

Playoffs to select teams to represent Australia

1. Timing

Background

The timing of the playoffs to select teams to represent Australia in international competition has varied during the past decade. This has frequently led to complaints from players. The absence of a fixed date means that the event needs to be scheduled every year, creating uncertainty for players and organisers, and a debate every time about the most suitable (or least unsuitable) dates.

The ABF Tournament Committee is seeking to resolve this problem. It would be advantageous to have a permanent time slot for the Playoffs. However, there are a number of issues to consider when determining the optimum time.

Any changes adopted will not come into effect before the Playoffs to select the 2016 Australian teams. The dates for the 2015 Playoffs are already set.

The International Target Events for which we are selecting teams via the Playoffs repeat in a four-year cycle.

1. (Odd years: 2015, 2017, ...) The Bermuda Bowl, Seniors Bowl and Venice Cup are contested (usually in September / October), but in order to determine whether they will be eligible to take part in these events, Australian teams are required to contest the Zone 7. Currently, the Zone 7 Playoffs are held in conjunction with the Asia Pacific Bridge Federation (APBF) Championships which take place in the preceding May/June. We are required to name our teams for the APBF by the end of March.
2. (Even Leap years: 2016, 2020, ...) The APBF does not hold a Championship event, just a congress to which we do not send Australian representative teams. The WBF holds the World Bridge Games (formerly the Olympiad) to which Australia has automatic entry and does not need to notify the WBF until June/July.
3. (Even but not Leap years: 2018, 2022, ...) the WBF Championships are open entry, so we do not send Australian representative teams. The APBF combines with other Asian and Middle Eastern nations from WBF Zone 4 to hold the Asia Cup, in the same time slot as the APBF Championships in odd years. We are required to name our teams for the Asia Cup by the end of March.

The necessity to name teams to represent Australia at the APBF by March is therefore an important factor in determining the timing of the Playoffs.

On the local scene, it is important that the Playoff dates do not conflict with our major events (nor with some other international events at which our top players compete). These include typically:

GNOT in November

Summer Festival in January

Gold Coast Congress in February/March

Tasmanian Festival of Bridge in March

ACBL Fall Nationals (USA; November/December)

NEC (Japan; February)

Yeh Brothers (Asia; February/April)

ACBL Spring Nationals (USA; March)

Considering these factors (and the uncertain dates of Easter and Passover) allows us to determine the window between the end of the previous International Cycle and the submission deadline (31 March) for the first representative event of the next year (APBF) during which the Playoffs should be scheduled.

Proposal

That the playoffs for the Open and Women's team each year be held early in the preceding December. This requires a one-off change to the Playoff cycle, to shorten the preceding PQP year.

For example, hold the Playoffs in early December 2016 to select the team to represent Australia in 2017. The 2016 PQP year would terminate after the 2016 Spring Nationals.

Rationale

This avoids the already busy January-March period, and allows sufficient time for the winners to arrange leave and make any other necessary personal arrangements prior to the APBF Championships and Zone 7 Playoffs. It also allows the team time to prepare and practice together at strong events such as the SWPT/NOT and the Gold Coast Open Teams.

Further considerations

- Should the same timing be used for the Playoffs in all years, when the external pressures are not as great in some years?
- Should the Seniors' Playoffs be held concurrently with the Open and Women's Playoffs?
- Should the Women's Playoffs be held at a different time to allow women to compete in both the Open and Women's (and, possibly, the Seniors') playoffs?

2. Format

Background

There is a long-running debate about whether to select teams via a pairs-based or teams-based event. Different countries and different states adopt different approaches (e.g. NSW selects pairs only; Victoria now has a playoff among self-selected teams).

The PQP system was initially used to restrict the number of entrants to the playoffs to the teams that included the best-performed players. The current two-tier approach (if there are sufficient entries) allows anyone to enter, provided they have earned at least one PQP while rewarding those teams with the highest number of PQPs.

Issues

Proponents of pairs-based selection argue that this allows under-appreciated or emerging pairs, a better chance to compete.

Proponents of teams-based selection argue that it encourages teams that are more harmonious and therefore less likely to perform poorly under pressure.

Currently, selection is via a teams-based playoff for the years when the Bermuda Bowl or World Bridge Games are being held. In the fourth year, a pairs-based selection method is used as there is no world championship that is contested by national teams.

Proposal

That the current approach to pairs- and teams-based selection be retained.

That the current two-tiered approach to the Playoffs when contested by teams be retained. That the Open and Women's Playoffs be held in December, and the Seniors' in March.

*The deadline for comments is **30th November**. Bearing in mind the issues above, all proposals will be considered but particularly those contributions from players with a likely interest in the outcomes.*

Responses will be directed to a mailbox accessible to all members of the ABFTC for consideration. Depending on the feedback, a decision will be made, which will be applicable for the Playoffs to determine the 2017 teams.