



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 begun 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 walking every day and have made real changes to my nutrition.'

He concluded,

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

