

Open News - Taranaki Open Fours

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Plenty of intensity inevitable despite withdrawals

The 73rd Devon Hotel Taranaki women's Open fours is here.

And it commences this morning with a growing interest from bowlers from around New Zealand.

Of the 86 sides in the field, 57 of them are from outside Taranaki, including one from Australia, and it's an outcome most pleasing for administrators.

"Unfortunately, we have had nine teams withdraw since the entries closed, three of which have occurred since the draw was done," Bowls Taranaki Executive Officer Ian Lewis said.

Last year, 88 teams took part. "So we are down two teams in the final analysis, but are still comfortable with the total number."

The withdrawals have forced changes to the draw.

Section two has been reduced from 14 teams down to 12. Teams are still in the order that they were drawn in. However, the sides that teams play have changed.

Rhonda Adams (Fitzroy) and Linda Clarke (Lepperton) have been moved from section two to three and seven respectively replacing Lesley McLinden (Royal Oak) and Kerin Roberts (Mairangi Bay).

Team three in section five is now Prue Wright's Paritutu lineup. It has taken the place of Lynda Bennett (Te Awamutu).

Teams require four wins from the six section play matches between now Thursday evening to make Friday's post section rounds.

The knockout rounds will occur between Friday and Sunday at Paritutu, which is the same location that the men enjoyed last week.

The Midlands Funds Management Open fours-pairs event, for the Margaret Cole Trophy, starts on Friday and will conclude on Sunday.

Looking through the sections, there are a number of leading lights who will be well challenged.

Section one, playing at Paritutu, Oakura and New Plymouth, features Dianne Strawbridge (Kensington), Adele French (Thames Coast), Robyn Wallace (Omarunui) and Val Symes (Fitzroy).

French's team includes the legendary Val Matthews, who was part of the runner-up team in 2024. It meets Symes in an interesting game this afternoon.

Section two, at Paritutu, Inglewood and West End, has the defending champion Sue Hodges (Omokoroa) in it.

Hodges' team has one change to it with Char Beckett replacing Ruth Lynch. Karen Pickering and Rachele Morrison remain up front.

The group looks very tough. Being now only of 12 teams, the draw sees the top six play the bottom six. In the top half is Karen de Jong (Central Cambridge) — who can forget her remarkable skipping endeavours in winning the 2019 Open? — Adrienne Tilyard, part of the winning team in 2017, local hope Cindy Nicoll (Inglewood) and Estelle Hickey (Carlton Cornwall). Hickey's team includes Auckland President and the latest gold star holder in that centre, Helen Blick.

Hodges is in the bottom of the section, along with Ruth Spittle, who has a similar side to the one which won the Hawke's Bay open fours last year, Debbie Wildermoth (Wanganui East) and Janet Barnard (Ngongotaha).

Barnard has the decorated Mere Eden at No 3. Eden has three bars to her gold star in Bay of Plenty.



Section three which plays at West End, Waitara and Lepperton, is headed by Leanne Stewart (Hikurangi), who won last year's New Zealand champion-of-champions mixed pairs. All four members of the Naenae quartet skipped by Pat Dixon hold Wellington centre titles, while Rhonda Adams (Fitzroy) remains a competitive performer on the local scene.

Section four has drawn West End, New Plymouth and Waitara.

Hetty Bolscher, who has taken over the skipping duties of her team now, knows what is required to win the Open. She won it in 2020.

Her side has to tangle with both Wendy Mitchell (Masterton) and Kaye Bunn (Thames Coast), the runner-up skip from last year who continues to run deep into competitions on the national scene.

Elaine Hodge (New Plymouth) faces the same test.

Reen Belliss (Aramoho) leads the contenders in **section five**, which has games at New Plymouth, Lepperton and West End.

Her side, which includes Diane Patterson, will be one of the favoured ones for the week.

Past winner Louise Fitness (Taradale) returns, as does Pam Mulford (Plimmerton) and Pauline Davy (Opunake).

Paula Meredith (Johnsonville) has 19 Wellington titles, of which four were annexed last season. She has a talented unit, as does Anne Lomas (Far North RSA). Both are in **section six** which plays at Oakura, Paritutu and Inglewood.

Lomas is best remembered for skipping the winning triple and four at the 2000 world championships — one of only three women to achieve the feat at the same tournament.

The depth of the group goes further with Eileen Jones (Paraparaumu beach), the holder of 16 Kapiti crowns, former NZ rep Cathy Andrews (Paritutu) and the skilled Chris Telford (Napier) among the more prominent skips.

Section seven, playing at Waitara, Paritutu and Oakura, is headlined by Wendy Green (Ngongotaha), who is closing in on 30 Bay of Plenty titles.

Her first opponent today is Mary Korewha (Manurewa), who can not be under-estimated.

Two of Taranaki's most aggressive and successful skips, Kristin Stampa (Stratford-Avon) and Gale Fache (Paritutu), are also in the section.

* Paritutu's popular Thursday evening dinner is on again this year. Players are requested to register with the club.



Fifty years ago the Open attracted 130 teams when it commenced on 17 February 1975. Eighty-one of these were locals and 49 visitors.

Teams required four wins from the six qualifying games to make post section, with 53 sides, including 17 visitors, making it through.

The title was won by an Auroa side, pictured above left to right, of Phyl Townsend (second), Edna Taunt (third), Jean Duff (lead) and Ruby Hammond (skip), which was a remarkable feat, given that the club has just 15 women members.

The Taranaki open pairs commenced on the Friday and involved those players who had been eliminated from the first four days of the fours, therefore, including those that lost in the first two rounds of post section in the fours.

From a field of 86, it was won by Ivy Opie (Hawera) and J Saunders (Hokowhitu).

In subsequent years, the pairs was played on the second week of the Open, meaning all players could take part in both competitions, making it a genuine open event, as opposed to a restricted one. The consolation pairs was re-introduced in 2022.