

A jolly good shot at Ballinger Belt

By ROSEMARY McLENNAN

Britain's 20-strong team has its sights firmly set on the Ballinger Belt.

The last time a British team competed in the National Rifle Champs at Trentham, in 2003, team member Ian Shaw won the belt, New Zealand's top trophy for rifle shooting. He would have been back but a heart condition meant he could not fly without medication that would disqualify him from the Commonwealth Games in India later this year.

On Monday the British team beat New Zealand in an international match and shattered a world record with 1989 out of a possible 2000. New Zealand's score was a still-credible 1968.

British High Commissioner George Fergusson presented the trophy to the British team.

A glossy publication about the visitors includes a message from the Prince of Wales, as president of the British National Rifle Association, who has "every faith that our team will do us immense service and, God willing, will triumph in the New Zealand match".

Planning has taken two years and with five applications for every place in the British team and several members already selected to compete in the Commonwealth Games, the greatest challenge will be New Zealand's fickle winds, especially given the

gales over recent days.

British captain Gary Alexander says reading the wind is vital.

"It makes the difference between winners and losers."

Alexander says the team is representative with shooters from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales adding to the mix.

It includes vice-captain Jon Underwood who won the last Queen's prize and grand aggregate at Bisley, the home of British rifle shooting. Underwood has also been selected for the Commonwealth Games team. Alexander rates Underwood as Britain's top prospect to win the Belt but says there are a few in the team with the Belt in their sights.

Alexander is also in the Northern Ireland team going to the Games. Ross McQuillan is a reserve in the same team.

The British team arrived in New Zealand straight after Christmas for some Kiwi sightseeing and a match against South Island shooters at Canterbury's Malvern range in the foothills of the Southern Alps.

After mastering the winds the British team, divided into two, took out first and second places.

Back in Britain, competitors' families are dealing with extreme winter weather.

"We're all here plastering ourselves with sunscreen and they are under a foot of snow," Alexander says.



First shots: British team members begin competing in the 300m event on Saturday.

Photo: ROSEMARY McLENNAN

Head coach Martin Townsend captained Britain's team, and led them to victory at the last Palma competition, the world champs of rifle shooting, in Canada. The Palma is a coached teams' match, rather than an individual competition, and is shot on long ranges up to 1000 yards.

The next Palmas are Australia in 2011, Las Vegas in 2015 and Trentham in 2018.

The only woman in the British team is Jane Messer. She will captain the team competing in the

Canadian champs later on this year to become the first woman captain of a British rifle shooting team competing overseas.

New Zealand and Britain will compete in a mini-Palma match at Trentham, a dummy run for next year, on Sunday.

The winner of the Ballinger Belt Queen's 50 will be named on Saturday afternoon.

Entries for the Belt are 152, down on last year and a sign of the times, says Alan Whiteman, the championship manager and

range director.

It could also be due to the deletion of the 800 yard shoot and its replacement with 1000 yards.

The Queen's final is shot over 900. Entries include three competitors from Malaysia, one from South Africa and three from Australia.

The British team is staying locally and most leave for home on Monday.

■ Weekend results are on page 4. More results: nrnz.com/

Bowls champs take aim



On target: Gary Lawson bowls at Silverstream. Photos: ROSEMARY McLENNAN

By CHLOE VAUGHAN

Some of New Zealand's top bowlers donned their whites to show off their skills at Silverstream, Upper Hutt and Whakatiki Bowling Clubs during the Hyundai National Open Bowls Championship last week.

Top contenders Peter Belliss and Gary Lawson failed to place in the final at Hutt Bowling Club in Lower Hutt on Saturday. But Lawson won his 10th national championship title, equalling the late Nick Unkovich.

The men's fours championship title was won for the first time by Alvin Gardiner, Blake Signal, Robbie Bennett and Clint Carroll. Gardiner says the team was relaxed going into the final after toppling the Belliss-led four of Kevin Robinson, Steve Posa and Justin Goodwin in the semi-final 21-17. Gardiner's team won the lead in the final and beat Ray Lovie, Scott Roddick, Gary Ruane and Barrie Andrews, 24-17.

The women's four of Barbara McGregor, Val Smith, Dianne Potts and Dale Bourke took out the women's title.

Silverstream bowler Clare McCaul did not make it to the finals in the fours competition after making a shock exit from round two of the competition. However, she was placed third in the pairs with partner Helen King.

On Monday a Lawson-skipped New Zealand fours team was found guilty of match fixing at the Asia Pacific champs in Malaysia.



Roll on ball: Peter Belliss aims for the jack at Silverstream.

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