

Blackjacks in quest for medal haul

New Zealand's new-look Blackjacks are in medal contention again at the Asia Pacific Bowls Championships presently under way in Christchurch.

The championships feature 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 second week's men's singles and fours, along with women's pairs and triples, will stake their claim for a start in the gold medal matches being telecast live on SKY Sport on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Already the men's triples team of Mike Nagy, Andrew Kelly and Paul Girdler are confirmed for Friday's high noon showdown against the Japanese trio of Hank Sato, Ken Emura and Kenta Hasebe, who pulled off the biggest upset in recent times by eliminating powerhouse Australians Wayne Ruediger, Mark Casey and Aron Sherriff last Friday.

In fact, three 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. Ironically, only defending champions and 2008 world women's pairs winners Jo Edwards and Val Smith, missed on a free pass and must overcome the Philippines duo of Ainie Knight and Sonia Bruce this morning to meet Australians Karen Murphy and Kelsey Cottrell in this afternoon's semi finals.

As expected the great Mike Kernaghan won his way into the men's singles semi finals, as did the hot running fours combination of Nagy, Kelly, Shannon McIlroy and Girdler, who along with Kernaghan, answered an SOS from Bowls New Zealand to bolster their talent stocks. The results have been astounding.

But tribute should be paid to the women's



• The Blackjacks trio of Katelyn Inch, Angela Boyd and Sandra Keith.

triples line-up of previously uncapped youngsters Katelyn Inch and Angela Boyd, along with skipper Sandra Keith who won her first Blackjacks cap in the 2013 Trans Tasman Series against Australia at Auckland's Howick Bowls Club, but has been missing since. In 2012 Keith won the world singles champion of champions title at Cyprus.

Inch, Boyd and Keith have never competed together before, but over the past four days have combined brilliantly to reach the semi finals undefeated. They are assured of a bronze medal, but there is a feeling in the camp that these girls are destined for something more.

Today's match schedule: Elimination finals commence at 9am, semi finals at 1.00pm.

Men's singles: Kenta Hasebe (Japan) v Ryan Bester (Canada), winner to play Mike Kernaghan (New Zealand); Ken Chan (Hong Kong) v Hizlee Rais (Malaysia), winner to play Aron Sherriff (Australia).

Men's fours: Tony Cheung, Terry Kung, Jason Choi, CY Wong (Hong Kong) v Brent Pauling, Phil Jones, John Christian, Tim

Sheridan (Norfolk Island), winner to play Wayne Ruediger, Ray Pearce, Nathan Rice, Mark Casey; (Australia); Bill Brault, Scott Roberts, Aaron Zangl, Charlie Herbert (USA) v Izzat Dzulkeple, Zulhilmie Redzuan, Fairul Muin, Soufi Rusli (Malaysia), winner to play Mike Nagy, Andrew Kelly, Shannon McIlroy, Paul Girdler (New Zealand).

Women's pairs: Dorothy Yu, Vivien Yip (Hong Kong) v Petal Jones, Carmen Anderson (Norfolk Island), winner to play Emma Saroji, Siti Zalina Ahmad (Malaysia); Ainie Knight, Sonia Bruce (Philippines) v Val Smith, Jo Edwards (New Zealand), winner to play Kelsey Cottrell, Karen Murphy (Australia).

Women's triples: Amy Choi, Mercedi Yeung, Angela Chau (Hong Kong) v Elizabeth Mocerai, Sheral Mar, Litia Tikoisua (Fiji), winner to play Carla Odgers, Anne Johns, Natasha Scott (Australia); Hazel Jaconoy, Ronalyn Greenlees, Rosita Bradborn (Philippines) v Shirley Fitzpatrick-Wong, Harriette Pituley, Kelly McKerihen (Canada), winner to play Katelyn Inch, Angela Boyd, Sandra Keith (New Zealand).