

Open News - Taranaki Open Fours

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Blucher becomes the youngest ever winner

Adam Blucher of the Te Atatu Peninsula club in Auckland has become the youngest ever winner of The Devon Hotel Taranaki men's Open fours tournament.

Blucher and his side of Stefan McCartain, Richard Coles and Brendon Walton took out the 121st edition of the biggest provincial bowls event in New Zealand on Paritutu's front green yesterday afternoon.

They won the first all-Auckland final since 1963, beating Steve Bicknell, Darral Gordon, Neville Hill and skip Liam Hill (Onehunga & Districts) 23-8 in the final that concluded after just 18 ends.

Aged 20 years and 169 days, Blucher becomes the youngest ever winner of the Open. The record was previously held by another Aucklander, Dan Delany, who was 20 years and 327 days old when he first won the event in 1999.

The record was always going to be broken after the finalists had been found, with Liam Hill only

16. Next week he enters year 13 studies at Selwyn College from where he eventually hopes to become a commercial lawyer.

The final was supplemented by some good shots but generally the heads were not ultra-tight, with the momentum firmly with Blucher's team. Even though scoring was restricted on most heads, a four on the sixth and a five on the 11th proved decisive.

Blucher's side led 10-1 after seven ends. Hill's side replied, winning the next three ends. That made it 10-5 and Hill held four shots. But Blucher, with his first bowl, killed the end. On the replay, Blucher's side got close, a five swinging the impetus.

On the resumption after tea, the game sat for a period of time, with four ends killed. The match was very much still alive, Blucher leading 16-8 after 14.

Blucher then took counts of 2-3-1-1, making it 23-8, at which point Hill conceded.

Following his semifinal finish in the Dominion singles earlier in the month, Blucher delivered on that potential. It was very much a Delany-like performance and he is certainly on the path for higher honours.

McCartain actually lives in Taranaki. He had not played any bowls until the recent Dominion and belongs to both the Hawera Park and Piha clubs.

Coles, unknown on Monday, is a fourth-year player, who divides his time between Northland and Auckland. His consistency impressed many and suggested that this first centre title will not be his last.

The plainspoken Walton drew a number of good shots. He becomes the

14th player with his name on all three trophies presented during the week — fours winner, fours runner-up and pairs winner. But as the victors don't all belong to the same club in Auckland, the victory is not added to Walton's three Gold Star-qualifying titles in Taranaki.

Liam Hill acknowledged the death of Mike Bradshaw during the presentation and said the side had dedicated their performance to him. Bradshaw had been a regular attendee with Hill senior. They were runners-up in 2014.



Both morning semifinals became largely one-sided affairs. Blucher beat his clubmate Andy Ellis 28-14 through 22 ends.

Ellis is a dual a member of the Pringle Park club, where his team mates all belong — David Windler, Willis Wichman and Wayne Ruka.

Consistent scoring had Blucher's team in charge at 21-5 after 14 ends. Ellis narrowed that to 21-9 three ends later. But Blucher counted that with a three on the next.

Ellis, 11 behind after 21 ends, conceded after dropping a further three on the last played end.

It was a similar trend in the other semifinal, with Hill's side beating the Mt Maunganui quartet of Graeme Hill, John Simons, Warren Harford and skip Paul Eaton 27-7.

The damage was done between the fifth and ninth ends, when Hill took the score from 4-2 to 18-2. Eaton's side won five of the next six ends but on each occasion the scoring was restricted to a single. From 19-7, Hill won the next five ends, with Eaton waving the white flag after 20 heads.

READ AND BROOKES WIN PAIRS: Daryl Read (Paritutu) and Corey Brookes (West End), work colleagues at Tegel, won the Marbles Restaurant pairs when they beat Opononi's Matiu Kirk and Tupu Campbell 20-19 after an extra end in the final yesterday.

Read and Brookes led 18-12 after 16 ends, before the Far North duo climbed back into the game. Needing two shots to tie the game on the last end, Campbell, holding one, delivered his last bowl, called "Pat", turned around and shook Brookes' hand. "Pat" was a holler to his late brother, who was an accomplished player in Auckland. The bowl ended up drawing another shot to force the game into overtime before Brookes coolly drew the winner with his first bowl on the extra end.

He had also risen to the occasion in the semifinals, when he and Read beat Simon and Marshall Kenny (Silverstream) 18-16. It was 16-all playing the last end. Brookes killed the first attempt, with Read drawing the winners on the replay.

Kirk and Campbell defeated Dylan Thomas and Nicky Morgan (Paekakariki) 19-10 in the other semi.



Runners-up, left to right: Neville Hill, Steve Bicknell, Darral Gordon and Liam Hill.

The semifinal defeats didn't detract from the successful weeks enjoyed by both Ellis and Eaton.

As Eaton remarked: "I was just happy to qualify."

* The 122nd Devon Hotel Taranaki men's Open fours will commence on Monday, January 18, 2027.

