

BOWLS ENGLAND OPENS 2023 NATIONAL COMPETITION ENTRIES

We are delighted to announce that entries for our individual and club National Competitions are now open. Always popular and keenly contested, 19 National Competition winners will be crowned at Victoria Park in August 2023, alongside 16 National Championship victors.

We have also announced our schedule for the 2023 Bowls England National Finals in order that players and spectators may start to plan their year ahead.

National Competitions

Our competitions are open to players of all abilities – with a range of events designed to meet your individual requirements. They give you a great opportunity to challenge yourself and make new friends or perhaps rekindle old rivalries.

We particularly welcome entries from those who may not have entered one of our competitions before, as this is a great opportunity to improve your game, test yourself against different players and perhaps win a place, and a few bragging rights, at the National Finals at Royal Leamington Spa. With all area winners proceeding directly to the National Finals in 2023, your chances of treading the hallowed turf are significantly increased!

All events are organised on a knock-out basis, with the early rounds played locally and the National Finals at Victoria Park, Royal Leamington Spa, which hosted the Lawn Bowls and Para Lawn Bowls at Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

So, whether you are a regular competitor or new to our sport, we have plenty of opportunities for you to get involved.

Entries are now open – [enter online here](#)

The closing date for entries is 9am on Wednesday 1st March.

2023 National Finals

The National Finals will run from Thursday 10th to Sunday 27th August inclusive.

We have listened to feedback from this summer in relation to the Regional Finals and number of qualifiers from each county. With this in mind, our schedule has been developed consistent with a number of key principles, including but not limited to:

- Priority given to National Championships
- Increasing the number of qualifiers to 62 in all National Championships (with the exception of the Senior Fours and Junior Pairs, which remain at one per county). This means an additional 14 qualification places and, with 30 rinks available, enables the green space at Victoria Park to be used maximally. In all those events with 62 places, those 27 counties with the highest entries per event will receive two qualification places, with the remaining 8 receiving one place
- No regional finals in National Competitions – all area winners proceeding to Leamington will provide a significant increase in qualifying places available
- Inclusion of Top Club Finals within the National Finals

- Minimising duplications wherever possible

Policy on duplications and match time limits

The 2023 schedule has been devised to minimise clashes. Historically we have sought to accommodate players in more than one event scheduled to run at the same time. Due to the volume of events and the multiple qualification of some competitors, it is inevitable that a small number of players will have matches that clash. For the best interest of the event, we have developed a clear policy on duplications to allow players, clubs and counties to make informed decisions.

In 2023, in all rounds of National Championships all players with a scheduling duplication will be accommodated.

We shall also seek to accommodate players with scheduling duplications in the following National Competition events, where time and green availability permits:

- Champion of Champions
- Family Pairs

However, in order to ensure the smooth running of the National Finals and for the wider benefit of the vast majority of players, spectators, volunteers and umpires, should scheduling clashes occur involving any of the following events, teams will be required to provide substitutes. **This will be a condition of entry.**

We would encourage players/teams to review the schedule prior to entry and be mindful of the implications of entering the following competitions if successful in the National Championships or National Competitions:

- All inter-county events
- All inter-club events
- National Mixed Pairs
- National Mixed Fours
- Senior Pairs

To support the increased number of qualifiers and removal of Regional Finals, we are also introducing time limits for the completion of matches in order to assist the smooth running of the National Finals. We feel these are reasonable, will assist umpires in managing slow play and will help avoid scheduling clashes due to matches over-running. The limits (to include trial ends) are as follows:

National Championships

- Two bowl singles – one hour and 15 minutes

- Four bowl singles – two hours and 30 minutes
- Pairs, Triples and Fours – three hours and 30 minutes

National Competitions

- Singles – two hours and 30 minutes
- Pairs – two hours and 30 minutes
- Inter-Club – three hours and 30 minutes
- Inter-County – TBC

AGM Propositions – important information for National Competition entrants

We must make all players considering entering National Competitions aware that Bowls Dorset has put forward a proposition to the Bowls England AGM in February 2023 proposing 70 qualifiers (two per county) from 2023.

Bowls England does not support this proposition because it will:

- Create greater inequality between counties in terms of the chances of qualifying for the National Finals based on entry numbers received. Counties with the largest number of entries have up to 20 times more entries than the smallest counties, and their players would have a correspondingly smaller chance of qualifying.
- Mean that plans for 2023 cannot be finalised by players, spectators or officials causing significant disruption and inconvenience.
- Negatively impact on the event delivery for officials, volunteers, county officials and staff, and compromising our duty of care for our workforce's wellbeing.
- Make no impact on entry numbers for National Championships given that many counties have already completed their competition entry process for the 2023 season.
- Create additional work at all levels of the game, time which can be better invested in getting more people playing.
- Precede the National Competitions Review (see below) and will hamper the full review that has been agreed to be carried out by that group as part of our 'Fit for the Future' Strategy.

If this proposition is passed by county associations, then we shall need to change the domestic schedule and National Finals programme just over 6 weeks before the start of the season. This will include:

- Reintroducing Regional Finals to enable the National Finals, with the additional rounds, to be completed within the allocated event period.

- Continuing to stage the Top Club, or other Finals, on a separate weekend
- Amending the National Finals schedule for re-publication following the receipt of entries and publication of draws

A proposition put forward by Worcestershire for a similar change but from 2024, will also be considered at the AGM. Whilst Bowls England acknowledges the desire to have more qualification places, it does not support this proposition as it will similarly hamper the National Competitions Review process. The proposal for 2023 is an effective solution balancing a range of considerations in terms of delivering the event.

National Competitions Review

We have committed to deliver a National Competitions Review and a working party is being assembled. Their recommendations, if approved by the Board, will be implemented for 2024.

Whilst we are delighted that competitions retain a good level of popularity within our membership, we are also acutely aware of a number of challenges. Entry numbers have been in decline for many years (particularly in women's events), the latter stages are being dominated by a reducing pool of players, age bands at junior and senior level may not be conducive to encouraging participation and the competition landscape is complicated for those considering taking part.

Providing the right competitions at the appropriate level is fundamental to the future of our sport. National domestic competitions should deliver great experiences for players, inspire new people to play our sport, stretch and prepare our best players for international bowls and increase our sport's visibility. The review will inform how this is best achieved. Ideally, we would wish to complete the review and implement positive changes that take our sport forward, provide fairness across the country and better meet the needs of all bowlers.

We shall shortly be advertising for members to join this group so please do keep your eye out if interested in working with us on the National Competitions Review. All stakeholders will be consulted as part of this process.