

TAKING THE TITLE

THE ROAD TO WINNING A NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

By Crispin Anderlini

Tears, unbridled smiles, sighs of relief, whoops of delight and nervous giggles of elation poured forth in equal measure as the National Secondary School champions found their way to the final jack, and started up the steps to the victorious top tier. Wong, Hocking, Heffer and McGee, Eminson and defending Pairs champion Cameron Higgins, all made their way to the top with a winning smile, a lot of hard work, and stunning results against fierce competition.

For three days they played, rolling end after end against the best teenaged bowlers the country could muster. And in the end it came down to a matter of centimetres – particularly for Tessa Hocking (Napier Girls High School) and Euan Wong (Hutt Valley High School). Recognised by Bowls NZ National Selector and Talent Development Programme Coach Terry Scott as “players with credentials,” there was still no room for error as they took on Connie Rowland from Linwood College (in the Girls Singles) and Kaitia College’s Monte Pawa (Boys Singles) in the epic finals.

Hocking started strong, but lost her way in the middle of the match, and succumbed to a fit of nervous giggling before finding her way back to the scoreboard for a final dash in the dying minutes of the game. Rowland took the opportunity to even the score, and in the end it came down to a paltry handful of centimetres, carefully measured out by the umpire, to decide the winner (13-12).

“It was a close game with Connie,”

says the quietly confident Hocking, “I lost my concentration for a bit and wasn’t scoring. Connie played really well to even the score, but the last bowl was a measure and I won by a couple of centimetres. It was pretty cool to end on that high note as I didn’t think I would win; just getting a top placing was my plan.” Smiling in a slightly overwhelmed manner, the newly graduated high school student reveals that it is also her first NZ title. Once that’s out though, it seems to sink in a bit deeper, and beaming all over the 18-year-old admits that it’s “the biggest thing I’ve ever won.”

A first for Wong as well, the national title match against Pawa that earned him the gold was riveting enough to be televised. “This is real spectator bowls,” 17-year-old Wong said proudly in the midst of play, as the umpire called for an extra end to decide the gripping final. Looking dominant throughout the match, Wong gave some ground as Pawa clawed his way back to the draw. Staying consistent and never losing his cool, Wong then rolled a beautiful draw on the extra end that Pawa just couldn’t get close to (11-10). This secured gold for the Hutt Valley High School student, and took him closer to his goal of a 2014 Commonwealth Games opportunity.

Kerry Heffer and Georgia McGee’s Girls Pairs victory was even sweeter, against Katelyn Inch and Brittany Tyson (8-7). It marked the end of a dramatic journey for Heffer, and lent a happy ending to the Southland Girls High School students’ courageous story.

Meanwhile, in the Boys Pairs there was a repeat performance by Cameron



Kerry Heffer and Georgia McGee.



Girls Singles Winner Tessa Hocking.



Cameron Higgins and Thomas Eminson.



Boys Singles Winners.

Higgins and a first victory for new partner Thomas Eminson (Tauranga Boys College) over Jordan Linn and Joseph Doyle (Coastal Taranaki School), 9-7. And those that left with the Plates were Malia Begley (Napier Girls High School) and Johnathon Ridden (Mountainview High School) in the Singles, and Selina Goddard/Siobhan Archer (Howick College) and Elliot Mason/Oliver Mason (Otago Boys High School) in the Pairs.