

## A CONVERSATION WITH LEANNE CHINERY

### Preamble

On a June afternoon I was looking for results from the Australian Open and found a livestream of the Women's Fours Final. The game had just started and on one team were 3 Canadians who all now live in Australia! I was now hooked to watch the whole game.

While I was watching I googled Leanne Chinery who I knew started her bowling career here in Victoria. In addition to some photos and the mention of many international competitions she had attended, I learned that she had recently announced her retirement from competition with the Canadian national team.

At that moment, I thought someone local should interview Leanne because her bowling story is truly remarkable and it is an inspiration to any young athlete and all Canadian lawn bowlers.

The victory of that mostly Canadian team on that afternoon was inspiring. There were 160 registered teams just in Women's Fours to start the competition and after sectional play (pools of 4) the quality of the remaining 64 teams was remarkable! With all teams sprinkled with Jackaroos (Australian national level players current and past), getting through to the final and winning was an amazing feat!

After that match, which the Canadians led from wire to wire, I decided to email Bowls Canada to get an email address and then I sent a request to Leanne to agree to write up a "conversation" for our Oak Bay club and waited to see what would happen. She replied!! We then set up a FaceTime call.

After thinking about our 100-minute call, I thought that we, as a bowling community, should be doing more to tell the stories of those that have had a major impact on the game through their active participation, their service as umpires, tournament managers, markers, or BSI reps, as well as coaches and executive of their clubs. For me to get a chance to talk to Leanne was a great opportunity and an honour. I would have been very happy to be given enough time to cover the early years in Victoria but we covered so much more and she even followed up with some explanation about her mental training.

Leanne had two terms on our national team. One from 2003 to 2009 and then again from 2013 to March of 2024 when she announced her retirement. I can appreciate the seemingly endless routine of work, train, compete and using every minute of your annual leave on traveling to competitions around the world that are so many more than we realize, including World Bowls indoor and outdoor, Asia Pacific Games, Multi Nation events and the Commonwealth Games.

FYI Look at these eye-popping numbers for entries to the events in the 2024 Australian Open competition. Women's Fours 160, Women's Pairs 200, Women's Singles 476. Men's Fours 388, Men's Pairs 512, Men's Singles 1312.

### Our conversation:

On a Thursday evening in Canada and midday Friday in Australia, Leanne Chinery graciously chatted, explained and reminisced about life and her extraordinary bowling career.

Leanne's mom was the first to take the plunge to join the Burnside Bowling Club. Soon mom asked Leanne to come out on a Friday night with her, thinking she would enjoy it and that there was someone there who worked with juniors. Leanne resisted the offer but when it came up again, she felt that if she went, the subject could then be put to rest! Well the "rest" as they say, is history.

In 1996 Leanne met Craig Wilson (and his infectious enthusiasm for the game) and before long she was playing in tournaments and participating in junior provincials. A few of the top junior names came up, the Battle sisters, the Kaufman brothers, Steve Santana and Sherry Sidel. At this time there was also the indoor facility at Pearkes Arena where she played in a Canadian Championship. Leanne also teamed up with her brother Ian to win the All-Home Cup pairs competition at Burnside, sponsored by Hermann Santana's company All Home Renovations.

Later, Leanne followed her mom to the Juan De Fuca Club and then there was another move to the Victoria club. All of this led to more encouragement, more people reaching out and by 2003, and not quite 22 yrs. old, she was listed with the National team!

Leanne remembers fondly winning the Under 25 Canadian Championship at Oak Bay. There was also a US Open where Leanne played with Betty Walker, Lynn McElroy and her mom winning the US Open Fours. She also played with Linda Cowie in a Provincial Fours championship where they won a bronze medal.

Off the green, Leanne mentioned the late Graham Jarvis and the numerous times he invited Leanne to dinner and they talked about lawn bowling. "I learned so much from Graham in those evenings. He had so many stories and he was so kind to me"

Ron Leslie was also very supportive. "He was my biggest cheerleader ever! I also did a lot of practices with the late Rick Armstrong. He was a master of details." After leaving Victoria Leanne met up with Nick Watkins former national level player and Victoria Club member at an international competition where Nick was an international umpire.

Alas, while there was so much success and support in Leanne's bowling career and she had completed her nursing degree at UVic, she found herself with no remaining family members and in 2005 she decided to move to Ontario to live and bowl.

With some help from her sponsor Don Caswell, Leanne secured a job in a London, Ontario hospital. Soon Leanne was successful with lawn bowling in her new province, winning the Provincial Championship, representing Ontario in singles at the Nationals and then getting the call for her first international competition in 2005 in New Zealand.

Travelling overseas to play was truly inspiring for Leanne and the focus was the upcoming Commonwealth Games in Australia the following year. When the local Kiwis asked her about Ontario, Leanne told stories of shoveling snow in the winter months. At that point someone broke into the conversation to say "why do you live there?" Good question!

Soon after the conversation about snow, Leanne began an endless trail of paperwork to move to Auckland, New Zealand. Fortunately, her nursing degree got her a sponsorship from an Auckland hospital and she was "good to go"

Leanne enjoyed the New Zealand life and after time spent in Auckland and enjoying the North Island she moved to the South Island and enjoyed the great beauty and the slower pace of life. Soon after her overseas move came her first Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. One of her all-time international highlights was walking with the Canadian Team from the Rod Laver Arena and into the majestic 88,000 seat (at that time) Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) for the Opening Ceremony. The chills from that moment will stay with her forever.

Our conversation covered many other events and locations..... from intense humidity in Malaysia, the slower greens of Scotland and going to the World Indoor in Belfast. I got a lesson on Multi Nation events where countries invited can actually take more than the minimum number of players to help prepare and do selections for upcoming major competitions. In addition, there are Asia Pacific Games, making every year a busy one! At the end of the day, Leanne went to four Commonwealth Games, the most recent being 2022 in Birmingham England.

During her career Leanne has spent time with a sports Psychologist to work on the 'ideal performance state'. As she explained, "when bowls leave your hand and everything seems to go where you want it to go". Another aspect of her training was team training where you learn to support your team mates to either stay in that ideal state or how to work into it if they are struggling. That team training was evident when Leanne played between two 23-year-olds in the Australian Open Fours this year. For anyone who has ever tried performance training or visualization or positive internal chatter it is a long slow process and in a sport like lawn bowling it can have tremendous impact.

After several wonderful years in New Zealand, Leanne put on her gypsy hat once again and moved to Sydney, Australia. It created a new chapter in her life and her bowling career. She was soon no stranger to the Gold Coast of Australia which hosted both the 2018 Commonwealth Games and 2019 Asia Pacific Bowls Championships.

She is very happy living in Australia and has a very rewarding job at a Steel plant where she works as an Occupational Health Nurse. Her new bowling club is Taren Point, located in a suburb of Sydney. It has 3½ competitive greens, and is a large facility with a restaurant, poker machines and paid employees! It was at the Taren Point club that she met her partner Ray Pearse, a Jackaroo who is the Bowls Manager and Head coach at the club.

What does retirement from our national team mean? As Leanne explained, it means "playing in the tournaments I want to play in, when I want to play". Of course, she will miss playing with and mentoring Canada's top players and playing in the top bowling venues around the world.

The victory in the Women's Fours at the recent Australian Open couldn't have been a better start to the next chapter and having two Canadian team mates made it even better.

Here's to you Leanne! Congratulations on all your successes and all you have given to our Canadian Team over your long career.