

Baseball – Thomas Haywood umpires tournaments in China

Edinburgh umpire, Thomas Haywood, has just returned to Scotland after representing his country as an umpire at the U18 International Rubber Baseball Organisation (IRBO) in Xi'an (pronounced "See-Aan), China. In 2018 Thomas also umpired in Taipei, Taiwan

Here Thomas tells us about his trip :

"Once the tournament was confirmed there was a lot of visa application bureaucracy to get round. In two months flat the hosts had built two full size baseball fields, side-by-side using astro-turf (on a concrete base) with full sized backstops, cut-outs and foul poles. Prior to that it had been farmland! There had been a few construction short-cuts taken (e.g. no drainage in one of the cut-outs on one field). We arrived at the field on the day before to find a few finishing touches still being completed."



At the start of the tournament there were two teams from China, Korea U18 national team, Taipei U18 National team, Hong Kong and Singapore. The umpires came from USA (2 former Minor League umpires, Luke and Brian) Singapore (Mathew), Chinese Taipei (Brian), Finland (Tony) Netherlands (Jules), Malaysia (Winson and Aman) and Thomas from Scotland. These umpires were to be supplemented by some local Chinese umpires but little was known about them at the time.

Thomas continued : “The format of the tournament allowed for play on both fields, 2 or 3 games (2 hours max each) a day using a 4 umpire system though this was often extended to 6 umpire system for games because the Chinese umpires were keen to participate.

“One umpire that shone above the other of his Chinese colleagues, was Max. Apparently he had learned how to umpire from reading and by viewing videos on the internet. His English was very good and he was extremely keen to learn from us and to umpire. The organisers were soon persuaded to let him umpire with us despite the fact that he was there to video some of the games. (Umpiring is a brotherhood, we look after our own!!!)



“The weather – a very British talking point. During the day it was generally a constant 33C and 23C at night, however, on the second day of the tournament, the whole day was lost to rain. Under normal western standards, you would shunt the games around to make up time and everyone would be happy. The Chinese answer was to disqualify one of the Chinese teams.

“To say that that team was annoyed, was putting it mildly! It’s a cultural thing. In China, often things are dictated to you, you don’t have an option. The shame was the second Chinese team was actually quite good. As a consolation they were allowed to play against the Chinese Taipei team which turned out to be a very good exhibition game.



“The strong teams in the tournament turned out to be Korea, Taipei and China (1st team).

“Singapore and Hong Kong sadly did not have the pitching or the quality of fielding needed. Games against these last two teams tended to be lop-sided.

“Rubber baseballs are hollow like a tennis ball. They do not give a crack when hit by a bat. It is more like a dull “boof” sound and they do not fly as far. Often when they are hit by the bat, they can really spin so the umpires have to trust the players’ reactions (hit by pitch etc) and have to wait until the ball has spun in the direction it wants to go. In all other aspects the tournament was played to OBR rules.

“The tournament was won by Chinese Taipei in a close fought game against China 1st team. Korea came third. It was a really good experience. The umpires certainly did take the chance to explore the city of Xi’an – where they found some really good shopping bargains.

“The Chinese then hosted the National U18 national Championships at the new fields just two days after the tournament for a 10 day tournament!



Photos from the Tournament can be seen on [Thomas' Website](#) and Photos from the Terracotta Warriors / Xi'an [can be seen here](#)