

1 AUSTRALIAN TEAM PLAYOFF DISCUSSION PAPER.

At the time of introducing the current playoff structure the Tournament Committee (TC) said they would consult and review the structure at the end of the 4-year cycle.

This paper is designed to commence the consultation process for Playoffs for the 2022 representative teams onwards.

The paper asks a number of questions and identifies a number of alternatives. This is to facilitate discussion and input. The TC does not have a preferred position. Interested parties are invited to comment on alternatives identified and raise other options not considered in the paper.

2 FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES

After the beginning of the current cycle the World Bridge Federation (WBF) introduce Mixed Teams to the World Championships. The WBF subsequently introduced U31 Teams to the Youth Championships. Going forward it is clear that the WBF will find new categories to add to world championships, noting that they generate more income every time they add a Category. The additional income comes from the National Bridge Organisations (NBO's) who fund extra entry fees and costs.

The Australian Bridge Federation (ABF) has seen its costs of funding playoffs and international representation rise considerably in recent times. The process for selecting Australian teams is a core activity of the ABF, however, we need to keep it under control. The cost of funding representative teams is a significant component of the ABF budget and the ABF Management Committee wants to reduce the amount of funding, subsidy and playoff costs for international teams significantly from the current levels.

Like any organisation with rising costs there are two choices. Increase income or reduce costs. To significantly increase the fees on all ABF registered players to provide more benefits to relatively few 'elite' players does not seem appropriate.

The ABF is looking at cost savings and efficiencies throughout its operations, however the ABF Management Committee has determined **funding all playoffs and international representation at current levels is unsustainable.**

2.1 MIXED EVENTS

Whilst not yet popular categories in most ABF and ABF Licensed events in Australia it is clear that mixed events are here to stay on the International Calendar, as evidenced by the entry numbers at two major international transnational championships tabulated below.

World Bridge Series Orlando 2018		
	Pairs	Teams (participants)
Open	238	96 (494)
Women's	67	17 (89)
Seniors	105	31 (154)
Mixed	295	107 (543)

9th European Open Championships Istanbul 2019		
	Pairs	Teams (participants)
Open	290	122 (616)
Women's	64	26 (132)
Seniors	54	22 (103)
Mixed	254	86 (430)

It is intended that Australia will continue to provide representative Mixed Teams at World Championships.

2.2 WOMEN'S AND SENIORS EVENTS

The number of Seniors competing in National Seniors Events is reducing for structural reasons, including the WBF progressively increasing the age at which players can enter Seniors events.

Entries into National Women's events has steadily been decreasing for some time, to the point where the viability of some events is marginal.

Seniors events and to lesser extent Women's events are disappearing from the PQP Tournament Calendar (note no Seniors events at Gold Coast or Autumn Nationals).

3 TERMINOLOGY AND BACKGROUND

Playoff year refers to the year in which the International Representation occurs not the year in which Playoff occurred i.e. the 2020 Open Playoff occurred in Nov 2019 to determine the 2020 representative team.

The PQP year commences in October (Spring Nationals) and finishes in September the following year to facilitate entry into the playoffs. The TC has had a long-standing policy of not changing PQP's for a playoff year (except to correct errors and misprints) once they have been published to enable players to plan their Bridge Calendar.

The Playoffs for 2021 and PQP's leading to these playoffs are currently scheduled and the TC is not proposing to make substantial alterations to playoff tournament structure. i.e. 2021 Playoffs will be substantially the same as the 2020 Playoffs.

If nothing changes the 2022 Playoff will be a pairs event based on PQP's earned from the PQP cycle beginning with the Spring Nationals in October 2020. Note that major changes to the Australian Playoff structures need to be made at least 18 to 24 months in advance of the relevant playoff target tournament.

3.1 FUNDING

Currently the Open, Women's, and Seniors playoff are funded the same and have the same entry fee refund policy, with subsidies paid to all players based on geography. Participants in the Mixed do not receive a subsidy, although they do not pay as high an entry fee. The Mixed Playoff does not refund entry fees.

When subsidies and entry fee refunds are accounted for the Open, Women’s, and Seniors playoffs run at a significant loss to the ABF. The Mixed playoff runs close to break even.

3.2 RECENT PLAYOFFS

The structure and entries to recent playoff is summarised in the following tables.

Open, Women’s, and Seniors Playoff					
Playoff for Team of nominated Year	Format	Entry Limit	Entries		
			Open	Women’s	Seniors
2015	2 Divisions	None	6	7	6
2016	2 Divisions	None	12	7	10
2017	128 Board KO	8	7	6	7
2018	Pairs	16	19	15	16
2019	128 Board KO	8	8	7	7
2020	128 Board KO	8	9	10	6

Mixed Playoffs			
Playoff for Team of nominated Year	Format	Entry Limit	Entries
2019	Open Entry, Swiss then 64 board KO’s	No Limit	23 (including non-contending)
2020	Open Entry, Swiss then 64 board KO’s	No Limit	17

3.3 COMMENTS ON RECENT PLAYOFFS

The Open Playoff has largely been fully subscribed and anecdotal and some written feedback have generally supported the 8-team knockout format with entry via PQP’s.

The Women’s playoff, except for the most recent playoff, has failed to fill the field. Arguably PQP’s have done nothing but rank the entrants and decide byes.

The Seniors Playoff has failed to fill the field in the last 3 Teams years. Arguably PQP’s have done nothing but rank the entrants and decide byes.

The Mixed Playoffs were added in the recent cycle, with the aim that the playoff should self-fund in the current cycle.

4 SELECTION METHODS

4.1 OBJECTIVE

There should only be one objective of any selection method.

To choose the best representative team.

Other considerations like people gaining experience, all participants playing something after they are eliminated etc. are the province of training schemes or other tournaments. They should not be considerations in choosing a selection method.

Popularity of a selection method is only a consideration if it impacts the ability to achieve the objective.

Financial, personal, and timing considerations are important in that they impact on the ability to achieve the objective. These considerations will be discussed separately in this paper.

4.2 ALTERNATIVE SELECTION METHODS

The alternative selection methods outlined below are not designed to be comprehensive and other methods are open to discussion. All methods of selecting representative teams have pros and cons (which will not be elaborated on in this paper). This paper is not intended to propose or support any method.

4.2.1 Selection

Selection by a Committee of Selectors based upon performance and/or trials.

4.2.2 Pairs Based Selection

Selection from a pairs-based tournament(s). Variants of this include options with limited or unlimited fields, where pairs placed 1 to 3 form the team, or 1st goes thru and 2nd chooses from 3rd to 5th and plays a match vs remaining 2 3rd to 5th pairs etc.

4.2.3 Teams Based Selection

Selection from a teams-based tournament(s). Options include:

1. Limited field KO tournament(s), similar to the current open, women's, seniors playoffs.
2. An unlimited field KO tournament.
3. Unlimited field multiple phase tournament(s), e.g. current mixed team format.
4. Playoff match between winners of specific events. Similar to the pre PQP era.

5 GOING FORWARD

5.1 TEAM SUPPORT

Going forward:

1. What teams do we support and in what order?
2. How much support do we give each team?

5.2 PLAYOFF STRUCTURES

Some fundamental questions:

1. Should Open, Mixed, Women's, and Seniors have the same playoff tournament structure?
 - a. Should entry into all playoffs be based on a PQP's? If this is the case, then a Mixed PQP tournament schedule may need to be established.
 - b. Is the current 8 team 128 board KO matches the appropriate playoff tournament structure.

2. Should a pairs playoff be retained every 4th year in the year that World Championships are open entry transnational?
 - a. Should entry to a pairs playoff structure be PQP based or unlimited entry?
3. Should the order of playoffs be:
 - a. As it is now i.e. Open, Women's and Seniors, then Mixed?
 - b. All playoffs held concurrently?
 - c. All playoffs held separately? Which order?
 - d. Modified from the current order to Open, Mixed, Women's and Seniors?
 - e. Modified to other combinations and orders?
4. Noting cost constraints, how long should playoffs run?
 - a. Should we retain 128 board matches throughout a playoff, or should this vary?
 - b. Should match length vary depending on category?

5.3 PLAYOFF, ENTRY FEES, REFUNDS, AND TRAVEL SUBSIDIES

Going forward we need to cut costs and this may involve some prioritisation.

As the sole objective of the playoffs is to choose the best representative team is there any reason to subsidise teams in the playoffs that 'make up the numbers'?

Some other questions include:

1. Should Open, Mixed, Women's, and Seniors all receive the same level of financial support? If not in which category(s) should support be reduce? Why?
2. The current scheme for the Open, Women's and Seniors Playoff refunds a portion of the entry fees if the team fails to make the finals. Should this policy continue?
3. The current scheme pays travel subsidies to all participants of Open, Women's and Seniors Playoffs who reside away from the playoff location. Should this continue? Should travel subsidies only be paid to teams that make the semi-finals?

5.4 OTHER ISSUES

Over the last few years the TC has received inputs from a number of players relating to various issues including:

- Teams of 4,5, or 6 at playoffs,
- Teams of 4 only with 48 board per day schedule,
- PQP allocations,
- Regulations,
- Timing, and
- Other matters.

This input is valuable and has always been considered if not always acted upon.

Input on any issue relating to the playoffs is sought, although consideration of some matters may be postponed until more fundamental decisions regarding the type of playoff are made.

5.5 THE 4TH YEAR

Traditionally there has been no target event every 4th year i.e. in open entry World Bridge Series years. Past cycles have run limited entry pairs playoffs in these years.

What do we do in 4th year?

6 INTERIM PROPOSAL

In order to provide sufficient time to consider all issues the TC is proposing the following interim proposal for the 2022 Playoffs.

This will allow time for a multi-staged approach from years 2023 and beyond.

- Stage 1 issue this paper consult and receive responses and post all comments (subject to website compliance policy, and anonymously if required).
- Stage 2 consider all responses and propose general structures for each of the Open, Mixed, Women's and Seniors Playoffs for 2023 and beyond. Publish the proposal and request feedback.
- Stage 3 consider all feedback and publish proposed detailed playoff formats and a summary of the regulations for comment.
- Stage 4 finalise the formats and regulations for each of the Open, Mixed, Women's and Seniors Playoffs.

6.1 2021 PLAYOFF

The 2021 Playoff schedule and format are already set with PQP's leading to this playoff already in operation. The format and timing of each Playoff will be similar to the 2020 Playoffs.

Should the entry fee refund policy be changed for the 2021 Playoff?

Should the travel subsidies be restricted to teams that make the semi-finals?

6.2 2022 PLAYOFF

As noted earlier there is likely to be no target event in 2022 and traditionally the ABF would run a pairs playoff. In the past subsidies to the first 3 placegetters in the pairs playoffs were paid by the ABF to attend the World Bridge Series events.

Under this interim proposal the TC is proposing 2022 Playoffs be pairs based. General proposals for each playoff are:

- The Open Playoff will be held over 5 or 6 days with a two-stage format similar to 2018. Entry will be restricted to 16 pairs based on PQP's. Travel subsidies will only be paid to pairs that make Phase 2 (top 10 pairs).
- The Mixed Playoff will be played over 5 or 6 days with unrestricted entry (or entry restricted to players with at least 1 open or women's PQP as appropriate). The format will depend on entries. Entry fees and travel subsidies will be subject to further discussion with the relevant ABF committee.

Two Options for the Women's and Seniors Playoff will be considered. Each option will involve a playoff held over 5 or 6 days. Either:



1. The format will be similar to 2018 (i.e. two-stage format held over 5 or 6 days). Entry will be restricted to 16 pairs based on PQP's. Travel subsidies will only be paid to pairs that make Phase 2 (top 10 pairs).

Or, if there is enough support for the idea,

2. Entry will be unrestricted with the format depending on entries. Travel subsidies will only be paid to the top 10 pairs.

Note if unrestricted entry for the 2022 Women's and or Seniors playoffs is preferred then the need for Women's and or Seniors PQP's awarded after September 2020 needs to be reconsidered.

7 FEEDBACK

The TC will facilitate a number of discussion sessions at Major Tournaments.

Please provide written feedback to the TC by 31 July 2020 via the email address playoffsdiscussion@abf.com.au. All feedback will be published on the ABF Website at <http://www.abf.com.au/member-services/feedback/> (subject to website compliance policy and consent by the author). Anonymity may be requested.