

With all six divisions at the half-way stage headed for exciting and closely contested finishes, Bowls North Harbour appears more than satisfied that it has found the right format for the inter-club pennants competition.

Centre board chairman Graham Dorreen is upbeat about what he has seen and heard about the competition. "I think it has been a great success so far," he says. "Every player tells me they love the pennants format."

Centre executive secretary Shane Gibson concurs with Dorreen's view. But he points out in the last two rounds there will be a survey of what players feel and like about pennants and there will be a review at the end of competitions.

But a belief the format having been successful is enhanced by the fact both the men's and women's premier competitions have been especially cut-throat and each has had more than its share of drama and upset results.

In the men's premiership after five of the 10 rounds Browns Bay has sneaked ahead of another of the heavyweight teams in this competition, Birkenhead. But this was only because of a cliffhanger clash between the two sides last weekend.

Browns Bay, which is headed by Black Jack international Tony Grantham and which contains a number of centre champions, including the multi-decorated Brent Turner, beat Birkenhead 15-0, but that margin was a little misleading. Indeed, such was the closeness of all three matches the result could have been reversed and been 15-0 to Birkenhead.

Browns Bay won each game by one, two and three points.

The clean sweep gave Browns Bay a six-point lead over Birkenhead, with Orewa another six behind.

But the quality of players in each of the Birkenhead and Orewa sides means Browns Bay in the next few weeks can take nothing for granted. Birkenhead has the likes of Randall Watkins, Shane Gibson and Peter Nathan in its line-up and Orewa has an array of top-liners, too, in the likes of David Eades and Colin Rogan.

Just when it seemed the Orewa women's premier team would clear out from the other teams it was given a rude jolt in the fourth round by Takapuna. Taking full advantage of playing at home, Takapuna gained a 15-nil win. That meant that after five rounds Orewa has a lead of only six over Takapuna.

A movement of players between clubs, mainly for residential reasons, has caused a shift in what has been the usual dominance in some of the women's competitions. Orewa, for instance, has gained several top players, like Elaine McClintock and Wendy Jensen, and Takapuna has been boosted by the arrival of Anne Dorreen, a long-time associate member, and Trish Croot.

Just as tight have been the men's division one and two competitions. Riverhead leads division one but just six points behind are Manly and Birkenhead, while Takapuna, with essentially a development team bolstered by veteran Bill Ryan, leads division two but with Orewa and Mairangi Bay still handy.

The two mixed divisions, where the standard is high because many distinguished players are scattered among the sides, have also been strongly contested. Glenfield, though, has a solid lead from Beach-haven in division one, while Mairangi Bay and Orewa are almost locked together at the top of division two.

The depth of the Orewa club is reflected in the fact it has five teams either leading their competitions or in the top three and thus in the running to be in the finals at Browns Bay on Sunday, December 9.