

## A Conflict of Interests

By Clive Preston, Principal Trombone, Barnes Concert Band

The great passions of my life (apart from my family, of course) have been music and sport, the latter more as a spectator (and an armchair one at that) than a player, although I have been known to hit the odd ace at Sheen Lawn Tennis Club. Since my sporting talents are even more modest than my musical ones it tends to be sport that comes second whenever a conflict arises.

I can recall three occasions when I missed a notable sporting event due to my obligation to assist Barnes Concert Band in its tireless quest to entertain the public of South-West London.

It is 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2010 and the weather is set fair for a performance in Barnes on the green by the pond. I'm not sure exactly why we are playing – probably not Barnes Fair as that is always mid-July – but no doubt it had been arranged well in advance. At the same time in South Africa England are taking on Germany in the first knockout round of the FIFA World Cup, having scraped through their group in unconvincing style with draws against USA and Algeria and a thumping 1-0 defeat of mighty Slovenia. So, I'm not feeling very optimistic for our chances against the perennial World Cup over-achievers.

When the time comes for a break in our performance all the talk is of how England had gone in at half-time 2-1 down and had been robbed by a disallowed goal by Frank Lampard that had clearly crossed the line. By the time we finish our performance England have been well and truly thrashed 4-1 and the disallowed goal is something of an irrelevance, although it still gets a mention in the Wikipedia entry for the tournament.

So maybe I was better off playing the trombone that day than sitting at home shouting in frustration at the television.

Skip forward to 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2013. Once again it is a beautiful day and we are playing in the bandstand at Canbury Gardens. We are surrounded by families enjoying picnics and the masterful rendition of favourites by the band. What I hadn't appreciated when I agreed the date with the organisers (yes, it's my fault I admit it) was that this was Men's Finals day at Wimbledon and Andy Murray was in the process of demolishing the challenge of Novak Djokovic in straight sets to become the first British man to win the Men's singles since Fred Perry in 1936. Having faithfully and hopefully watched as he failed to beat Federer the previous year and sat through his repeated failures at the last fence in Melbourne, I was now missing his great moment. A sneaky peak at the phone between numbers reassured me that things were going well but then Djokovic never knows when he is beaten. Our performance concluded to rapturous applause and by the time I got back to my car the match had reached its final game. This game went on for a tortuously long time and concluded just as I was turning into my road. Ah well, I did see the full match in 2016.

Cricket has always been my favourite sport to watch and the only one at which I represented my school. All those languid spells when not much happens followed by moments of tension and excitement. A bit like playing the trombone in most orchestral works, really. A very hot day greeted the band at Regent's Park on 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2019. All around the bandstand were hundreds of eager audience members taking in the fine weather and looking forward to another top-notch

performance from the Barnes Concert Band. Some 200 miles north England were tottering to defeat in the third Ashes Test Match at Headingley. Defeat would mean that our chances of regaining the Ashes were gone, taking some of the shine off our earlier World Cup victory. Only Ben Stokes remained of the recognised batsmen and his partners were falling with predictable frequency. By the time we stopped for a break I expected that it would all be done and dusted at Headingley, but somehow Stokes was still there but with only Jack Leach to help him and far too many runs still to get. About an hour later as the last jubilant notes of YMCA were fading away our dep bass trombonist excitedly announced that England were just a handful of runs from victory. I'm sure he was actually following the match on his phone while playing – I would have fined him part of his fee but for the fact that, as a Royal Academy student, he was still playing much better than me. Clearing up had to wait for a few minutes as we followed the last few minutes of what proved to be one of the most sensational wins in Test Match history (shame we lost the next Test Match and so the Ashes anyway).

So, do I have any regrets about missing these sporting occasions in order to play with the band? No. There is nothing more enjoyable than making music with a group of like-minded, enthusiastic amateurs literally playing for the love of it. I just might keep an eye on the date of the FIFA World Cup Final in 2022 (just in case).