

# Open News - Taranaki Open Fours

*Wednesday, January 21, 2026*

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## Rain blights Open; reduction in qualifying criteria

Players and administrators were similarly left frustrated as unpredicted rain, which commenced just before 6am, resulted in no play in The Devon Hotel Taranaki men's Open fours yesterday.

Puddling at some locations was already occurring by 8am, when most bowlers were either arriving at clubs or enroute. The rain was not necessarily heavy but it was persistent. Players would certainly have been soaked had they been pushed out to play.

It was not too bad at Okato, Oakura and Stratford-Avon, where play would have been possible for most of the day. Urenui, Waitara (pictured) and Paritutu B were among the worst affected.



But the Open is run as one combined tournament, and ensuring all teams have the same conditions of play is viewed as important.

It has been common over the years that a round on a day has been lost, but this is the first time since 2004, when the opening day was washed out, that a whole day was lost.

The loss of play means that rounds seven and eight will not be played now. Rounds three and four will be played at the day three venues today. Rounds five and six will be played at day four venues tomorrow.

Games remain at 25 ends. "That was the key determination in our thinking," Bowls Taranaki Executive Officer, Ian Lewis, said. "Bowlers are here for the 25-end game."

The change means that the new criteria for qualification becomes four wins from six games.

"Yes, that means that we will end up with more qualifiers. We will not know until Thursday night, once section play has concluded, whether six or seven post section rounds will be needed."

Some participants were asking questions about the implications of more forecasted rain on Wednesday and Thursday. "The tournament committee will make decisions as the circumstances become known."

\* There is no doubt that the Open has held special significance in many families and the history book records fathers and sons who have combined to win the event — such as Ken and John Murtagh (1978), Ross and Grant McKay (1982), Bruce and Craig Johns (1987), Barry and Craig Gush and Ray and Clint Park (2005), John and Dan Delany (2012).

Other families have also tasted success, albeit in different teams, such as the Boultons, the Baldwins, the Spurdles, the Andersons and the Settles.

Two other well-known family names squared off at New Plymouth on Monday — Lambert and Sellars.

Mark "Jacque" Lambert, a second-year player leading for Michael Crooks (Raumati), is the son of Open great John, who won the event three times in the halcyon days of the 1980s. Wayne Sellars, playing for Warwick Fredrickson (Feilding), is the son of Vic, the former NZ rep and Dominion singles and pairs winner.

Wayne in his own right has had a decorated career, including North Island representation, and was runner-up in the 1989 Open. Sellars' side won the game 27-18.

## 50 years ago: Murray Smith wins second Open

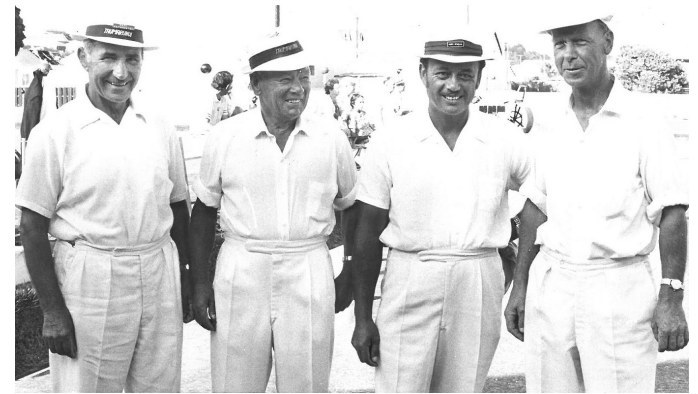
While not being the most popular man going around, Murray Smith, and his Taumarunui side, became the first team since 1944 to win back-to-back Opens when they succeed in 1976. They had also won in 1975.

Combining with impressive lead Mark Antunovich, Dave Fleming and accurate No 3 Harry Nicholas, the side prevailed 32-25 in the final at NPRSA over a side from the host club skipped by Sid Carley, and including his son, Tom, Ray Sampson and Sid Way.

Carley, pictured, exhibited his trademark hat-doffing antics during the final, especially up to the 15th end when his side held the lead 22-16. But after that Taumarunui dominated proceedings.

In the semifinals, Carley edged out dual Dominion fours titleholder Murray Davis (Onehunga) 22-21, while Smith beat a team headed by a tall, accomplished player from Waitara, Allen Robson.

With 532 teams, the 1976 tournament was easily a record, surpassing the previous highest of 490. This was exceeded by the 580



sides for the 75th jubilee.

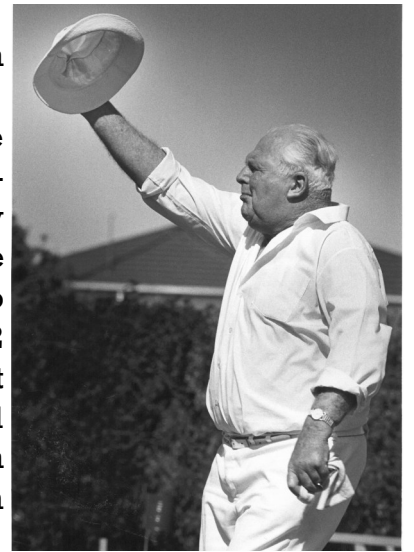
The pairs title went to Merv Hammond and Wally

G r i b b l e

(Edendale), who broke free from 12

-all, to beat Tokoroa's Phil

Ford and Ron Cooney 25-17 in the decider.



## Entry a first for Waiheke Island side

Some players walk to bowls, the majority drive, occasionally some fly off to tournaments, and then there is an even smaller group – those who boat to bowls.

So it is for two participants in this week's Taranaki men's Open fours, Shayne Ivory and Richard Jolly.

They belong to the Waiheke club on Waiheke Island which means for any competitive bowls, a trip across the Hauraki Gulf is essential.

This week, for a first time, that has extended to a Waiheke team competing in the Taranaki Open.

They have dragged in Neville "the devil" Clark, a regular at the Open, and St Heliers' Michael Gibson. Ivory, second from left, said the side was "absolutely loving" their first Open. The last Waiheke player to take part in the Open was Graeme Griggs, who followed a long tradition of his Manawatu family.



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