Ed's Hong Kong Diary

Day 1

Safely arrived after a 12-hour flight, no sleep and arrived at 8am local time, so a long day ahead 😵‍💫

Made the trip over to our host club Kowloon Cricket Club for a practice - this place is incredible, it's a club with Cricket and Bowls as its main footprint, but also has swimming, sauna, jacuzzi, tennis, padel, hockey, tennis and more. Places like this have to charge a small fortune to members as relatively large expanses of land out here are worth an incredible amount of money. I've been told they have 2,700 members currently - in order to join you have to pay $HK1.4 million (about £140,000) just to become a member (for life), as well as a fairly significant monthly fee and you also have to spend a certain amount on the bar and restaurant each month, so it's fair to say it's a fairly elite Club! They have also recently paid the government $HK160 million (£16million!!) to maintain the right to be a private members club and not open up to the wider public. That all being said, it's a non-profit Club just like ours is. Kinda crazy numbers.

Not sure what the members make of us turning up, but the Club is hosting us for a welcome dinner tomorrow night and also taking us to the Happy Valley races next week.

Heading out for a roll up shortly, the manager has told us they have had a very difficult summer with the wettest for many years, having to periodically close 1 of their 2 greens from time to time - I told him how similar that story was but for us (of course) due to zero rain.

Sightseeing/tourist bits this afternoon.

I'll attempt to do a detailed update each day, but I make no promises!

Day 2



Another practice day today, not much to report on that front but I've attached a few pictures of the greens. The weed-looking stuff is on 2 of the greens and it honestly doesn't play as bad as it looks, but it's tricky and each rink varies to the next, so playing with consistency is going to be a real battle throughout. The third has grass that is a little bit more like what we play on, but the lines are so hard to find.

Back off to our host Club Kowloon Cricket Club tonight for a meal - interestingly their green, in my opinion, is far and away the best we have played on but the tournament is not being held there this year (it cycles around a number of clubs each year).

Finally, won’t go into details, but the hotel is pretty awful!

Day 3 - Singles

Spent the whole day starting the Singles competition at the Indian Recreational Club - arguably the worst of the 3 greens, according to most others here, but I didn't mind it and of course, considering the club's name, I enjoyed the lunch!

I played 3 local players, 2 of whom are from the Hong Kong Youth Academy.



First game ended up 9-3 8-3, played well enough without being massively tested.

Second game was a much different story, I felt like I probably outplayed my opponent in the first set but every running bowl of his not only hit the target (fair play!) but got the perfect result as well. I did still lay a set lie with 1 bowl to come but he trailed the jack with 2 yards of weight for 1. 0-3 in second set I had a cathartic moan with our Manager Gerry, managed to nick a shot and throw the jack full length, proceeded to play it very well and reel off 8 straight ends to win 4-5 8-3 5-0.

Third game the youngster against me was playing short jacks very well, 4-4 in first set, got 1 and threw it full length once again and walked it from there - 10-4 15-2.

Perhaps it was just a coincidence, but I'm a bit surprised how poorly all 3 played the long jacks, they clearly all wanted to play short all game, maybe it's a common thing here, something to keep monitoring going forwards.

So, into the Quarter-Final in the morning, 3 more wins required!

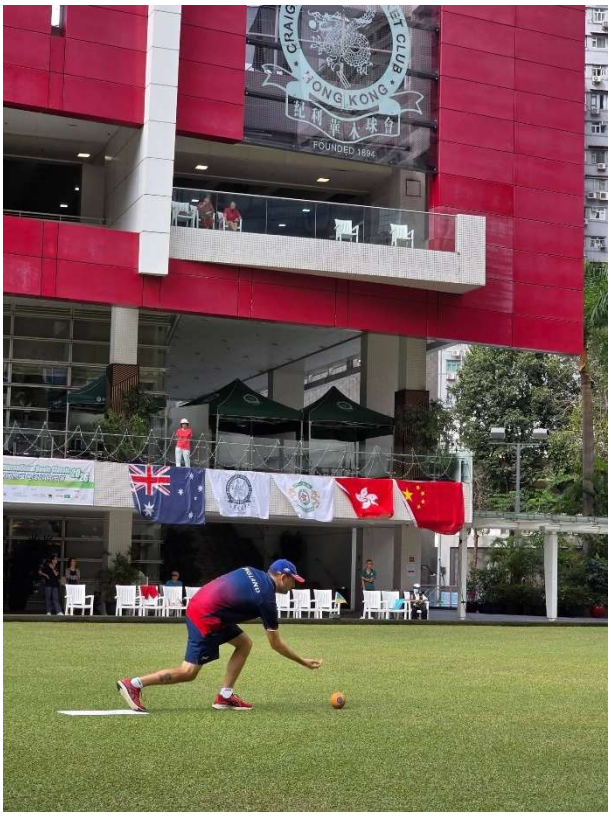
Off out for dinner and strictly NO drink tonight.

Day 4 - Singles Finals Day

Sadly, I bring you disappointing news….

In the Quarter Final I played Gary Prunty from Scotland (last year's HK Classic Pairs champion) - started great and played the best I have played since getting here, winning first set 9-3. It certainly made my life easier to find a hand that I could finish centre with relative consistency. Second set was close to begin with, but I got a bit of bad fortune to drop a 3 (he also played a

great end it must be said), he went short and played very well. The set was close in the main but the scoreline ended up very one sided as I was chasing shots unsuccessfully (3-10). Fortunately, I buckled down and played some really good stuff in the tie breaker, taking it 4-1.



On to the Semi Final against Dylan Fisher from Australia. You know that any game against an Aussie will be tough as they have some great players, but on this occasion, I barely managed to give him a game. It wasn't for lack of trying, but I simply could not find the rink at all for the entire match. Tried different hands, different lengths, different mat placements, nothing worked. It was incredibly frustrating and disappointing not to give a good account of myself. It was certainly a lonely place in front of a big crowd, losing 6-8 2-10.

The final will be live streamed on the Hong Kong Bowls Association YouTube and/or Facebook page if anyone fancies a watch. I believe it is 3:15 local, so 7:15am back home.

It's nice that losing Semi-Finalists do get a bronze medal and not have to play another game for it, which is the last thing you want to do after losing a big game. It is bittersweet of course and as I got a bronze at my last major international Singles competition I was really hoping for more, next time hopefully!

On to the Pairs starting tomorrow - 11 group stage games, I will be tired by the end of this trip!

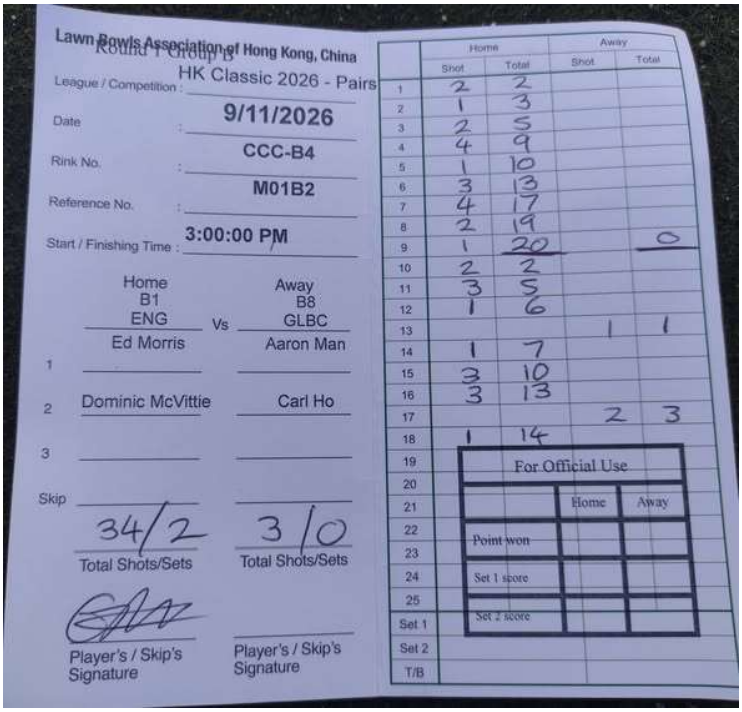
Day 5 - Pairs

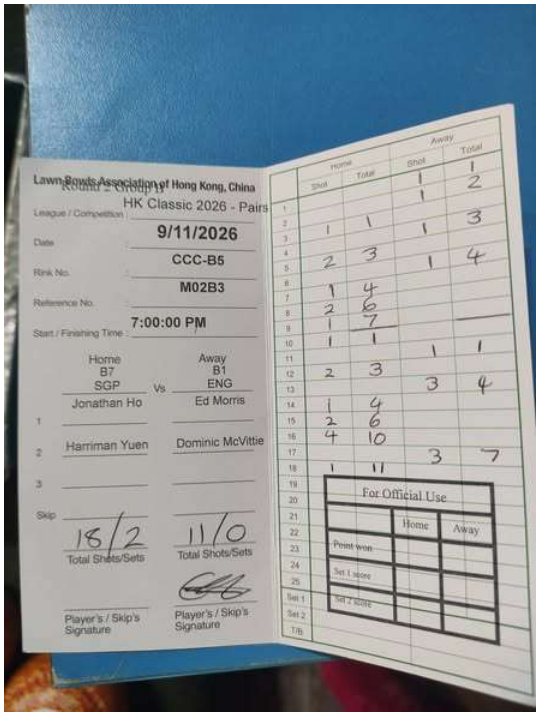
We kicked off the Pairs today at Craigengower Cricket Club.

First game against a local pair, played a pretty much perfect match from start to finish (20-0 14-3) - let's hope they can now take some points off others!

Second game vs Singapore was a much different proposition. They came into the game having comfortably beaten Ireland, who will be contending come the end of the comp. I believe we marginally had the better of the first set, but couldn't land the killer blow, we did hold 5 early but he drew shot with his last, he also bowled some crucial last bowls and we narrowly missed etc. Second set they improved and we didn't - but I think in a very close match we were fairly unlucky to get nothing out of it (4-7 7-11). This will happen in this format, but in a long group stage hopefully it will work in our favour on occasion too.

Probably our toughest day ahead of us tomorrow at the Indian Recreational Club, with games against South Africa, Scotland and Hong Kong national side.





Day 6 - Pairs Day 2

Found ourselves today back at the Indian Recreational Club, which was my successful venue from the Singles early rounds and it proved a good hunting ground once again, for what might have been our toughest day on paper.

Game 1 v South Africa - SA came into the game top of the early table after two 6-0 wins yesterday. We had a nip and tuck game, in which both sets went to the final end, but we played the crucial bowls when needed to pick up an important win, 8-7 8-5. I did comment to Dom after this was a reversal from the Singapore game where we felt we could have got something from it; South Africa probably felt exactly the same about this!

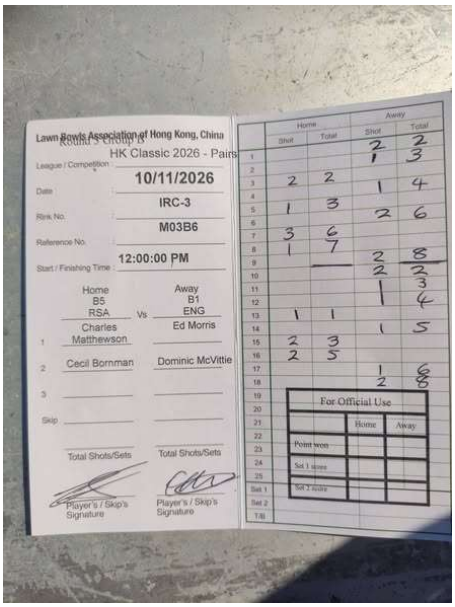
Game 2 v Scotland - After beating the previous table toppers we now faced the new ones. This pair is also the reigning champions who unbelievably won all 11 group games last year and of course all the knockout games too – apparently, they had won 19 consecutive games in the tournament all told. Fortunately, we managed to halt that incredible run, the game was nip and tuck throughout, similar to the SA match, but we played some big bowls when needed again to win 9-5 7-4.

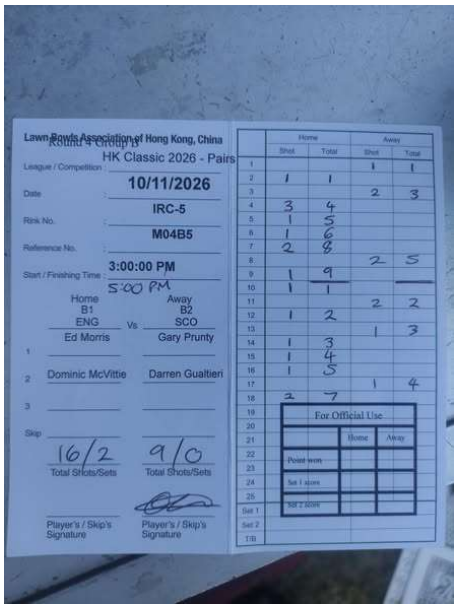
These were 2 vitally important wins for our overall run in the group stages, but you cannot relax for a minute in this format…

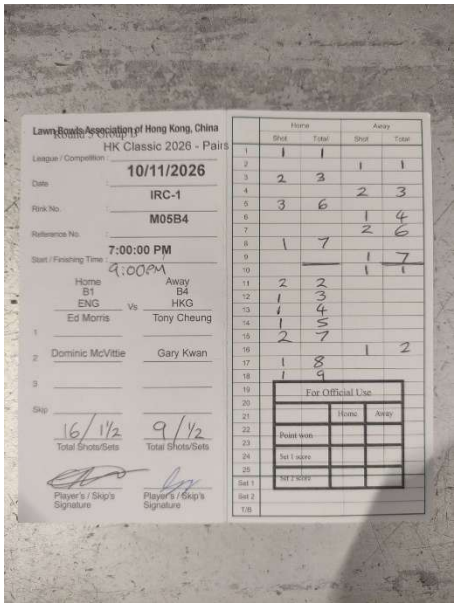
Game 3 v Hong Kong National Side - after being in relative control in the first set, we went into the last end only 1 up, we had a back and front toucher but skip burned it with his last when it didn't look likely, then on the replayed end I was 2 down and hit it, made 1 down but he had 4ft to win the set and fortunately he was short (easily done I can assure you!) So frustrating on

one hand to tie the set but ultimately could easily have lost it. Grinded out the second set very professionally, to ultimately triumph 7-7 9-2.

17 points out of a potential 18 on a very hard day was an incredibly good return; we are well positioned in 2nd place hitting the rest day tomorrow.







Day 7 - Rest Day



A much-needed day off bowls!

Due to my good run in the Singles competition, I had missed out on all the touristy bits until now, so a nice chance to switch off and chill out.

I took a trip to Tian Tan Buddha on Lantau Island with my teammates. As this is located at the top of a mountain (or at least a very large hill which is very difficult to traverse), we took the Ngong Ping 360 cable car – as someone who struggles a bit with vertigo and dizziness on tall buildings, I was unsure how I would find this but fortunately it was very enjoyable, even with the glass bottomed floor.



The Buddha, Po Lin Monastery and Wisdom Path have sent us on the path to bowls enlightenment, a great trip.

In the evening, we were invited to the Happy Valley Races by our host club KCC. I had been previously but it's still tough to believe how incredible the place is, with a crazy view of wall-to-wall skyscrapers as a backdrop to the racing. Naturally, I lost every race, which was entirely expected, but a super night out in any case.

Day 8 - Pairs games 6 & 7

Today we faced off against 2 teams looking to make a move in the standings.

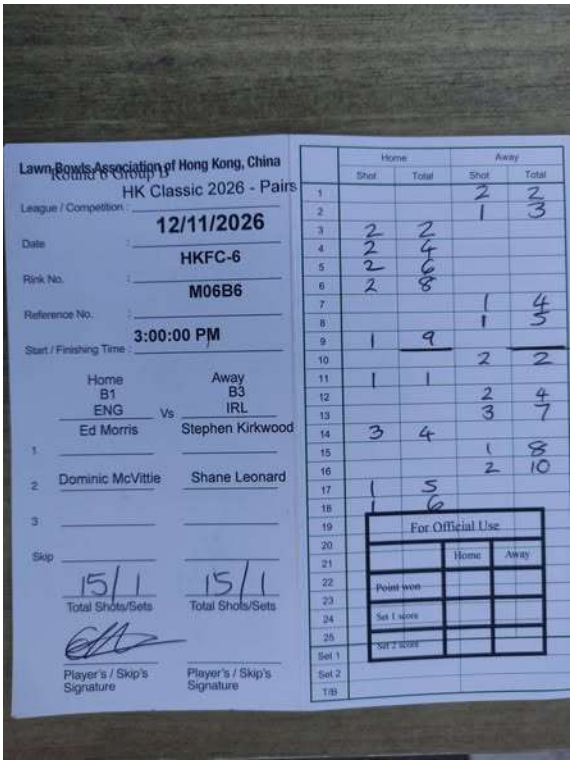
Firstly, against Ireland, who often play very well against us, so we knew it would be challenging. We were playing at Hong Kong Football Club which is easily the most like our conditions back home. We had the measure of the first set, but Ireland roared back to lead overall with a couple of ends to play. Managed to play 2 very solid ends and held a great match lie, until the Ireland skip played a very good one to get 2nd - a tie 9-5 6-10 (3pts each).

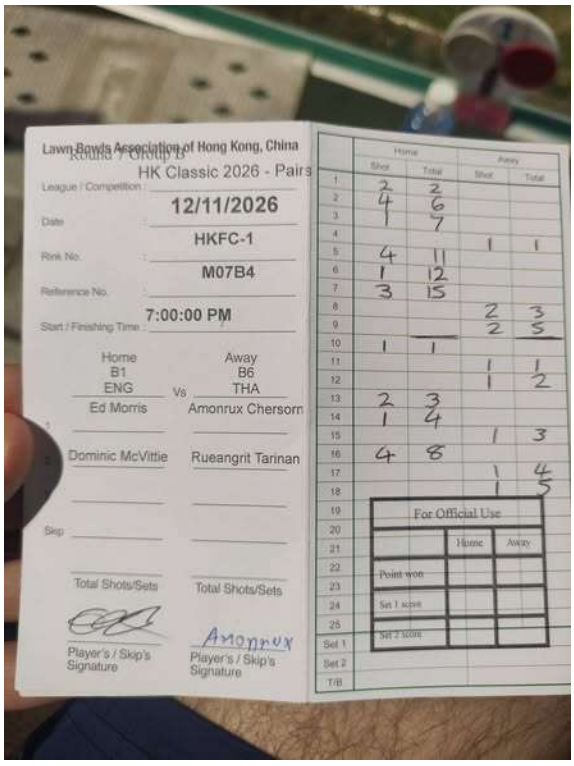
In the evening we played Thailand. They were at the bottom of the table at this point but honestly, they played very well in patches in this match. Fortunately, this was one of my better games, I think as it was in the evening and the moisture slowed things up and allowed me to play a more 'English' kind of game, reaching through heads rather than having to smash them. That being said, on the last end of the match we had a 4-shot lead but their skip hit the head perfectly and held 5 before my last, fortunately I bowled a very good one to collect maximum points, 15-5 8-5.

This leaves us nicely placed at the top of the table, but things can change quickly in this event and we won't rest easy just yet.

This morning I explored a bit of Wan Chai and also used the extensive facilities here at HKFC, making the most of my temporary membership! Similar to KCC, the cost of such a membership would cause most English bowlers to faint, so it's well worth getting full value from the place!

Another early night for myself, the days are hot and long and I am not sleeping entirely peacefully at night, so I must give myself the best possible opportunity to succeed by being careful and listening to my body – another day of no beer!





Day 9 - Pairs games 8-10

Just finished a VERY long day of bowls at Craigengower Cricket Club.

We went into the day in great position, being top of the table and also having played all the other countries, local teams only from here...

Game 8 - We started against Hong Kong Cricket Club and swept through the first set, before taking a far closer second set on the last bowl; 14-3 7-5.

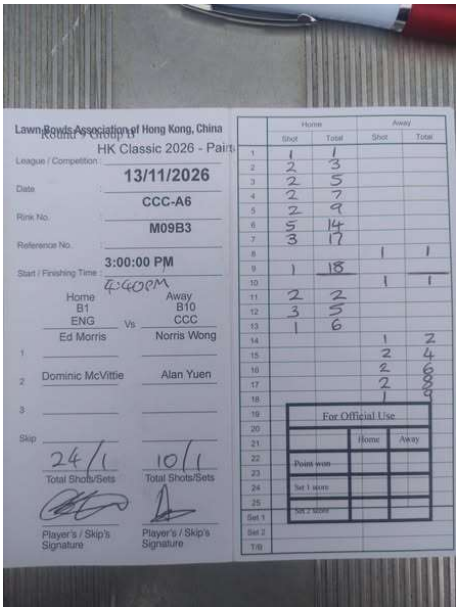
Game 9 - After stretching our lead at the top of the table thanks to other results, we took on CCC on their own green, 2 youngsters who were in decent position to qualify, until being 5 up against Ireland with 2 ends to play in their 8th game when they dropped 6 shots in those 2 ends to lose – this seemed to affect them quite badly against us. We controlled the game thoroughly until we didn't🤦 but at this stage, a 4-2 points win against them was more than enough - 18-1 6-9.

Game 10 - At this point, qualification to tomorrow's Quarter Finals was basically assured, but you do also play for seeding and it looks a good idea to avoid the top 2 in the other group (NZ and Australia, who are bulldozing their way through the group). So, a win was still important and we got it, in the first downpour since we've been here 🌧️ 14-4 17-5 against Hong Kong Football Club.

Therefore we remain at the top, but not by much, South Africa had a perfect day and remain close, top 2 is guaranteed though and whilst top of the group will be nice, 2nd would also be fine.

I have been struggling all day with feeling sick and just generally exhausted, so early to bed for me, 3 more games (hopefully) tomorrow.







Day 10 - Pairs Rd 11 & KOs

As mentioned, we came into today having already qualified but we were playing for top seeding in our final group game against Club de Recario. Controlled the first set but the

opposition skipper “turned into prime Alex Marshall second set” as Dom eloquently put it, not much we could do but take a 4-2 win. SA took a 6-0 so they pipped us on set difference to top the group, slightly frustrating as we would have liked to have won it and were top for some time, but ultimately 2nd is also great.

That meant a Quarter Final against Group A's third place finishers Wales – Dan Salmon and Carl Wood.

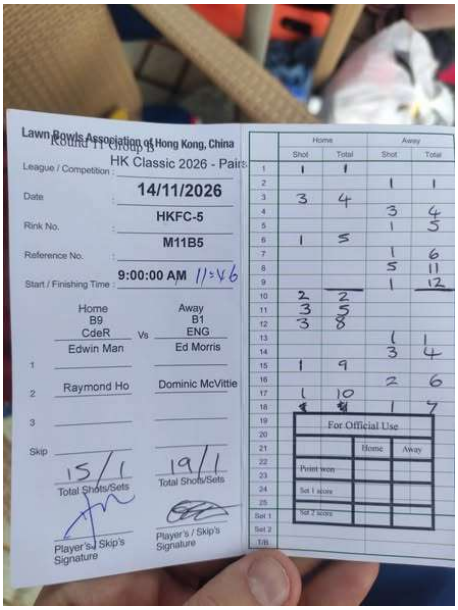
As expected, it was a scrap throughout – I played a crucial last bowl of the first set to bring a count of 2 down to only 1 to tie the set. Of course, the key end in the 2nd set was the 5, as you can see from the scorecard. Dom playing a great end and the jack ended up getting flicked out off centre, I chose to draw under/across the head to avoid the outer parts of the rink, Carl did not follow me and perhaps this decision was the only difference in the whole match.

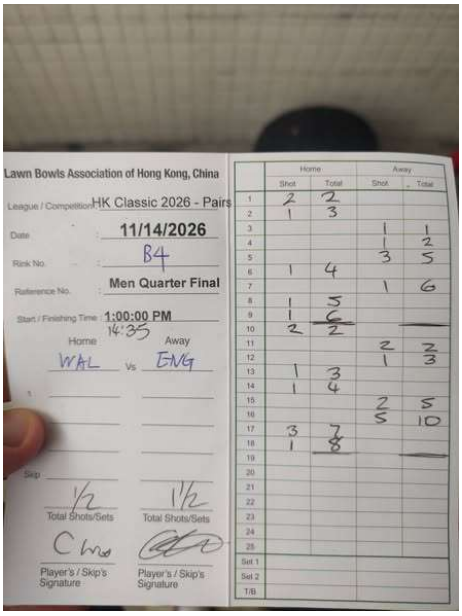
That meant another medal guaranteed but I was certainly looking to upgrade the bronze from the Singles.

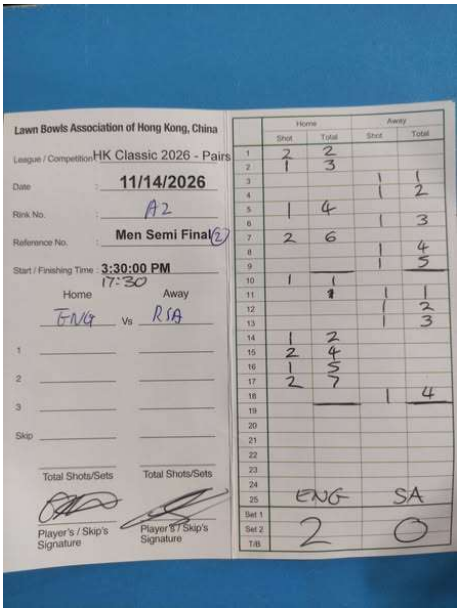
We faced South Africa in the Semi Final. We had previously beaten them in the group stage but the game was incredibly tight and they came into the Semi on a ridiculous winning streak – I believe winning every set in their last 6 matches or something like that.

I am delighted to report a straight sets win and we're in the final 🥳 obviously a scorecard doesn't always reflect the game or tell the story of it and it was another very close affair, the margins at this level always seem razor thin.

I believe the final is at 6am your time vs New Zealand, though don't quote me on that, and it will be live streamed on the Hong Kong Bowling Association Facebook and YouTube pages 📹





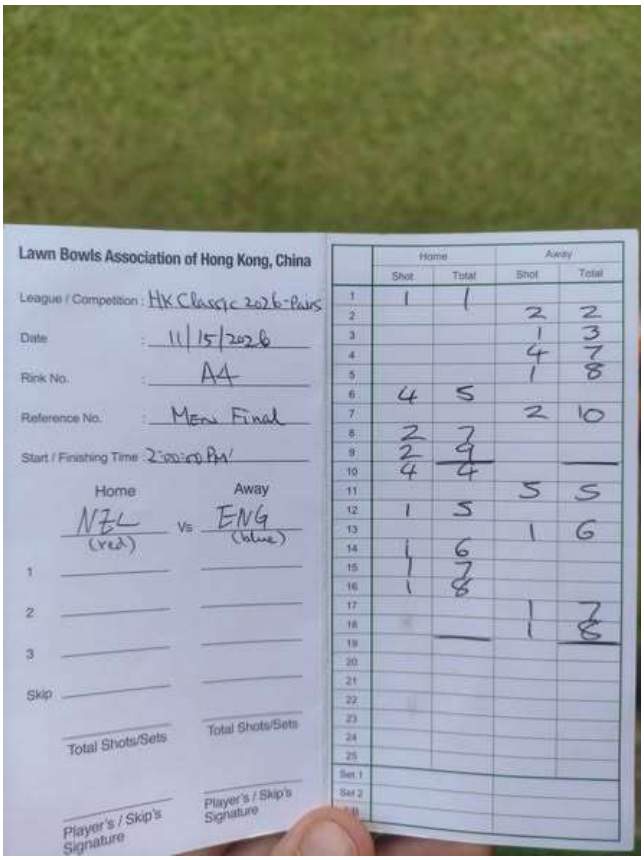


Day 11 - Classic Pairs Final

Well, what really needs to be said?!

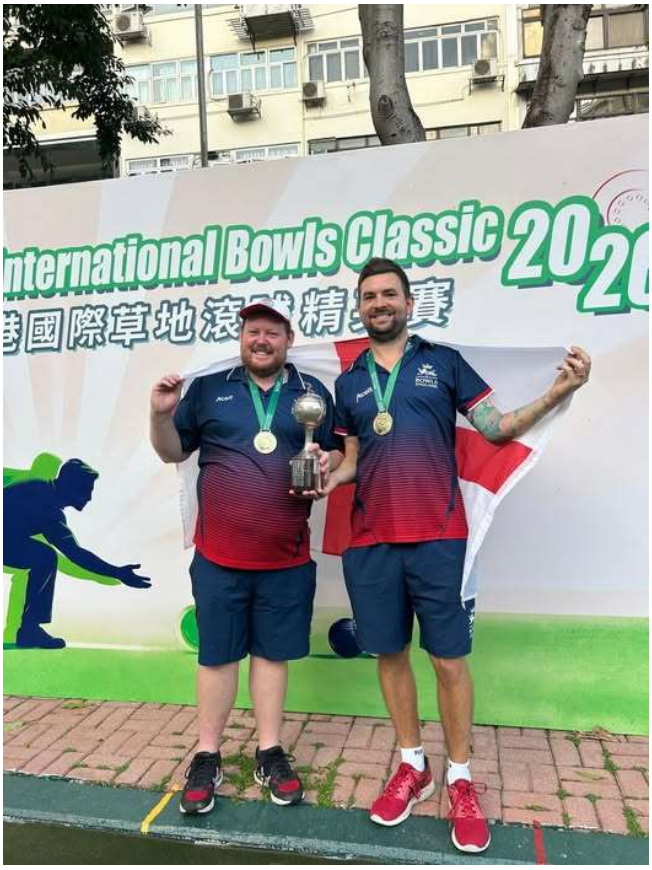
A fitting final that ebbed and flowed throughout, so unbelievably glad to come out on the winning side on this occasion.

With the video of the match being available I won't go into too much detail regarding what happened during it, but I do think it is worth mentioning it was the most comfortable I have felt the whole way through, I dropped on the weight straight away and found the hands all very playable. This meant I could enjoy the match, which I did throughout and played some big bowls when needed. I think Dom felt a little disappointed by his own performance but it says a lot about him that dropped in the winning shot on the last end with his very first bowl on a totally new length. I was very relieved to see Aiden miss with his last drive as he is certainly very accurate and I didn't fancy much playing another end!



Thank you for everyone's support from back home, hopefully you've enjoyed the updates.

Looking forward to the presentation dinner tonight and to finally have a drink!





Summary

Coming home with a Gold and a Bronze was more than I could have ever anticipated and needless to say I am truly delighted with how everything went!

I ended up playing 19 games, only one short of the maximum possible, and only played really poorly in 1 of them, so I was very happy with my consistency on tricky greens. I know plenty moan about the greens in Hong Kong, but they equate to a difficult lumpy green in England in my opinion and that is right in my wheelhouse. Perhaps that is why I had such success – truly an outdoor chucker!

I am very cognizant that these large-scale outdoor World events don't come around very often and I will only have a certain number of cracks at more of them, therefore I am grateful to be able to now say I have a Gold from one of them. I'm not sure I have many more goals in bowls to achieve, but this was certainly one of them.

Hopefully this will stand me in good stead for the upcoming 2027 World Championships team selection, but this is now out of my control. I would dearly love to be involved with a 'home' championships, on greens I know well – hopefully we will hear the announcement soon, but in the meantime, it is back to Indoor season hibernation for me!

I hope this diary was of some interest, if you made it this far then thank you for reading!

