

The Present and Future of Youth Lawn Bowls in NZ on Show at Burnside

The 21st edition of Christchurch's prestigious youth lawn bowls event, now branded as the Living House Burnside Under 26 Singles, will be held this year from Friday, October 4 to Sunday, October 6, at the Burnside Bowling Club.

The 32 invited players - (9 young women and 23 young men aged between 15 and 25) have been drawn into four sections each of eight players. After seven section games, all players are placed into one of four divisions. The aim is to be first or second in their section to win a place in Division 1, where the main prizes and kudos are to be won. Division games are all played on a knockout basis and the finals of all four divisions will be completed early afternoon, Sunday, October 6.

Photo: Before the 2023 Final. Aiden Takarua (L) with Anthony Ouellet (R) and Tournament Director and Marker, Tayla Bruce (2015 winner)

Three former winners of this event are in the field. 2023 winner Aiden Takarua (Port Chevalier) is back to defend his title. In January 2024, Aiden also won the National Men's Singles Championship. 2023 runner up, Anthony Ouellet (Bowls Tauranga South), won the Under 26 title in 2021. Seamus Curtin, now a capped Blackjack, was successful in 2018, when he represented Stokes Valley. Seamus is at present living, working, and playing bowls at Ascot Park in Australia. All three will be among the favourites, but they will face stiff competition from a host of other players, many of whom have enjoyed success in winning open National Championships, Centre events, competing in intercentre team events, and/or have represented their country in international age group test matches. Mike Kernaghan, Bowls NZ's Head Coach will be at Burnside to observe first-hand many future Blackjacks.



The presence of Australian and Cook Island players is a feature, as it gives the NZ players the opportunity to test themselves against internationals of similar age. Twenty-four-year-old Kate Matthews, who already has two Australian triples' titles, and 22-year-old Jack East will be accompanied by Bowls Australia Assistant Coach Karen Murphy, who won three of her five World Championships on Burnside's greens. Bowls Cook Islands also recognises the value of this experience in their players' future development by supporting Emily Jim and Royden Aperau to take part in this event. These two, and Sydney-based Adoni Wichman-Rairoa, are already Commonwealth Games veterans.

Eight of the field - Briar Atkinson, Seamus Curtin, Ashleigh Jeffcoat, Rebecca Jelfs, Jordan Keene, Hamish Kelleher, Olivia Mancer, and Aiden Takarua - have been selected to play in the 2024 New Zealand Under 26 team at the World Bowls Oceania Challenge event to be held in Auckland in November. In addition the Aotearoa Māori Bowls Board has selected Tom Taiaroa and Cameron Horo to play in the Oceania Challenge.

Local interest will naturally focus on local players. All six have recorded good wins in past years. Dylan Campbell (Woolston Park); Braeden Casware (Riccarton Racecourse); Jacob Inch (Oxford Club); Rebecca Jelfs (Belfast); Hamish Kelleher (Halswell) runner up in the 2024 National Men's Pairs; and Olivia Mancer (Burnside) 2023/2024 Bowls Canterbury Sportswoman of the Year, can all look forward to strong support.

Other players to watch are Adam Baillie (Auckland BC), winner of the Deaf World Championship Singles 2023 in Edinburgh; Briar Atkinson (Paritutu), Bowls NZ 2023 Emerging Player of the Year; and Adam Blucher, Nathan Goodin, Caleb Hope, Ashleigh Jeffcoat, Jordan Keene, and James-Cameron Powell, all of whom will be strong contenders vying for a spot in Division 1.

Event Organiser Kerrie Bruce commented, *"It's a great field again this year and it promises to be another exciting tournament. It is always thrilling to see the high standard of entries that come in and it's never easy selecting the field. This year attracted more entries than ever before."*

Spectators are very welcome at the Burnside Bowling Club at 330 Avonhead Road. Admission is free. Bowls NZ will be live streaming games on Saturday and Sunday on its YouTube channel. Full tournament results and information can be found at www.burnsidebowlingclub.com by selecting "Living House Burnside U26 Singles". Come along; you won't be disappointed.