

PRESIDENTS REPORT 2021 / 22



A picture tells a thousand words. What a joyful moment we had at our official opening on November 24, 2021. With all of our financial and Club supporters on hand for the opening of the new courts and clubhouse even the weather joined in the celebration.

Over the last 2 AGM's I have delivered an overly optimistic report suggesting our *"facility upgrades will soon be finished"*. This time it is actually true! We are now the custodian, on behalf of the entire Wellington Shire community, of one of the best tennis facilities in regional Victoria.

We received financial support from the State Governments Latrobe Valley Authority's Latrobe Valley Sports and Community Initiative Fund, The John Leslie Foundation, Wellington Shire, the Federal Governments Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Fund and Tennis Australia along with a very substantial contribution from our Club reserves. Without the collective support of each of these funders our project could not have proceeded.

I would like to thank every member of our 3 committees for the unbelievable job they have done in managing the issues that the extended construction time has caused and managing the expectations of our increasing frustrated user groups, while still delivering great tennis programs. To our members we say "Thank you" for your patience and for keeping the faith.

Below are some of the *"Highlights of 2021 / 22"* by way of an update on our journey over the past year and as a pointer to our ambitions and goals for the future. We look forward to continuing to redevelopment our facility as we strive to make the Sale Tennis Club a hub for tennis within our region for the benefit of the entire Wellington Shire community and a centre of national significance.

Participation

- Tennis joined every other sport in Victoria in being shut down during the COVID-19 restrictions. However the unique nature of tennis meant that we were soon able to offer other opportunities for the tennis community as a way for people to get valuable exercise and be able to socialise. Our post COVID “bounce back” has been a credit to the hard work of our committees as we have stayed at the forefront of local sport and continued to offer participation opportunities within the confines of the COVID-19 protocols.
- During the 2021/22 year we fielded a total of 64 separate teams in competitions in the Wellington Gippsland Tennis Association Junior and Senior pennant, Sale & District Mid-Week Ladies Tennis Association and Club based competitions. This covered junior and senior summer pennant, night tennis on Tuesday and Thursday nights and mid-week ladies and was a significant achievement given the COVID restrictions prevailing for much of the year.
- We fielded 16 junior teams in 2020/21 in the Wellington Gippsland Tennis Association. In the March 2022 WGTA Junior Finals 13 teams made it to finals and we ultimately took home flags in Sections 1, 3, 5, 6 and 7.
- We were fortunate to have 6 senior teams in WGTA pennant. 3 Sale teams made the finals and Section 1 won through to the Grand Final.
- Our night pennant competition has gone from strength to strength with numbers increasing to capacity on Thursday nights. Night pennants offer a different opportunity for many players who are not able to commit to the traditional Saturday format. We had a total of just over 100 players in our night pennants in 2021 / 22.
- We conducted our 69th consecutive Sale Tennis Club Championships. In a heartening trend entry numbers were again solid with good fields in most junior events. For the two Open Singles events talented junior Jess Board took out the Open Women’s and former Club Coach, Anthony Zafiris, took out the Open Men’s.
- 15 year old Sale Tennis Club player, Jess Board, was awarded a John Fitzgerald Scholarship by the prestigious Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club in Melbourne, the first ever awarded to a Sale player.
- Sale Tennis Club junior Mia Goold was awarded a prestigious Rafa Nadal Tour Trophy of Values. The Rafa Nadal Academy is a junior tennis circuit launched in Spain in 2014 by tennis legend, Rafael Nadal. It has a strong focus on sport and education combining the tournament aspect with dynamic and fun educational activities for the players aiming to establish strong fundamental values.
- We were unable to host our Junior Points Tournament over the Queen’s Birthday weekend due to COVID restrictions. Our Spring Junior Tournament and AMT was also cancelled due to COVID.
- Delivered for the 15th year the Tennis Australia ANZ Hot Shots program. This program has gone from strength to strength with the numbers increasing from below 10 per week to now nearly 30 children participating in beginner tennis activities each week. Further in 2022 we continued to deliver the Hot Shots program throughout the full year giving children the opportunity to accelerate their tennis development. We also had 10 children attend the Australia Open and participate in the “Kids on Court” program where the children play on the AO courts before the first matches of the day and get to toss the coin at the start of play, a once in a lifetime experience.

- Conducted a Free Tennis Day (Life Members Day) that attracted nearly 80 participants who enjoyed a great day of tennis and tennis themed activities and introduced them to our Club and facility.
- Continued, after an absence of over 15 years, the Dahlsens Challenge, an inter-town challenge for juniors and seniors played between Sale and Bairnsdale Tennis Clubs. Events such as the Dahlsens Challenge are essential for the development of junior players in regional areas as it provides a rare opportunity for them to be part of a larger team representing their Club and to compete with and test themselves against their peers from other areas. We have now had 7 rounds of the Dahlsens Challenge with the current tally in Sale's favour 4 / 3. The next round in April will be hotly contested.
- We have reached a 3 year agreement to deliver a Tennis Seniors tournament. A large number of senior's tournaments are now played throughout Australia each year. Seniors tennis competitions are divided into five-year age groups starting at over 30 years and tournaments comprise a mixture of round-robin and knock-out type events. Our event will carry seniors "points" that will contribute to players' Australian seniors ranking.
- During 2021 our Club Coach Anthony Zafiridis resigned to return to Melbourne. Anthony has raised the level of coaching at Sale Tennis Club to an elite level and we wish him, his wife Fiona and his family the very best. After an exhaustive search we were delighted to appoint a new Club Coach, Jason Yap. Jason has hit the ground running and has now increased coaching numbers by nearly 25% such that his programs are now virtually at full capacity.
- Held a Fast 4 Challenge competition in May and June. 8 teams competed in the modified game format with each team playing 3 sets of Fast 4 tennis each night. Teams were made up of workmates, social clubs and groups of friends, who all enjoyed the fun atmosphere.

Community

- Sale Tennis Club President, Robin Lowe, was a panellist on the Tennis Victoria Strategy Forum – Toward 2025. The forum was to help shape the future of tennis in Victoria.
- Sale Floral Art Group have commenced using our wonderful revamped Clubhouse for their monthly gatherings. A treat for the senses.
- Continued our involvement in the GippSport Healthy Sporting Environments program which is a structured program that assists with inclusion for all abilities, alcohol management, healthy eating, injury protection, UV protection and reduction of tobacco use. This in addition to our Club continuing to be a Level 3 Good Sports club.
- Sale Tennis Club won the right to host a sixth ballkids trial as part of the selection process for the ball kids at the Australian Open 2022. We welcomed the ability to offer opportunities to Gippsland children and generate publicity for tennis in our area.
- In 2021/22 we conducted further Responsible Service of Alcohol Courses which were provided free of charge to all participating Club members and their immediate family. This brings to over 120 the number of Club members and their family who now hold a RSA certificate as a direct result of our program.
- We had an estimated 35,000 separate visits to our facility from players, spectators, parents, tournament participants, school groups, casual users, function attendants, coaching students and other users.

- Sale Tennis Club President Robin Lowe completed his 6th and final year on the Tennis Victoria County Advisory Committee. The committee was tasked with bringing to the Tennis Victoria Board the unique issues faced by country tennis and crafting successful long term responses to these issues.
- Using trees donated by our members we have established a citrus orchard with lemon, lime, orange and grapefruit trees. Once it matures it will provide the small amount of citrus needed for our bar and be available to all members to take home and enjoy. This is a great use of otherwise wasted space.

Facilities

- Our Clubhouse renovation has been fully completed and we now have a modern state-of-the-art facility that is the equal of any clubroom throughout country Victoria.
- We now have 12 brand new red porous courts; 4 of them international size (to add to the 2 existing ones). A 14 court en-tout-cas facility gives our Club a fantastic springboard for tournaments and events. The 6 international courts will allow us to host international tournaments at some time in the future.
- What we now have is unique in country Victoria, if not in all of regional Australia. To have 14 first class red porous courts, including 6 international size courts, is amazing. Our Clubhouse is now state of the art and we are now fully accessible, inside and out. To have all of this in a spectacular setting beside 2 lakes and within the Stephenson Park precinct is an absolute tribute to all those involved.
- We now wish to complete *“the final piece of the puzzle”* by upgrading our 4 hard courts. These courts are now near the end of their effective life and will require considerable capital expenditure in the near future, regardless of whether it is a full redevelopment or extensive repairs.
- Our proposed upgrade of this area has 3 distinct components:
 - ❖ *Court surface.* We plan to upgrade the current degraded acrylic hard court surface to artificial grass. Artificial grass offers a number of distinct advantages that will help extend our current programs and create new participation opportunities.
 - ❖ *Lighting.* We plan to install modern, energy efficient LED lighting to Tennis Victoria “club standard” meaning the courts can be used for coaching later into each evening as well as being available for Club and community use.
 - ❖ *Fencing.* We will upgrade our fencing to match the modern fencing now installed around the rest of our facility. This will include full height wind barriers around 3 sides of the enclosure to make the courts more “playable” more often.
- Fortunately given the location of the 4 hard courts the whole project can be completed with a minimum of disruption to existing programs. Unlike our recent redevelopment where we lost use of much our Clubhouse and many of our courts this upgrade will not negatively impact our pennants or tennis programs.
- The outcomes we hope to achieve with the proposed hard court upgrade are:
 - A significant expansion of our coaching services.
 - The development of a coaching “Centre of Excellence” focusing on the redeveloped area.
 - A facility that is better able to withstand wind and rain. Artificial grass has a much higher saturation point than en-tout-cas and the existing hard courts so play can go on longer during showers and resume much quicker after rain passes.

- A designated coaching area where coaching gear can be left on court between matches or even overnight to make the coaching set up and tidy up process more efficient.
- These courts will be available for coaching much later into each evening as Club pennants will not need to take precedence at 7.00 pm each evening as happens now.
- Our coaches will not require breaks in coaching to water and bag the en-tout-cas courts between each session giving them more lesson time with players.

Volunteers

The most significant challenge for most community based organisations is the decline in volunteerism. Without volunteers our Club cannot run and without a Club our tennis programs cease and our facilities stop being maintained, to the detriment of all current and future users. We are most fortunate that we currently have a very strong and long serving group of volunteers but we cannot be complacent as we search for the next generation of Club administrators and try to share with them the great sense of achievement that community service and volunteerism provides.

Our committees work tirelessly to deliver our programs. Kurt Best continues to excel in his role as President of the Junior Committee and has been very well supported by Club Coach's Anthony Zafiris then Jason Yap, who bring invaluable experience from other clubs and roles. This committee has done a wonderful job and we should all be proud of the way they have brought together our junior programs. A special thanks goes to Masami Gould who organised the canteen each Saturday morning.

Our General Committee has continued to be very well served by: Karen Deschepper, our Membership Coordinator and Damien Theobald our new Treasurer; Sonya Stephenson who has kept our minutes; Murray Fitzclarence and Di Arnot who have ensured that our bar remains stocked amongst many other tasks, Andy Pate our IT and communications guru and Tim Dunnett who has the often difficult Club Captain's job. A special mention is also needed for Rob Tatterson who has done such a great job with our grounds and cleaning over the past 2 years. "Tatt" has done a sensational job, despite COVID, to ensure we look our best and deserves a special "Thank you". After 40 years' service Bruce Carter continues to be a driving force in our court maintenance and administration and deserves our heartfelt thanks again in 2022. Finally a big thanks goes to all of our General Committee members and other volunteers for their ongoing contribution, commitment and guidance.

Our Club looks forward to the future with optimism.

Robin Lowe
President
Sale Tennis Club
18/05/2022