

## Stars come out for Champion of Champions

Sunday's arctic blasts and wild winds for the official practice session were little more than a dusty memory yesterday when the world's finest players took on the challenge of not just the national champions from twenty-six countries, but also the swift-running greens here at the historic Fendalton Bowls Club. Often called the 'players championship', the annual World Singles Champion of Champions is the only world title that doesn't involve national selection, fitness criteria or the need to curry favour with decision makers. Since its inception in 2003 it has offered singles champions from every club on earth – from the most humble and remote outposts to the gigantic seaside resort palaces – the opportunity to become a world champion. The possibility exists for sport's ultimate rags to riches story to be written this week. With this in mind, yesterday we welcomed two new nations to the champion of champions – Sri Lanka and Argentina – and their respective charges Susil Ramanayake and Dicky Rubinat. And although neither managed a win on opening day, both have distinguished themselves as well-skilled competitors. However, there is a collection of the sport's biggest names competing here that will make a fairytale finish tough going for those less travelled. But it should be noted that their pursuit of glory this time around, like every other player in the field, started with success on their home club green.

There are many great stars out there and equally great stories.

Popular local Blackjack Ali Forsyth, who won this event a decade ago, is clearly the man to beat, while Australia's David Holt, who covets the 2002 Commonwealth Games fours gold medal he won for England, will also stake a claim.

Similarly, Bobby Donnelly from South Africa, who won the singles gold medal at those same Games, and more recently added triples gold from the Glasgow Games to his collection, is a top fancy, as is Scotland's Iain McLean, the reigning WIBC world indoor mixed pairs champion.

And let's not forget young Malaysian Fairus Jabal, who won mixed pairs gold and singles bronze in the recent world junior championships at Broadbeach on Queensland's Gold Coast. Good judges are predicting he will be 'the next Safuan Said', a name well known to New Zealand bowls enthusiasts for his exploits at the 2008 world championships in this neck of the woods.

In the women's competition Scotland's Lorna Smith, who was runner-up in last year's final to Karen Murphy, will be leaving no stone unturned in her quest for this year's gold medal. One of the sport's most decorated players over many years, Lorna created history earlier this year when she became the first woman to win three successive Scottish singles titles.

In this morning's third round she will take on another of the hot favourites, Noelene Abe from Australia, in what is sure to be a 'Clash of the Titans'. Both are unbeaten at this stage.

Much interest also surrounds local star Helen King, who hosted a masterclass in her only match yesterday, while Dutch champion Saskia Schaft, Tai Jim from the Cook Islands, Japan's Yoko Goda and Petal Jones from Norfolk Island have all emerged unscathed after two rounds and are well qualified to rock the establishment. Watch this space.

Dinner and bowls at Belfast Bowling Club – Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> – book at Tournament office.

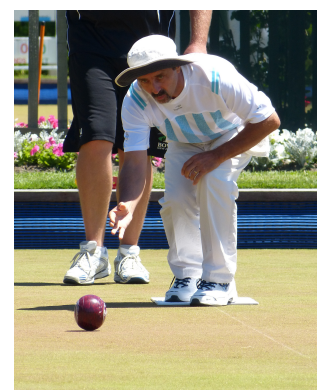
Competitors photos now available at Tournament office for \$NZ1 or large version for \$10



Ali Forsyth New Zealand



Lorna Smith Scotland



Dicky Rubinat Argentina