

Sport in Edinburgh

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Willie Wood

the ambassador to bowls

By Fraser Paterson

Scotland's most capped Commonwealth Games sportsman, and a multiple World and National Champion. He is one of Scotland's best known competitors, Willie Wood MBE. He was born in Haddington on 26th April 1938, and brought up in Gifford. He still lives in Gifford and plays bowls for the Gifford club today. He told me he even gets post marked simply 'Willie Wood, Gifford'! He was introduced to the game as a 12 year old by his father.

Willie played both as an amateur and a professional, the latter throughout the 1980's and into the early 1990's.

His first international victory was in Glasgow in 1966 as part of what was in that period a very successful Scotland team.

Willie won gold, silver, and bronze in the Commonwealth Games; most notably claiming the scalp of New Zealand's Peter Bellis in the 1982 Singles final in Brisbane. Heartbreakingly, he lost by the closest of measures in the final end of the 1984 World Outdoor final to the same player, at Aberdeen.

In the 1988 World Outdoor Championships in Auckland, he was to finish runner-up in the singles again, this time to Englishman David Bryant. Willie recollected a key moment towards the end of that final, when rain forced them off the rink. The score was 22 each, with 25 shots the required target. David said to him, "This could all be over in one end you know." It was.

David remains a close friend, and in Willie's view, the best player in history.

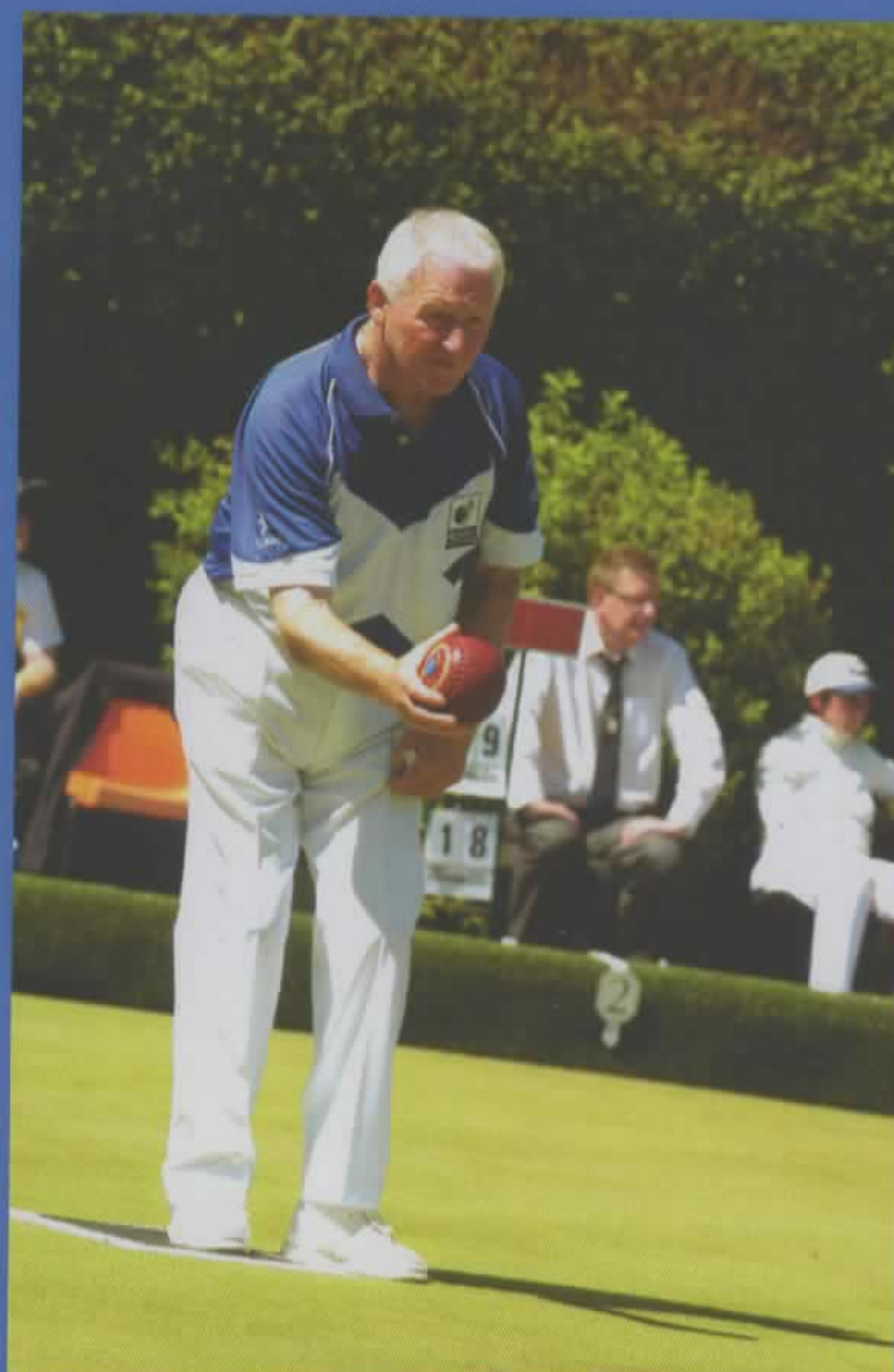


Photo courtesy of Bowls Scotland

To list his achievements at the highest level would take up the entire article. I have mentioned the Commonwealth Games. Outwith this, he has won 15 World Championship medals of every colour, two National Outdoor Championships, and four National Indoor Championships. He has also won and finished runner up in numerous international tournaments, from gold in the South African Games in 1973, to victory in the Millennium Singles in 2000.

One of Willie's proudest achievements is his singles victory against David Bryant in that 1973 South African games, where he won the gold medal.

Willie retired from outdoor international competition as a reigning World Outdoor Champion in 2011, having won the Triples in 2008. As such, he will not be part of the Scottish Commonwealth Games team for Glasgow in 2014. Willie's victories keep on coming however. He was part of the East Lothian Indoor Bowling Club Scottish Cup winning side earlier this year. He also won this year's Scottish Indoor Bowls Association Two Bowl Pairs competition with Mark Johnston.

He is currently an ambassador for Bowls Scotland, and still plays for the Scotland team indoors. Even at 75, you wouldn't bet against more titles for Willie Wood, would you?