

Firstly an apology. I had been expecting official results from Australia that would confirm the final scores. As far as I know we have not received these so please be aware that any figures are unconfirmed.

Our annual match with our Australian neighbours is always an eagerly anticipated clash. Although New Zealand has had the wood on them over the past six years this could easily change.

This year for the first time we had an Open Team, a Seniors Team and a Junior Team. As many of you are aware it has not been easy enticing younger players into our game despite the efforts of many people over the years. We are hoping that the incentive of National Representation assists with this goal. While on this subject, I would like to thank the regional associations that supported our Juniors. Your demonstration of support was appreciated and repaid, if not by results, certainly by the attitude and effort that our young players took into the games.

Many players travelled independently and either arrived early or added on days to their weekend of pétanque. The expectation was that players would be in Lake Macquarie for a Thursday afternoon practice.

Unfortunately some players in Wellington had obviously offended the weather gods and evening fog in the capital meant that the Thursday morning flight was cancelled. Fortunately all the affected players and supporters were able to rebook on flights to get them to the tournament on time. You can imagine the anxiety this caused for players, some of whom this was their first international event, and the coaches. This disrupted travel only really impacted on the Seniors and the Open Women, however a slight tweaking of combinations meant all was well.

We had been told that the Lake Macquarie pistes were rather benign, but we arrived to discover three distinct surfaces. Half of the pistes were covered with thickly covered with small stones requiring players to put some height into their pointing and shooters needed to hit boule to boule to make a difference.

The second surface was a hard base with a smattering of loose stone. Identifying and hitting your landing spot was the key to success on this surface and the third terrain was a hard, dry flat surface with no covering. The key to being successful on this terrain was being able judge the weight of your boule. Most players used low rolling pointing shots. This was arguably the most difficult terrain to play on.

The tournament was organised in such a way that the teams were drawn to play on different terrains throughout the weekend. This meant constantly having to adjust your style to suit the terrain.

The Tournament is run in three different sections; Open, Seniors and Juniors. Apart from the Juniors, the teams are six males and six females. We play single gender triples and doubles on the first day and single gender triples and mixed doubles on the second day.

From this point I will concentrate on the Open section as I have little information, and I cannot attest to the accuracy of the information I have gleaned.

After the first two rounds of triples the women were 4 – 0 and the men were 0 – 4.

Even scoring going into the doubles round. The Australians appeared to come out all firing in the doubles, however this was not matched on the scoreboard with the New Zealand team slightly shading the Australians by 10 games to 8. Both the Men's and the women's team had won 5 games to 4.

A slender 4 point lead was taken into day two of the competition by the NZ open team.

The competition was wide open as we started the second day with another two games of triples. We knew we had the Aussies a bit rattled as they changed their team combinations in an effort to peg us back. It

worked to some extent in the women's section but our men rose to the challenge and picked up a couple of the games.

The men split their games 2 -2 with the Aussies while the women still maintained a dominant position with a 3 – 1 outcome.

We entered the mixed doubles section of the tournament with a 10 point lead. With 36 points still in hand this could be a little like a lottery. While Andre and I had spent time working on the combinations to match player ability and temperament the reality was that only one of our combinations had played together before.

Call it a stroke of coaching and selection genius if you like but the Kiwi team won this section convincingly with a 14 - 4 game result. Our teams performed outstandingly. To quote Eric Doublet – the number one mens' player for Australia after his mixed doubles team had just been beaten by Joanne and Dez 13 -12 “Your team are too good”. I must add that Joanne and Dez turned around a 3 – 12 deficit to take this game.

The final result for the open section was a convincing 78 – 42 victory to make it six in a row for the Kiwis

All of the games were timed, 1 hour and two ends. This occasionally required us to think differently in terms of strategy and tactics.

At times it came down to defending a lead. I recall one particular end of the women's game the Kiwis were leading 9- 6, holding one and the Aussies were out of boules the position the Aussies defending boules were in meant that the Kiwis took 1 point even though they had five boules in hand. A 10 – 6 lead is easier to defend than a 9 – 7.

Conversely we had ends where we were required to score heavily and needed to attack. I recall one such end where Barbara and Sharon were attempting to score 4 to tie the game on a final end. Five shots were required, every boule connecting but unfortunately we were not always able to move the boules far enough to hold the point. Luckily we were in a dominant position as far as the match was concerned as it allowed us the freedom to attempt some very technical and difficult shots.

While all this was going on the Seniors were still battling away and in this epic struggle it was coming down to the result of the last game. A win to the Aussies would result in tied scores and a win to the Aussies on points differential a win to NZ would give us an outright, if somewhat slender victory. 62 - 58

The Australians had their opportunities to close this game out on the last end however a couple of loose boules handed us the victory.

The NZ Juniors were always going to be battling against a very talented, and experienced group of Juniors from Australia. From what I saw our Juniors never gave up even though their backs were to the wall. They were eventually defeated 29 – 9 but these kids performed creditably and stood up to the challenge. They deserved their Black Shirt and did NZ Petanque proud. We need to do all we can to encourage and retain these juniors.

It may appear that this was a relatively easy victory but the scores alone do not convey the intense competition of this tournament. Many of the games were tight and the points were ground out, end after end.

As a coach and PNZ President I am incredibly proud of the way our Petanque community was represented in Australia, the players, coaches and officials, and our supporters. It was a victory for us all

Dirk Winne