

The Agony and Ecstasy of championship bowls

The second stanza of qualifying for a shot at Asia Pacific Bowls Championship gold medals in Christchurch later this week got underway in fine style yesterday. And, as is almost a tradition, a collection of juicy moments came away from a challenging day on the Bowls Papanui and Burnside greens.

Whereas last Friday saw the gold medal opponents for the women's singles and fours, along with the men's pairs and triples decided, this new week works in reverse and features men's singles and fours, while the women's teams will vie for positions in their pairs and fours finals. All finals, it should be noted, will be telecast live on SKY Sport this coming Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

But there are thousands of these unique spheres to be delivered on sport's most level playing field between now and then – and, no doubt, several hearty dollops of the agony and ecstasy that this game can induce at will.

Who will forget last Friday's gallant performance by the previously unheralded Japanese triples combination of Kenta Hasebe, Ken Emura and Hank Sato who relegated the mighty Australian team of world champions Wayne Ruediger, Mark Casey and Aron Sherriff to the spectator seating for the gold medal match at noon next Friday?



• NZ's Katelyn Inch.

Kenta Hasebe, the Japan team's young skipper, who lives in Sydney and won last year's NSW Champion of Champions title, frontlined the victory. It was sheer ecstasy – quite possibly life-changing. However, a plate-sized serving of agony bit yesterday morning when the rangy Hasebe, who is highly fancied to be in singles medal contention, was soundly beaten by the relatively unknown Sunil Bahadur from India in the opening round.

And then there's Ryan Dixon from Norfolk Island, who hadn't troubled the scorers in yesterday's first two round, losing to Malaysia's Hizlee Rais and Brunei's Rahman Omar, then in the late match he took out favourite Ryan Bester from Canada, who is rated as

the hottest prospect in the sport at present.

Not to be outdone, earlier in the day Norfolk Island's women's pairing of Carmen Anderson -who has an appointment with Australia's Karen Murphy at 3pm on Friday to decide the singles gold medal – and Christine 'Petal' Jones led defending champions and former world titleholders Jo Edwards and Val Smith a merry dance in the first round. Holding a four-shot lead going into the last end was great for the islanders, however, the seasoned Blackjacks were having none of it and moved up a gear to surround the jack and claim four – the measure for a fifth fell short – and halved the match.

A couple of milestones have been celebrated recently, such as recalled Blackjack Paul Girdler's 200th international last Friday morning, and we heartily congratulate the great Karen Murphy, who chalked up her 500th outing for Australia a couple of weeks ago in Hong Kong.

But let's toss an orchid towards New Zealand rookie Katelyn Inch, who at a smidgen over 20 is possibly the youngest competitor at these championships. Yesterday she played her 10th senior game for the Blackjacks, and such has been the quality of her bowls in the conditions, that good judges are predicting a long and distinguished career for this richly talented young sporting all-rounder.