

REVIEW OF 2018 COMMERCIAL CLUB ALBURY AUSTRALIAN OPEN RACQUETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 35th edition of Racquetball's pinnacle event, superbly hosted by the Commercial Club Albury-Squash and Racquetball Section, and held at the magnificent Commercial Club Albury, the Wodonga Squash & Racquetball Centre, plus the Albury Club, was a resounding success, securing a massive total of 239 entries, including 33 junior players, who spent two and half days jousting for the sixteen national titles on offer.

Although the SUPERSTARS of Australian Racquetball Cam White and Sarah Fitz-Gerald, once again snared the lion's share of the \$10,000 booty on offer, it was the junior brigade who stole the show capturing five of the ten singles titles on offer.

The President's Choice Commercial Club Junior Scholarship Award sponsored by Andrew Sobolewski and all the Grand Prix tournament hosts was won by Xavier Brigden and he received \$200 to put towards his coaching and training expenses, plus free entry into every Grand Prix racquetball event held in Australia in 2019.

The inaugural Squash and Racquetball Victoria Awards for the most promising Junior Boy and Girl Under 15 years of age were won by nine-year-old Connor Haberecht and ten-year-old Amelia Brigden respectively, with each receiving \$250 in private coaching from Cam White and Sarah Fitz-Gerald respectively.

The Australian Open Teams Challenge comprised participants from 24 clubs, with the Commercial Club annexing the first prize of \$250, Wodonga received \$150 for second place and Geelong LTC taking out third place and winning \$100.



Mark Treloar, Xavier Brigden & Andrew Sobolewski



Lao Biesbroek, Amelia Brigden, Connor Haberecht



Campbell Shobbrook (Wodonga), Mark Treloar (Commercial Club) & Peter French (Geelong LTC)

SINGLES EVENTS

MEN'S OPEN

The Men's Open attracted another stellar field which included sixteen times national champion Cam White, 2018 National and Victorian Grand Prix Circuit leaders, Peter French and Garry Pedersen respectively, five times Australian Open Champion Geoff Wilcock, top Tasmanian player Leigh Mitchell, plus local teenager Alex Baines, who took out the National A Grade racquetball title two years ago and is also displaying outstanding potential in the squash ranks.

The two top seeds White and French, eventually reached the final stanza which commenced at a frenetic pace with the flamboyant White exposing his full repertoire of shots, whilst the speed and remarkable returning of French ensured a reasonable lengthy day at the office for the champion.

No matter what French threw at him White was able to counter it and more as he was at his brilliant best, claiming the first game 21/14. In the second game White hit his straps early and maintained a handy break throughout, taking it out 21/8, and annexing his seventeenth national title, plus extending his unbeaten run to a remarkable eighteen years.

The good news for French was that in reaching the final it assured him of being the National Grand Prix Circuit Champion for 2018.

In the semi-finals, White overcame Leigh Mitchell, 21/15, 19/21, 21/6, with French coming from a game down to overpower his Geelong stable mate Garry Pedersen, 14/21, 21/14, 21/18.



L-R: Ross Falconer, Cameron White, Peter French



Leigh Mitchell, Ross Falconer, Garry Pedersen

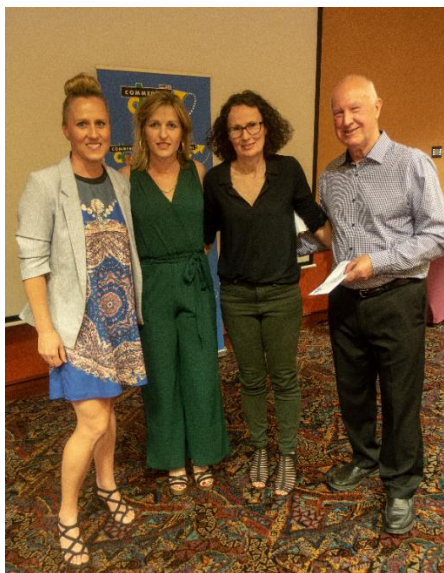
WOMEN'S OPEN

Although initially this event looked on paper a one-horse affair, the large crowd were well and truly entertained by the rest of the field's endeavours to secure a final's berth against the five times world open squash champion and nine times national racquetball champion Sarah Fitz-Gerald.

Second seeded and runner up to Fitz-Gerald in the 2018 Victorian Open Judy Wright, eventually ended up with that honour after nailing Geelong's third seeded Sue Dunlop, 21/17, 21/8, in their semi-final encounter.

Meanwhile, Fitz-Gerald had overcome fourth seeded Sally White, 21/13, 21/8 in their semi-final, to set up an entertaining final.

From the outset Wright clearly showed that in no way was she going to be intimidated by the title holder, displaying remarkable agility and recovery, but when the judge finally called a halt to proceedings, Fitz-Gerald utilising her brilliant front court game to great advantage, had claimed another title over the courageous Wright, 21/14, 21/8, and her tenth national crown in a row.



Sally White, Sarah Fitz-Gerald, Sue Dunlop & Ross Falconer



Judy Wright

A GRADE

The high quality field that the A Grade event attracted guaranteed a plethora of close matches, with some likely upsets, which was the eventual outcome.

In his quarter final, Albury's Tom Freire ousted top seeded and 2017 A Grade runner up Scott Petts in straight games, then doing likewise to Mt. District's fourth seeded Rob Hay in their semi-final, whilst Commercial Club's second seeded Daniel Chu, was cutting a swathe through the bottom half of the draw, dispatching seventh seeded Mitchell Nero, in their quarter final encounter, 21/12, 21/14, then overcoming Ballarat's sixth seeded Troy Anwyl, in their semi-final, 21/10, 19/21, 21/9. Anwyl had earlier come from a game down to take out SS&A's third seeded Carl Chant, 19/21, 21/13, 21/19.

The final stanza was a dour struggle with the sixteen year old Chu holding sway for most of the match, eventually claiming the A Grade crown 21/15, 21/11, and in the process becoming the second youngest player to do so, clearly displaying he is headed for greater triumphs, plus just being a mere thirty five days older than Alex Baines was when he performed the same feat in 2016.



Daniel Chu & Ross Falconer



Scott Petts, Ross Falconer & Tom Freire

B GRADE

Amazingly two players who had been off the Grand Prix circuit for virtually twelve months ended up fronting each other in the final stanza after surviving three tough encounters to do so.

Lakes Entrance's Jordan Rounds overcame promising Ballarat teenager Mitchell Harrison in the first round 21/19, 21/18, then defeated Wodonga's top seeded and Victorian Open runner up Jack Quinlivan, 21/9, 21/22, 21/18 in their quarter final, followed by an impressive straight games win over Wodonga's fourth seeded Kyle Magee, 21/17, 21/15.

In the bottom half of the draw Bailey was doing likewise, firstly putting paid to the SS&A duo, Scott Hanckel and Ron Iverson, then surviving a close quarter final encounter with Wodonga's Campbell Shobbrook, 21/18, 18/21, 21/14.

The first two games of the final were absolute nail biters with neither player giving an inch, resulting in Bailey taking out the first 22/21, and Rounds the second 21/19, and then taking charge early in the third claiming it and the title 21/10, over a courageous Bailey.



Jordan Rounds, Ross Falconer & Glen Bailey



Jack Quinlivan & Ross Falconer

C GRADE

A Melbourne Cup field of twenty seven starters entered the barrier stalls for this event, creating a likely scenario that to claim the title you would have to win five matches, which is what eventuated after twenty six very competitive matches.

The event's top seed was Bendigo's Anthony Dzioba, following his very consistent year winning two GP titles and being runner up in three others out of the six events he had played in, and he was progressing well in this event until he met up with Lakes Entrance stalwart Michael Smits at the semi stage, which Smits eventually won, 21/15, 20/22, 21/14.

In the bottom half of the draw South Australia's Damon Hagerstrom was on a roll having won three matches to reach the semi-finals, including falling over the line against the Commercial Club's third seeded Michael Brigden, 16/21, 21/19, 22/20. Hagerstrom then repeated the dose against the Commercial Club's Tim Darmody, in another heart stopper, 22/21, 21/22, 21/12, in their semi-final.

Smits and Hagerstrom played out a most entertaining final with the South Aussie claiming the seventy seventh point of the match and the title, 21/19, 21/16, plus becoming the first Kangaroo Island player to win a National Grand Prix Singles event.



Ross Falconer & Damon Hagerstrom



Andrew Meredith, Michael Smits & Ross Falconer

JOHN BROADWAY D GRADE



L-R: Cheryl Brigden, Elaine Broadway, Damian Maidment & Ross Falconer

This event, which was established in honour of one of our great ambassadors for the sports of racquetball and squash, was also a Melbourne Cup field with twenty two lining up, including three Goulburn Valley Club Grand Prix debutants, with one of these, Christin Le Compte getting the ball rolling for his club by ousting South Australia's top seeded Brian Richards in the second round and Wangaratta's eighth seeded Heather Meldrum, at the quarter final stage, both in straight games, before succumbing to Wodonga's fourth seeded Liam Tippett in a another close encounter, 21/15, 12/21, 19/21, in their semi-final.

Meanwhile, another Goulburn Valley player Damian Maidment was creating havoc in the lower half of the draw, claiming three scalps along the way, including the second seeded local Paul Morgan and Bendigo's seventh seeded David Drew, to face off in the semi-final against Wodonga's third seeded and 2017 D Grade runner up, Nicola Baines, which he won, 22/21, 21/10.

Maidment hit the ground running early in the first game of the final against Tippett, and was virtually never headed, capturing the match, 21/11, 21/16, and recording the Goulburn Valley Club's first ever Grand Prix title.

HEIDI TUGEND E GRADE

This event, named in honour of one of South Australia's most popular Squash and Racquetball players, contained an enormous variance in player's ages, including four juniors, and in the end, it was two of the younger brigade who reached the final, both locals, Wodonga's thirteen-year-old Gabby Baines, and Commercial Club's sixteen-year-old Lillian Brigden.

To reach the final Baines ousted Palm Cove's Denis Olsson, 21/13, 21/17, and Brigden overcame Westerfold-Bayswater's Jacqueline Wilcock, 21/10, 21/12.

In an entertaining final Baines staved off a determined challenge from Brigden to claim the title, 21/12, 21/16, and record a unique double, winning two Australian titles in a row, having won the Junior Girl's Under 13 Championship in 2017.



L-R: Dave Whan, Gabby Baines, Lillian Brigden & Ross Falconer

F GRADE

This event also included four local North East youngsters, who put on a great show for the other players and spectators, with Wangaratta junior Mitchell Hobbs eventually triumphing over Westerfold – Bayswater's Jessica Wilcock, 21/15, 21/17.

In their respective semi-finals Hobbs came out on top against Commercial Club's Vineeth Prasanna, 221/6, 21/13, with Wilcock ousting Wodonga's Marnie Shannon, 21/6, 21/6.



Mitchell Hobbs



Ross Falconer, Heather Williams, Vineeth Prasanna & Jessica Wilcock

JUNIOR BOY'S UNDER 13 YEARS

A very strong contingent of nine North East juniors participated in this event, including last year's winner and runner up Blake Sutcliffe, and Xavier Brigden respectively, but on this occasion, it was the twelve year old Brigden who was declared the victor, over SS&A's nine year old pocket dynamo Connor Haberecht, 21/12, 22/20.

In their respective semi-finals, Brigden defeated Harrison Haberecht, 21/9, 21/14, with Connor Haberecht overcoming Blake Sutcliffe, 21/19, 21/16.



Xavier Brigden, Connor Haberecht & Ross Falconer Campbell Hobbs

JUNIOR GIRL'S UNDER 13 YEARS

Commercial Club's ten-year-old Amelia Brigden overcame her fellow club mate Lucinda Fitzgerald, 21/5, 21/3, to win the final of this event and in so doing registering the fifth singles title at these championships for the junior brigade, plus making it a unique family double with her brother Xavier taking out the Junior Boy's title.



Lucinda Fitzgerald & Amelia Brigden

SINGLES Grade	Winner	Runner-Up	Plate Winner
Men's Open	Cam White (VIC)	Peter French (VIC)	Craig Ambler (NSW)
Women's Open	Sarah Fitz-Gerald	Judy Wright (VIC)	Liz Lopes (QLD)
A	Daniel Chu (NSW)	Tom Freire (NSW)	Scott Petts (NSW)
B	Jordan Rounds (VIC)	Glen Bailey (NSW)	Jack Quinlivan (VIC)
C	Damon Hagerstrom (SA)	Michael Smits (VIC)	Andrew Meredith (VIC)
John Broadway D Grade	Damian Maidment (VIC)	Liam Tippett (VIC)	Cheryl Brigden (NSW)
Heidi Tugend E Grade	Gabby Baines (NSW)	Lillian Brigden (NSW)	Jack Marengo (VIC)
F Grade	Mitchell Hobbs (VIC)	Jessica Wilcock (VIC)	Vineeth Prasanna (NSW)
Junior Boys	Xavier Brigden (NSW)	Connor Haberecht (NSW)	Campbell Hobbs (VIC)
Junior Girls	Amelia Brigden (NSW)	Lucinda Fitzgerald (NSW)	X

DOUBLES			
Grade	Winners	Runners-Up	Plate Winner
Open	Pedersen/French (VIC)	Chu/Baines (NSW)	White (VIC)/Paramore (NSW)
A	Sobolewski/Petts (NSW)	Magee (VIC)/Nero (NSW)	Hart/Suters (NSW)
B	Mihan/Horvat (VIC)	Bailey/Webb(NSW)	Phillips/Shobbrook (VIC)
C	Smits/Green (VIC)	Biesbroek/Pedersen(VIC)	Hagerstrom(SA)/Shobbrook(VIC)
D	Richards (SA)/Meredith (VIC)	David & Joey Rees(NSW)	Woolley/Tamburini (VIC)
E	Haberecht/Sutcliffe(NSW)	Olsson(QLD)/Fagan (NSW)	Jessica & Jacqui Wilcock (VI)



Open Doubles



A Grade Doubles



B Grade Doubles



C Grade Doubles



D Grade Doubles



E Grade Doubles