



Report on Changes to the 2024 Canadian Championships

June 2023

Introduction

There is a desire to re-imagine the national lawn bowling championships to better meet the goals of providing meaningful competition experience, generating revenue (or at least breaking even), and showcasing the sport to existing and potential participants. A longer term goal is to also create connection and excitement amongst recreational lawn bowlers for the national championships similar to how recreational participants in other sports are eager to attend and view the event each year.

In the winter of 2023, BCB learned that the expected increase in Sport Canada funding to accommodate for the new para-bowls disciplines was actually going to be a decrease in the neighbourhood of 20%. Additionally, the majority of “above-core reference” funding provided to meet the additional requirements from the federal government was being greatly reduced as of April 1, 2023 and likely non-existent in 2024. This scenario dramatically stepped up the timeline for re-imagining the national championships. Adding to the complexity of the situation were the issues of difficulty finding host venues over the last few years and the reduction in participation at the national level resulting in more B-teams to the extent that two events were not filled in 2022.

Existing Challenges

When considering the future of the national lawn bowls championship program, Bowls Canada Boulingrin (BCB) recognized that national championships must be a part of a vision that sees lawn bowling prosper at all levels in Canada in the future.

Lawn bowling is not the only sport facing this complex challenge as sport competition is evolving rapidly across the globe in both professional and amateur realms. Major league baseball recently introduced a pitch timer, limits on defensive shirts and bigger bases. World Bowls, lawn bowling’s international governing body, recently introduced a new league that show cases five-end sets play with a shot clock to speed up play. Rugby and Cricket are two more sports that have introduced shorter faster formats as a strategy to attract more participation and viewers to their game.

Bowls in Canada is facing the need to change. Even before the global pandemic, the search for hosts for seven championships was becoming more challenging leading to a 2022 championship season where so few facilities across the country were willing to host a national championship that all events except one were hosted in Ontario. The number of B-teams required to fill a 10-team draw has been increasing with each year and 2022

saw two national events (Mixed Pairs and Senior Triples) exhaust the B-team rolldown and run with byes in the draw. The costs to travel to and stay at national events have increased dramatically coming out of the pandemic. Volunteers are becoming scarcer at the same time that more are needed to address the increasing complexity of event requirements.

Overall, there was a recognition that change must result in:

- reducing cost to participants,
- reducing cost to provincial associations to host qualifiers for nationals,
- increasing the marketability and promotability of national events,
- freeing up space in provincial competition calendars to allow for more regional competitions that could attract participants beyond just national competitors,
- addressing the limited national resources being spread very thinly across seven national events,
- reducing the number of facilities required each year to host national championships,
- increasing the attractiveness to clubs to host a national event,
- reducing the number of overall number of volunteers required to run seven national championships while increasing the pool of available volunteers
- increasing the resources available to BCB to develop and promote membership retention and recruitment programs for clubs.

Moving Towards Change

Over a four-year period, BCB collected data from championship participant evaluations (totaling 721 responses from individual bowlers), evaluation reports by host organizing committees of national championships, club surveys, participant surveys conducted by a third-party consultants (both competitor oriented and general member oriented), reports prepared by the Canadian Sport for Life Society, interviewed other national bowls associations (England, Scotland, Australia and New Zealand) about their existing and future championship models, analyzed financial data and participation trends on the Canadian championships, reviewed provincial reports submitted at BCB Annual General Meetings and Presidents' Council meetings, and looked at Canadian participation trends in sport and physical activity, analysis of host organizing committee data from the past several years, analysis of competition data from multiple years (including timing, participation, finances, and game-results. This data was then compiled and analyzed over a six month period.

In March 2023, a working group was brought together for a weekend to review the analysis and to form recommendations for moving forward. Facilitated by an independent expert from the Sport for Life Society, the working group contained expertise representing recent athlete representation at all seven national championships, hosting expertise, regional qualification knowledge, recreational experience, provincial association

experience, coaching, umpiring, board and committee experience. Two BCB staff members were present to answer questions and provide additional background as needed. After reviewing the analysis, the working group identified a set of principles for the national championships. They were provided with example models from which to begin their discussions for potential solutions. After intense debate and deliberation, a single model was identified that all 16 members believed would best serve the sport as a whole. This was the model presented to the BCB Board and ultimately to the Provincial Presidents.

Principles for event

The working group identified

1. Offer **meaningful (close, challenging) competition** for all participants.
2. Are the **highest quality events** in terms of venue, organizational standards and participant experience.
3. Support a rational competition system that is also **financially and organizationally sustainable** to BCB and hosts and aligned with the needs of the provinces.
4. Play a key role in **marketing the game**: attracting and retaining bowlers, coaches, officials, sport leaders and supporters.
5. Are attractive, prestigious events in which a **growing number of bowlers aspire to succeed**, and are inclusive and accessible so all bowlers see their own path to Nationals participation.

Initial Proposed Model

The original proposal of the working group was released in [early April](#). The format features men's and women's singles/pairs/triples/fours in teams of 5-a-side, along with a Youth event and a Para event. Details on the rationale for this model are available on the [Bowls Canada website](#). The ideal scenario using 4 greens (either a 4-green complex, or multiple clubs in close proximity) looks like this:

	Green #1	Green #2	Green #3	Green #4
Day 1	Practice, Registration, Opening Ceremonies			
Day 2	Men = Singles/Fours	Women = Pairs/Triples	Para	Youth
Day 3	Men = Singles/Fours	Women = Pairs/Triples	Para	Youth
Day 4	Men = Pairs/Triples	Women = Singles/Fours	Para	Youth
Day 5	Men = Pairs/Triples	Women = Singles/Fours	Para - Finals	Youth - Finals
Day 6	Finals	Finals		

If 4 greens are not available (either in a single club or as combination of clubs within proximity to each other), a 2-green facility can host this event with the Para and Youth event occurring either before or after the other disciplines, resulting in a 10-day event. Evaluation and analysis of the implementation of this model is an integral part of the planned changes.

Feedback Cycle

After review and approval by the BCB Board of Directors, the model was presented to the Provincial Presidents at a meeting of the Presidents' Council. Based on the agreement of the Presidents at this meeting, this model was publicly released prior to any further discussion or consultation at the Provincial level.

Given the scope of the change, the new proposal generated many questions and concerns. It was and remains widely recognized that any change in this arena will result in some bowlers and associations being unhappy and disappointed. There were also individuals and associations who found the changes to be positive and a step in the right direction.

Overall, the Provincial Associations expressed significant concern and disappointment that they were not formally involved in the initial change process. To address this immediate concern, BCB engaged in a consultation process with the Provincial Associations through the President's Council over the period of April to June 2023.

Through this process, BCB shared with the Provincial Associations extensive financial data, historical participation trends data, expert recommendations from a study commissioned by the Canadian Olympic Committee, World Bowls and Commonwealth Games Federation updates, and more. In return, the Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) shared reports from their Boards and respective members. Numerous meetings of the Presidents' Council were held during this time period and time was provided to allow the Provincial Associations to further consult with their membership.

At the May 18th meeting of the Presidents' Council, a vote was conducted whereby seven out of nine PSOs voted in favour of proceeding with the 2024 model as proposed, with some revisions being considered. At this time there was no consensus on which revisions should be the priority. As such, the PSOs agreed to have the BCB staff conduct an analysis of all the PSO identified revisions which would be distributed to the Provincial Presidents no later than May 24th such that further review could be done at the provincial level with the goal of coming together on June 1st to finalize the 2024 model. The analysis of the suggested potential revisions follows below.

Suggested Potential Revisions

1. Proposed Model with 5-person team being optional

One of the suggested revisions was to not mandate 5-person teams for the disciplines of singles, pairs, triples and fours, but rather allow a provincial association to send unique players for each discipline should they so desire.

Implications – Sending 10 unique players would double the amount of flights, accommodations, meals to be provided, uniforms, etc. which would have a financial impact on those provinces that provide funding to their athlete representatives. This would also increase the complexity of the draw should a province not field an entire team (e.g. sending a singles player but not pairs/triples/fours). This would open the door to potential "B" teams being used, however based on previous years this is complicated and typically results in a higher cost for the individual bowlers as not all provinces fund "B" teams. This also would mean players would be attending/competing for just 2 days instead of 4+ requiring finals needing to be played after each discipline instead of a "Finals Day" for all disciplines on the same day. The goal of the single "Finals Day" was to create a unique promotion opportunity that would attract in-person spectators and online viewers for a festival atmosphere celebration of bowls excellence. Finally, playdowns

would be required for each discipline which would maintain the existing calendar congestion.

2. Proposed Model with longer time limits

The BCB Development Committee recommends extending the time limit from 1.25 hours to 1.5 hours based on the premise that Fours games take longer to complete. The original 1.25 hour time limit was based on 7.5 minutes/end (what is currently being used for the 2023 championships in pairs: 135 minutes/18 ends), however the same time limit is actually 9 minutes/end for fours (135 minutes/15 ends). Based on this calculation, 9 minutes per end would equate to 1.5 hours with this new model. While this doesn't change much from an administrative standpoint, it does mean days are slightly longer as each game has an additional 15 minutes added. NOTE: the time limit does not include the tie-breaker end, which would likely require additional time to complete. 1 hour and 39 minutes per game (11 ends x 9 minutes) is still feasible with this model if desired.

Implications – Longer days require more volunteer hours, more time required of umpires, hosts and athletes alike. Tie-breakers increase the length of the day further still. An initial goal of shorter games was to meet the needs expressed by athletes and volunteers for shorter days of competition while still retaining a full round-robin qualifying session and also recognizing the dramatic increases in costs to accommodations, ground transportation and meals.

3. Proposed Model with 3-end tiebreaker instead of 1-end tiebreaker

One of the suggested tweaks was to use a 3-end tiebreaker instead of the proposed 1-end tiebreaker. The addition of 2 extra ends per game would mean the time limit for each game would need to increase. If the total number of possible ends would be 13 (5 + 5 + 3), sticking with 9 minutes/end, the new time limit would need to be 117 minutes. As tiebreakers typically take longer than regular sets play, rounding up to 120 minutes, or 2 hours, may make scheduling easier. Based on 2-hour games, only 3 games could be played per day instead of 4. This would result in 1 extra day being required at a 4-green venue, and at least 2 extra days being required at a 2-green venue.

Implications - Based on feedback from previous hosts, adding 20% more days to the event at a 2-green venue will prove problematic. 10 days already puts an incredible amount of stress on the greens for prolonged usage and increasing that to 12 days is considered to be too much for most clubs/greens to bear. This would also mean two additional days for volunteers, and increased costs for players and/or PSOs and BCB. A three-end tiebreaker removes the suspense and "sudden death" excitement from the overtime experience. It does add more ends to the game allowing more time for a winner to emerge.

4. Proposed Model with 7-end sets, 1-end tiebreaker

One of the suggested tweaks was to use 7-end sets instead of 5-end sets. This would require the time limit to change to 135 minutes (15 ends x 9 minutes). Similar to above,

this would mean only 3 games/day, and an extra day necessary at a 4-green venue, or two extra days minimum at a 2-green venue.

Implications – Based on feedback from previous hosts, adding 20% more days to the event at a 2-green venue will prove problematic. 10 days already puts an incredible amount of stress on the greens for prolonged usage and increasing that to 12 days is considered to be too much for most clubs/greens to bear. This would also mean two additional days for volunteers, and increased costs for players and/or PSOs and BCB. One-end tiebreakers add suspense and excitement to the game in the same way that a sudden death over-time period has fans and players alike on the edge of their seats. In this case, every bowl counts.

5. Proposed Model with 7-end sets, 3-end tiebreaker

One of the suggested tweaks was to use 7-end sets instead of 5-end sets, and 3-end tiebreakers instead of 1-end tiebreakers. This would require the time limit to change to 153 minutes (17 ends x 9 minutes), however for simplicity it is rounded down to 150 minutes, or 2.5 hours, in the spreadsheet. Similar to above, this would mean only 3 games/day, and an extra day necessary at a 4-green venue, or two extra days minimum at a 2-green venue.

Implications – In addition to the implications outlined above in proposed model #4, this would result in a longer fours game than in previous years (7+7+3 = 17 ends vs. 15 ends used in 2023), and a longer time limit for all disciplines than 2023 is using. As outlined in Tab 5 of the accompanying spreadsheet, this would result in even longer days for players, and volunteers, than other models.

6. Proposed Model with 10 teams

One of the suggested tweaks was reverting back to 10 teams at national championships, with NB and PEI being allowed to field their own teams and “B” teams being used to fill the 10th spot when the smaller provinces are unable to field a team. Using the existing 5-end sets and 1-end tiebreaker model, this results in 4 extra days necessary at a 4-green venue (10 days total), or 4 extra days at a 2-green venue (14 days total) due to the increase in rounds played and rinks required. With 10 teams, this means 10 rinks for men, 10 rinks for women, 10 rinks for youth, and 10 rinks for Para. A 4-green facility (or two 2-greens co-hosting) only have a maximum of 32 rinks, which means all events can no longer be played at the same time. Whether it is Youth or Para that are pushed to be held after the rest, more days are required in order to hold all disciplines.

Implications – This proposal requires 14 days at a 2-green venue, which is a considerable jump from the initial proposal of 10. This also means an increased burden on volunteers with additional days/time required; Costs increase substantially for participants, PSOs and BCB.

7. Proposed Model with 10 teams, 7-end sets

Similar to above with 10 teams, using 7-end sets adds even more days to the calendar. A 4-green venue would need 6 additional days from the initial proposal (for a total of 12), and a 2-green venue would need an additional 7 days (for a total of 17).

Implications – Holding one discipline (Youth or Para) after the other events will result in them feeling as “lesser than”. This also requires 12 days at a 4-green venue, which is double the initial proposal of 6. A 2-green venue would require 17 days, making this virtually impossible to find a host club, as no club’s greens could sustain 17 consecutive days of use, nor would the existing membership be willing to forfeit their greens for that long. Finding the required volunteers for 17 days, or umpires/officials, would also be very difficult and costly based on the experience of the past three championship years.

8. Eliminate Triples and only play Singles, Pairs, Fours plus youth and para.

One of the suggested tweaks was to remove triples and allow provincial associations to send unique representatives for singles, pairs, and fours. This would result in an additional day being required at a 4-green venue, but one less day at a 2-green venue. This is due to an extra discipline occurring (previous models held 2 disciplines concurrently: singles/fours OR triples/pairs. This model would be 3 disciplines: singles + pairs + fours).

Implications – There are not enough rinks for all disciplines to compete at the same time, resulting in at least one discipline occurring before or after the others. This also results in higher costs for Provincial Associations and/or players, as more participants attending requires more flights, meals, uniforms, etc. This also results in more calendar congestion as multiple playdowns are required, over multiple weekends. This model shows 2-day events for each discipline; this would be a considerable change from the other tweaks as participants typically compete for 4+ days in the other models. Historical evidence for the last few years show that smaller provinces have difficulty fielding fours teams and it is likely that this model will greatly reduce their participation.

9. Separate Youth and Para and run as a separate event.

One of the suggested revisions was to run the Para and Youth as a separate event from the Singles, Pairs, Triples and Fours

Implications – This would result in two shorter events and could be seen as more desirable format for a host club. It is recognized that Youth and Para are the main media draws, so while this would continue to garner promotion for these disciplines, it would not help promote the major events. This would result in PSOs sending two sets of support staff to cover to separate locations for the two events. The estimated cost to BCB to run separate events is an additional \$5,000 - \$10,000 pending the location of the event over and above a single event with all disciplines.

10. Maintain Status Quo

One of the suggestions was to maintain the existing status quo of seven individual national championships.

Implications – The challenges with the status quo have been identified in detail in the introduction of this report. The key implications of maintaining status quo was the recognition that it is not a sustainable model. The continuation of the current model does not address the challenges of ‘hostability’, volunteer scarcity, rising costs to participants, rising costs of fielding qualified and available umpires across seven events, ability to redirect resources to membership recruitment and retention programming, nor ability to use the championships to increase the overall visibility of the game to the Canadian market.

Provincial Consultation Results

At the June 1st, 2023 meeting the Presidents’ Council, the PSOs had the opportunity to discuss the results of the analysis and provide their feedback to the BCB Board for final consideration.

There were unanimous votes of support from the PSO Presidents on the following:

1. To support the elimination of the mandatory requirement of 5-person teams for the singles/pairs/triples/fours event. This would allow provinces to choose whether they wished to send a team of five to play in the four events or to send some other combination of players to play singles, pairs, triples and fours.
2. To NOT support the suggestion of five-end sets with 3-end tiebreakers.
3. To NOT support 7-end sets with 1-end tiebreaker.

There was support from only one PSO to maintain the status quo.

There was support from the majority of PSOs on proceeding with the 2024 model as initially proposed in April with no changes or alterations.

There was support from the majority of PSOs on bringing back Indoor Singles in some format provided it was financially viable to do so.

All other suggestions received split support.

Additionally, at this meeting the PSOs expressed their big picture priorities. Overall, the majority of the PSOs indicated that they are still looking at BCB to support initiatives for growing membership, creating competition opportunities and marketing. Financial feasibility, national competition and local development are also still very important. This would suggest that BCB should continue to strive to find a balance between national competitions and membership programming. The PSOs also shared that while they were expecting the membership fees to return to the 2019 rates, the majority felt that any further increase would be very difficult to implement.

The Way Forward for the 2024 National Championships

The BCB Board of Directors met the week following the June 1st Presidents' Council meeting to analyze the feedback and determine a way forward that would best meet the current needs of the membership and the future needs for securing a viable future of the sport.

After much discussion and debate, the BCB Board of Directors approved unanimously to the following adjustments from the initial model released in April:

1. **TEAM COMPOSITION:** PSOs will have the option for how to field teams in the singles/pairs/triples/fours. Singles & Fours will still be played concurrently, as will Pairs & Triples, meaning the 5-a-side option will still be available for those provinces who wish to qualify as a team of 5; alternatively, if a provincial association wished to hold 4 separate qualifiers and send 4 unique teams, they would have the option to do so.
2. **BYES AND B-TEAMS:** The 8-team draw will remain, however, if there is a vacancy in the draw, B-Teams will be used to ensure a full draw. As the largest province, Ontario will have the first right of refusal, with random wild cards used after that if necessary.
3. **OUTDOOR SINGLES FORMAT:** As an international qualifier, the outdoor Singles event will be modified to mimic the current World Bowls Champion of Champions format. Using the 2023 Champion of Champions conditions of play, this would look like three 5-end sets. During the round robin, all three sets must be played, while in the playoffs only the best 2 out of 3 must be played. As Singles is typically played much faster than team events, it is anticipated that the length of time to complete a longer singles match would not add additional rounds (or days) to the schedule.
4. **TEAM GAMES FORMAT:** Given that seven of nine provinces were initially willing to try the new model and that there was no clear indication of support of the other suggested revisions, the Board elected to maintain the current proposal of five-end sets with a one-end tie-breaker.
5. **EVENT FORMAT:** Should finding a host prove difficult, splitting up the Youth & Para disciplines from the Singles/Pairs/Triples/Fours would be considered. This could result in two separate hosts in separate locations, if need be, however, every effort would be made to finding a host(s) for a single event.
6. **INDOOR SINGLES:** The Indoor Singles will be reintroduced as a World Indoor Championships Qualifier instead of as a national championship. The draw would still consist of 12 men and 12 women, however managing event entries will be

modified from previous years to still encourage participation from all provinces, but then streamline the administration of filling vacancies.

7. **CONSULTATION:** A national task force will be created to evaluate the national championships and make recommendations to the BCB Board. This task force will consist of BCB's Development Committee and the representative from each PSO who is involved with organizing/running their provincial playdowns and/or managing their competition program. This task force will be charged with evaluating the 2024 model, including determining which metrics to gather, assist in gathering them, analyzing the results and then making recommendations to the BCB Board after the first year of this new model has been tested.

While these modifications do not resolve every concern brought forward (it was clear that there was no solution that would please everyone), it addresses many of the concerns raised by the PSOs including the need for more consultation. It also recognizes that many of the bowlers across Canada expressed excitement and a willingness to try the new format as originally presented.

Provincial Response to the Consultation Outcomes

Seven of the nine provincial associations expressed immediate support for the decisions that came out of the consultation process. One province noted that this competition model would align very well with BCB's new strategic plan (launched in March 2023) which outlined plans for the development of an athletes' council, emphasis on coaching development, the development of a regional competition format and the initial groundwork for creating a Canadian Open event.

Support was shown by all nine provinces for the reintroduction of a national indoor singles event and all expressed support for the national consultative task force. The task force provides two opportunities for PSO consultation – one through the PSO designated representative on the task force and a second through the Presidents' Council.

Several provinces expressed excitement for the new format and one (Manitoba) shared that they had already trialed the new format to great success. This trial tournament sold out quickly and saw five-person teams that involved both competitive bowlers and recreational bowlers. Manitoba also shared that the two five-end sets with one-end tie breaker format was exciting to play and generated a lot of enthusiasm by the participants.

While Ontario continues to express concern with the changes as they believe that the removal of B-teams will reduce the competitive standard of the Canadian Championships, they have committed to work with Bowls Canada and the other PSOs to evaluate the 2024 Canadian Championship format.

At the time this report was released, Bowls BC reiterated their position to reject the changes for the 2024 Championships due to the process followed and indicated that their participation in the new format is yet to be decided.

Next Steps

The immediate next step is to establish a Terms of Reference for the Consultative Task Force and get it up and running as soon as possible. One of the first responsibilities for the Task Force will be to establish evaluation metrics and baseline measures for the new event.

BCB will also work on developing the formal “Request For Proposal” bid package and bid-evaluation metrics over the coming weeks, with a formal application process to be released in the near future.

Conclusion

Re-imagining the Canadian lawn bowling championships is a bold step on the pathway to securing a sustainable future for the sport of bowls in Canada. The Canadian Lawn Bowling Championships must provide value to all members. A national championship program that creates connection amongst all bowlers in Canada, generates excitement for spectators and players alike, and brings benefits to its hosts is a vision that Bowls Canada looks forward to bringing to life in collaboration with the Provincial Bowls Associations.