



SPORTING MATTERS

BY PETER JACK

IF you watch tennis, cricket or football on television, you will undoubtedly have seen the effects of the technology known as 'Hawkeye'.

In football, did the whole ball cross the goal line? In cricket, would the ball have hit the wicket? And in tennis, was the ball in or out? All of these decisions are now ruled by Hawkeye!

Thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands of pounds, depend on the outcome of these marginal decisions. The referee and the umpire's eye might be good but the technology of Hawkeye is even better!

So what's the connection between these vital decisions and our own wee town of Limavady - particularly as we are not known for our cutting edge technology nor are we situated in Silicon Valley? The answer lies in a young Limavady man, Andrew Simpson, from the Barnailt Road.

Andrew has just been appointed as manager for Hawkeye and is in charge of their entire operations for Australia, New Zealand, Asia and South America.

So how on earth did Andrew get this dream job?

"Good question!" laughs Andrew on a rare day home to the Roe Valley.

"It all started at University at Bath where I was studying Mechanical Engineering. After two years, we had our year out in industry. Bath is known for its involvement with the Formula One Grand Prix racing technology but I saw an ad for Hawkeye and put my name forward. I could have ended up at an engineering works in Bristol but I decided to have a go at the Hawkeye post - as did 300 others! Luckily, I passed the interviews and four of us were taken on to commence our internship.

"After our training, I ended up following the circuit and before I knew it I was in the booth for the Men's Final day in Wimbledon in July 2010. I was really nervous but we have faith in the equipment, in the technology and in ourselves.

"After that hectic year out, I was back at Uni in Bath where I graduated with a 2.1. I was offered a Masters at Uni but decided to try to go full time with Hawkeye. There were more interviews, this time for this job and again I was successful. Of the four of us who were in Hawkeye in our placement year two of us survived and are now on the tour 'full time.'"

MASSIVE CAREER LEAP

Andrew has been with this groundbreaking company (recently bought over by Sony) for five years and recently went for another interview with the Hawkeye board, this time for a massive career leap.

He was once again successful and this young man is now the tennis Operations Manager for all of the major tennis tournaments in Asia and the southern hemisphere.

Not many 25 year olds can say that they are in charge of such a challenging undertaking with so much at stake but Andrew is cool under pressure. I have known him all his life and his calmness and professionalism have obviously impressed Hawkeye. Andrew knows that if all the hard work is done beforehand, then the technology itself in the tournament will work well.

I asked him what a typical day was like, whether it's in New Year for the US Open or Wimbledon, Melbourne or Paris, etc.

He replied: "I arrive at the tournament at 9am. I turn on all the computers, check the cameras and all the connections, check the components and we test them when the players are warming up. One of my colleagues logs the information, another works with the TV producer and the team leader then calibrates the



Scotland's Andy Murray was once a rising star in tennis circles like Limavady's Andrew Simpson. NCL45-15s

A Tale of Two Andys

system and looks after communications as well because in our booth, we have an ITF (International Tennis Federation) official who liaises with us and the umpire. The only time we can relax is at the end of a game or a set!

"Before the first ball is due to be hit I have my security clearance and all the necessary passes and badges to get me through all of the scanners. Our team will have been there for four days before the tournament starts to set up the computers and prepare the vision processing to identify the centre of the spinning ball.

"We have ten cameras on each court and we use all of them to process the information to triangulate the position of the ball.

"Our cameras record at 60 frames a second so when Andy Murray or Novak Djokovic signal that they want to challenge the decision of a line official to the umpire, the umpire sends us a signal and we activate the system to track the last five bounces of the ball.

"We get the umpire to confirm which bounce he or she wants us to check. It's usually the last one so we then hook up our links to the screens in the stadium. All it takes is for one millimetre of the ball to hit the outside of the white line and the ball will be ruled to be in. If it is one millimetre out, it's out!

"The players are allowed three incorrect challenges per set. It is very rare that both players use up all of their challenges so we could then relax but I can't remember the last time that happened!

"Every new set, they have three more challenges each, ie, six. Sometimes no one challenges but that is rare as well. At a 500 tournament (ie, Vienna two weeks ago) or at a 1000 Masters tournament (Paris last week), we have our cameras on the show courts at the grand slams.

"We cover six courts each so sometimes a big player will be on an outside court and be disappointed that our technology is not there to help!

There are nine officials and one umpire at every big match and they usually get it right but sometimes they get it wrong - that's why we're there!

"We have revolutionised the way that disputed points in tennis are dealt with and it's hard now to imagine Wimbledon without the drama of the spectators craning their necks to watch the ball bounce on our big screen in slow motion! It really helps to add to the drama of the occasion! There is undoubtedly a lot of pressure on us in our booth but we enjoy it."

ASIA SWING

Andrew has been officially at 15 tournaments this year but has been working at home for the next two weeks, planning the Asia swing - he has no idea how many air miles he clocks up a year.

He remarks that the biggest upset in tennis in 2016 was Djokovic being beaten by the USA's Sam Querrey in the third round at Wimbledon.

Very shortly, he will be off to Brisbane, Auckland and Perth before the Australian Open starts at the end of January. Many of us are lucky to get an afternoon out in Portrush!

Home is still Limavady but Andrew will soon be looking for accommodation in Basingstoke, the global headquarters of Hawkeye.

Born in Dundee, this global go getter spent one year in the USA, based in Boston, when he was only two (his parents Shaun and Jackie are both health care professionals) and maybe that's where Andrew got the travel bug. He has now visited well over 30 countries yet he hasn't yet been to South America.

When he first goes there to cover tournaments in Brazil and Argentina, he will be in charge of the back room tennis operation!

He is looking forward to that trip but his favourite tournament is the US Open in Flushing Meadow, New York, Why? "Because of the New York buzz, you are in the city that never sleeps," he says.

"New Yorkers are loud and brash and make more noise than any other tennis spectators in the world. The late nights and the residents

make for a unique atmosphere in this cosmopolitan ethnic melting pot of the city, mind you I can be working until 1.30am and not back at the hotel until nearly 3am so it's tiring as well as exhilarating."

FAVOURITE PLAYER

The favourite player on tour Andrews says is Argentinian Del Potro (and the next big rising stars are Great Britain's Kyle Edmunds and Germany's Zverev) and it's no surprise that Roger Federer, the legendry Swiss, is also a massive favourite on tour.

In the women's game, the most popular player is the new world number one, Angela Kerber of Germany. Andy Murray, the new World Number 1, like Andrew Simpson, has been rising to the top over the last five years. Whilst the sporting world knows of the Dundee lad, not many are aware of the vital role that the Dundee born lad plays as well.

In his year out, Andrew at the tender age of 21, was working in Australia, South Korea the USA and all over Europe and China - what an eye opener!

His favourite county to get away from it all however, is Thailand (maybe because he can completely escape the pressures of work there) and, this week, Andrew is in Bali in Indonesia.

Hawkeye (founded by Paul Hawkins, a 41 year old from England who got the idea whilst doing research at Durham University) employes 35 people in tennis and 200 in total to cover other sports including the fields of cricket and soccer - Hawkeye hope to move into the contentious area of off side and penalty area disputes and are in talks with FIFA and UEFA about this topic which exercises football fans all over the world.

Andrew plays a bit of tennis, not surprisingly, but I can testify that he hits a mean golf ball a long way.

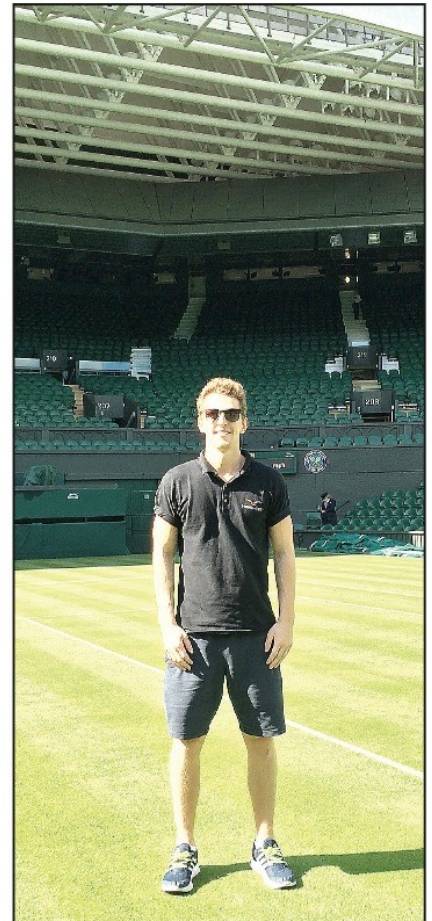
A fervent supporter of Liverpool FC (he was at the Champions League final for the Miracle of Istanbul in 2005), he is now a leading figure in the sports world.

Unknown to most but vital to many, Andrew is a young man who is going places. Limavady has provided big hitters in global sport in the past (think of Les Irvine who has helped pick referees for the previous World Cups and Olympic Games etc) and Andrew will surely deserve to be mentioned soon in the same breath.

This young man has an eye for the main chance and is now a vital component in one of the world's leading sport technology companies. Well done Andrew, you are a credit to Limavady.



Andrew just hanging out with tennis ace Novak Djokovic following the 2013 Hopman Cup. NCL45-14s



Limavady's Andrew Simpson stands centre court at Wimbledon. NCL45-13s



Andrew checks out the Hawkeye system in Melbourne. NCL45-16s