

19 July 2026

TBNZ Tournament Report:



Where are we heading as a sport?

Tournament entries are generally healthy, and league numbers remain reasonably strong across the country. However, one ongoing concern is clear: where will the future growth of our sport come from? Over the past five years, our membership has aged, with 60% now over the age of 50 and, 35% of that over 65 years of age. Growth can come from all age groups though, not only younger bowlers under 21. While TBNZ can support development through tools such as Bowl Patrol, sustainable growth must ultimately happen within each centre by increasing league numbers. From there, some bowlers may progress into competitive tournament bowling and potentially representative honours.

Turning to the tournament review for the past 12 months, the U21 Nationals and Teams Challenge were held last October at Pins Lincoln. The divisional champions were Junior Girls – Kaitlyn Hoare (Tauranga), Junior Boys – Ben Pettit (North City), who completed a four-peat and became the most successful Junior male bowler with four titles, Youth Women – Natasha Goggin (North City), Youth Men – Kosei McGrath-Takeji (Manukau), and Tyler Cortland-Baker, who won both the Junior Graded and Junior Bantam Championships. The Teams Challenge featured nine teams from North City, Hawkes Bay, Canterbury, Tauranga, Manukau, and hosts Waitakere. Close finishes have become a familiar feature of these team events, and 2025 was the closest yet. After North City Ice beat Manukau by just one point in 2024, the South Auckland team reversed the result in 2025, winning by only half a point. Will 2026 end in a draw? This year's championships will also see the welcome return of Australian Junior and Youth bowlers to our shores.

The Open Championships were moved to October to better align with the international calendar. The 2025 Nationals were held at North City, where the champions were Classic – Vanessa Tomlinson (North City), Graded – Logan Edwards (Masterton), Open Men's – Ben Pettit (North City), who is now level with Adrian Judd on four National titles, and Open Women's – Sarah Young (Waitakere), who claimed her fifth consecutive win and now sits second on the all-time list with six titles, just one behind Melonie Lister's seven championship crowns.

The National Teams Championships were also held at North City, where the local team, Lightning, won the championship ahead of the Counties Comets, with Waitakere Karekare finishing third. With 12 teams represented this year, a plate division was held on the final day. Manukau Meteors won the plate division, finishing just one point ahead of Rotorua Rebels and the other Manukau team, Asteroids.

The 2025 Senior Teams were hosted by Pins Lincoln, with 11 teams representing six centres. Tauranga Blue Men defended their 2024 title, while Manukau won the women's championship, ending Waitakere Muriwai's five-year dominance and securing their first win since 2017. Team Muriwai won the overall championship. The 2026 Nationals were also hosted by Pins Lincoln earlier this year. This year's National champions are Open Men's – Craig Nevatt (Manukau), Open Women's – Melonie Lister (Waitakere), winning her fifth title, Graded Men's – Henry Bonsay (Waitakere),

claiming his second win, Graded Women's – Sylvia Meeuws (Waitakere), winning her third title, Grand Senior Men's – Greg Nicolas (North City), with back-to-back wins, and Grand Senior Women's – Carole Adshead (Palmerston North), earning her third championship win. Several Australian visitors also attended the tournament, with some returning for yet another consecutive year.

Fun facts: over the past 12 months, 36 honour awards have been achieved, including eighteen 300 games, eight 299 games, two 298 games, and eight 800 series awards. Since the first 300 game in 1977, more than 450 honour awards have now been recorded. Several New Zealand bowling records were broken at the Nationals and team events over the past 12 months as well. Several bowlers have now achieved either 50 game, 100 game or 200 game plaques at the team championships, with over 225 players achieving that goal. Craig Nevatt has become the first to achieve a total of 300 games at the NTC, the highest any age level. Lastly, since 2005, more than 1,350 athletes have represented their centres at the team championships. Where are they all now?

Another important part of tournament bowling is our partnership with host centres. Strong relationships with these partners are essential if the sport is to continue growing, both domestically and internationally. Speaking of partnerships, TBNZ is very grateful for South Pacific Bowling's sponsorship of the Junior and Youth divisions at the National Championships. The final piece of the puzzle is you, the membership. Without your continued support of both TBNZ and the host centres, our sport cannot flourish. Together, this creates a win-win for everyone.

What does the future hold? Hopefully, continued growth for our sport in New Zealand, along with more international opportunities for all age groups. We also hope to see more doors open for our Youth athletes through scholarships, building on the opportunities already available to four of our athletes in the US college system.

Regards

Pete Richardson

TBNZ Tournament Committee