

Olympic Games Tokyo 2020....one Scottish Line Judge's experience.

By Marisa Baird

I found out I had been selected by Badminton World Federation to officiate at Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in 2019. I began to plan a trip to Japan with an International Technical Official friend from England, Suzanne Benton, who had also been selected. We planned our 10-day trip, prior to the Games, to include, sightseeing around Kyoto and Osaka, Hiroshima Peace Park, a trip on a Bullet train and of course, seeing Mount Fuji. We had booked our flights and were all set to travel when Covid 19 struck and everything was cancelled.

When the Games were rescheduled for 2021, things had changed. There was no chance of sightseeing or in fact entering Japan out with the Games dates. The International Olympic Committee arranged our transport, hotel and demanded we stay within our 'badminton bubble' throughout our complete stay in Japan.

In order to travel to Japan, we were required to undertake 4 PCR tests before leaving Britain. For this I had to travel to Edinburgh (85 mile round trip) on 4 consecutive days and have the test taken by a Japan Government approved testing facility. I had to have the facility sign a Japan Government document showing my negative test. This document proved to be one of the most important to get through Japanese immigration.



In addition to testing, we had to record our temperature daily for a fortnight before we left and although we did not have to self-isolate, we were encouraged to stay away from others as much as possible.

My flights included a trip to London Heathrow, a flight to Helsinki and then another to Tokyo's Haneda Airport. Once in the airport we had to go through a series of 'stations', including health and Covid testing, immigration and customs. The whole process lasted about 5 hours. Finally, I was in Japan and provided with a taxi to my hotel.

The Keio Plaza Hotel was fantastic, I had my own room and the view from the 45th floor was amazing, however, we had to wear masks at all times unless in your room. We ate in our rooms using room service or 'Uber eats' and we were forbidden from entering anyone else's room. There was one restaurant available to visiting



officials, but only from 8pm in the evening and there was a restricted menu and no alcohol was served. We were not allowed out of the hotel other

than to walk the 200m to the buses which would transport us to the arena. This all sounds a bit difficult, but we knew the rules were in place for our safety and so it made things easier to comply with.



We were taken to get our uniforms on day 2 and on to the arena to familiarise ourselves with the layout, the rules and restrictions concerning the event. Security was tight throughout every area and we could not stray from the designated path. Once in the arena we were only allowed to be within our allotted area and the field of play.



The badminton event started on Saturday 24th July. We had to catch the 6.50 bus from the hotel to the arena. At our briefing, it was explained that we would be in 16 teams of 5 people, named A-P. A and B would form the first team to go on court one, C and D would then alternate with A and B. Court 2 would have E, F, G, H, Court 3 would have I, J, K, L. The last teams M, N, O, P would have the session off.

As the first session got underway, the excitement of being back on court officiating after such a long time away was daunting but, for each of us, it soon became like old times and a very enjoyable experience. IRS was available on all courts and the percentage correct calls was around 87%, an extremely worthy average.

The days passed quickly and the Japanese Line Judges made us very welcome, over the time, most presented us with little tokens, some were pin badges or magnets, some sweets and biscuits, handkerchiefs, fans and other gifts. Language barriers were obvious, but not a problem - we used our phones to translate and had many a laugh when things got a little 'mixed up' in translation!!



On the final day of competition, the International Line Judges were placed on Gold Medal matches. I was lucky enough to officiate the Ladies Doubles final and the Men's Singles final. Although there were very few spectators in the hall, the emotion from the players when the games ended was electric and made the occasion very special.

We had to leave Tokyo the next day and return home. So, sitting, writing this back at home, I know I would love to visit Japan again and meet up with the new Japanese friends I have made. Visit the places I'd planned to visit and see the 'real' Japan. There will hopefully be a time in the not-too-distant future when Covid will be a thing of the past and we can enjoy the freedoms we had before.

Until that time.....Sayonara...(goodbye)

