**REVIEW OF 2018 GENESIS VICTORIAN OPEN RACQUETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS**

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**TOP SEEDS PREVAIL AT GENESIS VICTORIAN OPEN RACQUETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Although the thirty sixth edition of the longest running racquetball tournament in Australia, the Genesis Victorian Open Racquetball Championships, contained several very strong fields and numerous close encounters, the top seeds in seven out of the eight open and graded singles events were eventually crowned as Victorian Open champions for 2018, with the only one to buck the trend being Mulgrave’s second seeded Matt Bayley in the A Grade event, and underlining his meteoric rise in the sport, as he only commenced tournament play in the C Grade section some sixteen months ago.

Steve Andrewartha made it two Victorian Open titles in three years, plus claimed his third Open Championship for 2018, from the four events he has competed in (including runner-up in the South Australian Open), when he consigned Geelong’s ultra-consistent third seeded Garry Pedersen to bridesmaid status for the fourth occasion this year.

As anticipated, nine times Australian Open champion Sarah Fitz-Gerald claimed her seventh Victorian Open crown, defeating five times National Open champion Judy Wright in the event’s climax, and extending her unbeaten run in the sport to just over nine years.

**SINGLES EVENTS**

MEN’S OPEN

Although this event contained a red-hot field, including three greats of the sport (Steve Andrewartha, Geoff Wilcock and Steve Salter), the expectation was that it would take a herculean effort to topple the reinvigorated Andrewartha who has been in outstanding form over the past 2.5 years.

The expectation became a reality when Andrewartha blasted his way through the top half of the draw which included taking out eighth seeded Charlie Stevenson, and 2018 Wangaratta Open winner Ryan McCarter, both in straight games to reach the event’s finale.

Meanwhile, Pedersen was doing likewise in the bottom half of the draw, overpowering all before him, Including sixth seeded Wilcock and second seeded Geelong stable mate Peter French in a tight encounter, 21/17, 22/20. French had earlier overcome one of our top squash players and newcomer to the sport Lilydale’s Nathan Linder.

In what was a high class finale, punctuated by many unbelievable long rallies, plus an incredible range of shots and returns, it was Andrewartha who finally prevailed, 21/18, 21/17.

WOMEN’S OPEN

This event saw the return of the Queen of Australian Racquetball Sarah Fitz-Gerald, who swapped her Court Tech squash court building tools for a racquetball racquet, for the first time since the Australian Open held in October last year.

With Fitz-Gerald at prohibitive odds to win the event, the greatest interest focussed on who was going to reign supreme for the runners-up booty, which ended up being 2018 ESRA & Geelong Open winner Judy Wright, who finally succumbed to Fitz-Gerald, 12/21, 13/21.

In their respective semi-finals, Fitz-Gerald defeated Mulgrave’s Sylvia Tiet, 21/7, 21/7, with Wright taking out 2018 Wangaratta and Darwin Open winner Sue Dunlop, 21/9, 21/6.

A GRADE

Another outstanding field fronted the starter for this event which included Matt Bayley and Daniel Lewis who between them had won the three previous Victorian GP A Grade titles conducted this year, Corio Warhorse Adam Lander, plus a “blast from the past”, Mulgrave’s Clint Emery, who has been off the tournament scene for more than a decade.

 After ousting top seeded Lander, 21/9, 21/11, in their quarter final, Emery faced off against Mt. District’s fifth seeded Rob Hay in a precursor to the final, following his straight game’s win over Wangaratta’s fourth seeded Dean Milligan.

Although Hay would not lie down, Emery held on in a nail biter, 21/8, 18/21, 21/19.

In the other semi final, Bayley, who had accounted for seventh seeded Jamie Evans in their quarter final 21/12, 21/15, was then confronted by third seeded Dean Lewis, who had ousted Mulgrave’s Craig Royale-Young, eventually coming out on top, 21/12, 21/14, with Bayley coming from a game down to overcome Lewis, 21/22, 21/18, 21/12.

The final was an absolute classic with again Bayley coming from behind to claim his second successive Victorian Open crown, having taken out the B Grade title last year, winning the 109th point and the match, 16/21, 21/14, 21/16.

B GRADE

One of the most improved players on the circuit over the past twelve months has been Lake’s Entrance’s Steve Theologou, whose only loss on the Victorian GP circuit this year was in the final of June’s Geelong Open Classic to Wodonga’s fifteen-year-old Jack Quinlivan, 21/19 in the third game.

 Both these players again found themselves at the event’s climax, after Theologou overpowered Ballarat’s Blake Caspersz, and Quinlivan doing likewise to Westerfold’s Peter Walters, both in straight games in their respective semi-finals.

 On this occasion it was Theologou who took out the final stanza over Quinlivan, 21/15, 21/17, but everyone in attendance were left in no doubt that both players are destined for richer pickings.

 C GRADE

The C Grade event was littered with players of varying ages from across the state, including Commercial Club’s fourteen-year-old, Alex Brigden and Bendigo’s Anthony Dzioba, who has reached the pointy end of all events he has participated in 2018.

Top seeded Dzioba once again reached the final stanza following straight game victories over promising Wodonga junior Jordan Tamburini and 2016 Victorian C Grade GP champion Michael Smits, with Alex Brigden overcoming his Commercial Club stable mate at the quarter final stage, but alas falling short in his semi final being taken out by no less than his father Michael in a marathon, 22/20, 14/21, 21/15, which gave him the bragging rights for the four-hour drive home.

Dzioba overcame a most determined Michael Brigden in the final, 21/14, 22/20, which catapulted him into top position with substantial leads, in the 2018 C Grade rankings for both the National and Victorian GP circuits.

D GRADE

The D Grade event contained the two finalists from the recent Geelong Open, Commercial Club’s Paul Morgan, who won the event, and South Australian Stalwart Brian Richards, who also won this year’s Darwin Open D Grade event.

Morgan once again was victorious in straight games, which now places him on top of the Victorian GP rankings, with Richards stretching his lead over his rivals on the National GP rankings.

To reach the finale Morgan had accounted for another promising junior Nelson Howard and Bairnsdale’s fourth seeded Chris Kool, coming from a game down, 15/21, 21/17, 21/15, whilst Richards ousted Commercial Club’s Elsabe Du Plooy, 21/18, 21/19, and Wangaratta’s third seeded Heather Meldrum, 21/5, 16/21, 21/11.

E GRADE

The top seed for this event in a pool of five players, was fourteen-year-old Zach Tamburini, who won the 2017 Australian Open F Grade championship and had been runner-up in each of the two E Grade titles he had contested prior to this event.

After four rounds Tamburini had most certainly justified his seeding finishing in top position, with second place going to Jacqueline Wilcock, part of the Geoff Wilcock team both on and off the court. Wilcock’s only loss was to Tamburini, 21/5, 21/7.

F GRADE

This event contained two round robin pools, followed by positional playoffs, in which Geelong Open F Grade winner Amanda Pavia prevailed in the final over Jessica Wilcock, 21/18, 21/8.

The playoff for third/fourth was won by Corio’s Danica Morgan over Bendigo’s Thomas Chen, 21/14, 21/18.

JUNIOR BOY’S & GIRLS UNDER 13

The two winners of the junior events, ten-year-old Amelia Brigden (Girl’s), and her brother twelve-year-old Xavier, also participated in the F Grade event where they performed very well, with Xavier winning all three of his matches.

2018 GENESIS VICTORIAN OPEN RESULTS

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| SINGLES |
| Grade | **Winner** |  **Runner-Up** |
| Men’s Open  | **Steve Andrewartha**  |  **Garry Pedersen** |
| Women’s Open | **Sarah Fitz-Gerald**  |  **Judy Wright** |
| A  | **Matt Bayley** |  **Clint Emery** |
| B | **Steve Theologou** |  **Jack Quinlivan** |
| C | **Anthony Dzioba** |  **Michael Brigden** |
| D  | **Paul Morgan** |  **Brian Richards** |
| E  | **Zach Tamburini** |  **Jacqueline Wilcock** |
| F  | **Amanda Pavia** |  **Jessica Wilcock** |
| Junior Girls  | **Amelia Brigden** |  **N/A** |
| Junior Boy’s  | **Xavier Brigden** |  **N/A** |

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| DOUBLES |
| Grade Winners Runners-Up |
| Open Wilcock/ Andrewartha Patterson/ Morris  |
| A Paramore/ Groom N/A |
| B Horvat/ Mihan Shobbrook/ Quinlivan  |
| C Pedersen/ Seedy Fry/Smits  |
| D Lane/Dowling Richards/Nemes |
| E Chen/Lee Amelia & Lillian Brigden |

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PHOTO: Courtesy of Jodi Wilkinson