

# A Review of the Format of Certain Australian Association Croquet National Events

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## **Rationale**

This review is taking place as a result of a number of factors at recent Australian Croquet Association (ACA) national Association Croquet events:

- The split format of the Australian National Championships into two discrete events (Men's, Women's and Eire Cup as one, and Doubles and Singles as the other) has now been in place for a few years.
- Players meetings in Adelaide 2006 and Melbourne 2007 have made a number of suggestions.
- The report from the panel who reviewed the problems that occurred during the final of the doubles championship in November 2007.

This review is concerned only with the format of the Open Singles, the Men's and Women's Singles and the Open Doubles. There is no review intended at this time of the ACA Gold Medal or Interstate Cup competitions.

Inputs to this review are:

- The Minutes of Players Meetings – Adelaide (April 2006) and Melbourne (November 2007) – both of which were passed on the ACA Executive and are available from the Croquet Australia web site at: <http://www.croquet-australia.com.au/Governance/minutes.html>
- The report from the Panel that reviewed the events during the final of the 2007 Open Doubles. This report is available from the ACA web site at: <http://www.croquet-australia.com.au/Governance/Documents/Clarke-Williams-Report/Report.pdf>

Additionally, the views of a number of senior Australian players were sought, and the ACA is grateful for the input from Trevor Bassett, Kevin Beard and Bruce Fleming, and their comments and suggestions on the drafts of this review.

Each event will be reviewed separately, starting with an overview of the current format, including a number of possible changes (with positive and negative impacts), and recommendations to be considered by the ACA Executive.

## **Time Limits and Light**

It is accepted that sometimes events will be played in States and at venues where there is not the opportunity to use artificial lighting.

Where venues exist with lights it would be preferable to ensure that those venues are scheduled for use on days where the formats mean that play could be expected to continue under lights if all matches went to "time" or to be used to make up for time lost due to weather.

## **Recommendation**

- [Players should be made aware on the Entry Form and on the Conditions of Play that lights may be used if required.](#)

The ACA has a duty of care to competitors, referees, managing staff, and all other volunteers regarding the amount of time each day that they be expected to play and/or perform their duties.

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Formats must not be used which can lead to overlong days. The “worst-case” scenario must be assumed rather than assuming games within matches be over in approximately 1 hour. It is, however, impractical to factor weather delays into formats.

It is accepted that any time a match (or individual games in a match) is played under a time limit that will affect the players’ tactics. It is unfortunate, however, with the requirement to play tournaments in a limited time-frame it is not practical to have untimed matches.

The current format of several events schedules 3 best-of-3 (BO3) matches over 2 days. If each match goes to 3 games that will see players playing 9 games over 2 days. The longest overall time for each match that players can be expected to fit in will be 7½ hours; 22½ hours over 2 days. The best way to achieve this is with time limits of 3-2½-2 hours. Time not used in games carries over to subsequent ones in a given match.

It should be noted that the possible 22½ hours play over two days also needs to have warm-up times and breaks between matches factored in, leading to something like 24 hours over two days. It is possible that this may be pushing the limits of daylight in some states at some times of the year. However, it is unlikely that all matches will go to the full time over three games.

The comments above regarding time limits and duty of care apply to all events considered in this document and form an overriding constraint when considering formats and time limits within matches.

## ***Open Doubles***

### **Current Format**

The event is played over 4 days.

It caters for a maximum of 32 pairs.

Initially it is played as a round-robin (RR) with 4 blocks of (up to) 8 pairings.

The rounds are played as follow:

Day 1 – 2 rounds

Day 2 – 4 rounds

Day 3 – 1 round

RR matches each have a time limit of 2.5 hours.

After the RR the top 2 pairs in each block play in a BO3 knockout (KO) resulting in 4 quarter-finals, 2 semi-finals, and a final.

The Conditions of Play for the 2007 event do not specify how the KO matches were to be split over the final two days.

The KO phase has no time limits. *ACA Reg 15(b)* applies.

### **Problems with this Format**

The event is played over 4 days. At the Players Meeting (Melbourne, 2007) the players expressed a desire to keep the overall event (doubles and singles combined) to 9 days in total.

In what follows we take the limit of the Open Doubles to be 3 days.

#### **Alternative 1:**

The Players Meeting suggested playing the event over 3 days; maintaining the current block format; but having single game quarter-finals. That is, play 4 rounds on Day 1, 3 rounds on Day 2 plus the quarter-finals. That would then leave the final day for the semi-finals and final.

It is felt that there are two problems with the above suggestion.

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Firstly, depending on the venues and courts not all block play in the RR will be at the one venue. This would lead to some block winners and runners-up having to travel to another venue for quarter-finals. There is a time issue, and also the possibility that some players may feel disadvantaged in having to play important single game KO matches on courts where their opponents have already had the best part of 2 days play. This court familiarity problem could be lessened by blocks playing on the final venue on day 1 and then a separate venue on day 2. The worst case scenario is then that people had 4 games the previous day on the finals venue and their opponents had played 3 games there before the finals.

There is still the possibility that with BO3 semi-finals and final on one day with no time limits that there could be up to 18 hours of play (if both semi-finals go to 3 games and 3 hours per game), which is not practical. (3 hours per game is the minimum that would be possible under ACA Reg 15(b).)

#### **Alternative 2:**

Limit the number of entries to a smaller number so the block rounds are shorter.

This would lead to a maximum of 24 pairs – 4 blocks of 6 implying only 5 rounds of block play.

This alternative is not considered appropriate or viable. The number of entries in the past two years (21 pairs in 2007, 18 pairs in 2006) would work with this, however, there were 32 pairs in 2005. It is felt that as large a pool of entrants as possible should be catered for. Limiting numbers means less games for the players, and will result in higher entry fees as the event needs to maintain financial independence.

#### **Alternative 3:**

Keep the entry numbers and block structure the same – as per Alternative 1 above.

Only the block winners move through to the KO, leading to no quarter-finals and only semi-finals plus the overall final.

This alternative suffers from the same problems as Alternative 1 above regarding court familiarity and travel time. However, it has the advantage that the semi-finals will be able to be started on Day 2, leading to somewhat less time pressure on the final day.

### **Recommendations**

- The existing block structure be maintained with only block winners progressing to the KO.
- There be cumulative time limits on each of the semi-finals and final of 3-5½ -7½ hours. This means that even if only one game of the BO3 semi-finals are completed on Day 2 it will ensure no more than 12 hours of play on the third and final day. This is a realistic limit for semi-finals and the final.

### **Men's & Women's Singles**

These two separate events will be treated together as they are run over the same time-frame and use the same basic format. Any differences between them will be noted below.

#### **Current Format**

The event is run over 4 days.

A qualifying tournament may be used (for up to 2 places in each event).

The total number of entries for the events combined is 80 (dependent on the number of available courts).

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It is played as a KO, each match being a BO3.

Players will play 3 BO3 on Days 1 and 2; and another 3 BO3 on Days 3 and 4 (for those progressing through the KO).

The initial draw is done using the ACA Draw Method as detailed at:

[http://www.croquet-australia.com.au/Governance/Documents/Seeding\\_and\\_Draws\\_for\\_Australian\\_Croquet\\_Tournaments\\_July\\_2007.html](http://www.croquet-australia.com.au/Governance/Documents/Seeding_and_Draws_for_Australian_Croquet_Tournaments_July_2007.html)

Losing semi-finalists play a BO3 for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> places.

Losing quarter-finalists play a BO3 KO for places 5 to 8.

There is an optional plate for those KO'd in rounds 1 and 2.

The entry form for the 2008 event does not specify if time-limits apply to the matches, nor the format of the plate event.

### **Problems with this Format (Preliminary Tournament)**

The possible use of a qualifying tournament is problematic. Due to the short time span between the close of entries and the tournament it is not practical for people to be required to suddenly change their travel plans to accommodate a preliminary tournament.

If there are more entries for the events than can be catered for at the available venues there are two alternatives.

#### **Alternative 1:**

That those players with the best world ranking grade at the closing date be accepted.

#### **Alternative 2:**

That the entries be accepted strictly in the order in which they are received.

### **Recommendations**

- The possibility of a qualifying tournament be done away with, and entries accepted to the maximum number of available positions (based on the World Ranking Grades available on the closing date). This will ensure that players are not disadvantaged if unable to enter immediately entries open, and that the best players will be able to compete.
- If more than the maximum number of entries are received a waiting list should be created and players notified of their position on the list as soon as practicable after the closing date.

### **Problems with this Format (General)**

The players meeting in Adelaide (April 2006) made a number of suggestions regarding the formats of the men's and women's singles events. In summary they were:

1. Women's final 16 losers go into a block of 8 and play a single game RR over 2 days. The aim being to give them more matches against different opponents.
2. All BO3 matches be played continuously. That is, players not be limited to 3 BO3 in each 2 day period.
3. BO5 matches be used for the semi-finals and final of the men's event.

Each of the above will be considered within the discussion below.

In what follows there is no move to change the length of the event, or the fact that the main draw consists of a KO with best-of-X (where X = 3 or 5) matches.

Additionally, it is felt that it is necessary to specify that the maximum number of entries in each event shall not exceed 64. This is to ensure that there is not more than 6 rounds of play in the allotted 4 day period.

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### **Women's Final 16 Losers**

The players meeting did not consider this fully. With entry numbers to date of 32 or less in the women's event the third round is actually the quarter finals. However, it is clear from the Minutes of that meeting that they meant those KO'd in the round of 16.

By the end of Day 2 there will be 3 rounds complete. It would be preferable for all those players to compete in a plate event. The format of this Plate is considered below – for both men and women.

### **Time-Limits**

As no time-limits are specified ACA *Reg 15(b)* is used. It is best to specify time-limits for all rounds. This is to make tournament management easier and for all players to know up front the time available.

There is the requirement to play a minimum of 3 BO3 in 2 days. Those cumulative time-limits should be 3-5½-7½ hours, leading to a maximum time of play over a two day period of 22½ hours.

### **BO5 Semi-finals and Final (Men only)**

It is practical to play a BO5 in the final only if both semi-finals are completed by the end of Day 3. That is, only if the final is the only play scheduled for Day 4.

It is practical to play BO5 semi-finals only if all of Day 3 is free for both semi-finals. The format should be the same for both semi-finals (not BO3 for one and BO5 for the other).

It is unlikely that 4 rounds of the KO will be finished by the end of Day 2, and hence, the likelihood of BO5 semi-finals is quite low. However, as the players meeting expressed their desire for BO5 semi-finals then they should be played provided all of Day 3 is available.

The cumulative time-limit for both semi-finals and final can be set to 3-6-8½-10½-12 hours to enable the fullest possible use of the time available.

### **More Than 2 BO3 in Each 2 Day Period**

For the men, in order to facilitate the possibility of BO5 finals the playing format needs to be loosened to permit more than 3 BO3 in each two day period.

To date the number of entries in the women's event has not exceeded 32. This means that they play 5 BO3 over the four day period.

The players meeting expressed the desire to remove the artificial constraint of no more than 3 BO3 in each 2 day period. This is a reasonable request. However, the health and safety interests of all players must be protected. It would not be appropriate for any player to find themselves in a position where they feel "forced" or "obliged" to race through matches in order to meet the desire of others for BO5 finals. A method that can be used is that: *no player shall be required to play more than 12 hours or 6 games in one day.*

It is preferable not to start a game and have to peg it down due to poor light. Severe time constraints due to bad weather may mean this is an option for managers to consider.

### **XYZ Format**

On the entry form for the recent championships in Brisbane (March-April 2008) there is no mention of further play for people knocked out in later rounds of the main event and who do not proceed to the Plate. However, an XYZ was played and worked well. The format should be specified.

## Recommendations

- The maximum number of entrants shall be 64 in each event, but may be lower due to court constraints, and be specified on the entry form.
- All BO3 matches shall have cumulative time-limits of 3-5½-7½ hours.
- BO5 semi-finals (men only) be played provided all of Day 3 is free for both of them.
- A BO5 final (men only) be played provided all of Day 4 is free for it.
- The cumulative time-limit for BO5 be 3-6-8½-10½-12 hours.
- The limitation of no more than 3 BO3 in each two day period be removed, and matches be permitted to carry straight on. No player shall be required to play more than 12 hours or 6 games in one day.
- If there more than 32 entries then an XYZ will be played at the round of 16. That is, first and second Round losers proceed to the Plate; losers in the Round of 16 play in the Y event; and losers of the quarter-finals play in the Z event.
- If there 32 or fewer entries then an XYZ will be played at the round of 8. That is, first and second Round losers proceed to the Plate; losers in the Round of 8 play in the Y event; and losers of the semi-finals play in the Z event.
- These Y and Z events are played as BO3 knock-out with both Y and Z played out to completion.

## Plate Event

See Plate Event section below.

## Open Singles

### Current Format

The event is run over 6 days.

It caters for a maximum of 72 players.

If there are more than 72 entrants there will be a qualifying event for the final 4 places (World Rankings are used to determine those who will play in the qualifier).

The initial play is block play – 9 blocks of 8 players.

The format is not specified if there are <72 entries (less blocks, or less players per block?).

The RR is played over the first two days – Day 1 has 4 rounds; Day 2 has 3 rounds.

At the completion of the RR the top 32 players proceed to the KO.

The 32 is composed of the top 3 place-getters in each block + the 5 best 4<sup>th</sup> place-getters (the 4<sup>th</sup> places are differentiated using the BPR method as adopted by the ACA).

Those who do not proceed to the KO go into the plate event (blocks or modified Swiss).

Games in the RR and plate are 2.5 hours.

Rounds 1-3 of the KO are BO3, no time limit.

The semi-finals and final are BO3, no time limit.

Days 3 and 4 comprise the first 3 rounds of the KO.

Day 5 is set aside for the semi-finals; Day 6 for the final.

### Final 32 Composition

The 32 is composed of the top 3 place-getters in each block + the 5 best 4<sup>th</sup> place-getters. The 4<sup>th</sup> places are differentiated using the Block Performance Rating (BPR) method as adopted by the ACA. The Executive has not published this.

## Recommendation

- That the Block Performance Rating (BPR) method be formally adopted by the ACA for determining across blocks who will proceed to the next round.

## **Problems with this Format (Preliminary Tournament)**

The possible use of a qualifying tournament is problematic. Due to the short time span between the close of entries and the tournament it is not practical for people to be required to suddenly change their travel plans to accommodate a preliminary tournament.

If there are more entries than can be catered for at the available venues there are two alternatives.

### **Alternative 1:**

That those players with the best world ranking grade at the closing date be accepted.

### **Alternative 2:**

That the entries be accepted strictly in the order in which they are received.

## **Recommendations**

- The possibility of a qualifying tournament be done away with, and entries accepted to the maximum number of available positions (based on the World Ranking Grades available on the closing date). This will ensure that players are not disadvantaged if unable to enter immediately entries open, and that the best players will be able to compete.
- If more than the maximum number of entries are received a waiting list should be created and players notified of their position on the list as soon as practicable after the closing date.

## **Problems with this Format (Time Limits)**

The players meeting (Melbourne 2007) noted that BO3 time limits should be imposed (cumulative 4-7-9 hours) to ensure 3 rounds were completed in 2 days. These times are not practical and could lead to 27 hours play over 2 days. That is too long for some venues (without lights) and could lead to unacceptable hours of play.

There was no discussion at the players meeting regarding BO5 semi-finals and final. However, in Melbourne last year the final was BO5, and the players meeting (Melbourne 2006) was in favour of BO5 finals for the men. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that this is the players' wish for the Open as well. It needs to be made clear to competitors ahead of time if this is to happen. With a complete day for semi-finals, and similarly for the final, it is reasonable to play BO5 finals.

BO3 matches should have cumulative time limits of 3-5½-7½ hours, which will lead to no more than 22½ hours play over 2 days – the maximum that can be accommodated with ease.

## **Recommendations**

- All BO3 matches shall have cumulative time-limits of 3-5½-7½ hours.
- The semi-finals and final be played as BO5.
- The cumulative time-limit for BO5 be 3-6-8½-10½-12 hours.

## **Y and Z Phases**

This paper contains no discussion of the Y and Z aspects of the KO. It is felt that the operation and format of this phase is satisfactory. No changes are recommended.

## **Plate Event**

See Plate Event section below.

## **Plate Events**

Plate events are considered separately as they are to all intents and purposes separate events.

### **General Comments**

It is important to remember that the Plate is a consolation event. It is not the focus of a tournament, and is there to provide more matches for players knocked out and who would otherwise have no more play. It is important to balance the design to meet the needs of those playing in it while not placing extra management requirements on the overall tournament and venues. However, we need to balance the fact that many of the entrants know they are not good enough to win the main event but enjoy the competition in the plate, and that event is the main event for those and should be given due respect.

### **The Plate Event in Christchurch**

All Australian players who took part in the recent WCF World AC Championships (Christchurch, 2008) were invited to comment on the format of the plate at that event. Seven players (out of 18) responded. In summary their responses were:

- Two suggested using an Egyptian format
- One gave negative comments about the Swiss format used but did not appear to have a preferred format
- Three said a Swiss format would be good for our Nationals and liked the flexibility of such a format
- One said Swiss was excellent at a large venue but more difficult at smaller venues
- All who commented said that block results should not carry through to a Swiss plate event
- It was noted that with small venues good management and communication between managers and players was imperative (to ensure players got on and played games, and for information about venues for the following day)
- Those who commented suggested the minimum number of rounds should be approximately twice the number of days available for the event (and perhaps + 1 game)

### **Swiss Format**

A Swiss event (as outlined in the Australian Regulations) works best if there is a single venue where all players are located. In that way each round of matches can be drawn and scheduled as per the regulations. However, such a format is able to be used (after a manner) with smaller venues. For example, a 2 court venue could have 6-8 players on a given day and effectively there would have a series of “mini-Swiss” events at each venue on each day.

This leads to the necessity of excellent management and places some responsibility on the players. At the end of each day results from all venues need to be communicated to central management, who determine groupings and venues for the following day. Players need to be available until the time each day when these determinations are made. This in some way defeats the flexibility of a Swiss format – where players would normally be able to leave early, to come late, etc.

One player deciding to leave early from a small venue leads to players being left without possible opponents.

If a modified Swiss format is to be adopted for any plate event the following is clear:

- No block results should carry through
- The minimum number of games to qualify should be two times the number of available days + 1 game (for example, a 3 day Swiss would require 7 games)
- Strong and pro-active venue and central management is required

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## **Egyptian**

An Egyptian format will not be considered separately as only two players suggested it and it has similar strengths and weaknesses to a Swiss format.

## **Block Format**

A positive aspect of block play is that it provides a known number of matches for each competitor. A negative point is that it locks each player into that number of games.

Venues for all players are able to be determined ahead of time, based on finishing place in the RR or KO phases of the tournament.

## **Summary of Possible Plate Formats**

- Four Australian players out of a possible 18 commented that they liked the Swiss format.
- Extra management involved with coordinating a Swiss consolation event at multiple venues when still running the main tournament is not an optimal use of management resources.
- The flexibility that a Swiss format offers players is somewhat lessened when played at multiple venues due to the requirement that they need to stay at a venue, or be contacted after hours, to advise of the following day's arrangements.
- A single player leaving a small venue causes problems for other players.

In the light of the points above we should continue to use block format play for the Plate events at the Open Singles, the Men's Singles and the Women's Singles.

## **Open Singles**

The pool of players for the Plate event at the Australian Open Singles is made up from those who do not proceed from the RR phase to the KO. The number will be the number of entrants less 32 less any who choose ahead of time not to partake.

It can be a problem if some players decide at the last minute not to play in the plate. We need to accept that this will occur, but encourage people to note on their entry form if they do not wish to partake in a plate event.

The current plate format works well. That is, having blocks that provide the maximum number of matches before a KO comprising semi-finals and a final.

## **Recommendations**

- Keep the existing Plate format for the Open Singles.
- Players be asked to note on their entry form if they will not be playing in the Plate event.
- Pre-arranged Plate blocks be included in the program with positions determined by block finishing place.
- There will always be some who pull out of the Plate at the last minute. An attempt may be made to fill those places with local players who did not play in the Open Singles.
- RR matches be single games of 2½ hour duration.
- Block sizes will be 8 players (or near). There will be 4 rounds on Day 3, and 3 rounds on Day 4.
- The KO phase of the Plate be BO3 semi-finals on Day 5 (cumulative time-limit 3-5½-7½ hours); and a BO3 final on Day 6 (cumulative time-limit 3-5½-7½ hours).
- If more than 32 players are eligible for the Plate (for example, 35 players, which leads to 5 blocks of 7 players) then there will be a single game play-off between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> blocks to determine the 4<sup>th</sup> semi-finalist at the beginning of Day 5 (or end of Day 4 time permitting).

## Men's & Women's Singles

The similarity in format between the men's and women's singles means that the discussion below applies equally to both, unless stated differently.

Plate participants are those who are knocked out in either the first or second round of each event. There are currently a maximum number of 48 places available in each tournament. That equates to a maximum of 16 players knocked out in the round of 64, and 16 more in the round of 32. For an event with 32 players or less it equates to a maximum of 16 in the first round and 8 in the second. There will be no more than 32 players in each Plate event.

As these events in their entirety are run over 4 days and Plate participants are not completely determined until the end of round 2 that does not leave a great deal of time for Plate events. Round 2 may not be complete until midway through Day 2. If players need to wait until the completion of Round 2 then Round 1 losers may be sitting around for a whole day. It would be preferable to begin Plate matches as soon as possible.

With small venues it is likely that Plate competitors will need to travel to another venue for their Plate matches.

## Recommendations

- A block format Plate be used for both the men's and women's singles.
- First and second Round losers will move into the Plate event.
- Players be asked to note on their entry form if they will not be playing in the Plate event.
- Pre-arranged Plate blocks be included in the program.
- There will always be some who pull out of the Plate at the last minute. An attempt may be made to fill those places with local players who did not play in the singles.
- RR matches be single games of 2½ hour duration.
- Block sizes be 8 players (or near). RR matches may start immediately that players are available on Day 1. It is accepted that players may have to wait for some time between matches due to the timing of players from the second round entering the Plate.
- The KO phase of the Plate be single game semi-finals (if more than two blocks) and a single game final on Day 4 (time-limit 3 hours).