

1 Executive Summary

The Bridge Federation of the ACT (BFACT) formed the Tournament Advisory Committee to investigate the selection processes for the Open and Seniors teams for the Australian National Championships (ANC). In addition, it was asked to assess other events impacted by these selection trials and to make recommendations for any changes. This review was initiated to answer two primary questions – how should BFACT run the Seniors trials to accommodate increasing numbers of entrants and what should be done to address recent poor attendance at the Open Stage 2 Selection, particularly in the restricted category. This report presents the committee’s findings.

Historically, the ACT has fielded strong teams in the Open, Women and Seniors divisions, and the selection process should continue to provide all interested players a fair chance of qualifying for a representative team. Additionally, the selection process must be seen to be fair and unbiased, and the committee kept these principles in mind.

The committee developed a recommendation for a new approach to the Seniors trials, presented in the recommendations below. It also considered proposing changes to both the Open and Women’s selection process to address perceived concerns but decided to limit the amount of change in one year and recommends no changes for these two teams.

The committee identified three reasons for low participation in the Open Stage 2 Selection process. One will not recur – the clash with the Commonwealth Games in the Gold Coast – and the other two can be addressed by actively promoting the event and by working with the Canberra Bridge Club (CBC) to appropriately space weekend events for restricted players throughout the calendar year.

1.1 Recommendations

1. Maintain the current format for the Open team selection in 2019.
2. Appoint a convenor for Stage 2 who will focus on publicity and other efforts to increase attendance.
3. Work with the CBC to reschedule weekend events aimed at restricted pairs so that they are more evenly spaced throughout the year.
4. Complete the selection trials for the Open team before commencement of the Seniors’ team selection.
5. Maintain the current format for the Women’s team selection in 2019.
6. Introduce a two-stage event for Seniors’ teams when 14+ pairs enter.
7. The qualifying stage is run as two separate fields, with the intent to qualify half of the pairs from each field. Tiebreaker regulations must be adopted to ensure a fair qualification in the event of dropouts.
8. The final stage is run as a round-robin between all qualified pairs.
9. All pairs in the final stage should commit to playing in one of the representative teams if they finish in the top 3.

2 Introduction

BFACT Council formed the Tournament Advisory Committee to consider the question of how to structure selection of the Open and Seniors' teams for the Australian National Championships each year, along with other events that impact on or are impacted by these two events. This report presents the Committee's findings and recommendations.

2.1 ACT – historical performance

The ACT has had very good recent results in all divisions under consideration and should continue to attempt to field its strongest teams. The table below shows our record since inception of the Seniors' field in 1993.

Division	Since 1993	Last 10 years
Open	4 titles	2 titles, 2 finalists
Women	4 titles	1 title, 1 finalist
Seniors	6 titles	4 titles, 3 finalists
Youth	1 title	1 finalist

2.2 Questions to be considered

The Terms of Reference highlight the following questions to be considered:

- How changing entry numbers will impact selection methods.
 - Entries into the Seniors' team trials continue to climb, and it is becoming difficult to hold the entire event in one weekend. With so many entries (16 in 2018), the number of boards played against each pair is either reduced to a number small enough to make the selection more random or the event length increases. Neither option is seen as desirable.
- How selection for the Open and Seniors' teams impact each other.
 - Currently, players have the option of waiting until the conclusion of all selection events before nominating which team they play on. This situation can mean pairs do not have a fair chance of making the team or non-contending pairs who make the final stage of a selection event can take the place of a pair who would contend for the team.
- Which selection methods should be used in 2019.
- Revenue and cost implications for the events.

The other notable events considered during this selection process were the:

- Selection events for the Women's team, both because it currently uses a similar selection method to the Open and Seniors' trials and because ACT members are eligible for more than one team, which can impact team composition.
- ANC Open Team Selection Stage 2, which has recently seen low entry numbers.

2.3 Principles used

The Committee identified the following guiding principles:

1. Selection should allow all interested pairs a fair chance to make the team.
2. The final stage should provide the best possible chance that the best team is chosen.

While it was not always possible to satisfy both principles, they were agreed to be important goals to aim at.

2.4 Committee members

Committee membership comprised Stephen Fischer (chair), Niek Van Vucht, Julia Hoffman and Roy Nixon.

3 Findings & Recommendations

3.1 Player concerns

Several concerns have been raised by players who have competed in the final stages of one or more selection event final weekends. These items have not been prioritised but are presented here as a record of considerations during Committee discussions.

- **Number of boards on Saturday:** Most commonly, the final stage consists of 12 pairs competing in 11 14-board matches. Two matches are held on Friday evening, five on Saturday and four on Sunday. This schedule means the players must play 70 boards on Saturday. This number of boards means the event has the potential to reward stamina rather than skill. The ANC teams event does not require this many boards on any day, so the question was raised whether this is appropriate. This concern has primarily been raised for the Seniors' trials – it is seen as a long day but not unjustly so by players participating in the Open trials.
- **Friday night play:** Many people would prefer play to be limited to two consecutive days.
- **Length of matches:** Players prefer longer matches, which rewards the better player and is more likely to lead to an optimal outcome for the team.

3.2 Open team selection

Recommendations

1. Maintain the current format for the Open team selection in 2019.
2. Appoint a convenor for Stage 2 who will focus on publicity and other efforts to increase attendance.
3. Work with the CBC to reschedule weekend events aimed at restricted pairs so that they are more evenly spaced throughout the year.
4. Complete the selection trials for the Open team before commencement of the Seniors' team selection.

The current selection process has three stages:

1. A four-week event held over consecutive Tuesday evenings at the Canberra Bridge Club (CBC). The event qualifies eight pairs to the final stage.
 - a. This is seen as a prestige event in the calendar and should be maintained.
2. A one-day selection event held on a Sunday after completion of stage one. Four pairs from this event qualify to the final stage.
 - a. This event serves two purposes, both of which the committee thought were valuable both from a competition and an inclusion perspective. It provides people who were unable to commit to the four weeks or who performed badly in stage one with another way to qualify to the final, and it provides an easy alternative for BFACT members who do not normally play at the CBC.
 - b. Numbers for this event in 2018 were low for three main reasons:

- i. it clashed with the Commonwealth Games in the Gold Coast (which will not recur).
 - ii. More effort could have been made to encourage players to attend.
 - iii. There were two other weekend events aimed at restricted players during the selection process.
 - c. Although numbers were low in 2018, this should be addressed through better promotion rather than by reducing the event's prominence.
 - d. Restricted participation can be improved by working with the CBC to better space events aimed at restricted players throughout the year.
3. The final stage takes place over a weekend, as described in section 3.1 above. The top three pairs are eligible to form the ACT Open team.
- a. The committee agreed that the Open team is typically seen as the most prestigious option, but that players eligible for multiple categories value the flexibility to choose which team they play in. One way to help achieve this while allowing the greatest flexibility for players eligible for other teams is to complete the Open team selection process first. Doing so will allow unsuccessful players to form strong partnerships to contend for the Seniors' team.
 - b. The committee considered recommending the final event be reduced from 12 to 10 pairs. This change would allow either play on Friday night to be eliminated or for Saturday play to be shortened (but not both).

3.3 Women's team selection

Recommendation

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain the current format for the Women's team selection in 2019. |
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Recently, the Women's team selection event has struggled to field 12 pairs on the selection weekend. The committee agreed that the current format is suitable for the expected number of pairs and need not be revisited until a significant increase in entry numbers.

3.4 Seniors' team selection

Recommendations

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce a two-stage event for Seniors' teams when 14+ pairs enter. 2. The qualifying stage is run as two separate fields, with the intent to qualify half of the pairs from each field. Tiebreaker regulations must be adopted to ensure a fair qualification in the event of dropouts. 3. The final stage is run as a round-robin between all qualified pairs. 4. All pairs in the final stage should commit to playing in one of the representative teams if they finish in the top 3. |
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The bulk of the discussion focused on how to cater for the increasing numbers in the Seniors' team. The committee agreed to introduce a two-stage process for selection. This

approach allows all interested pairs to enter, while having a final stage that directly compares the top contenders. To achieve the greatest chance of choosing the three best pairs, it was agreed that the final stage have the following characteristics:

- A full round-robin, for greatest fairness.
- Maximum of two days of play, with each day being limited to no more than 60 boards.
- All pairs should intend to play in the ANC if they make the top three. This restriction maximises the chance that the best three pairs are selected, allows for fewer pairs in the final stage and means that each match is more meaningful, since each match is between pairs competing for the team. It also allows players the freedom to select which team they play in if they have already qualified in another category.

To select the pairs for the final stage, the committee agreed on a qualifying stage similar to the current ANC Swiss Pairs event. It features:

- A one-day qualifying stage, to be held on a weekend before the final stage.
- All pairs seeded and divided into two separate fields.
- One field plays N-S and the other plays E-W throughout the qualifying stage.
- Each N-S pair plays as many E-W pairs as possible – ideally all pairs.
- The top contending pairs from each direction will continue to the final stage. The ABF has clear regulations about how to manage dropouts, and these should be reviewed and adopted.
- Non-contending pairs may enter the qualifying stage.

The following table shows the proposed number of pairs for each stage:

Qualifying entries	Final stage pairs	Final stage format
12 or fewer	No qualifying – full round robin	As per current regulations
14 or 16	8 pairs	4x14 board matches on Saturday 3x14 board matches on Sunday
18+	10 pairs	5x12 board matches on Saturday 4x12 board matches on Sunday

It is worth noting that the qualifying stage requires an even number of pairs.

A reduction to 8 pairs were chosen when initial numbers were 14 or 16 pairs because qualifying almost the entire field both has the potential to lead to strange results near the end of qualifying (both from pairs who have already qualified and from pairs running almost last) and because it is seen as harsher to eliminate only a very small number of pairs.

The reason that the final event was not limited to 8 pairs for larger numbers is that it reduces the risk of a pair who would improve the team not making the initial cut-off.

The reduction in boards in each match, compared to the current format, was chosen to address fatigue. It is justified by limiting the final stage to contending pairs, which makes each result more meaningful.

A small carryover for top finishers in the qualifying stage is reasonable (two VPs per position was suggested).

3.5 Other points for consideration

3.5.1 Scoring method

The committee discussed whether there is a significant benefit to which scoring method is used. Options include:

- Cross-imps vs. butler scoring
- VPs vs. Total IMPs with a cut-off in each match

The committee did not have a strong opinion about which scoring method was best and does not have a recommendation in this area.

3.5.2 Teams selection

One option suggested was to hold team-based trials, either as a team of 6 players or a team of 4, with the successful team to augment with an eligible pair of their choosing. All types of team trials were rejected because they broke the first guiding principle. They either:

- Did not provide each pair with a fair chance due to the uneven chance of obtaining quality teammates;
- Allowed a weaker pair with good teammates to have an unfair chance of making the team, or
- Provided the top pairs with a significant additional chance to make the team because of the need to augment a third pair.

These reasons, combined with negative feedback received on this issue, led to the committee recommending all trials be pairs-based.

3.5.3 ACT-based PQPs

Other jurisdictions in Australia (Victoria, and possibly South Australia and Western Australia) manage their own playoff qualifying point (PQP) schemes, to determine eligibility for the final weekend events. The committee discussed introducing this concept into the ACT but rejected it because:

- Although it could increase attendance at the chosen state-level events throughout the year, most players who contend for the state teams play regularly anyway and those who do not have good reasons to do so. A more likely effect would be to encourage players to play more frequently with one partner, and the committee saw this impact to be negative.
- The time and effort to administer the PQPs is likely to be burdensome.
- BFACT would be subject to complaints and claims of bias over the selection of events and how points were allocated to each one.