

THE FUTURE IS NOW

WHAT DO CURRENT BLACK JACKS GENEVIEVE BAILDON, SHANNON McILROY AND ANDREW KELLY HAVE IN COMMON?

All three once stood on the dais as winners of National Secondary Schools Championship titles.

Genevieve won her singles title in 2002, Shannon had a three year stranglehold on the singles from 2002-2004 and Andrew secured a singles title in 2005. Furthermore, these players are now at the pinnacle of our sport, with Genevieve and Shannon representing New Zealand at the Commonwealth Games.

But it hasn't been by chance that these three, and others of their generation, are now forging a new chapter in the New Zealand bowls history books, it has been the firm commitment by us as a sport to develop youth within bowls and the growing force of youth bowls supporters/coordinators / ambassadors / coaches throughout the country.

The National Secondary Schools Championships has developed into a challenging and competitive event endorsed as an official secondary schools championship. The Kittyhawks National U20's Singles has been an established event on the youth bowls calendar for years and is regarded as one of the best for identifying future talent. In February this year, New Zealand secured a historic win over Australia in the Under 18's tests.

So where are we now? The pool is growing, the talent identification and development pathway is demonstrating success, and our dedication to a High Performance programme will go a long way to ensuring that we continue to 'dominate the world of bowls'. But to keep this going,

we need to look at our sport holistically – what are we doing to make bowls appeal to younger people, to get more young kiwis playing more bowls, more often?

Squad6 is the nationally branded and SPARC supported secondary schools participation model. Squad6 is not a championship to find winners; it is designed to grow student participation at a base level.

Youth bowls is now a priority. Traditional club membership will continue to be the backbone of our sport, but unless we continue to promote and encourage youth to play bowls, clubs will close and the sport could die. Before the mat is pulled out from under us, let's get more young people playing bowls – the future is now.

What can you do to help? Support youth bowls by creating a positive and welcoming environment for all youth. Support youth bowls coordinators in your club and centre, attend events, run Squad 6, and develop youth focused coaching.

Our youth bowlers are the future of the Black Jacks and among the great Kiwi names such as Khan, Skoglund, Bellis will go the names of Baildon, McIlroy and Kelly.

Pictured right from top: Andrew Kelly in 2005, and 5 years later wins the World Junior Cup; Shannon McIlroy claims his third secondary title in 2004 and 6 years later is a Commonwealth games athlete; the victorious Area 2 Team in 2002 including Genevieve Baildon (right).

