

26 April, 2000

Dear ABF and Australian Bridge,

Australian Team Selection Method - Let's Play to Win

Ranting and diplomatic immunity aside, Michael Courtney's article on how to select the "best" Australian Team is right on the money. Define "best" as most likely to **win** internationally. Then it's clear the top qualified **pairs** should compete in a Butler, the top three pairs form the Australian (or Zone 7) Team. For a second Team take the next three pairs. If a pair drops out take the next pair.

As Michael states, it is totally irrelevant (and absolute nonsense to suggest otherwise) whether these **pairs** are friends or not. At this level, the "best" team-mates are the ones who consistently bring back good scores. When you play to win, the happiest teams are winning teams.

More important than wanting to have team-mates you like to eat and drink with, is a Captain who effectively communicates, defines and executes their role, and is respected by all on the Team. The Captain's administration management and their managing of players expectations in advance is vital. Far more vital than loving thy team-mates.

Staging the Team selection event as a Butler does nothing to detract from the successful ABF qualification circuit with its Playoff Qualifying Points (PQP). Keep all the playoff point events as is, **and** make each qualified pair play as a pair.

Playing as a **pair**, in addition to selecting the "best" Team overcomes: -

1. the frenzy of negotiations and "sucking up" that occurs presently as pairs jostle to form teams for the playoff,
2. **young** or unfashionable pairs being disadvantaged because they don't have the friendships or clout to get on one of the stronger teams (or on a team at all),
3. is the sponsor good enough to play on the Team? Sponsors are great - yet let them qualify as part of a pair,
4. the board rule issues - rather than 50%, everyone plays all the boards,
5. a potential lack of resilience of some pairs. In international events you not only need to plan for, but expect partnerships at times to fall sick or run out of form. In these cases the other two pairs have to be battle hardened and be able to play at their best for two or three days straight.

(I'm in no doubt Australia's patchy performances are at least in part due to not having three battle hardened pairs and the Captain not capable of making decisions which maximise the Team's likelihood of winning.).

Examples of the undesirable politics over the current formation of playoff teams abound. The pair of Klinger-Dyke “deserve” (based on results and PQP) to have the opportunity to be at this year’s playoffs - they won’t be there. John Roberts and I “deserved” to have had the opportunity to be at last year’s playoff’s but we got out jostled and missed an invite. Many other **pairs** high up on the PQP list have missed out - let’s get the best **pairs** to the playoffs based on results and PQP.

And one other essential enhancement. The pairs in the current Australian (or Zone 7) Team **must** be granted automatic entry into the following year’s playoff.

Why? Because:

1. International commitments seriously curtail their ability to accumulate PQP in the ABF events (in effect they would be discriminated against if not invited), and
2. Surely the three pairs in the current Team are deserving and good enough to participate in the selection of the “best” Team for the following year.
3. To not grant entry would be just plain dumb, we need to provide opportunity for continuity at the top level. Players benefit from international experience let’s provide the opportunity for this experience to be employed.

Let’s play to win now. Let’s select the strongest three pairs. Let’s do it now. Let Easter 2001 be the start of Australia/Zone 7 being a force at international level.

Sincerely

Matthew Thomson