

Open News - Taranaki Open Fours

Monday, January 15, 2024

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166 sides ready to roll — if weather permits

Only the forecasted wet weather, absent during last week's heat spell, will prevent 166 sides commencing the 119th Midlands Funds Management Taranaki men's Open fours in North Taranaki today.

At the time of printing, play remains dubious, and organisers were praying the forecasters are not on the money this time.

Decisions will need to be made throughout the day, depending on the weather that is being encountered at the various locations. There are four reserve greens available in New Plymouth, should these be clear, and the need for the transfer of sections occur.

"Obviously, the preference is for two rounds to be completed today, but that could be hard work. Certainly, as a minimum, we would like one round completed, even if the match has to be reduced," Bowls Taranaki Chairman Robert Wolfe said.

Wolfe confirmed that once a match had started there would be no reduction in the length of that game. Only future games would be reduced, he noted.

The last time the whole opening day was lost was in 2004, when four out of six became the qualification criteria.

"It is a matter of getting the balance right between player safety and enjoyment, looking after the greens and progressing the tournament satisfactorily."

Wolfe said, weather aside, that every indication suggests that the tournament is set to be just as successful as last season, albeit the entry numbers are down on the 182 from 2023.

"We knew that they would be down on the basis of the Dominion tournament being held here next month. While it is pleasing to see a lot of players doubling up and playing in both events, there are others — both locals and visitors — who have decided this time to play in just the Dominion.

Wolfe was delighted to welcome Midlands Funds Management on as naming rights for the Open this year. "Initially, it is a two-year term with a right of renewal at the end of that. We are grateful for their contribution."

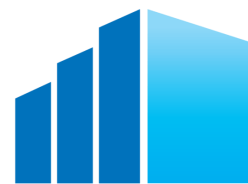
In addition, regional development agency, Venture Taranaki have become more closely aligned with the Open this year.

"Through the New Plymouth Major Events Fund, we're thrilled to support the 2024 Bowls Taranaki Open Fours tournament, the largest of its kind in Aotearoa, New Zealand," said Brylee Flutey, GM Destination, Te Puna Uman-ga Venture Taranaki.

"We wish the 1,000-plus competitors, over the men's and women's events combined, the best as they hit the greens over the two-week event, which attracts and includes locals as well as a significant number of participants from across New Zealand and Australia along with their friends, family, and spectators."

"The longstanding tournament also provides those visiting our region with the chance to discover Taranaki beyond the green as they enjoy the region's hospitality, retail, and stunning natural landscapes while competing at various venues across the region.

We wish the competitors well and encourage them and others to make the most of exploring our magnificent region while they're here."



MIDLANDS
FUNDS MANAGEMENT

Early wins critical to qualifying chances

Attaining six wins from the eight qualifying games is tough going, especially if teams are tripped up early in the piece. There will be plenty of anxious moments over the coming days, mixed in with plenty of social thrills and sectional delights — such as when a leading side is challenged, or perhaps even beaten. Here's a taste of just some of the talent that lines up.

Section 1: A number of teams should feel confident, or at least hopeful, of advancing through the section. The sides appear evenly matched, with Evan Thomas (Birkenhead) and Ross Thorn (Naenae), the most likely. Bob Sanders, who made his name in South Otago but now plays for Dunedin's Wakari, skips a useful team, while Darren Scott (West End), with Taranaki rep Bruce Colgan in tow, should both give a good account of themselves.

Section 2: Nigel Drew (Birkenhead), a semifinalist in 2019, skips a strong Harbour side, which has the ability to feature in the later rounds. So, too, does Caleb Hope (Stokes Valley), who was part of Gary Lawson's 2020 Dominion fours winning team. Whangamata's Mark Pene skips a side which contains Wayne Head and Adrian McGaughey, last season's Thames Valley pairs winners. Steve Ramsay (Mt Albert) and Colin Christie (Fitzroy), qualifiers 12 months ago, again rate a chance of gaining the necessary six wins.

Section 3: Regular visitors Kevin Coombe (Aramoho) and Anton Ferrari (Naenae), who gave eventual champion Hamish Kape a torrid time in the last 16 last year before bowing, head the group. Mike Reddy (Kaitaia), ousted only on an extra end last season in post section, also returns, with his No 3 Sam Allison in good form, following an excellent run at the Dominion. Also keep an eye on Nelson rep Graeme Crawford (Pohara) and Gavin McLeod (Tawa).

Section 4: Peter Belliss (Aramoho) will be endeavouring to erase memories of a very frustrating semifinal loss in in 2023. His side includes this time Lance Tasker, a winner in

2021. 2002 Dominion pairs champion Brendon Gibson QSM (Johnsonville), who competed for a first time last year, presents a strong side, which includes Phil Todd, twice a runner-up. The Deegan brothers, Kevin, an impressive performer in Tropical Far North Queensland, and Paddy, of Opunake, are in the section. While Danny Goodall's Coromanandel side contains Tony Jensen. It will be interesting to see if the thunderous drive that Jensen used to assist him in attaining a Manawatu gold star is still in his armoury.

Section 5: Two members of last year's winning side, Aidan Zittersteijn and Daryl Read, are back for another crack. But Hamish Kape and Kaylin Huwyler, having spent the past fortnight in Christchurch, are not taking part this time. Zittersteijn will skip the team, with two capable players coming in – National Para squad member Kurt Smith and 2022 national club fours winner Adam Collins. Zittersteijn will clash in the fourth round with four-time champion Dan Delany (Royal Oak). His team, once again contains Teo Turua, who gave an excellent account at the 2023 world championships for the Cook Islands, a side that of course also included Zittersteijn. Gerard Slatery (Tui Park), with north of 30 Thames Valley titles and a few in Waikato, remains competitive, while Barney Bowden (Parklands, Christchurch) knows how to navigate section play.

Section 6: Gary Lawson (Elmwood Park), the 2011 winner, will be the early favourite. He presents a strong side. But as Lawson discovered during his last visit to the Open in 2022, it is a long week and the tide will undoubtedly turn in some pressure-cooker games. Kevin Smith (Hinuera), now with over 40 years experience in the game, is likely to provide Lawson's sternest test in section play. That match is scheduled for tomorrow afternoon at West End. Northern visitors Garry Banks (Takapuna) and Andy Ellis (Pringle Park) are in the group, as is Grant Pease (Fitzroy), who was part of the 2003 winning side. His team contains former All Black Bryce Robins.



Section 7: A host of evenly-matched visiting teams will dispute qualification. Simon Poppleton (Takapuna) is better known for his indoor bowls exploits but is in good touch having won the North Harbour pairs earlier in the season. The 2005 champion Ray Park (Wanganui), after an absence last year, returns to the fold. And so it continues – John Petelo (Pt Chevalier), Waikato open singles winner Stephen Liddington (Hillcrest) Phil Morgan (Te Puke) and regular qualifier Terry Osmont, playing under the Johnsonville banner. Expect plenty of topsy-turvy results.

Section 8: Taranaki selector John Garrud (West End) will face an interesting opening clash this morning on his home green. The match will be played on approximately the same spot that his opponent, Graeme Fulford (Havelock North), tasted victory as a member of John Granger's quartet in the 2002 final. Garrud will also tangle with Naki Nehemia (Johnsonville) during the week while Fulford faces a further tough assignment on day one – against Cary Pinker (Wanganui East).

Section 9: A number of competitive sides will clash with each other during the week, meaning teams that are usual qualifiers may not advance through. Early wins will be imperative. Dan Dickson (Tauranga) – who can forget that dominating finals performance in 2021? – commences with a game against an excellent draw player, Garry Petersen (Wanganui East), and then tangles with Trevor Harris (Hillcrest). Wednesday will be another tough day for Dickson with matches against Garry Muriwai (Martinborough) and Gerry O'Sullivan (Inglewood). And that is without mentioning Peter Dorreen (Far North RSA).

Section 10: The big game on the opening morning will be on the front green at headquarters where Auckland gold start holder Mike Bradshaw (Onehunga & Districts) meets the 2015 winner Darren Goodin (Paritutu). On Thursday both teams will meet dual winner Mark Anderson (Tower). The Hawken family team has a late change with Bruce Phillips coming in for Geoff Hawken, who has not made the trip over from Australia this time.

Section 11: Raymond Martin (Victoria), who represented NZ in 2023, brings with him an imposing side that includes 2016 world fours winner Blake Signal. They appear the strongest team in the group. But they are certain to get a good work out in some of their games. They meet the competitive Phil Taylor (Bridge Park) and the 1989 winner Maurice Symes (Fitzroy) on day one and during the week will also encounter Scotty McGavin (Bulls) and Paul Howell, whose Paritutu team contains two members that contested last year's final.

Section 12: Craig De Faria (West End) has been a dominant force in recent Opens – the winner in 2019 and 2022, runner-up in 2020 and third-equal in 2023. It would be a major surprise if he doesn't qualify, as the case was in 2021. But he does strike plenty of talent in section play: Warwick Frederikson (Blockhouse Bay) and Scott Roberts (Tower) – both on day one – as well as Putaruru's famed Sutton family, Gary Johnstone (Arrowtown) and the 2021 Dominion mixed pairs winner, Laurie Guy (Victoria).

Jacks to be rethrown: Organisers have reminded all participants that should a jack be improperly delivered then the opposing team must re-deliver the jack. If the jack has been improperly delivered by each side, then it will be placed on the 2m mark. The only exception to this rule will be during section play in the pairs on Friday. Because those games will be played under a time-limit, the jack will be placed by the opposing side if the original throw is improper.

New Plymouth Club meals: Sponsors of the pairs event, the New Plymouth Club in Gill Street, have corrected details in the tournament handbook. Meals are available every night during the tournament, except for tonight (Monday). As an alternative, the Marbles buffet at the Devon Hotel, comes highly recommended.

Shirts available for purchase: In response to demand over the years, a specific Taranaki Open fours shirt has been designed. It is available for purchase at:

www.gamechanger.org.nz/bowlstaranakiopenfours

100 years ago: West End unbeaten in 1924

While the conditions of play for the 1924 Open were different, there were still some similarities that the 52 entered teams — including sides from Onehunga, Ponsonby and Hastings — encountered. Two games per day was already established, but play did not commence until Wednesday, January 23. And, wait for it, the opening day washed out with rain! Wind meant that when play did start on day two, “scattered heads were the rule rather than the exception.” The third day was in sweltering heat. The fourth day saw three games of 21 ends, to conclude seven sectional rounds.

Interestingly, Jim Sole, the 1919 winner, teamed with two sons and a nephew.

Clothing was of concern. The Taranaki Daily News noted: “Players must wear the colours of their club.” This sentence appears in bold black type in the tournament programme, but the rule was broken in many instances yesterday...nothing looks so slovenly as a rink playing bowls in gardening dress.”

Going into the final, played on the New Plymouth green, with two lives was the West End side of Percy Douglass, Herbert Petty, Ed Petty and skip Tom Billing (pictured left to right). They beat Albert Codd, Henry Cottier, Geo Morton and skip Fred Spurdle (Inglewood) 25-16. “The game is one that is likely to live in

the annuals of Taranaki bowling, the outstanding feature being West End’s fine recovery in turning a defeat of 15-9 at the fourteenth head into a victory by nine points.” Spurdle, needing eight to draw the game, killed the last head three times before “he had to admit defeat”.

Billing’s side won 13 successive games – a record that is believed to be unique in the history of New Zealand bowling at the time.

“Visiting bowlers had declared that the Taranaki gathering was the best managed tournament in New Zealand,” the Taranaki Daily News concluded. During the event, a number of bowls were disqualified during the event, for players following bowls up more than the allowed fifteen feet from the mat.



T O I
FOUNDATION

Pre-Open results from West End

Twenty-four teams contested the annual Shifty’s Sports Bar-sponsored pre-Open tournament at West End yesterday. On green one, Frankie Lim (Pukekohe) was the only three winner from the three games played, to emerge with first prize. Second place went to Gavin McLeod (Tawa), with two wins and one draw, while Graeme Crawford (Pohara) sneaked third with two wins (+34).

Bob Shorter (Darfield) took out the top prize with an unblemished record (three wins, +38) on green three. Barry O’Brien (Victoria), with Laurie Guy at skip, also won thrice (+14), while Jim Cornish (Omarunui) was third with two wins (+25).

- Garry Murfitt

