

# Hong Kong International Bowls Classic

As the tournament is now World renowned, it is worth remembering how it all began.

In 1980, the concept of holding an international bowling tournament in Hong Kong was suggested by Philip Chok and O. K. Dallah to the President, Geoff Murphy. With his committee of Keith Bosley, Pete Smith, Elmo D'Souza, Tiny Conway and Nat Ulla, and with sponsorship forthcoming, plans were implemented. A sub-committee of Jim Viney, Ken Wallis, Roger Pickford, Jimmy Kellock and Mike Fergusen was also formed and with a lot of hard work, the Classic went underway.

## 1981-1990

The first Hong Kong International Bowls Classic (Classic) was held in 1981 between 24th and 29th November at the Kowloon Bowling Green Club (KBGC). Seven overseas teams from England, Scotland, Wales, Australia, New Zealand and New Castle District of Australia, plus teams from Hong Kong, CCC, CdeR, HKFC, USRC, IRC, KBGC, KCC and HKCC were divided into two sections of eight which played a seven game round robin with the top two teams advancing into the semi-finals. England and Scotland won their section respectively and the runners-up were New Zealand and New Castle District who had come second in its section with a better difference of two shots over Hong Kong Football Club. In the semi-finals, England beat New Zealand 27-14 while New Castle District beat Scotland 22-21. The final was played between Jimmy Hobday/Tony Allcock of England and Darby Ross/Robbie Dobbins of New Castle District. Earlier in the week, England had won the same section game with a handsome 29-9 margin but in the final, Darby and Robbie turned the tables by winning 18-17 to grab the inaugural title of the Classic Pairs.



There was no Classic in 1982 but it revived in 1983. Teams from the same overseas countries and local clubs were invited to participate again and a Pre-Tournament Singles was introduced. Peter Belliss (NZ) beat John Bell (ENG) in the Singles while Philip Chok and George Souza Jr. of Hong Kong beat the New Zealand Pair and won the Classic Pairs title.



In 1984 the Singles was officially included as part of the Classic and was played at the Hong Kong Football Club. 32 participants, including the overseas visitors, took part and George Souza Jr. won the title. In the Pairs, the entries were increased from 16 teams to 20 teams; two more overseas teams, USA and Canada made their first appearance and locally, two LBA teams, the Dragon and the Phoenix, were added to the list to form two sections of ten. A quarter-final system was also introduced this year where we saw five local teams, Hong Kong, KBGC, IRC, Dragon and Phoenix with three visiting teams, Australia, New Castle District and England playing in the quarter-finals. In the semi-final, Australia beat Phoenix and Hong Kong defeated IRC 16-14. In the final, Hong Kong won 20-19 and made it a good year for Hong Kong, especially for George Souza Jr, by winning both the Singles and Pairs titles.

The 1985 Classic saw disappearance of Canada and the two LBA teams but they were replaced by Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Israel. This year we saw a Scottish domination when George Adrain won the Singles and continued to take the Pairs title with his partner, Willie Wood.

In 1986, Canada and one LBA team returned replacing P.N.G and Israel. Paul Richards of Australia made his first appearance and beat Bob Fishlock of New Castle District to win the Singles whilst George Adrain and Willie Wood retained the Pairs title only after a tight battle with New Zealand.

In 1987, Paul Richards retained his Singles title whilst Richard Corsie and Brian Middlemass made it three in a row for Scotland by taking in the Pairs title.



In 1988, Hong Kong, with duo Noel Kennedy and Mark McMahon, equaled Scotland's three victories in the Classic Pairs and Richard Corsie of Scotland grabbed his first Singles title.

In 1989, the gold turned to the Southern Hemisphere with Rex Johnson and Trevor Morris won the first Pairs title for Australia while Peter Belliss of New Zealand took the Singles title again having last won it in 1983.

There was an increase in the size of the Classic Pairs in 1990 with the arrival of Japan, Norfolk Island and India for the first time to form two twelve team sections. This year we saw a Scottish domination again with Graham Robertson taking the Singles title who went on to take the Pairs title with his partner, Alex Marshall.

## 1991-2000

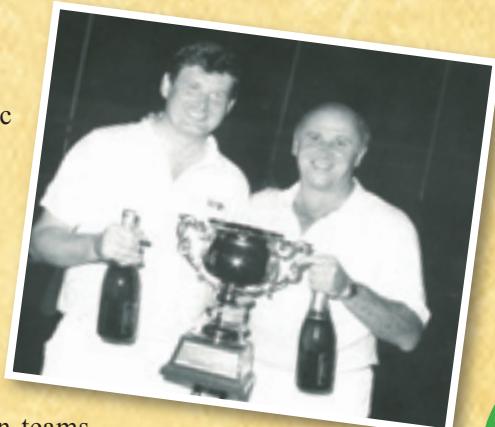
1991, saw no Classic because of hosting the 4th Asia Pacific Championships.

1992, there was also no Classic for lack of resources.

In 1993, the Classic was revived mainly due to the assistance from the government and our counterpart, the Ladies Lawn Bowls Association (LLBA). In appreciation to the assistance, four ladies teams were invited to take part and this was their first appearance in the Classic. They were Australian Ladies, British Isle Ladies, HK Ladies and LLBA and, together with eight overseas and eight local teams, two sections of ten teams were formed. This year, the number of Singles players was increased to 64 and we saw a most legendary Singles final which can be described as a "never-to-be-forgotten" Singles final between Cecil Bransky of Israel and Graham Robertson of Scotland. It was a bit unfortunate that the game was not recorded on video otherwise it would have served as a great example to all bowlers of fighting spirit and determination to overcome. It seemed to be a whitewash for the Israeli who galloped to a 24-4 lead in little more than an hour over the title holder but suddenly the tide changed and the Scotsman began to eat away the deficit by converting game down positions nine times with his final delivery. In the following thirteen ends Graham managed, not only the improbable of winning all the ends, but also the seemingly impossible of winning the march by 25-24 and retained his title. To have witnessed this was a stunning experience and all the spectators are still proud and honoured to talk about it nowadays for having

been part of such a spectacle. Nevertheless, Cecil, with his partner Jeff Rabkin, snatched the Pairs title from the South Africans and gave himself some consolation for his traumatic Singles experience.

The Classic was moved to the Hong Kong Island for the first time in 1994 and was held at the Craigengower Cricket Club (CCC) to celebrate her Centenary. This move gave us another Hong Kong domination after exactly ten years when David Tso and George Souza Jr, representing CCC, took



the Pairs title and became the first local club ever to win this title and Noel Kennedy of Hong Kong won the Singles crown.

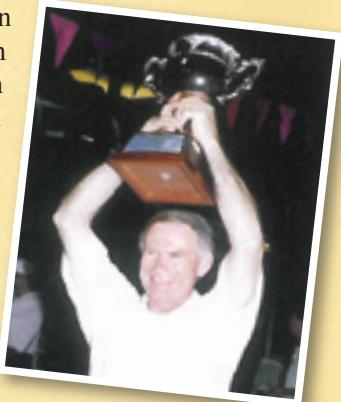
The Classic began to have split venues in 1995 with the Singles being played at CCC and the Pairs at KBGC. Noel Graham of Ireland beat Neil Burkett 25-24 in the Singles while Ken Logan and Alex Marshall won the Pairs making Burkett a Classic runner-up in 1995 in both the Singles and Pairs.

In 1996, again, the Singles was held at CCC and the Pairs at KBGC. John Noonan of Australia took the Singles title on his second Classic appearance and the South Africans, Gerry Baker and Neil Burkett managed to take the Gold Medal in the Pairs.



1997 was a memorable year in more ways than one. In July there was the handover of sovereignty followed in November by the appearance of previously unknown young bowlers from Australia and England. Adam Jeffery of Australia, Andrew Wills and Stuart Airey of England outbowled their more experienced opponents and lifted the Singles and Pairs title in their first appearance in the Classic.

1998 was a year for the defending champions as both Adam Jeffery of Australia, Andrew Wills and Stuart Airey of England retained their Singles and Pairs title respectively.



In 1999, the last Classic Tournament of the old millennium was held at KBGC where Adam Jeffery claimed a hat trick of Singles titles and made it the fourth Australia Classic Singles victory in a row. Jonathan Ross and Noel Graham took the pairs title and made it a dream finally come true for Noel after trying it five times.

The 2000 Classic was held at KBGC to mark the Centenary of the Club where we saw the appearance of

bowlers from China taking part in the Singles event. In the Singles, Adam Jeffery was hoping for a fourth title but was knocked out in the first round. The Singles final was played between Peter Bellis of New Zealand and George Sneddon of Scotland. It was 16 "all" after 20 ends when the Kiwi took a three and then a one to

take the command but the Scotsman did not capitulate and responded with a one and two twos and took the title. The Pairs competition was disrupted by the weather and with the overnight rain flooded the KBGC green, a decision was made to move the last three games to the indoor venue at Hong Kong Football Club where in the final, Jonathan Ross and Noel Graham of Ireland beat Bobby Donally and Neil Burkett of South Africa and retained their title.

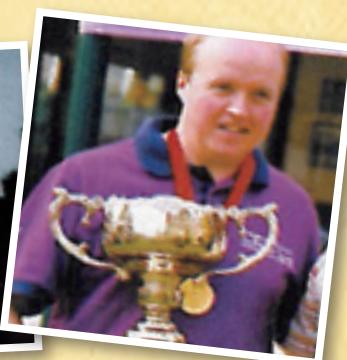
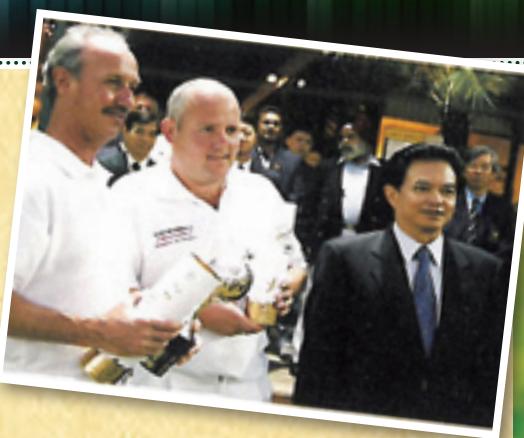


## 2001-2010

In 2001, the Classic Singles was held at KBGC with the Pairs being held at CCC. The Singles final was played between Jason Greenslade of Wales who beat Jonathan Ross of Ireland, and Neil Burkett of South Africa who beat Robert Jones to stop an all Welsh final. Greenslade was out of the block very quickly in the final and Burkett was, as always, playing catch-up in an attempt to win. In the

end, the early lead was too much and the delighted Welshman took the title.

Players then moved over the harbour to CCC to start the marathon event of two groups of 12 playing 11 games in five days with the top four teams of each group battling it out in the knock out stage for the title. To win the Hong Kong Classic Pairs Championships each player had to bowl over 1200 woods; hard work when a lot of people still see the game as an old mans' sport. The Pairs final played between Jason Greenslade and Robert Jones of Wales, who beat the Australians and George Sneddon and Alex Marshall of Scotland, who defeated the South African Pair. The Scots were in control throughout the game and took the title with a 22-16 victory that stopped a Welsh domination which had only happened three times so far in the Classic History, ie. 1983 Hong Kong, 1985 and 1990, Scotland.



at KBGC and players from down under dominated the final. Paul Girdler and Russell Meyer from New Zealand started off better on a very wet green and beat Tom Ellen and Kelvin Kerkow of Australia 33-13 to grab the first ever Classic Pairs title for the Kiwi's.

There was no Classic in 2003 because of the intended hosting of the 10th Asia Pacific Championships in Hong Kong which was later cancelled because of the outbreak of SARS in Hong Kong.

In 2004, the Classic resumed with both events being held at KBGC. This year, we saw an England domination when Mark Walton took the Singles title then went on to win the Pairs with his partner Graham Shadwell.

2005 marked the Silver Jubilee of the Hong Kong Classic and to celebrate this special occasion the organizing committee decided to invite all the past winners back to Hong Kong to take part in the Jubilee Year Tournament. After an intensive search around the globe, a total of 12 overseas and 4 local past winners accepted the invitation. They were Rex Johnson (1989) and Robbie Dobbins (1981) from Australia, Noel Graham (1995, 1999) and Jonathan Ross (1999) from Ireland, Jeff Rabkin (1993) from Israel, Brian Middlemass (1987), Willie Wood (1985, 1986), George Sneddon (2000, 2001), Kenny Logan (1995)

and Graham Robertson (1990, 1993) from Scotland, Paul Girdler (2002) from New Zealand, Neil Burkett (1996) from South Africa and from Hong Kong, George Souza Jr. (1983, 1984, 1994), Philip Chok (1983, 1984), Noel Kennedy (1988, 1994) and David Tso (1994). The Singles was played at CCC. Paul Girdler beat George Souza Jr. to reach the final against KBGC youngster Heron Lau who defeated Noel Kennedy of Hong Kong, Noel Graham from Ireland and George Sneddon the Scotsman to reach the final where he lost to Paul 2-0 in sets. The Pairs were played at KBGC where Noel Graham and Jonathan Ross from Ireland defeated Australian 18-8 and Scotland





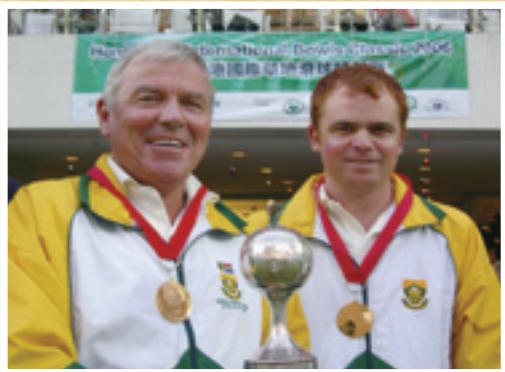
25-14 in the Quarter and Semi where the LBA team, represented by Lee Ka-ho and Ken Chan from the Youth Development Team, beat KBGC 18-11 and a combined team of Neil Burkett and Jeff Robin 13-15 to reach the final. In the final, Ireland narrowly defeated the young boys 14-10 to record their third Classic Pairs title. Despite the defeat, the youngsters reflected a high degree of success for the Youth Development Programme organized by the HKLBA.

After celebrating its Silver Jubilee in 2005, the Classic resumed normal business

in 2006 with the competitions being held at three different clubs on the Island. Singles at the Indian Recreation Club (IRC) and the Hong Kong Football Club (HKFC) with the Pairs at CCC. The Singles final was played at HKFC where Jeremy Henry of Ireland beat young Scotsman Wayne Hogg 2 set to 1 with his greater experience. The Pairs was played at CCC and Henry's hope of performing a rarely achieved double was dashed in the final when he and teammate Paul Daly was edged out 18-13 by South Africa's Wayne Parry and Neil Burkett. That was the second Pairs title won by Burkett who was playing his 10th Classic. In addition to the two titles, Burkett was also on the receiving end of four Pairs and two Singles finals.



The 2007 Classic returned to Kowloon side at KBGC and this year was a year for the younger bowlers, both overseas and local. In the Singles, Mark Watt of New Zealand beat Merryn Kings of England two sets to one and being just turned 19, he became the youngest Singles winner in the Classic history. In the Pairs, Hong Kong's Noel Kennedy and Ken Chan had a nail biting game against the Wales Pairs and managed a 15-13 win for the Pairs title which made Ken the youngest local player to win the Pairs title.



History was in the making at the 2008 Hong Kong Classic, firstly for the inaugural Women's Classic but also for the record-breaking achievement of the English men's team, Graham Shadwell and Mark Walton, who became the first team to twice complete a Singles and Pairs "double". The inaugural Women's Classic marked the complete amalgamation of the HKLBA since the process began in 2002. This inaugural event celebrated that all bowlers in Hong Kong, despite their gender, can now equally enjoy all the advantages and conveniences when they play the sport under a single management and governing body. The inaugural Singles winner went to Margaret Letham of Scotland who beat Shirley Ko of Canada two sets in the final where the inaugural Pairs Championships went to Nor Hashimah Ismail and Siti Zalina Ahmad of Malaysia with a comfortable 21-4 final against the Welsh women.





The 2009 Classic was held on Hong Kong side with men and women playing simultaneously at IRC, HKFC and CCC, and it was an Australasian domination. Leif Selby of Australia beat Hommer Mercado of Philippines to win the men's Single while Genevieve Baildon of New Zealand beat Canadian Josephine Lee and took the Gold. In the Pairs, Andrew Kelly and Richard Collett from New Zealand men, Kelsey Cottrell and Julie Keegan from Australian women both beat the men and women teams form Malaysia and won the pairs title.

Three Kowloon clubs, the Kowloon Cricket Club (KCC), Club de Recreio (CdeR) and KBGC, hosted the 2010 Classic. In the men's event, once again it was an English domination with Robert Newman taking the Singles title then going on to win the Pairs with his partner Sam Tolchard, the third time for England in seven years. In the women's event, Nor Hashimad Ismail of Malaysia won the Singles, Kelsey Cottrell and Julie Keegan from Australia successfully defended their Pairs title by beating Sonia Bruce and Maila Witheridge of Philippines in the final.

