

Blackjacks in the hunt for APC gold

New Zealand's recently re-jigged Blackjacks are positioned for a hard-earned medal tilt at the Asia Pacific Bowls Championships presently under way in Christchurch.

This year's championships rolled out the red carpet to no fewer than eighteen bowling nations from across the Asia Pacific region.

Today, at the Burnside Bowling Club, all four Blackjack combinations competing in the first week's women's singles and fours, along with men's pairs and triples, will stake their claim for a start in next week's gold medal matches being telecast live on SKY.

In fact, two Blackjack disciplines gained direct entry into this afternoon's semi finals, a reward for topping their sections, and their worst-case scenario is a bronze medal. However, women's singles representative Jo Edwards has her sights set higher than that, as her singles gold medal at last year's Commonwealth Games in Glasgow attests.

Yesterday's 'battle of letters' between Jo Edwards MNZM and Norfolk Island's legendary Carmen Anderson OAM, saw the New Zealand great emerge victorious and formalise her ascension to this afternoon's semi finals. Ironically, Anderson plays Canada's Kelly McKerihen in an elimination final this morning, with the winner facing Edwards in the semi final at 1pm.

The newly formed Kiwi men's pairs combo of Shannon McIlroy and Mike Kernaghan were irrepressible throughout and richly deserved top billing in their section. A three-shot first round loss to the aggressive Fijians was little more than a hiccup to the experienced Blackjacks, who combined brilliantly to



• Shannon McIlroy and Mike Kernaghan top qualified in their pairs section.

secure sectional victory by a round win and more than fifty shots. After lunch today they play the winner of this morning's eliminator between Malaysia and Hong Kong China in a semi final. National skip Paul Girdler and his men's triples partners Andrew Kelly and Mike Nagy will be looking to repeat their Round 6 victory over Brunei this morning, with the view of an afternoon semi final blockbuster against defending champions Fiji. These Blackjacks have combined brilliantly all week and a medal of any hue would be a just reward. But Girdler is one tough hombre, so he will be eyeing off gold; but first there's the ever-improving Brunei men to contend with!

Likewise, the women's fours side of skipper Sandra Keith, Val Smith, Angela Boyd and Katelyn Inch, has gone from strength to strength since its forgettable first day and are keenly awaiting this morning's challenge against the Philippines line-up. Reward for a strong performance is a shot at the powerful



• Blackjack great Jo Edwards also topped her section yesterday.

Aussies and, perhaps, further honours in front of a live national SKY television audience next week.

Hats off to the well-drilled Australians, who have qualified in medal position in all four disciplines being contested today, while the USA women's fours and Fijian men's triples are also guaranteed a tier on the medal podium.