Bowls New Zealand / World Bowls Coaching & Umpires Conference — 25—26 November 2024

Ponsonby Bowling Club, Auckland

The Bowls New Zealand / World Bowls Coaching and Umpires Conference was held at the Bowls New Zealand Office (Ponsonby Bowling Club) in late November 2024.

With the theme **Empowering Athletes**, all presenters aligned their sessions to this key concept.

We welcomed **60 attendees on Day One**, including **10 umpires** who were in New Zealand between international events. **Day Two** saw **50 participants**, all eager to continue learning and connecting.

DAY ONE

Mark Cameron - CEO, Bowls New Zealand

Mark opened the conference by outlining Bowls New Zealand's strategy and vision for the future.



Neil Dalrymple – CEO, World Bowls

Neil shared insights into the **World Bowls Strategic Plan**, reinforcing the sport's global development goals.



Neil

Conference Presenters:



Conference Presenters

Lewis Clareburt – NZ Olympic Swimmer

Lewis kicked off with an engaging icebreaker on the green, immediately connecting with the audience.

- Trains 30+ hours a week, supported by Sport NZ and sponsors
- Spoke about early coaching under Gary Hollywood, who used an autocratic style
- Now coached by **Mitch Nairn** in Auckland, Lewis is empowered to co-design his training
- Emphasised the importance of two-way feedback, trust, and confidence



Michael Johnson - Umpiring Session

Michael provided a deep dive into the role of umpires, with a high-performance lens.

Purpose of the session:

- Provide insight into umpiring in bowls
- Explore how high-performance mindsets apply to officiating

Umpiring in NZ:

- Over 550 umpires, all volunteers
- Three main groups: club/centre, national, and international
- Focus on developing pathways and support structures

Panel (Sue Way, Wendy Suttie, Cath Thomson):

• Covered key themes: being match-ready, personal growth, support systems, reflection, and career aspirations

This session was incredibly interactive and could have easily gone longer.



Mike Kernaghan - Head Coach, Bowls New Zealand

Mike encouraged self-reflection and asked key empowering questions like, "What are your thoughts?"

- Emphasised player ownership through the **why what how** framework Shared a story of an athlete who lost a game from a strong lead and used reflection to grow
- Modelled how giving athletes responsibility deepens their development



Suzie Muirhead – Raise My Game (RMG)

Suzie introduced her athlete-empowerment tool Raise My Game, sharing:

- Great video content and tools
- A bowls case study featuring Tayla Bruce, who shared her experience using RMG



Helene Wilson – High Performance Coach

Helene brought a gendered lens to coaching, with insightful distinctions between how men and women typically process coaching:

- "Women are emotional, men want the facts."
- Shared extensive experience coaching both genders
- Delivered practical and powerful insights on coach-athlete communication



Networking Dinner

The day ended with Australian presenters **Lachlan and Danny** filming green sessions, followed by a **Thai meal for 30 attendees**—a chance to debrief and network.

DAY TWO

Day One set a high bar—and Day Two delivered just as much inspiration and insight.

Barrie Lester – Australian Representative

Barrie shared personal stories and coaching insights:

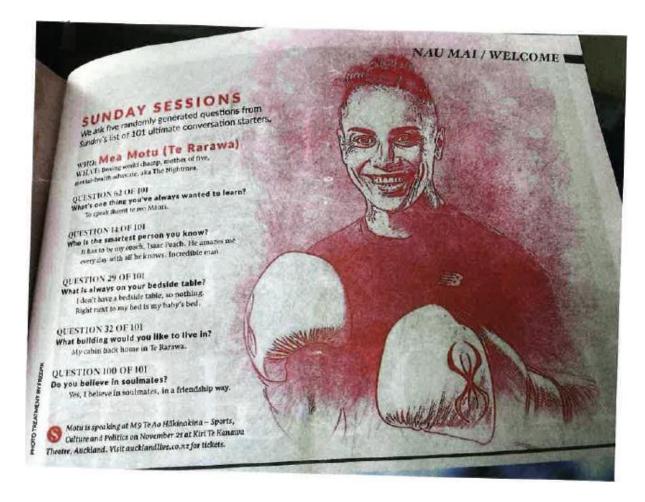
- 1. Challenges outside the sport (injuries, personal loss)
- 2. Demonstrated technical skills using a **bowling arm**
- 3. Took attendees onto the green for live drills



Mea Motu & Isaac Peach – Q&A with Julie Blake

This was a standout session.

- Julie Blake (Bowls NZ HP Manager) led the session expertly
- Mea's story: dislocating her shoulder in Round 1 of a 12-round fight and winning anyway
- Showcased a remarkable trust-filled coach-athlete relationship
- Mea shared her drive, resilience, and that her son David is already making waves in bowls!
- Mea has tried bowls—but admits she doesn't have the patience!





Craig Palmer – HPSNZ / Cycling NZ Coach

Craig shared stories from both his and his wife's elite sporting journeys:

- Highlighted moments of mental toughness, such as a brutal mountain "walk" test
- Explained his current work with **CORE Knowledge**—a programme for coach development
- Bowls NZ performance coaches are now involved in this initiative





















Lachlan Tighe - Australian Coach Educator

Lachlan explored barriers and enablers to empowerment.

Barriers:

- Authoritarianism
- Dictatorial styles
- Fragile egos
- Lack of personal interaction
- Avoiding confrontation
- Treating training as the only role of coaching

Empowering coaches:

- Build relationships
- Encourage responsibility
- Foster self-awareness and leadership

Lachlan's message: "Build awareness, build responsibility, foster leadership."



Emily Belton, Erica Ayers & Carl Street – Bowls NZ Coaches

- Emily and Erica spoke on **communication insights** from the CORE Knowledge programme
- Carl demonstrated video analysis of Tayla Bruce's delivery using RMG tools—four overlays showing delivery consistency





Dr Kylie Wilson – Final Keynote

Kylie closed the conference with an inspiring and interactive session.

- Let the audience set the tone by asking what they wanted to learn
- Presented the **Framework of Power**:
 - o Power Within
 - o Power Between
 - o Power of Unity
- Used group engagement to illustrate these in action



Final Reflections

This was an **outstanding two-day event**, driven by passionate, expert presenters all aligned with the theme of **Empowering Athletes**.

Thanks to:

- All presenters for their brilliance and generosity
- World Bowls and Bowls New Zealand for their support and funding

To access the presentations please click on this link Coaching Conference 2024