

HIGH ROLLERS

STORM DUNEDIN



AT NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL CHAMPS

By Crispin Anderlini

In a whirlwind of colour, laughter and intensive greens action, the Bowls NZ National Secondary School Championships touched down on Dunedin's North East Valley and St Clair greens for a debut appearance in the country's oldest city. And with the talented teenagers filling the historic greens to the brim, a bright future for the sport of bowls looked apparent to all.

From the 12th to the 14th of December, 2010, 72 students from all over the country rolled up against each other in what has become one of the biggest and most enjoyable youth bowls events in New Zealand. With a mere decade of history behind it, the successful tournament has come to be seen as a reliable indicator of future talent, and a "launching pad for an international bowling career," according to New Zealand National Head Coach Dave Edwards.

"It's a fantastic breeding ground for talented bowlers, and we certainly keep an eye on it. If you look at the current Black Jacks you can see the proof of this," Edwards says - and he's right. Looking back at the past winners of the event, names like Genevieve Baildon (BlackJack), Shannon McIlroy (Black Jack), Mandy Boyd (NZ representative and youngest woman to win a national title), Raika Gregory (NZ Open winner, Men's Singles), Amy Brenton (NZ representative and National Singles finalist) and Chris Le Lievre (NZ representative and national title winner in the Pairs) stand out as examples of class bowlers that have gone on to earn top honours at the senior level.

With a close eye on the proceedings, Bowls NZ National Selector and Talent Development Programme Coach, Terry Scott, summed it up nicely: "It was the first time we've seen the event down here before, and it was something really interesting for the bowling community. We do also have a national under-18 team, and this event is especially important for choosing players for that side. It's a great starter for serious young bowlers because you receive national recognition, but there's a social side as well because most of them know each other."

In the Girls Pairs an amazing story of courage and friendship found a happy ending in the courageous victory of Kerry Heffer and Georgia McGee (Southland Girls High School).

Sixteen-year-old Kerry came out of surgery to treat thyroid cancer on December 1st, and only a mere ten days later she went into the tournament with her mind set on victory. The Southland girls relied on teamwork, communication and a lot of love for each other to earn the national title. "Support from our families and friends got us through and really helped us out," both girls agree, "we talked more this time and we really had each other's backs." This new approach saw them cut a swathe through the assembled competition, some of whom had bested them at last year's event. Their title win is an awe inspiring story of courage, friendship, and determination.

For those who attended this year's event the overwhelming feedback has been that this event was inspiring to be a part of. The level of play was exceptional,

the attitude of the players overwhelming, and the atmosphere breathtaking. Encompassing the very best aspects of this growing sport - the social and the seriously competitive side of bowls - the National Secondary School Championships is often the first great introduction to a new addiction and lifetime of bowls.



Monte Pawa and Mrs Wong.



Euan Wong and below, Georgia McGee and Kerry Heffer

