



International stars out for second wave

The international appeal of lawn bowls reached new heights on Friday when the semi final results out of last week's qualifying program in four disciplines were circulated.

Of the eight oppositions competing in the four Asia Pacific Championships finals to be decided in women's singles and fours, along with men's pairs and triples, no fewer than seven bowling nations will be involved.

The Australian Jackaroos, after fielding four teams in the semi finals, have two in gold medal play-offs, being it's women's fours combination and singles player Karen Murphy.

Murphy's opponent Carmen Anderson represents Norfolk Island, and the Aussie fours will come up against the keen USA quartet. The men's pairs sees Malaysia playing the Canadians, while New Zealand will face sentimental favourites Japan in the men's triples final. All of these matches will be telecast live on SKY Sport.

New Zealand skipper Paul Girdler had two-hundred reasons to be euphoric at Burnside on Friday when he piloted his NZ Blackjacks triples team into the men's triples gold medal play-off.

Girdler, who is based on Australia's Gold Coast these days as sports co-ordinator at the palatial Tweed Heads Bowls Club, answered an SOS from Bowls New Zealand and returned to international duty last week. He last wore the distinctive Blackjacks uniform at Ayr in Scotland during the 2004 world outdoor championships.

Friday morning's elimination final against the Brunei national team was Girdler's 200th appearance for NZ, and although the Dunedin southpaw was delighted to



• Mike Kernaghan

claim victory with teammates Andrew Kelly and Mike Nagy, he was thrilled with the team's fighting 'come from behind' win over hot favourites Fiji in the afternoon semi final.

Today sees the second stanza of Asia Pacific qualifying get underway with the blue ribbon men's singles, along with men's fours, women's pairs and women's triples.

Much local excitement will surround reigning NZ singles champion Mike Kernaghan, who also answered a call to rejoin the Blackjacks after a 13-year absence from international bowls. He is a magnificent competitor and knows the Burnside greens intimately.

The men's singles field offers so many seductive features with former world champions Hizlee Rais from Malaysia and Aussie Aron Sherriff in full flight, while Canada's Ryan Bester, who won singles silver at the most recent Commonwealth Games, and world outdoor



• Paul Girdler

championships in Adelaide, is the form singles player in the sport right now. But keep an eye on young guns Kenny Chan from Hong Kong and Japan's Kenta Hasebe, who will make their more senior opponents work hard for every shot.

The women's pairs also carries some of the sport's top performers with Blackjacks Jo Edwards and Val Smith, the defending champions, who also claimed the world title here in 2008, being one of the most successful women's combinations of the modern era.

But they will be pushed by Australia's Karen Murphy and Kelsey Cottrell, who are both world singles winners, as are Malaysia's Siti Zalina Ahmad and recently crowned Emma Saroji, while anyone who discounts the formidable Philippines duo of Ainie Knight and Sonia Bruce, who won last year's Hong Kong International, does so at their own peril. And that goes for any team in any discipline this week. Enjoy!