

# Open News - Taranaki Open Fours

Monday, January 20, 2025

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## Highest visiting numbers since 2006

A surge in visiting numbers has administrator's smiling as the 120th Midlands Funds Management Taranaki men's Open fours gets underway in the province today.

One hundred and twenty six sides from outside the region have greatly assisted in boosting the numbers overall for the tournament. All told 180 teams are in the field, compared with 166 last year.

"It is pleasing to see," Bowls Taranaki Executive Officer Ian Lewis said. "We were confident of getting an increase this year, as we missed out on a few sides last season as they came here for the Nationals instead."

There is something about the Taranaki Open that drags the players back each year and the increase in visiting numbers is in fact even more noteworthy.

It is the highest number of visiting teams since 2006. There were 136 visitors that year, which included a bit of a hangover from the centennial the previous year when there were 223 visitors from a full field of 376.

"Notwithstanding the positive indication we have received with this year's entry, we are always willing to take on suggestions and feedback. It's a tournament for the players," Lewis said.

The biggest Open ever was in 1980 when 580 teams took part – 291 locals and 289 visitors. Visiting numbers steadily declined from there as numerous tournaments popped up on the calendar, often offering significantly higher prize money.

Local numbers reached their peak at 315 quartets in 1985. There were more than 3,000 registered male bowlers in Taranaki at that time. Now there is fewer than 800 and that largely reflects the reduction in local numbers.

Meanwhile, the standing that the Open has on the New Zealand scene has been further un-

derlined this year. Not only do both the men's and women's Opens appear on the Summer of Bowls calendar, but this year a record number of employees and board members also take part in the Open.

The Open has always received excellent support from Bowls New Zealand and its forerunner, the New Zealand Bowling Association.

Heading the list this year is current president Piripi Huwylar, who is playing as part of a Para side.

He follows other more recent presidents like Malcolm Kidd, Brian Guy, John Carter and Mark O'Connor, who all found time during their terms to compete in the Open. Kidd was the most successful, making the semifinals in 1998.

Huwylar is joined in the field by fellow Board members Garry Muriwai, who skips his own Martinborough team, and Scott Pickering, who is part of Andy Campbell's Mt Maunganui side. Campbell was runner-up in the Open 25 years ago.

CEO Mark Cameron, fresh from his qualification in the Dominion singles, plays No 3 for Broadcast Manager Alex Reed, while Digital Manager Colin Williams skips a Riverhead side.

National selector Lance Tasker is part of Peter Belliss' four.



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# Para side a first for the Open

For the first time, a team of para bowlers will compete in the Open. Robert Wolfe, of the tournament committee, said that while the four players are from different centres, dispensation has been granted for the tournament. "The team is compiled in the spirit of the tournament," Wolfe said. The side will be skipped by Darren Wolland and includes New Zealand President Piripi Huwyler, Bruce Sayers and Adrian Browne. Wolland's side commences its campaign at Paritutu this morning in **section one**.

The big name in the section is last year's winner, Darren Goodin (Paritutu), while other teams to watch include Peter Small (Hutt) and both of the Sunshine Coast teams.

**Section 2:** The group also has a distinctive international flavour to it. Former leading New Plymouth footballer Peter Ritchie (Oaks North – USA) leads a team, while Ian Hosken's Clayton (Victoria, Australia) side includes Roger Scott. Scott hails from Kaponga

where his father Len and grandfather Ernie were both prominent players. The section includes the 2020 winner Scott Roberts (Tower), who has the same side that made the semifinals 12 months ago, plus Bowls NZ employees Colin Williams and Alex Reed skip sides. Reed won his Auckland gold star in December. Then there are two excellent Johnsonville prospects in the group – Logan Amer and Phil Todd.

**Section 3:** John Gray (Fitzroy), who like his No 3 Maurice Symes, has previously won both the Open and Dominion fours, is in the section, along with Phil Morgan (Te Puke), past NZ rep Neville Hill (Onehunga & Districts) and the ageless Neil Clarke (Frankton Junction). Hill, a quarterfinalist in 2024, faces a tricky assignment this afternoon against Gavin Bannatyne



(Upper Hutt). While regular visitor Marty Doak has an extra spring in his step following his Far North open triples victory last month.

**Section 4:** Dunedin gold star holder Regan Larkin (Fairfield) will receive a warm welcome to his first Open today when his side encounters two dual past winners – John Garrud (West End) and Grant Anderson (Tower). The section looks the toughest to negotiate with Wellington gold star holder Brent Stubbins (Johnsonville), Malcolm Moore (Frankton Junction) and Billy Fulton (Henderson) all presenting sides capable going deep into the competition.

**Section 5:** There will also be very few soft games in the group, which looks incredibly even. Past winners Graeme Fulford (Havelock North) and Kevin Smith (Hinuera) are included, along with Andy Ellis (Pringle Park), Terry Osment (Johnsonville) and the Hawken family team, which Peter (Tumut, NSW) skips. The local sides include Opunake's underrated Paddy Deegan and the 2019 Dominion fours winner, Neil Candy (West End).

**Section 6:** Dan Delany (Royal Oak), who bypassed the Dominion in preference for the Open, looms as the most dominant looking side in the section. However, it does not now include Liam Hill, part of the original entry. His place has been taken by the Dave Good. Jerry Belcher (Takapuna) and Garry Petersen (Wanganui East) skip solid units, although the former can expect a torrid opening battle against Dave Walker (Tahunanui) this morning at Vogeltown. Walker, formerly of Kapiti, has a decorated side that includes Auckland gold star holder Graham Growcott. Growcott, pictured playing in the pre-Open tournament at West End yesterday, recently claimed the Nelson open singles for a second time.

**Section 7:** Dan Dickison (Tauranga), the 2021 winner, returns with a completely different side this time. Although there is familiarity, especially in the form of Alvin Gardiner, a winner of the pairs and fours at the Dominion in the past. Phil Corney (Durie Hill) will still be smiling as he recalls his last-bowl victory in the 2004 final. His side is certainly talented enough to make the money rounds. A late change to the section has occurred with Lee Warburton (Mangawhai) withdrawing. His place has been taken by a side that will be skipped by Steve Cottam (Paritutu), twice a winner of the pairs.

**Section 8:** Grant Wakefield (Johnsonville), the winning 2002 Dominion pairs lead, heads a reasonable team, with the group also including a further Australian side – Peter Perhouse (Gladstone), who is a Port Curtis representative player. Former Wai-kato open triples winner James Thomson skips a promising Rewa side, while another past NZ champion, Chris Water-son (St Johns), should also be among the quali-fiers.

**Section 9:** Frankie Lim (Pukekohe), pictured, stormed onto the national stage when he impressively skipped his side to victory in the NZ champion-of-champions fours last winter. He meets Evan Jones' solid Fitzroy side this morning at Oakura. Ross Thorn (Naenae) and Peter Dorreen (Far North RSA), 48 centre titles to his name, are in the group, along with the O'Sullivan family side, which Danny will skip this time. Auckland administrator, Brendon Walton, runner-up in the fours in 2023 and winner of the pairs last year, is in good form and should not be underestimated.

**Section 10:** Steve Ramsay (Mt Albert), a quarterfinalist 12 months ago, Cary Pinker (Wanganui East), Steve Critchlow (Naenae)



and Scott Johnson (Tawa) will be among the more difficult sides to negotiate in the group. But perhaps the strongest side is Garry Muriwai's Martinborough team which includes Gavin Hamlyn. Hamlyn made the Dominion singles quarterfinals earlier in the month — the best performance in the singles for a player from Wairarapa since Eketahuna's Frank Sigvertsen made the final in 1979.

**Section 11:** National gold star holder Petar Sain (Carlton Cornwall) is the big name in the section. He combines again with Rob Ashton. Other potential qualifiers include Les Smith

(Wanganui East), Joe Hunn (Kia Toa) and John Petelo (Pt Chevalier). Hunn's side includes veteran Ian Mason who has over 50 years representative play behind him. Mason still features in the Hawke's Bay side this season and has played his way into that centre's open singles final which will be played at a later date.

**Section 12:** Craig De Faria (West End), with one change to his usual line-up, poses a big threat again. Already with two Taranaki titles

to his credit this season, plus a bronze medal from the Dominion pairs, De Faria's side will take some beating. Among the visitors are Naki Nehemia (Johnsonville), Alan Child (Upper Hutt) and Selwyn Riwaka (Central Levin).

**Section 13:** Peter Belliss (Aramoho) remains a brilliant example to all players. Others in the section will be better for the experience of watching the 1984 world singles winner go about his work. His side is warmly favoured to qualify, but among his qualifying opponents are Anton Ferrari (Central Levin) and triple Auckland gold star holder Gavin Brown (Royal Oak).



## 100 years ago: Henry Price's Fitzroy four succeeds

The 20th Open commenced on Tuesday, January 27, 1925, with 64 teams from Taranaki, across 18 clubs, and eight visiting sides, in windy weather that the *Taranaki Daily News* described as “anything but conducive to scientific play.”

“It made results more or less a gamble. It was practically impossible to say where a bowl would go after it was delivered.”

There was a disruption to a number of local teams on the opening day, with substitutes used for the Smart brothers, Alan and Herbert, and Jimmy Lobb. They were still travelling back from the Dominion in Wellington, where they had gone deep in the rinks.

Seventeen teams secured the necessary five-from-seven qualifying games and contested the post section rounds under a two-life system. Three teams made it to Monday – Herbert Smart (New Plymouth), with two lives, plus Lobb (West End) and Henry Price (Fitzroy).

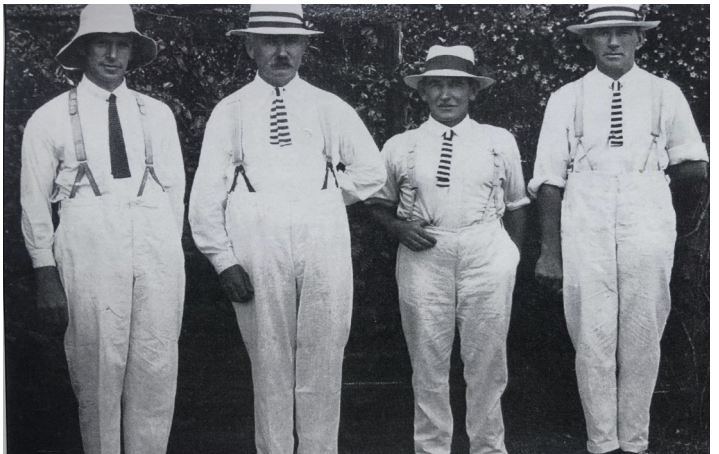
Lobb took Smart's first life 23-8. While Smart managed to draw the shot on the opening two ends, each time when five down, fours was then, as it still is today, a team game; Lobb's lineup being too consistent.

This gave Lobb a bye into the final, while Smart and Price squared off. Price took that clash 20-16.

In the third game of the day, the final, it was honours to Andrew Martin, John Bennett – grandfather of future Taranaki Life Member, Brien – Edward Dingle and Price.

They defeated Lobb's side of William Putt, Stephen Hurlestone and William Bruce 20-10. Martin was considered the outstanding lead and also a pioneer in technique. “He has the peculiar style of placing his bowl in the left hand, then placing his right hand over the bowl, grasping it firmly and transferring it to the right hand and delivering it away on a true running surface.”

Participants concluded that the tournament was the most social in the country.



Winners (left to right): Martin, Bennett, Dingle and Price.

## Pre-Open results from West End

Thirty teams contested the annual Shifty's Sports Bar-sponsored pre-Open tournament at West End yesterday.

On green one, Frankie Lim (Pukekohe) repeated his victory from 2024 by taking out the top prize once again. His side finished on three wins +33. Second place went to Mike Oldfield (Tauranga South) with three wins +29. Third was Garry Banks (Takapuna) on three wins +19.

Joe Hunn (Kia Toa) was the only three winner (+42) on the number three green. Okaihau's Mac Solomon (two wins +16) was second, ahead of Havelock North's Graeme Fulford (two wins +9).

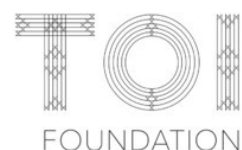
- Garry Murfitt



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