

High Noon 'shootout' a fairytale finish

All bowlers understand that their sport can be a great leveler in which reputations count for nothing and there are no guarantees of success.

Fact is, even the greenest newcomer to lawn bowls will have had a resting toucher - the 'ultimate' bowls shot - at some stage during their earliest orientation to sport's most-level playing field. Only difference between these rookies and the greats of the game is that the champions can do it at will.

During these Asia Pacific championships in Christchurch, where some of the world's greatest bowlers rub shoulders with relative novices from what can politely be called the 'emerging nations', there have been some surprises.

The fledgling bowling nation of Brunei on the island of Borneo produced two of them; when Esma Brahim, Suhana Daud and Bella Chuchu defeated Carla Odgers, Anne Johns and Natasha Scott from Australia in the women's triples; then Haji Salleh, BJ Chuchu, Haji Bujang and Naim Brahim toppled Australia's 'Dream Team', Wayne Ruediger, Ray Pearse, Nathan Rice and Mark Casey, in the men's fours.

However, last Friday, in the biggest shock result for years - quite possibly ever - the previously unheralded Japanese combination of Kenta Hasebe, Ken Emura and Hank Sato, staved off a late charge by a trio of Aussie world champions, Wayne Ruediger, Mark Casey and Aron Sherriff to win their semi final clash 14-11.

So, at 'high noon' today, the high-flying Japanese team will face New Zealand's national heroes, the Blackjacks - Mike Nagy, Andrew Kelly and Paul Girdler - in a shootout for the gold medal that will



• *The Japanese triple: Kenta Hasebe, Ken Emura and Hank Sato.*

be telecast live on SKY Sport.

The unassuming Japanese trio, having charmed the local fraternity at the Bowls Papanui and Burnside clubs over the past two weeks, will most likely start as sentimental favourites. And fairytales do happen, however, Blackjacks skipper Paul Girdler is a hardened professional who neither asks for or gives an inch.

He will have partners Mike Nagy and Andrew Kelly tuned in to make every post a winner. After a 10-year absence from the big time, a gold medal dangling around Girdler's neck would be just reward for answering Bowls New Zealand's SOS to resume active international duty.

In the women's fours final, the day's curtain raiser, Australia's Carla Odgers, Anne Johns, Kelsey Cottrell and Natasha Scott, face off with the USA quartet of Candy DeFazio, Anne Nunes, Janice Bell and Myra Wood, who were undefeated in qualifying rounds and moved into the

main event with their victory over the highly fancied Malaysian rink.

Friends - whether you've found a vantage point at Burnside Bowls Club, or are viewing at home tuned into SKY Sport, set your timer for 3 o'clock this afternoon when former world champions, Karen Murphy from Australia and Norfolk Island's Carmen Anderson, go for gold in the women's singles final.

These international greats are actually clubmates at Cabramatta in Sydney during the club's premier pennant season, however, it will mean zilch once the first jack is set.

Anderson won the 1996 world singles championship at Leamington Spa in England, while Murphy is the reigning world outdoor singles champion from Adelaide in 2012, plus she won the 2013 world singles champion of champions title right here at Burnside, in gale force winds. And that factor might just be the difference.