

Open News - Taranaki Open Fours

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More of a country feel to 2026 Open

Participants in The Devon Hotel Taranaki men's Open fours this year will notice more of a country feel to the event, with more out-of-the-City greens being used in 20 years.

While the likes of Oakura, Waitara, Inglewood, Lepperton and Stratford-Avon have been regular hosts, this year Urenui and Okato are also involved.

Urenui was last used in 2023 while Okato has not been home to the Open since 2012. Up until that time, Okato, pictured, had been widely regarded as the best bowling green in the province, when the likes of Barry Agnew had the surface flying along. It was regularly used in post section

of the Open, often during Saturday's rounds, too. Those teams playing at Okato can expect a warm welcome where long-serving President Bruce Peacock, who

also serves as the green keeper, and even more long-serving secretary, Fiona Liddall, a fudge cake supremo, have the club in great heart.

Only three of the six city clubs are being used this year — Paritutu, West End and New Plymouth.

The current centre policy is that greens laid in the past 12 months will not be used in the Open, which rules out Waimea, the front Fitzroy green and Paritutu C. The back Fitzroy green, when allocations were done in November, was rated below those selected.

Vogeltown still has two quick, star-weed greens, but the club resolved that it didn't

have the human resources to adequately host this time; a shame given the quality of greens and the atmosphere.

This year's event has attracted 182 teams, two more than last time, and equal to the 2023 number. 2015 was the last time that the number was higher, when 188 took part.

The field includes five Australian teams among the 125 visitors, plus 57 local sides.

The published draw in the handbook has had two team changes, as reflected on the draw/results on the Bowls Taranaki website, organisers said.

In section 10, team 14, Don Parker (Homai)

has withdrawn and is replaced by a composite Taranaki side, which is entered under the name of former advertising guru, Jeff Blyde (Vogeltown).

In section 12, team 10, which was to be led by 2018 winner, Adam Wishnoski (New Lynn), has been replaced by a West End (New Plymouth) team that will be skipped by New Zealand pool representative, Ryan King, a third-year player. His side contains Dean Butchart, a past Taranaki rugby league rep. Butchart is a brand-new player, having played his first official game of bowls at West End's tournament yesterday.



Some unknowns will soon be known

While there are inevitably a number of known names taking part in the Taranaki Open fours this year, and a chunk of them rate a mention below, there is also another group: those less-known warriors, who by the end of tomorrow will have already stamped their mark on their section. They may not be mentioned below, but be assured, their turn will come.

Section 1: Bruce Phillips (Tower), a three-time winner, is registered to skip the most imposing side in the section. It contains the three Anderson brothers. Ian Mahoney (Waitarere Beach), despite his advancing years, remains a determined competitor, while the Mt Maunganui side skipped by Phil Morgan contains the 2010 Open winner, veteran Merv Gibbons. Bowls NZ President, Piri-pi Huwyler, skips a Para side for a second time, while the Hawken family side will endeavour to repeat the efforts of their father, Geoff, who shared in the 1988 title.

Section 2: Dave Jones (Taupo) is the only member of the 2025 winning side returning in 2026, with other commitments preventing the attendance of Dan Dickison and co. Scott Roberts (Tower), third-equal in each of the last two years, returns with the same side. Peter Dorreen (Far North RSA), with seven bars to his Far North Gold Star, remains a tough competitor, while Mike O'Leary (Aramoho) is in good recent touch. He collected his eighth Wanganui title in that centre's open triples last month.

Section 3: Grant Wakefield (Johnsonville) heads a useful side, as does Daniel Geaney (Blockhouse Bay). The latter's team includes the 2025 Dominion singles winner, Matt Berry. Nathan Goodin skips a youthful Rahotu team, while two sides from Paekakariki – headed by Kapiti reps Stacey Thomas and Derek Taylor – have enough talent to advance. Shaun Pennell is scheduled to take over the skipping duties of a successful Pukekohe four.

Section 4: Craig De Faria (West End) has built an imposing record in recent seasons in the Open and is expected to feature again. His opening round clash against Liam Hill (Onehunga & Districts) is sure to attract plenty of interest at Okato. Liam's side includes his

grandfather, Neville. Peter Small (Naenae) and Paul Eaton (Mt Maunganui) were among the 45 qualifiers last season, while another Kapiti rep, Adam Batty (Levin), is a rising talent.

Section 5: Qualifying paths in the section are likely to be controlled by World Bowls Hall of Famer Peter Belliss MBE (Aramoho) and the 2002 Dominion pairs winner (with Wakefield), Brendon Gibson QSM. Both have competitive sides. Regan Larkin (Fairfield) will be looking to improve on last year's DNQ, and he also has a solid side to support that quest. Joe Hunn (Kia Toa), an accomplished snooker player, is also a useful bowler, and a past Hawke's Bay open singles winner. His side contains the ageless Ian Mason. And there is a definite Bowls NZ feel to the section, with commentator Alex Reed (Ponsonby) skipping CEO Mark Cameron, while Colin Williams skips a Riverhead side.

Section 6: Dean McMurchy, playing now under the Kamo banner, was runner-up in 2015. The NZ champion-of-champions singles winner in 2023, McMurchy has been in great form this season as he reaches the peak of his powers. Robbie Aitken (St Johns), who made his name in BOP, and Brent Stubbins (Naenae) should be competitive. Among the qualifiers from 2025 in the section are Evan Jones (Fitzroy) – who completed an unbeaten run as the Taranaki triples skip over seven rounds in last year's central region Octagonal representative fixture – Bob Shorter (Darfield), Andy Ellis (Te Atatu Peninsula) and Auckland rep, Dean Edge (St Heliers).

Section 7: Maurice Symes (Fitzroy) is the most recognisable skip in the section. He continues to regularly pick up centre titles. Runner-up in last month's Auckland open pairs, David Ball (Carlton Cornwall), should not be underestimated, after a solid 2025 Open; the same also applies to Mark Mathews (Thames Valley). Other teams to keep an eye include Billy Fulton (Henderson) and a side from Maroochy on the Sunshine Coast. It contains the current Queensland Over 60 pairs champions, Roger Manning and Paul Warren. Warren previously was a competitive player with Wellington's Hutt club.

Section 8: There will be an interesting clash on the end rink at Lepperton this afternoon. Logan Amer (Johnsonville) has the same side that made it all the way through to the semifinals 12 months ago and they meet the side skipped by the most successful player in the Open post-WWII, Dan Delany (Royal Oak). Delany, a four-time winner, was eliminated after round three last year, and while he may argue the Open is now an annual holiday – clearly, he did learn some “Unky” tactics from his former mentor – qualification would see his side move into the dangerous category. The visitors should be weary of the locals here, with a number of them regular qualifiers. They include Paddy Deegan (Opunake), Steve Cottam (Paritutu), and two promising south Taranaki prospects, Jason Peters (Manaia) and Nigel Berry (Hawera Park).

Section 9: Two strong visiting teams, Petar Sain (Carlton Cornwall), a quarterfinalist in 2025, and Garry Muriwai (Martinborough), spearhead the section with good sides. Muriwai went deep in the Dominion pairs earlier in the month. John Garrud (West End), a previous winner twice, appeals as the strongest Taranaki team. All three have the good fortune of missing each other in section play. But the tidy Trevor Harris (Frankton Junction) hasn't drawn the same luck, with matches against both Sain and Garrud.

Section 10: A wide-open group, where many of the teams could advance from. Despite his relatively short time in the outdoor game, Steve Fisher (Royal Oak), has done remarkably well, including victories in the last two Dominion fours, leading for Michael Galloway. He will be skipping this week, albeit with an entirely different side to the one he took to the quarterfinals last year. During the week, Fisher will meet at least two tricky sides – Cary Pinker (Wanganui East) and Warwick Fredrickson (Feilding), who after a successful spell in Auckland is now establishing himself as one of the best in Manawatu. Mike Oldfield (Mt Maunganui) returns as well.

Section 11: Paritutu's Darren Goodin meets Takaro's Trevor Belk this morning – a repeat of their 2024 quarterfinal clash, when the former sneaked through on the last end. Other respected players in their centres include last

season's Nelson champion-of-champions triples winner Hank Nalder (Motueka), representative players Geoff Bovey (Paekakariki) and Wayne Gundersen (Rewa), and Gold Star holder Bernie Anderson (Wanganui East).

Section 12: Big-driving Adam Blucher (Te Atatu Peninsula), who was third-equal in the Dominion singles earlier this month, rates a chance of going a long way in the Open. But his side has a ticklish draw in qualifying. It commences today at Oakura with matches against two well-known Taranaki family teams, Danny O'Sullivan (Inglewood) and John Ranford (Fitzroy). Then there is Allan Child (Upper Hutt), 2014 winner Kevin Smith (Hinuera) and 2004 winner Phil Corney (Durie Hill) to come in the following days. Grant Sargison (Omarunui) will also cause opponents some distress.

Section 13: A second Kevin Smith-skipped side is also in the field – the one skipped by the Bowls NZ employee from Burnside. The Dunedin Gold Star holder has Bowls NZ coach Graeme Rees and former Paritutu man, Pat Bonham, who was a finalist in the Taranaki open singles 30 years ago, in his side. Other likely contenders include 2000 Dominion pairs winner Chris Waterson (St Johns), John Petelo (Birkenhead) and Bart Robertson (New Plymouth). Petelo's side includes the respected Steve Hoeft. In an irony in the draw, Petelo meets Robertson this afternoon on Robertson's home green. Hoeft and Robertson are regular team mates, and combined at the Dominion pairs earlier in the month.

* The annual Flamingo Motels-sponsored pre-Open tournament at West End was belted by blustery winds yesterday — with West End teams winning both sections.

John Garrud won all three games, with a plus-24 differential on green two. Queensland visitor Paul Warren also raised three wins, with a plus-21 count. Third place went to Papanui's Jono Radka, who was runner-up in the NZ Para singles a fortnight ago, with two wins and one draw.

The three prize-winners on green three all won thrice. Craig De Faria came out on top with a whopping plus-56, ahead of Regan Larkin (Fairfield — plus-18) and Ray Scott (Omarunui — plus-10).



100 years ago: 14 days before Open winner found

The vast majority of sides taking part in the 2026 edition of the Open will be hoping that what happens this time, given the latest forecast, is not a repeat of what happened 100 years ago, when it took 14 days from start to finish, before a winner was found.

Sixty-four teams commenced the 21st Open on January 26, 1926, a Tuesday. Fitzroy, New Plymouth, West End and Vogeltown were the hosting clubs. The sides were divided into eight sections of eight teams, meaning seven qualifying matches were played. While these matches consisted of 25 ends, post section, under a two-life system, was only 21 heads. Twenty-three teams posted the necessary five or more wins, with only John Abbott (Fitzroy) winning all seven games.

Section play finished soon after noon on the Friday, with qualifiers then required to play two games of 21 ends – a mammoth day, given one game of 25 ends had been played in the morning. Indeed, play did not conclude until dusk.

Eight rounds were required to settle the issue in post section, and after the loss of Monday morning because of rain, the final was scheduled for Tuesday morning. However, it rained again, and so the final was eventually played on Waitangi Day.

But still no result could be found, with Alan Smart's New Plymouth team and Henry Price's Fitzroy side drawing the final 21-all.

That final was played in wind and rain, with stoppages for the flooded green.

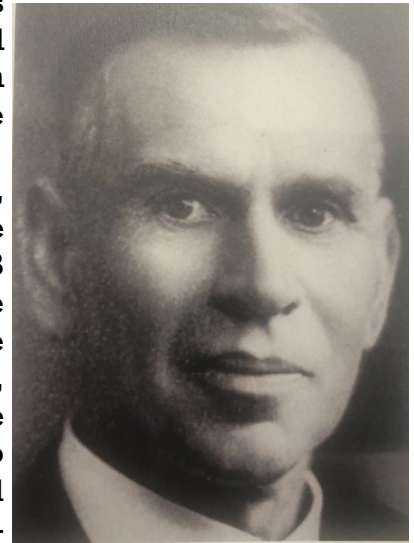
Smart, pictured, had led the game 18-7 after 13 ends. But Price won seven of the last eight ends, including a brace on the last end, to force the tie. Until 1971, the Taranaki centre had a

rule that required drawn finals to be replayed. And so it was in 1926!

The replayed final, on Monday, February 8 – some 14 days after the commencement of the Open – was a humdinger. The scores were even after 19 ends, before Price took a two on the penultimate.

On the last end, Smart held one on the changeover and coolly drew two more to take the title.

Smart's winning team comprised Abraham Goldwater, William Freeman and John Griffin. Price's team contained Ernest Thorpe, John Bennett, who had shared in his 1925 triumph, and Percy Jury.



All go at Rahotu as Horo selected

It was all go at Rahotu on Friday night when the two sides from the club that are taking part in this week's Open, skipped by Shae Fleming and Nathan Goodin, squared off in a dress rehearsal over a full 25 ends. Fleming's side got the win 27-22, but soon the attention shifted inside, where among the observers was Camron Horo. Horo, aged 20, has just been named in the Black Jacks side to compete in the Nations Cup tournament in Kuala Lumpur next month. It follows an impressive rise through the bowling ranks, which included winning the world junior indoor pairs with Briar Atkinson in Ireland late last year. But competitors this week need not worry, with work commitments meaning Horo is just a spectator.



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Te Puna Umanga

