

Thank you to all the interested parties that have commented on the proposed playoff regulations. In the interests of encouraging more, here's a quick summary of what has been received so far. Some respondents were really quick and their comments refer to the original regulations for the 16 pair event.

Leigh Gold

Prefer the 10 AM start times we dont care what time we finish...Its what time it starts.

Sartaj Hans

I must remark that I'm delighted at the idea of ABF soliciting the players' opinion before finalising the regulations for the playoff. Such initiatives will surely lead to better playing conditions.

Feel strongly about:

Session times : Prefer to Include evenings (start at 10 am). The playoff ought to follow norms of international events where the non-evenings schedule would be decried as exhausting with not enough time for breaks.

7.3 Reserve team - Any pair that qualifies for the Australian team 2004 should remain in that team, unless it can't play. The concept of reserve team may disadvantage a pair that qualifies via stage 2 when its team-mates for stage 2 match later withdraw.

Harsh Procedural penalties : While running a smooth tournament is in the interest of all concerned, the priority should be on fairer competition instead of disciplining an indiscretion. Allowing one slow play warning and one late-arrival warning should still achieve the desired results.

Suggestions :

Matches scored on butler averages are notorious for producing smaller victory-point swings than usual team-games. Using a 12 board scale for a 16 board match would help adjust this factor a bit better than a 14 board scale.

In case of a tie, an 8 board playoff would be more desirable than 4.

The objective of the trials should be to ensure that the strongest candidates get tested the best way, than that every candidate gets a big chunk of playing time.

The first four days of bridge produce just one pair for the team and effectively shortlist 4 others. Then only one day is left for determining two-thirds of the Australian 2004 team. 3 days of round-robin (a la ANC Butler pair) and a 2 day knock-out match of 128 boards (maybe 96) would be more likely to produce the strongest team.

Using bidding boxes would be far superior to bidding sheets as the latter have a number of inconvenience issues that I had detailed in an email to the ABF about a year ago.

Sartaj Hans (continued)

Also in case of ties in stage 1, I think the ABF should review the format being used at the American team trials where instead of having traditional victory points, they are using fractional victory points. It ensures that the "IMP-ed out" and "IMP-ed in" randomness in victory point determination is eliminated.

A draft of conditions of contest for 2004 can be found at :

<http://www.usbf.org/GeneralCofC2004.htm>

Appendix C has the graded VP scale.

(I have reproduced this for 12 board scale below for winner's VPs only - WL)

impdiff	vps	impdiff	vps	impdiff	vps	impdiff	vps
0	15	14	19.22	27	21.91	40	23.78
1	15.36	15	19.46	28	22.08	41	23.9
2	15.71	16	19.7	29	22.24	42	24.02
3	16.05	17	19.93	30	22.4	43	24.13
4	16.38	18	20.15	31	22.56	44	24.24
5	16.7	19	20.37	32	22.71	45	24.34
6	17.01	20	20.58	33	22.86	46	24.44
7	17.31	21	20.79	34	23	47	24.54
8	17.61	22	20.99	35	23.14	48	24.64
9	17.9	23	21.18	36	23.28	49	24.74
10	18.18	24	21.37	37	23.41	50	24.83
11	18.45	25	21.55	38	23.54	51	24.92
12	18.71	26	21.73	39	23.66	52	25

Peter Reynolds

For me and other WA reps at least, the impact of the schedule on plane availability is important. The last Qantas flight to Perth leaves at 7:20. The last Virgin Blue flight leaves at 8:00pm. This means that play should be scheduled to finish no later than 6:15pm on Sunday and Monday.

What does the ABF propose to do about pairs making Stage 2? Given that it is only prepared to pay for non flexible tickets.

Ron Klinger

With the last page proposal, it could be added that rather than 1-2-3 in the team after the Butler that another preferred option is #1 is in team and 2-5 play a final, as per current scheme.

Laurie Kelso

13.1 Probably worth specifying which of the "Correction Periods" (12.1 or 12.2) apply to fouled boards.

14.3 20% is no longer exactly 3 rounds - should specify one or the other.

15.2 Stage II late arrival penalties - should they be in IMPs?

15.7 Specify fines in IMPS for Stage II?

19.2 Does this really refer to Pair 16 or should it be Pair 18 that switches?

(Agreed error - WL)

Richard Grenside

1) 19.2 shouldn't it be pair 18? (Agreed error - WL)

2) Worth mentioning that with screens that no alertable calls should be circled!!!

3) Surely it is time Aus converted to bidding boxes for screens and in fact all finals?

4) My only other comment relates to my one gripe, that is that surely in events leading to World Championship qualification that the system regs should parallel those in operation for the championships. For Australia to perform well requires players who have the ability to play according to such regs.

Alida Clark

I think 70 boards a day for 3 days is too much. Plus I feel that players who play every day for long stints (e.g. professionals) will have a distinct advantage. That would be OK if it simulated the conditions when you represent your country, but mostly they play 40 boards per day and very occasionally 60 - not 70.

Nigel Rosendorff

Do you know who the genius is who works out the dates for ABF events?

The Butler playoffs in the Northern Territory coincided with the Test match no accommodation!

The GNOT and Spring Nats coincided with the Rugby World Cup no accommodation!

The Playoffs coincide with the Sydney Mardi Gras no accommodation!

Not happy

Nigel

Merrilee Robb

The last day playoff turns the 4 previous days' work into a lucky shoot-out over 64 boards. Get rid of it.

Eric Ramshaw

I am opposed utterly to any structure that sends half the field home after 2 days.

Alternative format on last page is unacceptable.

Bruce Neill

4.4. Bidding systems in which the partnership routinely opens at the 2-level or 3-level with less than 15 or 12 Opening Points respectively will not be defined as yellow *per se*.

Can you please clarify? Does this mean that the ABF system regulations as published apply, except that for this event only, the requirement for green systems which says:

“(1) One level Bids must show no less than 18 Opening Points, two level Bids must show no less than 15 Opening Points and 5+ cards in the suit bid, and three level suit bids must show no less than 15 Opening Points, or no less than 12 Opening Points and a suit of at least seven cards in the suit bid”

is amended to say

“(1) One level Bids must show no less than 18 Opening Points”.

7.3. The Reserve Team for 2004 will consist of the pair ranked 1 from Stage I plus the losing team from Stage II.

What is the function of a reserve team? Why is the same pair in both teams? Why penalize pair 2 if pair 3 can't go to an event, but not penalise pair one?

10. SESSION TIMES

As you know by now, Saturday 6th March is the Gay Mardi Gras. The march starts from the corner of Elizabeth and Liverpool streets at 8:00pm. So there will be a horde of party people around the Bridge Club between 6:00 and 8:00. I think it is unrealistic to assume that people will be able to eat between the end of the afternoon session at 18:15 and the start of the evening session at 20:00. I suggest either providing food on site or rescheduling to finish the last match that night around 8:30.

15.4. If a number of boards are unable to be played because one pair is late, the non-offending pair will be awarded a score of 3 IMPs for every board not played.

This seems to provide a huge inappropriate incentive for the non-offending pair to play slowly. Also the provision is three times as generous as that for a forfeited match. A forfeit is worth 18 VPs, which is less than 1 IMP per board. Slow play should be worth at most 1 IMP per board unplayed to the non-offenders.

16.3. The offender's score is 0 VP and 0 IMP.

Inconsistent. 0 VP is equivalent to -62 IMPs on the 12 Board scale.

Another possible format.

Don't like it. There are problems with Butler averages in very small events. And, two days is too short to eliminate the luck factor.

Bruce now spends some time considering the technical aspects of the draw - WL.

19.3. Pairs will be assigned pair numbers as follows.

This is unnecessary. Renumber the draw so seed 1 becomes pair 1.

19.4. The draw for each round will be as specified in the following table.

I did several weeks' work (with input from Ross Moore, who designed the previous version) to produce an improved draw for 16 pairs.

The previous draw is based on a traditional Howell movement, a good design for a one- or two-session movement. It has a "follow the leader" structure which makes it easy to put movement cards on each table.

Since the playoffs as a four day event, movement cards aren't so important.

I think the priority is to arrange for high seeds to play each other in the last few rounds; ditto low seeds. If the seeding is good (and of course it will be!), that will minimise the problem of low-placed pairs who might have "lost heart" playing high ranked pairs at the end.

Of course, it is desirable to retain the good features of the current draw. It is balanced in that:

1. each pair has each other pair as team-mates 8 times, and as other-table opponents 8 times, and
2. the NS and EW fields to be collectively as even as possible each round, so the Butler averages are as fair as they can be (there's actually not much flexibility if the movement is balanced).

Can you please defer finalising the draw so there is time to look at optimising it to meet the goals above?

Peter Gill

7.3 I do not understand why the top team does not go to whatever it wants to. I do not think there should be a Reserve Team, even though I appreciated being in the Reserve Team last year.

7.6.2 Rather than toss for choice, surely 2nd in the Butler has earned the choice of seating rights by qualifying for this carryforwardless match in superior manner.

15.2 Stage 2 penalties in IMPs not VPs.

15.4 has serious problems if a non-contending pair is deliberately late (impossible to detect) in order to give their contending pair an easy run into the top five towards the end. At least some discretion is needed in the application of this rule, e.g. at the CTD's discretion.

Get rid of the last day playoff - see Merrilee Robb comment.

(My quick summary of Peter's full argument that takes up the next page and a bit - WL)

I am widely regarded as the architect of the Australian Youth Team having used this "Butler then places 2 to 5 playoff over 64 boards" method of team selection in 2002 and 2003. Based on "experience", my opinion now is that it is an extremely atrocious method. 238 boards of competition in the Butler is replaced by a short 64 board shoot-out to determine two thirds of the team. By all means use this method if you want to avoid sending the best team overseas by randomising the results, but I hope that that is not the intention.

What do I mean by "experience"? Firstly, it turns out that it is not the Polish method of selection, despite Marston's description of it as such. Ask any Pole if you want confirmation.

In 2003 the Australian Youth Team performed horribly overseas (16th of 18). The top two seeds had come 2nd and 4th in the Youth Butler then lost the short 64 board match. Was that because they were overseeded? Well, Nic Croft of the 4th pair promptly won the Open Butler and Tony Nunn of the 2nd pair made the 2002 Australian Open Team, so no. In my opinion, it was the selection method which failed. The same virus of a selection method which it is now proposed to introduce to the Open and Women's Playoffs. Our 2002 Youth Team also performed indifferently overseas, so it could be argued that the Youth selection method did not shine that time either.

Self-interest should make this method popular with most of the contenders, because the chances of all but the two or three best pairs (and thus of most pairs) are increased by the randomisation of the selection process when a 238 board event is reduced to a 64 board crapshoot.

The main reason why we use this method for the youth is that last round blowouts by non-contenders determining team content are very hard to police at our youth events with limited staff available. The Open and Women's Playoffs however have a perfect incentive scheme to prevent chucking whether deliberate or incidental (the latter refers to a pair lacking motivation virtually giving away a big win). Simply assign Playoff Points to virtually all the field, to give everyone something to play for. I suggest:

36, 32, 28, 24, 20, 16, 14, 12, 10, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0

instead of your proposed 36-32-28-24-20-16-12-8 which fails to allow for the need to keep as many pairs as possible contending for something meaningful for as long as possible.

This assignment of Playoff Points has another advantage - it may encourage pairs to stay together, in a country noted for its partnership instability - as they have playoff points together for the following year. And a mere 1 Playoff Point together can be very important indeed. .

Perhaps monitors could watch key matches in rounds 16 and 17 of the Butler too.

A 17 match Butler could be spread over five days neatly to allow for interstate travel - 3 (nice late start for interstate arrivals) then 4 then 4 then 4 then 2 (early finish to go home) matches each day. This has the added advantage that all pairs play throughout with no early eliminations of pairs.

It is utter rubbish to say that "a pair may be third one VP ahead of 4th so this method is best". What if third is 2 VPs from first and 55 VPs ahead of 4th with another 20 VPs to 5th? This sort of argument is obviously irrelevant.

I was stupid enough to be involved in introducing this method for the youth. Please do not be as stupid as I was. Please.

Leigh Gold (again)

I am against the 2nd format that eliminates half the field after 2 days.

I Like Sartaj's Imp scale though. I think that would work well.