

## **Scheduling of the Playoffs to Select Australian Teams for the 2017 Representative Cycle and Beyond.**

The ABFTC wishes to establish a permanent timeslot in the Australian Competition Calendar for the selection of Australian Representative Teams. A discussion paper outlining the TC's objectives and many of the relevant considerations was placed on the web at the end of September ([http://www.abf.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Playoffs\\_discussion\\_paper\\_2014.pdf](http://www.abf.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Playoffs_discussion_paper_2014.pdf)), together with an invitation for player feedback (to be submitted before November 30). Comment was also invited in respect to any other aspect of the current selection process.

In order to further solicit feedback from specifically those players with representative aspirations, two forums (chaired by the ABF President and attended by those members of the ABFTC present at the event) were held during the Spring Nationals.

Nearly all of the opinion and comment received addressed one or more of the following questions:

- What is the optimal time slot(s) for the Playoffs, after taking into account the current scheduling of other National and International events, the effect of various holiday periods and imposition of external deadlines?
- Should the all three Playoffs be held concurrently, separately or in some other combination or grouping?
- Is the current format of the various playoffs satisfactory and how might it be improved?

A representative cross-section of the various viewpoints expressed can be found in the accompanying Appendix 1.

The ABFTC, in light of this input, has revised its recommendations about the future scheduling of the playoffs and their format. The key recommendations are:

- The Open Playoffs are to be scheduled to commence on the second Saturday in November each year (from Nov 2016, to select the 2017 team).<sup>1</sup>
- The Seniors' Playoffs are to be scheduled to commence on the first Saturday in December each year (from Dec 2016).<sup>1</sup>
- The Women's Playoffs are to run concurrent with the Seniors', instead of the Open.
- All Knockout matches in the Playoffs are to be increased in length.<sup>2</sup>

The ABFMC will consider each of these recommendations at its next meeting (January 12-13).

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<sup>1</sup> This would require a once-off change to the dates at which the "PQP year" starts/ends in 2016.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed summary of the proposed formats can be found in the accompanying Appendix 2.

## **Appendix 1 – Comments Extracted from Various Player Submissions**

### **Timing/Calendarisation**

“I would definitely prefer the Seniors’ playoffs to be held much earlier than previous years so that plans for the year can be made more effectively whether you make the team or not.”

“Accommodation: December is peak season so accommodation bargains are only in your dreams.

Flights: Ditto reasoning for accommodation. Cheap flights are rare and if available, you usually have to pay well in advance.

Begrudgingly OK with the very start of December but if in school holidays, then a definite NO.”

“December is OK in principle but the issue of clashes with the Fall Nationals have to be factored in. I feel quite strongly that the more our players compete at the US Nationals, the better the level of bridge would be back in our country. Over the years, this play at the toughest events in the world has had a positive impact on the games of at least \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_”.

“I think the fixed early December timeslot for the playoffs is a superb idea. And that it should be used for all years - regardless of what the subsequent years' international events are.”

### **Separation/Amalgamation of Events**

“I have strong feelings about whether the Open, Women's and Seniors' Playoffs should be held together or separately. I do not believe that the current system of having the Open and Women's simultaneously is 'fair', nor does it allow the Women players who might wish to play both events (and have PQPs for both) the opportunity to hone their skills against our best players.”

“In an ideal world I think all 3 (playoffs) should be held separately so no-one eligible for more than one is compromised. In reality schedule and financial constraints probably make this impossible.”

“I think Open should be held on their own and Women/Seniors should overlap. Women and Seniors’ are both fields where entry is restricted in some way (whether by gender or age) and should therefore be regarded as secondary categories to the Open.”

“It is my strong view that the Open Team should always be the primary priority in thinking about international representation. Women, Senior, Youth are all restricted categories and should be thought of accordingly. The Open Team is the flagship and all players should be encouraged to play in that selection tournament.”

## **Event Format**

“I feel that the objective of the playoff should be to select the best possible team for Australia. There should be no secondary objectives. To achieve that, we should work towards:

a) Longer matches: The 96 board final is a great development in our playoff culture. The event will have even more integrity with a longer semi-final.

b) Longer duration of event: If longer matches require more time, then why not an extra day or two? It is, after all, the most important week of bridge for the top players in the country. The NOT/SWPT goes for seven days, why not the playoff?

The other issue is bridge fatigue. If Australia is ever going to create bridge news at the Bermuda Bowl, it will need a team that can survive the round robin grind and win the quarterfinal match. Such a team will need to be good enough and tough enough to last a test against other (far weaker than international level) Australian teams over seven or eight days.”

“I think more boards played during the knock-out phases of the playoff increases the likelihood of getting the "best" Australian team selected. Also having team selection in the main years, then giving pairs an opportunity in the non-world championship years, sits well with me.”

“There is no need to limit play to only 48 boards a day in the Open Playoff. 48 boards may be appropriate at a LONG World Championship, but you should want to get in as many boards a day as possible at a shorter Playoff, at either Teams or Pairs. I suggest a max of 64 boards a day and a general minimum of 56 boards a day, adjusted to suit the format.”

## **Appendix 2 – Proposed Playoff Formats**

Open Playoff commencing on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday in November and running for 7 days; Women's and Seniors' Playoffs to run concurrently commencing on the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday in December, running for 5 days (for <6 entries) or 6 days (for 6-9 entries), or 7 days (for 10 or more entries)].

### **Open (assuming at least 10 teams entered)**

Top 4 teams on total PQPs after discounting (Division A) will gain automatic entry to the Q/F

Remainder of the field (Division B) will play as follows:

Sat/Sun a RR (or Swiss if numbers make a RR impossible) event to qualify 4 teams to the Q/F

Mon 64 boards of Q/F

Tues 32 boards of Q/F followed by 32 boards of S/F

Wed 64 boards of S/F

Thurs 64 boards of F

Fri 48 boards<sup>1</sup> of F

### **Women's/Seniors'**

If 10 or more teams enter a division, it will be run as for the Open

For 6-9 teams (more likely), the bottom 6 teams will constitute division B, with the remainder (0, 1, 2, or 3 teams constituting division A) gaining automatic entry to the S/F.

Sat/Sun RR qualifying

Mon 64 boards of S/F

Tues 48 boards<sup>1</sup> of S/F

Wed 64 boards of F

Thurs 48 boards<sup>1</sup> of F

For fewer than 6 teams, all teams play a double RR for 3 days commencing Saturday, qualifying 2 teams to a Final of 112 boards<sup>1</sup> on Tue/Wed.

<sup>1</sup> Note that the TC proposes that the semi-final and final matches are of 112 boards rather than 128 boards duration so as to allow members of the defeated teams the opportunity to fly home, if they live outside of Sydney, and for the organisers to prepare for the next stage and/or pack up at the conclusion of the event.