

# Referee Sherlock hopes to be invisible

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Commonwealth Games referee Stuart Sherlock

Stuart Sherlock has a crucial role to play at the Commonwealth Games – but is hoping no one will notice him.

As referee for the table tennis tournament at Glasgow 2014, he will be responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the schedule and dealing with any disputes which arise during play.

And he would be delighted if his role was largely invisible to spectators and TV viewers.

“The best thing you can say is that you don’t notice the referee,” said Stuart. “I hope that my decisions are few and almost invisible.”

Not that he would shy away from taking any necessary action. As one of only nine members of the worldwide Advanced Referee Group, he can draw on the experience of having been both chief and deputy referee at world and European championships and deputy at previous Commonwealth Games and the London 2012 Olympics.

“I think I read the tournament reasonably well, which helps,” said Stuart, whose professional background is in senior management in the chemical industry.

“It’s not about firefighting, it’s about seeing things as they start to brew and being in a position to nip it in the bud.

“A lot of it is about having empathy with players and coaches. The game is about the players but it is played to rules and regulations, so we have to make sure the players stay within those rules and the coaches do not go too far.

“I’m used to dealing with people on a day by day basis and I believe I have the ability to listen to people and sort the wheat from the chaff and hopefully make the right decision.

“I like to think I’m reasonably good at the job but I guess you are only as good as your last decision.”

The key relationship for Stuart is probably with the coaches more so than the players, and he added: “I believe they have got a job to do, and that’s to do their best for their country – and if they don’t, they get fired. My job is to make sure they don’t step over the line.

“I’ve got a good working relationship and empathy with them, but in the end they can’t win and most are clever enough to know when to stop. They aren’t going to be doing their players any good if they are sent to the far corner of the room.

“They have to walk a line. That’s their job and it doesn’t bother me. I don’t think there’s any point taking offence at anything that’s said.

“You have to be realistic and allow the game to progress but intervene when you have to, but you’re not there to be the centre of attention.”

Stuart will be assisted by three deputy referees – Dave Delpratt of Australia, Jonathan Whitaker of Scotland and Singapore’s Joseph Lau – and technical delegate Graeme Ireland of Australia.

The officials will have a busy time, particularly in the early qualifying rounds.

Stuart said: “We have got a much larger entry than we expected. The first two days in the team and individual events are going to be very, very busy. We will be solid all day.

“Scotland are putting a lot of effort into the Games across all the sports. It’s being run very professionally.

“From my point of view, if the matches have progressed serenely to the end without incidents and on time with the schedule, that will be a successful tournament.”

**By Paul Stimpson (July 14th, 2014)**

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