



Men's Playing Programme 2017

Following discussions held at the EPA Management Committee on 14th January 2017, it has been decided to adopt a new approach and introduce rankings competitions that will ultimately be used to inform selection for international representation.

This document examines the current system and explains the new system that will apply in 2017.

Current basis for international representation

For many years, the basis for qualification for the men's international representation in Triples (alternately each year for the European and World Championships) has been via two single day qualifying rounds (usually of five games using the Swiss System) and then a single day Top 8.

In recent years, the number of teams entering the qualifying rounds has been limited, leading to a situation where only a few teams have been eliminated in the early stages. The qualifying rounds' principal function has been to establish rankings for the Top 8 which has comprised two poules of four teams playing barrage to find the teams for the straight knockout semi-finals and then the final.

The whole process has been completed over three days.

The format also requires teams to play as a four in at least one of the qualifying rounds and the Top 8 itself. The reason for this requirement was the decision made by the MC some time ago that in Triples, international representation shall always comprise of four players to maximise competitive and tactical advantage, matching the approach followed by international opponents.

The other key element is that the qualification at the end is for the following year. This means that the successful team does not actually play in the international competition until around 15 months or more later. The rationale for this was that teams can prepare over an extended period.



Features of the current system

There are several features of the current system:

- **The fundamental basis of the system relies on teams self-selecting.** The judgement is therefore made by players themselves and this is inevitably influenced by friendships, geographical and club location as well as assessments on what might constitute a winning team. Whilst solid inter-personal relationships within any team are critical to success, it does not necessarily follow that such self-selection leads to the strongest combination;
- **The system itself is not particularly rigorous.** The relatively small number of entries of late means that the qualifying rounds are not very challenging and there is not even any great advantage in seeding as all teams know that it will come down to a small number of games at the Top 8 (a minimum of four, in fact) that must be navigated;
- **The three rounds involve only limited commitment.** In fact, one of the team members need only attend two days. This is less commitment than is required by many regions for qualification to the inter-regional championships and in most instances, far less actual matches;
- **The 'qualify one year, represent the next' means that there is a very lengthy gap which risks loss in motivation and focus.** It also does not consider form, which can vary significantly or changed personal circumstances. Another motivational issue is the possibility that the team that has not yet represented the country could fail in the following year's qualification or could split up prior to the following year's qualification. In practice, it has been difficult to identify any clear playing or competitive advantages to this delayed representation;
- **The system is restricted to trying to identify Triples Teams.** Recent expansion and development in the international playing programme also requires representation in other formats of the sport such as Singles and Doubles (same gender and mixed). We have relied largely on the results of the National Titles weekend – like the Top 8, a 'single day competition' - to identify players to represent the country in these other formats. As with the current system for the Men's International Qualifiers, this is a limited and partial test of performance.



The 2017 & 2018 system

The proposal is to introduce a rankings system based on the approach already used for our elite women in 2016.

The competitions that will form part of the national rankings will be:

- May 14th 2017 – Singles and Precision Shooting (Rankings);
- May 27th 2017 – National Singles;
- May 28th 2017 – National Doubles;
- May 29th 2017 – National Mixed Doubles;
- July 2nd 2017 – Doubles (Rankings); and
- July 23rd 2017 – Triples (Rankings).

In the case of the Triples (Rankings), teams can play as a three or as a four. As with the Women's Rankings in 2016, Juniors will be allowed to compete in all these competitions. The format for the competitions will depend on the entries received, but the default approach will be to combine poules and knockout, with seeding used.

The top 4 in the Precision Shooting will gain automatic entry into the recently introduced Precision Shooting competition at Hayling.

Rankings points are gained by individuals and the result at the end of 2017 process will identify the top 16 Men. Ranking points will be allocated to those players that finish in the Top 16 of the competitions as follows:

- 1st - 30pts
- R/u - 24pts
- Losing semi-finalists x2 – 16pts
- Losing quarter finalists x4 – 8pts
- Losing Top 16 x 8 – 4pts

The National Performance Team¹ will construct a programme with the top 16 players, where international playing opportunities will be identified along with appropriate international coaching input.

The playing programme will then be transacted again in 2018, following the same process. The results of the rankings competitions in 2017 will also be used in making selections for tournaments, which may take place between the conclusion of the 2017 programme and the 2018 programme.

¹ It is the objective of the MC to create an integrated National Performance Team that will take a strategic view of all our elite players and teams. This will combine individuals with responsibility for our Youth, Espoirs, Women and Men and the Chair of the EPA Playing Commission. This Team will also make decisions on selections. Current vacant positions for coaches for our Women and Men will be advertised shortly.



All the competitions in the rankings will be standalone and players can choose which ones they wish to participate in. All entry fees for these competitions will be returned in cash prizes. The competitions provide the opportunity for the best players in the country to compete against each other in all formats of the sport.

In terms of format, whilst there has been an argument to try and replicate the initial stages of major international tournaments through use of the Swiss System, the actual numbers of entries in recent years in the Men's Qualifiers has meant that this format has not functioned in an optimal way. Familiarity with and preparation for tournaments using the Swiss System can be achieved without its imperfect use within EPA national competitions.

The format that will be employed will therefore be the same as used with the Women's Rankings competitions in 2016, namely seeded poules and then knockout. The exact format (e.g. numbers of teams in each poule) will depend on the numbers of entries.

A decision on the Men's representation in the World Championships in 2018 will not be made until July 2018, once the 2018 rankings competitions have been completed. It is expected (although not confirmed) that the World Championships will take place in December 2018.

The results in both 2017 and 2018 will be reviewed to aid the final selection decision along with performance assessment at international level and external input from international coaches.

The major difference between the current system and the new system is that it requires a much greater level of consistent performance in more competitions over an extended period. This also inevitably requires a greater level of commitment from players above and beyond the current system; something which the EPA MC believes should be part and parcel of the approach and which will ultimately give much more value to achievement, performance and ultimately representing the country at international level.

Any male member of the EPA has the chance with the new system to win ranking points and this can be achieved across different formats of the game. It is hoped that this will attract more of our players to compete as they seek to establish a personal national ranking and from year to year seek to maintain or improve their rankings. It will also allow the National Association to give recognition to players that are the most improved or the best in their age group.



Summary

- Men's Rankings to be introduced in 2017;
- 7 separate competitions will feature in 2017;
- All competitions are standalone; players decide their own participation/team selections;
- For the Triples, no requirement to play as a four although that option is open to teams if they so wish;
- Junior players permitted to compete if they wish;
- All entry fees returned in prizes;
- Results in 2017 competitions will result in Top 16 rankings;
- Playing programme and coaching constructed for Top 16;
- Format for competitions based on seeded poules and knockout, no use of the Swiss System;
- 2018 Rankings results (a further 7 competitions) reviewed alongside 2017 results;
- International tournaments which require selection between the 2017 and 2018 ranking competitions will use the rankings results available at the time of selection;
- National Performance Team to be created; and
- Final decision made on World Championship selection in July 2018.