

OVERVIEW

The new Squash ACT Board has been in place since the 2017 AGM. Over the course of the year, we have had to operate knowing that, financially, the association must firstly meet its loan obligations and not extend itself further into debt. This has been achieved. I will make some general comments:

1. Squash ACT has had an interesting run of General Managers over recent years, from fulltime to part-time to none to part-time to none. I'd reiterate that Courtney Bugden as General Manager worked extremely well with the squash community, the Board and both Rob McComas and myself as presidents. Rob and Courtenay had both a realistic view of what could be done and set a solid foundation for the association. My sincere thanks at this AGM to both. I know that is shared by other Board members.
2. Squash as a sport has enormous potential and that's rarely recognised within the squash community. In just about every visit to the Woden Centre I spot someone I've never seen before. A quick reflection is that it's a sport made for today – able to be played socially (which is what so many people want i.e. getting away from hard competition); good workout in an hour so fits with work and family commitments; played indoors out of the sun, rain and cold.
3. Despite above, the most negative press around squash is too often found *within* the squash community. Maybe it's reflecting back on the halcyon days. Time to move on.
4. No real explanation needed but the reality of smaller volunteer sporting organisations is that all are operating at a time when people are simply time poor. Squash is in this boat. Our clubs – Dickson, Queanbeyan, Vikings and South Canberra – have some great things happening but are no doubt hamstrung, for example, by a lack of available and experienced coaches.
5. The other reality is that squash, unlike many other sports, has had to be financially self-dependent. Courts are often privately owned. In the ACT, we're fortunate in many ways but – and it's a big but – we need to make clear the value of squash courts to the community. At some point, we should conduct a small study that measures court usage and the ratio of activity to facility. Near Woden, look over at Phillip Oval and the Cricket facilities, the Woden Athletic Track, Melrose High Football Field to get an idea of what I mean. Large spaces quite often empty. It's a message that we take to Active Canberra and our politicians.
6. Finally, the composition of the Squash ACT Board would benefit from greater female representation. It is an ACT Government requirement that boards have a reasonable gender balance (40%). I would encourage club presidents to put out a call to members so that we address the imbalance. Someone with financial acumen would be particularly helpful!

SQUASH ACT FINANCIAL POSITION

At the end of the initial loan period under which just interest payments were met, Bendigo Bank indicated that it would seek an interest + principle payment arrangement. This placed the association in the position of having to discipline itself to meet payment obligations on a monthly basis. Not a bad thing.

- The 'Brindabella Loan' was fully paid out in May 2017 with a final payment of \$90k.
- The Audit has been completed and presented at the AGM along with financial reports. Our thanks to FCB Bookkeepers and Anthony Wilson (auditor).
- Aged Receivables continue to present a challenge. Russell and Ross have done a good job in chasing these up though we still have some tidying up to go.
- Squash ACT runs a reasonably sized business. While Russell Weatherburn has worked assiduously on our accounts, we would benefit from greater financial expertise on its Board to oversee finances and put in place the accountability measures that ensure good financial governance, particularly in relation to the Woden Centre.

GENERAL MANAGER POSITION AND ADMINISTRATION OF SQUASH ACT

- The Board discussed the General Manager position when Courtenay finished. The decision was made to hold off employing a new GM until we had a better handle on the financial position. One contingency measure was to look at how desk staff could cover some of the duties undertaken by the GM. This has worked out well with Leanna Davey stepping up. It raises the issue of how we can best utilise the skills of desk staff to assist Leanna with, for example, social media, tournaments, social comps, etc.
- Squash ACT has also had several attempts at employing a Development Officer. Despite good intentions there has been limited success. This is a position that can be further explored over the course of 2018.
- Following on from above, Squash Australia has advised that it will fully support the part-time employment of an ACT Squash Community Engagement Officer. Details to be finalised but it will certainly assist us and have no impact on our finances.

SPORTYHQ

I'm no expert on SportyHQ but it is pleasing to see steps being taken to conduct pennant using SportyHQ. At the moment, my understanding is that we are running both Matrix and SportyHQ just to ease into the latter.

Note that SportyHQ is a requirement of funding from Squash Australia. The ACT Open is set up in SportyHQ for entry including payments. Masters, too, has been in contact with Henry Weber to see if they can use the system.

Ideally, we'd like all clubs to use SportyHQ for membership, communication, tournaments, etc.

QUEANBEYAN SQUASH COURT DEVELOPMENTS

Following several conversations with the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, Squash ACT, working with the Queanbeyan Squash Club, prepared a submission to include squash in the QPRC Sports Centre. The result was two squash courts which will see squash return to Queanbeyan after many years absence. QSC has committed itself to supporting the courts and utilizing as much as possible with practice, socials and pennant matches.

This is a great outcome and one to be celebrated.

WODEN SQUASH CENTRE

Woden Squash Centre redevelopment

Over the years there have been various discussions, plans and hopes in relation to the redevelopment, extension and, indeed, sale of the Woden Squash Centre. In 2017, the ACT Government provided money (\$7500) to assist in developing a master plan for the site. The Facilities Committee (Rob McComas, Michael Hill and Michael Nuttall) worked with AMC Architecture from around March onward. The outcome was three options ranging from \$5.8m (excl GST) to \$6.95m (excl GST). All three options were essentially based on refurbishment and/or replacement of courts, and the inclusion of a commercial premise that would generate income – a medical centre for instance. Given the risk involved, the inability to borrow that sort of money and the unlikelihood of the ACT Government assisting in any significant way, any redevelopment along these lines could not be undertaken.

In more recent times, discussions have been (again) held with the owners of Bellucci's in relation to the amalgamation of the three sites and a major multi-storey redevelopment that would include a squash centre. Discussions are continuing based on:

1. There be no interruption to the playing of squash at Woden.
2. There be no financial risk to Squash ACT.
3. Any new facility would be state-of-the-art and provide at least 8 courts + a show court.
4. Squash ACT would be the owner of the centre.

From here, Squash ACT is looking to make representations to the ACT Government requesting that the restriction on residential development on the Woden Squash Centre land be removed.

ActewAGL and representations to ACT Government

In August last year, ActewAGL replaced the old substation with a new one. Initially, it was placed on Squash ACT land. An opportunity was seen to reposition it 'away' from the centre so that it would be out of the way should we look to redevelop the site. To cut a long story short, this was not possible so it was put back in its original position.

Representations were made to ActewAGL for reparation of the grassed area. This was agreed to and some seeding and watering took place. The outcome was unsatisfactory so, after further discussions, ActewAGL agreed to pay Squash ACT an ex-gratia payment of \$8,000 to allow us to manage the work. This has begun, is expected to cost less than \$3,000 and will provide us with a reasonably well-presented piece of land.

Graffiti and Garbage Bin Shelter

In late January, I wrote to the Chief Minister outlining concerns around continued graffiti of the Woden Squash Centre and the state of the Garbage Bin Shelter. As no reply has been received, I am following up. (Letter attached.)

COMPETITIONS

Firstly, my thanks to the Competitions Committee for managing the pennant competitions so smoothly. Numbers are slightly down for various reasons but the three-member team is proving successful and could well see numbers build in coming competitions.

In 2017, we trialed a 'Premier League'. While reasonably successful, it was decided to revert to those players being part of weekly pennant. Personally, I wouldn't discount the possibility of a Premier format of some sort in future.

Juniors is going from strength to strength with the Friday night competition bringing together some 77 players of wide age and wide ability. We have to remember that there are also young players attending club sessions that are not included in this number. Under the coaching of Anthony Ricketts and Dave White, there's been good improvement in player strength and skill levels in the development squads.

In 2017, the Board committed itself to running a \$10k PSA Men's event in conjunction with the ACT Open. We were excited to announce that Alucom (John Carter) took up major sponsorship of the event and we are currently exploring other sponsorship opportunities. We have others in the pipeline and hope to announce these shortly. I take this opportunity to thank Vlad Zokic of SCSC (Art Director, Zokitch Creative Studio) for his design of the poster, sticker and sponsorship flyer. Many great comments have been received.

COACHING and REFEREE ACCREDITATION

In February this year, we had 13 participants in a very successful Club Development Coaching Course held at Woden. Organised by Dave White and presented by Pat Siciliano, it was a tremendous initiative that will not only build our coaching strength but will obviously help develop our players across all levels. My thanks to Pat and Dave.

As an association, we have to have a clear understanding that all coaches must be qualified to be coaching under the auspices of a club, Squash ACT and Squash Australia. The online Foundation Coaching Course is the simplest and easiest way to start.

On the refereeing front, Russell has spent considerable time assessing referees during this Autumn pennant season. While we had hoped to hold Player Rules Presentations this pennant, circumstances have seen us delay this until the Spring Pennant.

GLASS COURT

At the time of writing, we are in final stages of negotiations with Squash Australia for them to purchase the glass court for \$35k. While this is somewhat down on a hoped-for figure, it is a realistic and practical outcome. Several weeks ago, the court was transported by GOLDOC to the Gold Coast to be assembled as a demonstration court. They paid transportation costs and will now insure.

BOARD

The workings of the Board across the year have been effective but it's fair to say that while intentions are aimed towards building the sport and looking to the future, quite often business is about dealing with current issues and, from a president's perspective, it is not always easy to delegate to already busy people. Squash ACT is not unique in this regard as I'm sure many would recognise – limited time, resources and personnel impacting.

I take this opportunity to thank the current Board and outgoing Board members for their work and efforts over the last twelve months.

COMMUNICATION WITH CLUB PRESIDENTS AND CLUBS

Communication is an area that requires addressing. While we have Facebook and a website, there are actions that need to be taken to engage with players at a social, competitive and even non-playing level. The best example in squash communication in the ACT is that provided through Masters. Squash ACT has made, from memory, the odd attempt in recent times.

My aim is to put in place a consistent and regular (quarterly?) communication available to all players throughout the year.

The other avenue is in relation to Board meetings. There should be regular occasions (again, quarterly) when club presidents or their reps attend.

Michael Nuttall
Squash ACT President
March 2018