

Rising Stars Shine at Prestigious Bowls South Masters Event

South Africa's top 80 selected lawn bowlers gathered at one of the South Africa's most picturesque and charming clubs in South Africa, Wingate Park CC, in the Gauteng North District, for the Bowls South Africa Masters Event from 6-8 February 2026.

The Event format divided competitors into three elite categories — The Open, (16 Men and 16 Women), Veterans (12 Men and 12 Women), and Under 30 (12 Men and 12 Women) ensuring a dynamic blend of experience, strategy, and youthful flair.

Spectators witnessed world-class skill, fierce competition, and unforgettable moments, the quaint venue providing the perfect backdrop for a showcase of the sport at its very best.

The Open Event: Precision Under Pressure

The Open division of 16 men and 16 women, featured some of the most accomplished players in the country, 20 Protea players in total.

From the very first end, it was clear spectators were in for something special. Matches were tightly contested, with margins often decided by a single shot. Draw bowling of the highest precision, fearless conversion attempts, and nerve-steadying final ends had the crowd leaning in with every delivery.

A particular game in Section 1 of the Men's Event, had supporters holding their breath as both players, locked in on 19 each, traded perfectly weighted shots in a dramatic last-bowl decider. Wayne Perry from Bowls Gauteng North had drawn a front and back toucher, with Charles Peter (CP) Mathewson, playing out of the Northern Cape District, playing an inch perfect runner, hitting the target, and the jack locked in between his 2 bowls, a metre behind the head, to win the game.

Applause echoed across the green as players demonstrated not only exceptional skill but remarkable sportsmanship.

This 4th round encounter in the men's Open, proved the catalyst for the 30-year-old Mathewson, who explained, "It was tight throughout and that last drive I hit was an eye opener for me, that God wants to bless me with The Master's title"

The win was the fourth in a row for Mathewson, after victories against a trio of Proteas, Clinton Roets, Gerry Baker and Thinus Oelofse, on the opening day.

As the sections entered its closing stages, the tension was palpable around the greens. CP Mathewson was drawn to play against Protea Brad Robinson from Natal Inland in the final round. A heavy defeat for CP could have resulted in another Protea Wayne Ritmmuller, sneaking into the final. CP however, managed to hold his nerve on the way to a dramatic 21-20 victory, relegating last year's silver medallist Wayne Rittmuller to a bronze medal.

Section 2 of the Men's event, proved equally exciting. Jason Evans, who has a Men's record of 6 Masters Titles, struggled to find his rhythm on the opening day, winning only 1/3. However, like the true champion he is, Jason, shaking off the first day setbacks, returned on day 2 and 3 with renewed focus and determination, his confidence kicking into gear on his way to 5/5.

Going into the final round there were 3 players on 4 points Jason Evans +18, Cecil Bornman +21 and young 24-year-old Josh Turner on +35. There was all to play for. Bornman, the 29-year-old, home favourite, comfortably beat Paul White, in a dominant display from start to finish 21-6. This left Turner the daunting task of having to beat Jason Evans by any score to advance to the final. Evans on the other hand, slim chances diminished further after the big

Bornman win. He would need to beat Turner 21-2. The game was closely contested, with Turner having led much of the way, succumbing to the international experience of Jason Evans, eventually losing 21-18.

Bornman, last years U30 Gold Medallist, was through to the final against CP Mathewson, opening up a new youthful era in Bowls South Africa. Evans alongside Rittmuller, had to settle for Bronze, with the bitterly disappointed Turner, who will become a first-time father on 16 March, leaving empty handed as far as medals are concerned, but with his head held high and the knowledge, that he has a bright future in the game.

The final drew a vast crowd, many from the Bowls Gauteng North District (Bornman's home District), who ensured that their Junior and development squad would be spectators to witness an epic final.

Mathewson opened an early lead in the final, but with the vociferous crowd cheering him on, Bornman staged a huge comeback. However, it was the calmness and big drives from Mathewson that secured a tight 21-15 Victory.

It was a remarkable victory for Mathewson, made even more powerful by the weight of personal loss carried into the Event. Competing under emotional strain, CP, as he is affectionally known, showed extraordinary courage and composure, channelling his grief into focus and determination.

Mathewson, "A sign of how powerful God is, because despite the huge storm in my personal life, He was there to pull me through. That last bowl, I started stressing, this was a big moment, a calmness came over me, the bowl counted and the title was mine. The feeling I had at the end was just extremely grateful. I was proud of myself because I wanted to win this for my daughter"

The moment the result was sealed, the applause was heartfelt and genuine. It was a hugely popular victory, his win felt shared, a triumph not just for himself but for everyone who admired his sportsmanship, humility and dedication.

The Open Ladies Masters Event was equally exciting, delivering drama, skill and superb competition throughout.

The 16 invited ladies, saw a perfect mixture of youth and experience, creating a fascinating dynamic throughout the competition. The youngest lady player in the Open event, 2025 U30 Gold Medallist, Leila Snyman (20), with Veteran, Commonwealth Games Gold and 2024 Masters Winner Esme Haley (72) at the other end of the scale

Colleen Piketh the record 7 times Gold Medallist in this event and Commonwealth Games gold medallist, would once again be one of the favourites to lift the trophy.

Piketh was drawn in a very tough, Section 1, with Proteas Esme Kruger, (Current title holder), Anneke Scheepers and Jax Van Rensburg being her opponents on day 1.

Moving into the final round of the 8-player sectional play, it appeared to be a 2-horse race between Piketh and Kruger, Kruger leading the section on 4 points plus 21 and Piketh 4 Points plus 13.

Piketh had a comfortably 21-12 victory against Port Natal's Michelle Gerber, which meant that a 21-19 or better victory for Kruger would see he play in her 2nd consecutive final.

Kruger's opponent, debutant, young Nicole Erwee (32), fresh off her Bowls SA National Mixed Pairs title, was relentless, refusing to be overawed by the reputation or expectations of her

Protea opposition. Nicole proved that heart and grit can be just as powerful as pedigree on her way to a 21-18 victory, opening the door for another Piketh final and relegating Kruger to the Bronze podium.

In Section 2, of the Opening Ladies, after 5 rounds, Veteran Esme Haley appeared to be cruising to another Masters final from her 8-player section, winning 5/5. However, in her 6th round match Esme was upset by debutant Tara Janse Van Rensburg, from Natal Inland by 21 shots to 20. Meanwhile Elma (Mo) Louw, from Western Province Bowls, had been operating under the radar, quietly building up momentum and surprising everyone with her consistency, winning 4 out her first 5 games, and then comfortably winning her 6th game 21-14 against Protea and 2025 Silver medallist, Marizelle Rousseau 21-14.

The scenario was quite clear; Esme Haley would play Mo Louw in the final round robin game with the winner progressing to the final and the loser receiving the bronze medal.

Mo Louw's philosophy throughout the event was "Relax and enjoy, there many things that make life stressful and tough. The sport you play should not be one of them. If you can really believe this, you will not play with expectation and pressure. When you enjoy the game, the outcome is not the most important aspect of the game."

Mo's calmness proved invaluable in the high-pressured match, advancing to the final with a comfortable 21-14 over Haley.

The Ladies Open final between Piketh and Louw featured a clash between 7-times Gold Medallist in the event and a fresh newcomer. This kind of matchup often fuels extra drama, experience and reputation on one side and unpredictable skill and daring on the other.

In a stunning final of the ladies open event, the debutant defied expectations, topping the seasoned record holder to claim a remarkable victory. After leading 20-17, Mo's final bowl delicately removed Colleen's side toucher with precision weight, to the generous applause of the vast crowd at Wingate Park. Her opponent Colleen showed remarkable sportsmanship by embracing her opponent, and with a tear in her eye had to settle for a silver.

CP Mathewson and Elma Louw have both qualified to represent South Africa at the World Indoor Championships at Ocean Grove Sports Club, Victoria, Australia from 12-16 March 2026.

Under 30 Event: The Future is Bright

The Under 30 category injected energy and fearless ambition into the tournament. These rising stars displayed confidence beyond their years, attacking the head boldly and embracing high-pressure moments.

Their enthusiasm was infectious. Big conversion shots were met with cheers, and the pace of play kept excitement levels high. The future of the bowls in South Africa looks exceptionally promising, with young talent clearly ready to carry the mantle forward.

In Men's U30 Section 1, the gentle giant of the U30 Event, Adrian Bookless (23) from Northern Free State, coming from humble beginnings, showcased not just skill, but grit and determination with every delivery. He was unscathed in his 6-man section winning 5/5. Adrian was pushed hard by the 23-year-old Armand Ascaray, a rising star from Western Province. Their head-to-head encounter was won 21-16 by Bookless which ultimately decided the section, with Armand settling for a bronze.

Section 2 of the Men's U30 event was a more closely decided affair. Current National Mixed Pairs Gold Medallist and Bowls SA Open Singles Bronze Medallist, Aidan de Smidt (27) from

Johannesburg Bowls, started as one of the pre-tournament favourites. Aidan came unstuck against Micus Grech from Mpumalanga District, 21-14 in his 3rd round. Playing the last round of the section Micus had 4 points plus 37, Aidan 3 points plus 8 and Port Natal's Keegan Bauristhene on 3 Points plus 19.

Keegan would need to beat Micus by 9 shots in the final game. This was not to be as Keegan beat Micus 21-20, and Aidan winning his last game 21-5. This left all 3 players on 4 points, with Micus + 36, Aidan +24 and Keegan on + 20. Micus would play Adrian Bookless in the final with Aidan de Smidt receiving a bronze medal.

The final, Bookless versus Grech was contested by two young, polite and impeccably well-mannered players who reflected the best values of bowls. From the opening end Micus and Adrian displayed not only remarkable skill but also tremendous composure and tactical awareness far beyond their years. Going in to the last end, Micus led 20-17. Remarkably, but not unexpectedly, Adrian drew 3 great bowls within 30cm of the jack. Micus' last bowl, an attacking shot was a couple of cm narrow, leaving Micus with half a metre to win the event.

When his final bowl left his hand, there was a split second of silence, the kind that only comes when everyone senses something special is unfolding. Halfway down the rink, the spectators were already rising to their feet. As the bowl nestled in for another shot, Adrian was mobbed by fellow competitors and spectators.

Adrian Bookless "Winning the BSA U30 Masters event was one of the proudest moments of my life. Throughout the event I felt a mix of nerves and excitement, but as each game progressed my confidence grew. I felt an overwhelming sense of achievement, gratitude and joy for everyone who had supported me along the way"

Adrian acknowledged the resilience of Micus. They walked off the green side by side, not as rivals but as friends who had shared something special.

In Ladies U30 Section 1, Protea bowler and seasoned U30 Master player Thabelo Muvhango, would seek to play in her 3rd Consecutive U30 Masters final. Thabelo comes from a bowling family, her father Morgan is a Protea Bowler and her brother Nomatter was selected for the Men's U30 Masters.

Thabelo was drawn in a relatively inexperienced section with Calsey Hollis (19) and Ciarra Schipper (27) making their Masters debuts. All eyes would be on the baby of the event Charne Van Staaden (17) from Sables District who has captured the imagination of bowlers with her concise, deliberate pre-delivery routines to match her friendly and bubbly personality.

Thabelo's most experienced opponent in her section would be Protea, Fran Baleri from Natal Inland. The game between the 2 ladies proved to be crucial, with Thabelo winning 21-17 and going through the section unbeaten, leaving Fran with 1 loss and a bronze medal to show for her efforts.

The Ladies U30 Section 2 was dominated by 2024 Gold Medallist, 20-year-old Lezandri Hildebrand from North West District. Lezandri showed undeniable class throughout the event, her form clearly a level above her opponents and winning 5/5. Her closest rivals were debutant Ilonka Van Breda from Bowls Gauteng North and Gillian Young from Western Province who ended up with 3 wins a piece. Ilonka would claim bronze medal with a higher shot aggregate

The final between Thabelo and Lezandri was a repeat of the 2024 final. This would be Thabelo's 3rd consecutive final.

Thabelo could just not match the consistency of Lezandri in the final. Lezandri remained composed throughout. Executing with consistency, turning tight situations into scoring opportunities.

When Thabelo's last bowl narrowly missed her target, with Lezandri recording a 21-16 victory, Lezandri explained that this was a victory to savour; "Winning the Bowls South Africa U30 Masters for the second time in three years felt absolutely surreal. All the early mornings, pressure games, and sacrifices suddenly felt worth it. I was overwhelmed with pride, not just in the title, but in how much I've grown as a player. I truly believe God guided me and strengthened me every step of the way, especially in the toughest moments. Most of all, I felt incredibly grateful — to Him and to everyone who believed in me and supported my journey"

Spare a thought too for Thabelo, who for the 3rd consecutive year received a silver medal. Thabelo shed a few tears but was quickly comforted by a host of fellow competitors.

This moment epitomised the U30 players' true camaraderie within the sport. It was a reminder that while titles and trophies matter, respect and friendship are the heartbeat of the game.

Veterans Event: Experience on Display

The Veterans (Over 60) format was similar to the U30 event with 2 sections of 6 played on round robin basis with winners of each section meeting in the final.

The event delivered intensity, and showcased composure and tactical mastery. Years of experience were evident in the way these seasoned competitors controlled the head and dictated the pace of play.

Spectators admired the subtle adjustments, only decades on the green can refine. The Veterans Event proved that bowls is as much a mental contest as it is physical, with strategy and patience often triumphing over aggression.

Section One of the Men's Veterans Masters ended up being a close contest between Roger Boule from Port Natal and legend of the game Neil Burkett from Eastern Province. Moving in to the final game Burkett needed a good win against John Connellan from Port Natal and Boule losing to Otto Holicki from Johannesburg Bowls. A win for Boule would be a ticket into the final by winning 5/5.

As the games progressed Burkett was never in trouble against Connellan and recorded a comfortable 21-12 Victory. At the same time Boule was 17-11 down to Holicki. However, Boule's strong-willed demeanour, refused to let the game slip from his grasp. Pressure only seemed to sharpen his resolve. In the closing stages that mental toughness proved decisive. It wasn't just skill that secured the win, it was determination and composure. Boule was into the final with Burkett ending up with a bronze medal.

Section 2 of the Men's Veteran Masters was headed by 2025 Gold Medallist, Kevin Smith, a dentist from Western Province. Smith started well but was beaten by debutant Arnie Muscat from Port Natal in the 3rd round, leaving Muscat unbeaten. Smith won his last 2 games quite comfortably while Muscat's form deserted him in last 2 games, going down 21-16 and 21-10 respectively. Smith would play in his second consecutive final, with Muscat earning a bronze medal.

The final between Boule and Smith was a showcase of composure and tactical intelligence, with neither player willing to yield. Boule would need to show his grit as he came from behind to close the score. The scoreboard reflected the battle, tight, tense and constantly shifting. Moving into the final end and Smith leading 20-19, Boule drew 3 shots half a metre in front of

the jack. Smith attempted a conversion shot, hitting the 3- bowl target but his bowl followed through the head leaving Boule a game lie of 2 shots.

Boule raised his fist in triumph. His celebration was heartfelt rather than flamboyant, a proud acknowledgment of the hard-fought battle he had just endured. Spectators cheered and Smith offered a respectful nod, and leave with a silver medal.

Roger Boule reflected on the event, "Just getting the invite and the way you are treated from the time you arrive until you leave, you already feel like a champion. Kevin was steady throughout the game, taking a comfortable 16-8 lead. This is when you start reflecting on the tough games you have come through and I started slowing the game down to get more composed, and focused on getting my first bowl close and build up pressure. With Kevin poised to take the title at 20-15, I managed to pick up a 4 and a 2 to win the title. This achievement will remain with me for a very long time"

In the Veterans (Over 60) ladies event, Section 1 would come down to the last head-to-head game, sectional decider, between Lydia Maritz from Western Province and Port Natal's Glenda Mathews. The game was on a knife edge throughout, with Lydia drawing the crucial shot on the last end to record a 21-19 victory and into the final. Glenda would receive a bronze medal.

Section 2 of the ladies' veterans, 2025 Silver Medallist Johannesburg's Heather Pembroke, and Bowls Gauteng North's Sue Tarr, winner in 2023, went into the last game of the section, playing different opposition, with Heather on 3 points plus 20 and Sue on 3 points plus 28. Both ladies delivered their final bowl with unwavering composure, both ladies winning the final game 21-20. Sue Tarr would advance to the final with Heather receiving a bronze.

In the final, it was clear that neither player was willing to give an inch. Each bowl was delivered with intent. The scores were level at 18-18 when Sue drew 3 pearlers, which Lydia could not displace.

At the end it was more than just a win. It was a testament to longevity, resilience and the enduring passion that keeps these stalwarts competing at the highest level.

Sue Tarr - "I Knew, playing Lydia, a renown singles player, was going to be another tough one, which you would not expect anything else. Bowls is such a wonderful community, one I am proud to be in. This win will be one for the books, I am proud, elated and chuffed"

Celebration of the Sport

Beyond the competition itself, the event was a celebration of lawn bowls and community. Spectators and supporters filled the greens surroundings, enjoying sunshine, camaraderie, and spirited discussion about every tactical decision.

The beautifully kept greens drew widespread praise, and Wingate CC's hospitality added warmth and charm to an already memorable weekend.

As trophies were presented and applause rang out across the grounds, one thing was certain: this tournament was more than just a contest, it was a showcase of excellence, passion, and the enduring appeal of lawn bowls at the highest level.

With brilliant play across all three events and excitement from start to finish, the event will surely be remembered as one of the highlights of the season.

BOBBY DONNELLY 23 February 2026