



Sherlock in his element as Rio referee

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Olympic table tennis referee Stuart Sherlock is ready for a once-in-a-lifetime experience – for the second time.

Stuart will fly out to Rio at the end of this month in time for the draw on August 3, before the competition begins on the 6th.

It will be a second taste of the Olympics for the 62-year-old from Blackpool, who was deputy referee in London – he was not eligible for the top job in 2012 because it was a home Games for him.

He has already been to Rio for the test event last November, plus a couple of trips to help with training other officials for the Games.

He said: “It’s a once-in-a-lifetime experience but I’ve been lucky this is my second one, having been in London.

“I’m looking forward to it. I know quite a lot of the people as I’ve been working with the Brazil group since 2010.

“I was doing training with Maria Ferreira, one of their umpires who was a deputy referee in London, and I went out to Brazil to work with her and help in general with their organisation.

“It was about being London-ready for Maria and then Rio-ready for them all. Part of their team came to London to gain experience, they’ve run several Brazilian Opens and the test event – it’s been steps along the road and they’ve come on in leaps and bounds in the last six years.

“From a table tennis point of view, they’ve got it pretty well sorted.”

The venue will feature an eye-catching green floor and Stuart added: “It’s the first time to my knowledge that it’s ever been used. The whole colour scheme is quite spectacular – but the Olympics are spectacular.”

Stuart will have four deputies from Japan, Costa Rica, Australia and the USA, plus a team of 26 umpires in Rio.

Great Britain’s Richard Scruton is one of two technical delegates on the team of officials.

Unlike at the Paralympics, the officials will not stay in the athletes' village – it is not logistically possible due to the sheer number of athletes who will be in Rio.

And while Stuart knows a good number of the umpires from around the world who will be in Rio, he will also be working with some of them for the first time.

He says working with old friends and making new ones from around the world is one of the aspects of the Games he is most looking forward to.

He said: "I always like meeting up with people I've worked with in the past and the chance to meet a lot of new people.

"There are a lot of people in the list of umpires who I've never worked with. That will be interesting and potentially challenging, but they are all there because they are good at what they do, so that gives you confidence."

While he will be ready to deal with any controversies which arise, a quiet Games is high on the wish-list – along with success for Team GB.

"Hopefully nothing (untoward) will happen," he said. "The best matches in any sport are the ones where the players play and the officials keep everything moving.

"I just hope it's a memorable event for everybody.

"Obviously I would like to see Team GB come back with a hatful of medals. Whether or not there's a possibility of a table tennis medal, you never know – it would be absolutely fantastic.

"They would have to play at the top of their game but anything is possible. I'd like to be in a position where I wouldn't be allowed to referee a medal match!"

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