

Teams to stake claims from medal chase

This is the business end of the first week's qualifying stanza for the women's singles and fours, along with the men's pairs and triples at these magnificent Asia Pacific Championships.

And like the world of thoroughbred racing, where seasoned jockeys position their mounts heading into the main straight for their run to the finish line, teams wishing to be in contention for next week's medal play-offs must put their best foot forward today.

New Zealand certainly did yesterday when the proud Blackjacks handed in 10 winning cards from 10 starts.

Without doubt the big performance came from the new-look women's fours combination of debutante Katelyn Inch, Angela Boyd, Val Smith and Sandra Keith, who, after a dismal opening day on Tuesday, came out with all guns blazing to record three fine victories and sit outright second in their section.

However, with just one match in which to accumulate points today - while those looming behind have two - the Blackjack quartet will hope for a gentle wave of Lady Luck's wand to finish in the top three and qualify for a medal tilt.

NZ's singles player Jo Edwards was in an equally savage mood when she stepped out on the Burnside turf yesterday. After her close call against Cook Island's Teokotai Jim on Day 1, the reigning Commonwealth Games singles champion never allowed Yoko Goda, her much-admired Japanese opponent, to settle into the match and took just nine ends to deliver a clean sheet in the first of her three wins.

A word for the wise - at around noon today Edwards will play Carmen Anderson from Norfolk Island in what promises



• *The Blackjack women's quartet of Katelyn Inch, Angela Boyd, Val Smith and Sandra Keith*

to be one of the tournament's highlights. The diminutive Anderson, who burst onto the scene when she won the 1996 world singles title at Leamington Spa in England, has been a prolific winner on the Australian circuit for more than 20 years, and just recently captured the singles crown at the prestigious Malaysian Merdeka Indoor Championships. Anderson has a day at the office that would send most professional athletes into a tailspin. Following her appointment with Edwards, she faces the defending champion, Malaysian superstar Siti Zalina Ahmad, who has two Commonwealth Games singles gold medals to her credit and is the reigning World Cup champion.

The Blackjacks men's pairs and triples combinations are both well placed in their quest for medals. Mike Kernaghan and Shannon McLroy lead their section, and will lay claim for a guaranteed semi final spot in today's late afternoon session against Hong Kong China's Terry Kung and Kenny Chan.

With a narrow round three loss to the currently undefeated Fijian team being their only blemish to date, the Blackjacks men's triple of Mike Nagy, Andrew Kelly and Paul Girdler are travelling beautifully. They are in second place in their section and have a shots advantage over Messrs Turanga, Aitchison and Kumar.

The Fijians will need to be at their best - these Kiwis will pounce on any opportunity for a guaranteed medal - the reward for finishing qualifying rounds at the top of the section.

Australia's Jackaroos occupy top section position in three disciplines, world singles champion Karen Murphy in the corresponding singles grouping along with the women's fours and men's triples; while USA holds top spot in the other women's fours section, as does Malaysia in the second men's pairs section.

And the best news about this two-week extravaganza of international bowls is that entry to the hosting Bowls Papanui and Burnside clubs is absolutely free.