

## **A Short History of the New Zealand Indoor Bowls Federation (Inc.)**

**Written by Reg Motion (March 1984).**

The New Zealand Indoor Bowls Federation was formed on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1948. Its history is one of favourable circumstances leading to a meteoric growth in the first years of its existence followed by a period of consolidation and then a period when the glitter of other attractions required continuing promotion of the sport to retain its place in the sun.

### **Early Development (pre-Federation)**

Indoor Bowls started in New Zealand around 1908. Its start is attributed to a Mr John Jenkins of the Hope of Auckland Rechabite Tent - one of the then very active friendly societies. Mr Jenkins saw indoor bowls played at the Franco-British Exhibition in London in 1908 and brought a set of bowls back to his society for their use. These bowls were much smaller than those in use here today, being only 2.5 inches in diameter and a 12 foot long mat was used.

Following some experiments with 4-inch diameter bowls turned from ti-tree and lignum vitae but biased with lead weights there was a move to wooden bowls biased by shaping them in a similar manner to the lawn bowls of the day. Play was almost completely confined to the various friendly society groups at that time.

By 1925 the game had developed to a considerable extent among the friendly societies but there was a good deal of dissatisfaction with the variability of their bowls and the answer was found when an English firm (Taylor Rolph) produced a four inch lignum vitae bowls in sets of 16 having a guaranteed draw. These sets which it is believed were produced solely for the New Zealand market became very popular and their use contributed greatly to the expansion of the game. Various mats had been used including an imported woollen carpet but none found general favour. Eventually the problem was solved when Mr W Miller, manager of the Onehunga Woollen Mills designed a special carpet which had sufficient nap to make play seem like that on an outdoor green in miniature. Everything was worked out in proportion and the size decided on was 22ft long by 6ft wide. It is a tribute to the designer that these same proportions and texture find general favour among bowlers of today.

With standardised playing conditions the game spread rapidly. Commercial organisations took it on as a form of staff recreation. Principally through the friendly societies it spread outside Auckland into other towns and cities throughout New Zealand.

By 1938 there were an estimated 10,000 indoor bowlers in the Auckland area. Leading names among the organisers include Mr F Harris, Mr G F Day, Mr S George and Mrs L Boles.

With play in other areas expanding rapidly the time was ripe for the formation of a national body but the clouds of war were approaching and indoor bowls had to take a back seat while the urgent business of winning the war was undertaken.

Following the war indoor bowls enjoyed a mushroom growth as returned services personnel and others sought to continue the social pattern developed over the war years. Clubs sprung up everywhere. In those days there were no taverns open after 6pm or television and the clubs

provided community-gathering points after work. Indoor Bowls is relatively easy to learn and is played by all ages of both sexes thus it was an ideal reason for the clubs' existence. Interclub play showed the competitive possibilities of the game but this development needed organising. Auckland, Wellington and a few other centres had Associations - a National body was required.

### **Formation of the Federation**

In 1948 Mr George Welch of Wellington, with some assistance from the Physical Welfare Department, sought opinions on the formation of a National body. He then convened a meeting which took place in the Harbour Board Social Club rooms in Wellington on the 18th September 1948. Representatives from Indoor Bowls Organisations of Auckland, Palmerston North, Wanganui, Hawera, Hutt and Wellington attended and the New Zealand Indoor Bowls Federation was born with George Welch its first secretary and Cliff Wearne of Wellington as President.

Canterbury, Hawkes Bay, Horowhenua, Hutt Valley, Palmerston North, Central Taranaki, South Taranaki, Wanganui and Wellington were the inaugural member districts of the Federation. Waikato and Taranaki North joined in the second year of operation but it was not until the sixth year that the large Auckland Association affiliated. Their entry brought the total affiliated membership to 21,000 spread among the 21 member districts from Auckland through to Southland. Membership continued to climb rapidly reaching a peak in 1963 with 73,100 members affiliated through 35 member districts covering the total area of North and South Islands. Since 1963 there has been a slow decline in membership but in 1984 there were 50,300.

The first efforts of the Federation were directed at providing a common set of rules for playing the game and at organising national championships.

### **Laws of the Game**

One of the first steps taken was to arrange production of a two inch diameter jack. Up until 1950 a two and a half inch outdoor jack had been in general use. The new jack completed the work of harmonising the equipment used for the indoor game. As might be expected in a game which originated in New Zealand and is unique to this country many changes to the rules of play have taken place over the years. The Federation has guided these changes and facilitated them by arranging a complete rules review every five years, authorising desirable changes then reprinting the book of rules known as the Laws of the Game.

Administrators Federation executive members recognised for their services to the game by being made Life Members included C. G. Welch, R.J.A Pinhey, K. L. Woolston, G. A. Oliver, E. G. F. Smith.

### **1984 – 2002**

Administrators recognised for their services with Life Memberships during this time were Reg Motion (Wellington), Kevin Eddy (Wellington), Horace Warnes (Nelson), John MacKay (Manawatu).

Bay of Plenty's Delwyn Hughes from Rotorua, who made indoor bowls history in 1985 by being the first woman to be elected to the Federation executive is one of the stand-out administrators. She was president from 1995 to 1997 and has been the sport's publicity officer since 1987. 2004 saw Delwyn Hughes from Rotorua, Bay of Plenty and Ivon Pash, North Harbour were recognized for their services with Life Membership of NZIB.