

## **Officiating Adventures in Beijing** by Ross Capill

Along with fellow club members Marguerite Christophers and Cathi Davey I was lucky enough to be part of the Technical Official team for the Beijing World Champs.

Marguerite and I were on the same flights and after a bit of a panic making our connection in Auckland we arrived safely on the Sunday before the race. We were among the early arrivals and so there was a bit of confusion getting the transfers underway and checking in to our hotel but thanks to the volunteer translators we got ourselves settled in.

As ITU's Head of Paratri Classification, Marguerite was pretty much straight down to work, facilitating a classifiers course and then classifying athletes. I had Monday off so decided to head up to the Great Wall. The hotel advised me that the easiest way was just to take a cab which cost the equivalent of only \$25. I was told that I didn't need to get the cab to wait as I would be able to find another cab to come back without difficulty. So after a couple of hours clambering up and down steps (I can tell you the wall is very steep in places) I was ready to fall into a cab and head back for a shower and a well-earned beer.

Ummm no! The few cabs there were didn't want to take me back to Chiangping. So, following the advice of the information centre I caught the 919 bus which (apparently) would go through Chiangping and I could get off and get a cab back to the hotel from there.

Turns out there must be more than one "919" bus - the one I got didn't stop till we were in downtown Beijing - 35km from where we were staying. After more unsuccessful attempts to get a cab (none of them wanted to go to Chiangping in the rush hour) I was able to find where to get a bus and got back to the hotel a bit frazzled and having seen a bit more of Beijing than I planned on. I was very ready for that beer by then.

From Tuesday onwards it was down to business with preparations for the aquathlon and everything rolled from there. I was assigned as the Chief Transition Official for the elite transition, Cathi was on the run course and Marguerite was assistant lap auditor when not tied up with a number of paratri-related duties. I had only one other international official assigned permanently to my team but up to five or six local officials, two of whom spoke quite good English and were able to translate to the rest of the team.

The venue itself is pretty amazing when you see the scale of it. I've never seen so much blue carpet (actually it's a kind of rubberised matting - a bit like a running track). It's just a shame that there were not more spectators in the stands - I went up the top of the stands while the athletes were out on the bike in one of the races and the view was fantastic. Unfortunately the venue wasn't the easiest place to get in to - because of road closures you had to walk about 2km to get in and so I think a lot of the age groupers and supporters chose to watch from out on the course closer to their hotels.

Being in the transition area we had periods where not too much was happening followed by brief periods of intense activity. After the last athlete was off the bike in each race we then had our work cut out for us to get the transition area cleared out and ready to check in the next group of athletes. This was especially true on the Friday when we needed to completely reconfigure the transition ready for the paratriathlon after the U23 race. By the time Sunday came though we were a well-oiled machine.

Even though the run course goes through transition on each lap we were usually so busy setting up for the next race during the run that we couldn't keep track of what was going on. In the U23 race on Friday Tom Davison, Mike Poole and an Irish guy got off the bike with about a minute lead. The next time I looked up there were three Brits (they must be putting something in the water) fighting it out down the finish straight. However it was great to do the same thing again on Saturday to see Michela Neilsen heading for her win.

The junior women's race was not without incident for Cathi. Lucy Hall had led the field out of the water and was still in front on the bike when Cathi came on the radio to report that she had just hit a dog right by where Cathi was positioned out on the course.

We technical officials are of course completely neutral and do not offer support or encouragement while on the field of play. That still didn't prevent a few discrete fist pumps and low-fives among the various kiwi officials when Andrea showed a clean pair of heels to the rest of the field along with a great performance by Kate to cap off a great race for the New Zealand women. Although she finished down the field even Nicki played an important role by not contributing to the chase pack's efforts to catch the leaders during the bike.

On the Sunday morning I worked for a while in the age group transition until it was time to move over to the elite race. I was able to see a few of our club members racing including Sean Kavanagh, Sarah Beable and Ann Bondy. Part of me really wanted to yell out go for it guys but again not the done thing for a TO but I was cheering on the inside guys!

So, overall a great experience. As with other big events I've been to, I reckon the officials work harder than the athletes – after a 10 hour day on the Friday we had 4.00am starts on Saturday and Sunday and finished after 6pm each day, with more work to do in the evenings to prepare for the following day but it is absolutely worth it to be part of a great team of people that all pitch in to make it happen. Language was a bit of a barrier and communication with the local organisers was particularly difficult as it had to be all channelled through interpreters – a bit like playing Chinese whispers (literally) only in two languages. But it all worked out and the best athletes on the day won the medals. Even better that, in two of the races, they were kiwis.