

MY 10 DAYS AS A PURPLE HERO

The Paralympic Games Maker's story



I was a Bus Transport Team Member at the International Broadcasting Centre on the Olympic Park. We were hidden away behind the Riverbank Arena.

Being "on the buses" wasn't glamorous and involved standing around, writing down bus numbers, greeting media folk, mainly photographers with paparazzi style cameras and directing them to the right bus for the venue they were covering e.g. Eton Dorney, Greenwich Park, Excel etc.

The job brought its own rewards though -

Here are some of my memories, musings and ok a bit of name dropping:

Crikey. I can't believe I am getting up at 4am every morning to do this! (I hate getting up this early unless I am going to an airport for a holiday)

First sighting of Rob Walker, Channel Four commentator.

They seem to be bribing us with chocolate! - well Cadbury's are a sponsor or to be more precise the official "treat provider" for London 2012.

A journalist in a wheelchair comes over the zebra crossing. Will she need assistance? Before I have the chance to do anything she has sped by at incredible velocity.

A German TV producer rushes in with an "Emergency". I get ready to mobilise paramedics and possibly call an ambulance. It turns out a guest has got lost on the way to an imminent interview. In media terms though I guess this is an emergency!!

Spotted Adam Hills, Aussie presenter of Channel Four's The Last Leg, late night comedy show which reflected on each day's action at the Paralympics. We were queuing for coffee and I took the opportunity to say I was loving the show. He said thank you very much and gave me a nice smile.

If anyone else bangs on about how much bigger and busier the Olympics were I think I will scream...!

First sighting of Iwan Thomas, silver medallist in 4 X 400m relay at Atlanta Olympics 1996.

Embarrassing moment: I moved along of passengers for my log. Just at that moment a man was taking off his shirt so it looked like I had rushed over to have a gawp!

Clever uniform. The jacket turns into a bag the size of a small pillow.

I am quite enjoying writing down

numbers - I'd better watch out I don't turn into a bus spotter! Some of the drivers have come from all over the country and as far afield as the Orkneys. One is an ex-Gurkha.

Have started playing "Games Maker bingo" at London Bridge each morning - basically seeing if we GMs can fill an entire carriage on the tube to Stratford!

Sainsbury's are offloading tons of brownies on us. They allocated us too many it seems. Yum!

Warwick Davis and family have just come over the zebra crossing. His children are very sweet.

I can't believe this obsession with pin badges.

Second sighting of Rob Walker.

Long story but I ended up going over to the athletes' village one morning with a Korean volunteer who was looking for the Korean team. I delicately asked if she was from the North or South. I didn't get much of an answer. What does the flag look like I asked? It was red and blue with those little black stripey bits i.e. South Korea. Not only did we track down the team but I ended up taking photos

of her and a wheelchair archery champion in a floppy hat wearing her gold and silver medals. At one point during all this an Argentinian parathlete tried to give me his dirty laundry!

Second sighting of Iwan Thomas.

My fellow volunteers are from places like Derby and Pembrokeshire. One guy is staying at the £10 a night LOCOG camp site in Wanstead. Apparently it is excellent.

Very impressed by the army. I feel safe with them around. They are checking all the buses before they come into our depot. We also see them in the canteen. I wonder how the food compares to Camp Bastion.

Another truckload of chocolates arrives.

Sightings of Seb Coe: 3. He is one of the few who was allowed to use a car to get around.

We fell around laughing when a Mexican photographer who didn't really speak English managed to splutter out the word Equestrian and then backed it up with a loud N-E-I-G-HI horse impersonation. I think he was looking for the Greenwich Park bus.

If anyone else inappropriately tags "innit" on to the end of a sentence I think I will scream!

Ade Adepitan came over our zebra crossing and I told him I was enjoying his evening programme with Clare Balding. "Big night tonight" he said in return. It sure was – that night Jonnie Peacock won the 100m gold in spectacular style.

People are actually trading pin badges.

Was returning home when a man apologised to me for cycling on the path rather than the road. I seem to be becoming an authority figure!

A woman with a foreign accent calls out to me "Thank you for your service"

Bus drivers are after my Games Maker pin badges, bits of my uniform and any other London 2012 freebies.

One day a distinguished looking man with a Continental accent asked the way to the Press Centre. I didn't recognise him but he turned out to be sporting legend Johan Cruyff who had come in to discuss the blind football. What a guy.

Heading into Sainsbury's when a teenager shouts out to me "Thank you for supporting England"

Volunteering is a bit like a cross between jury service and fresher's at uni – you meet a massive range of new people very quickly. During the 10 days I worked with anyone from a vicar to a security guard who had won a boxing silver medal for Nigeria at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984.

I seem to be getting an East London tan ☺ I wander through the Olympic Park when my shift is finished. The atmosphere is just amazing. Union jacks everywhere and some dressed mainly in union jack clothing. This is a really special time for London and indeed the whole country. We have really pulled this off.

I will remember and treasure this experience all my life. May the incredible spirit of London 2012 never die.

JACKIE
FISHLEIGH
