

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 :



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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!

SUNDAY SESSIONS

We ask five randomly generated questions from Sunday's list of 101 ultimate conversation starters.

WHO: Mea Motu (Te Rarawa)

WHAT: Boxing world champ, mother of five, mental-health advocate, aka The Nightmare.

QUESTION 62 OF 101

What's one thing you've always wanted to learn?
To speak fluent te reo Māori.

QUESTION 14 OF 101

Who is the smartest person you know?

It has to be my coach, Isaac Peach. He amazes me every day with all he knows. Incredible man.

QUESTION 29 OF 101

What is always on your bedside table?

I don't have a bedside table, so nothing. Right next to my bed is my baby's bed.

QUESTION 32 OF 101

What building would you like to live in?

My cabin back home in Te Rarawa.

QUESTION 100 OF 101

Do you believe in soulmates?

Yes, I believe in soulmates, in a friendship way.

S Motu is speaking at M9 Te Ao Hākinakina – Sports, Culture and Politics on November 21 at Kiri Te Kōwhiri Theatre, Auckland. Visit aucklandlive.co.nz for tickets.





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**:
 - **Power Within**
 - **Power Between**
 - **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](#)