

## YBA Men's Inter County Selection

### 'The Challenge!'

As the Men's 2024 Inter County campaign kicks off, there have been a few isolated expressions of concern around 'selection'. I therefore thought it may be worthwhile updating you on just how selection takes place within the Men's Section.

The four YBA Men's Inter County competitions which take place annually are;

- The White Rose – Men's U 25
- The Muras Trophy – Organised through the Northern Counties BA consisting of matches between Lancashire, Northumbria, Durham and Yorkshire (Cumbria do not currently engage in this event). Note: this competition was cancelled in 2024 as both Lancashire and Northumbria withdrew.
- The Alsop Trophy - Organised through the Northern Counties BA consisting of matches between Lancashire, Northumbria, Durham, Cumbria and Yorkshire. Consisting of six rinks per match.
- The Middleton Cup – A Bowls England men's six rink national competition played down regionally to the semi final stages which are held at Leamington
- The Balcomb Trophy – A Bowls England men's double rink national competition played down regionally to the National semi final stages which are held at Leamington

This year we moved to 'self-nomination' with anyone able to nominate provided there were from a YBA/BE Affiliated club via the YBA website. This saw a tremendous response with over 100 nominations. One of the challenges for our Men's Team Manager, Sam Winter, is just how in a County our size can you know all those who nominate? Using a network of experienced bowlers Sam has been able to find out about most of the nominees but in truth there are still a few who we need to get to know better. Another way of identifying yourself as a strong candidate for County selection is through achievements in County and National competitions.

The identification of younger bowlers eligible for the White Rose Team is easier. Sadly there are fewer of them and the Men's Youth Manager, Phil Parsons, identifies these individuals through attendance at Youth Development Days along with that vital network of people across the Yorkshire bowling family. Phil is responsible for selecting the White Rose Team and for advising Sam on the potential of younger players for the other Men's Inter County teams.

Sadly this year just at the point of selection of the Yorkshire Muras Team the event was cancelled. However, many players who would have been in the Muras Team joined Sam at a YBA Men's Development Day at Dunnington BC towards the end of May. This along with the wider performance knowledge gained by Sam allowed him to select the first Middleton Cup Team to play Cumbria BA on the 1<sup>st</sup> June.

For anyone who has never been involved in selection it's a tough job!! Just listen to the armchair experts around any sport and people will hold differing views on who should be in what team and in what position. That's why we have a Team Manager. Its on Sams shoulders to make the final choice.

Once the Middleton Teams are selected players are notified and the team selection is published on the YBA website, there is usually a link from the Bowls Yorkshire Facebook site as many people use that regularly to find out quickly just what's going on in Bowls Yorkshire. Increasingly the Middleton

Team is becoming a 'squad' who form the core of the selection pool for Sam but it is vital to recognise that players who develop their game and improve can always find a path through into the squad.

One key feeder route for players who aspire to play at the County top level is the Alsop Trophy. This has seen many players in the past few years called upon for Middleton Cup duty. So whilst a few people like to talk of the 'closed shop' at the County's highest level they are just plain wrong!!

The Alsop Trophy Teams are selected between Sam and the Alsop manager Graham Stephenson. This is also a tough job as so many want to play for Yorkshire in this competition. The balancing act here is the selection of players to assist their development potential along with selecting the right skills and attitudes in more experienced players.

Whilst the County and the Team Manager truly welcome the volume of nominations we receive one emerging myth must be dispelled. Nominating for the County does not guarantee anyone selection for a team. Selection needs to be earned and those who pull on the Yorkshire shirt and represent the County never forget that pride. Again we will increasingly head towards an Alsop Squad selection but for those who don't see their names on the teams sheet the answer has to be keep trying. Everyone knows that form varies year on year and through working on our games we can all improve our bowling standard.

One additional date in the diary this year will be an Alsop Trial (more information on this in a later Newsletter) where people within the Alsop Squad and those pushing to join them will be invited along for an opportunity to state their case for County selection. Whilst we hope to invite most of those who nominate the numbers will just not allow this so again if not selected for this trial day keep performing and I'm sure we will see you at a future event.

I haven't mentioned the Balcomb Trophy yet. This is a double rink national competition and so very few will ever represent the County here. Nonetheless for those with passion and a willingness to work on their game the door will always be open. Push for selection into the Middleton and you will be in with a chance of that Balcomb call up!

So selection is not a dark art neither is it a science. The use of performance data in terms of competition achievements supported by knowledge from those who see you bowl regularly and attendance at Development/Trial Days all helps inform the choices Sam and Graham have to make.

I wish you all well in your journey to represent Yorkshire but remember, bowling offers tremendous rewards whether you play in local leagues or socially. So whilst there is huge pride in playing for your County you should also carry that pride onto your local greens.

Andy Humphreys

YBA Men's Secretary