extent of human endeavour while in the Paralympic Games the athletes showed the world their ability rather than their disability.