

# Harry and Gurmit's Special experience in LA

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International Umpire Harmesh 'Harry' Jutle recently travelled to officiate the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles.

Harry received £100 from Table Tennis England's Tom Blunn Fund to help with his travel expenses.

**Here, Harry describes his experiences at the event, where the GB players were among the medals.**

I met Michael Mears whilst umpiring in Luxembourg. Somehow the fact that Alan Thomas and I had umpired at the UK Special Olympics 2013 in Bath came up and this prompted Michael to invite us to the above event, especially when it was described that this was for people with special needs, so umpiring this would be very different. Michael said he is the referee for the event and welcomes our experience. I said I would only be interested if my wife, Gurmit could go.

Alan did not choose to go, but I set about what was needed to make this a reality, and had to do a lot of preparatory work, including getting Gurmit to qualify as a Local Umpire, in order to qualify as an Official to get accommodation. She did not actually expect to umpire, only be there as a general helper.

We flew out of Heathrow on Thursday July 23, landing at Los Angeles just before midnight, after a connection flight at Philadelphia. We attended the dinner for the Officials at Mount Saint Mary's University, which would also be our accommodation from Monday.

On Saturday we attended the Opening ceremony in the evening, for which we had bought tickets. It was an exciting and colourful event with a list of guests including Michelle Obama, Stevie Wonder, Avril Levigne and Nicole Scherzinger. The next day we used VIP tours to show us around LA.

On Monday we made our way to our official accommodation on top of a mountain where we'd had the official dinner Friday evening. Here we collected our uniform of two purple shirts, a cap and a waist-pouch each and keys for our room, which was student accommodation with two single beds, two desks and two wardrobes. The wash facilities was to be shared with next door. Food was nice here, with cold drinks available freely from chilled cabinets set outside in the yard.

On Tuesday, after breakfast we caught the half-past seven bus to the LA Convention Centre, this being the venue for some of the sports including table tennis. I wore my International Uniform and found that the referee and Michael also had theirs on, but everyone else wore the purple shirts. At the end of the day Michael asked me to wear the purple shirt for rest of the event.

The referee gave his briefing, and the deputies added their bits. There were 57 umpires and for 27 of them this was their first umpiring event. We were split into teams of three to practise and left to do whatever we wanted. Gurmit and I went shopping and returned to the venue later to catch the bus back to our rooms.

On Wednesday I was paired with Hiroshi and Gurmit with Reiko (International Umpire). Reiko was very good with Gurmit and helped her to gain confidence as an Assistant Umpire. I mentored Hiroshi in the singles matches.

Thursday was similar with conclusion of the singles events to late afternoon. In the evening it was fun night with athletes paired with celebrities, playing doubles on 20 tables. Most of the Junior umpires were rested for this event including Gurmit. I was one of the tables nearest to the crowd. As it was a fun event the rules were very relaxed as some of the celebrities did not know how to play. All the participants were given medals at the end.



Gurmit and Harry Jutle with, GB medal-winners, from left, Simon Richardson, Emma Hunt, Jessica Bromley and Simon Green

On Friday Gurmit and I were paired to score doubles for the remaining two days. After the first group matches finished we were free and heard the presentation of medals would be soon and made our way there. The girls' group matches for medals had been scored by us yesterday and we watched with pride as English girls Emma Hunt and Jessica Bromley were presented with the silver and gold medals respectively. We managed to have our photographs with the English team. Overall, Simon Green and Simon Richardson won golds in some of the men's singles classes, the girls together also won a silver in the doubles. After the ceremony we returned to score more doubles.

On Saturday we continued umpiring the doubles to their conclusion. At the end we even managed to swap a couple of shirts with other volunteers for different colours. On Sunday morning we checked out and had bit of a holiday, visiting San Francisco before returning to the UK. Gurmit has enjoyed the experience and now will go for the County Umpire qualification.

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