

REVIEW OF 2019 COMMERCIAL CLUB ALBURY AUSTRALIAN OPEN RACQUETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 36th 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 and the Wodonga Squash & Racquetball Centre, was a resounding success, securing a massive total of 218 entries, including thirty two junior players and twenty four Grand Prix debutants, 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 seven of the ten singles titles on offer.

Another person who put on a magnificent performance and sent tingles down our spines, was the dulcet tones of David Suters on the bagpipes to formally open Saturday Night's Presentation Dinner.

The President's Choice Commercial Club Junior Scholarship Award sponsored by Andrew Sobolewski and all the Grand Prix tournament hosts was won by ten-year-old Connor Haberecht 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 2020.

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

The inaugural Heather Meldrum Junior Girls Under 13 Singles Championship, which was established in honour of our sports beloved Godmother, was won by the Commercial Club's Amelia Brigden.

The Australian Open Teams Challenge comprised participants from twenty-three clubs, with the Commercial Club annexing the first prize of \$250, SS&A receiving \$150 for second place and Wodonga taking out third place and winning \$100.

SINGLES RESULTS

MEN'S OPEN

The Men's Open attracted another stellar field which included seventeen times national champion Cam White, 2018 National and Victorian Grand Prix Circuit Champions Peter French and Garry Pedersen respectively, five times Australian Open Champion Geoff Wilcock, and a somewhat of a smoky in former Australian Junior Squash Champion Tom Steward, a recent convert to racquetball.

Although he was off the Circuit for most of this year White was quick to show everyone that he most definitely was at his brilliant best for this event and it was going to take something very special to deny him of his eighteenth national crown, after he blew both 8th seeded Daniel Chu and 4th seeded Peter French "out of the water" in straight games at the quarter final and semi-final stages of the event respectively.

The good news for French was that in reaching the semi-final it assured him of being the National Grand Prix Circuit Champion for the second year in a row.

In the bottom half of the draw Tom Steward won a dour struggle over 6th seeded local hope Craig Ambler, 21/14, 21/16, at the quarter final stage, then survived an absolute thriller over Geelong's 2nd seeded Garry Pedersen, 22/20, 21/18.

In the final stanza White hit his straps early and maintained a handy break throughout the first game to take it 21/10, but the second game was a far closer affair with Steward matching White point for point and both exposing their incredible repertoire of shots, then as we have seen on many previous occasions White managed to lift a gear in the

latter stages, to claim the game 21/17, and annexe his eighteenth Australian Open title, plus extend his unbeaten run to an unbelievable nineteen years, indeed very “Heather McKayesque”.

WOMEN’S OPEN

Although initially this event looked on paper as 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 ten times national racquetball champion Sarah Fitz-Gerald.

Second seeded, and herself seven times national champion, plus being runner up to Fitz-Gerald in this event last year, Judy Kool, eventually ended up with that honour after nailing Geelong’s third seeded Sue Dunlop, 21/18, 21/12, in their semi-final encounter.

Emulating her brother Peter French in the Men’s Open, Dunlop in reaching the semi-final assured herself of being the National Grand Prix Circuit Champion for the second year in a row.

Meanwhile, Fitz-Gerald had overcome fourth seeded Sally White, 21/11, 21/9 in their semi-final, to set up an entertaining final.

From the outset Kool 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 Kool, 21/5, 21/6, and her eleventh national crown in a row.

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.

To reach the final Lakes Entrance’s Brandon Smits ousted Bright’s 5th seeded Chris Photis in straight games and Ballarat’s top seeded Troy Anwyl, 21/15, 15/21, 21/7, whilst Commercial Club’s second seeded Luke Suters was cutting a swathe through the bottom half of the draw, dispatching two of his Commercial Club stable mates in Tim Paramore, 21/19, 21/14, in their quarter final encounter, then surviving three hard fought games over Kyle Magee, 21/17, 17/21, 21/17, in their semi-final.

The final stanza was another dour struggle with Suters holding sway for most of the match over Smits, eventually claiming the A Grade crown 21/14, 21/16, and in the process claiming his first Grand Prix Circuit Singles title, with Smits being crowned the National GP Circuit Champion.

B GRADE

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

Commercial Club’s top seeded Jack Quinlivan was also the number one seed for this event last year, but lost 21/18 in the third game to the eventual winner Jordan Rounds at the quarter final stage.

Reminiscent of last year, Wangaratta’s 8th seeded David Ryan nearly repeated the dose on Quinlivan, extending him to the wire in their high class quarter final, before Quinlivan snatched victory right on the line, 20/22, 21/12, 21/19, and eerily with their being an overall total points score differential of only three points to Quinlivan’s 2018 loss to Rounds, 115 to 112 points.

At the semi-final stage Quinlivan overcame SS&A’s 4th seeded Adrian Sommerfeld, 21/12, 21/19, who had earlier ousted 4th seeded Cory Sutcliffe.

Meanwhile in the bottom half of the draw, Westerfold-Bayswater's Marcus Horvat was taking on all before him, firstly claiming the scalps of two highly credentialled locals, Cade Kotzur and last year's runner up in this event Glen Bailey, before overcoming Corio's 2nd seeded and 2019 Victorian Open B Grade Champion Carlos Da Silva, 21/15, 21/12, at the semi-final stage.

In a most entertaining final, the sixteen-year-old Quilivan belied his age and lived up to his seeding, claiming the title on the sixty seventh point, 21/12, 21/13.

The ultra-consistent Carlos Da Silva claimed the B Grade National Grand Prix Singles Title.

C GRADE

A Melbourne Cup field of twenty-four starters entered the barrier stalls for this event, creating a scenario that to claim the title you would have to win at least four matches, which is what eventuated after twenty-three very competitive matches.

In the top half of the draw, Commercial Club's 4th seeded sixteen-year-old Alex Brigden, winner of the recent Ballarat C Grade title, survived a very tough first round encounter against Cairns Croc's GP debutant Ken Coffey, coming from a game down to win, 16/21, 21/19, 21/19, then eventually overcoming Commercial Club stalwart Tim Darmody, 21/10, 16/21, 21/12, in their quarter final encounter, before surviving another marathon in his semi-final against South Australia's Jack Lo Iacono, 21/10, 16/21, 21/12, who had earlier put paid to top seeded Michael Smits's chances of a second National C Grade title this year, 21/13, 21/22, 21/13, to reach the final stanza.

In the bottom half of the draw Wodonga's 2nd seeded fifteen-year-old Justin Chu was on a roll winning three matches to reach the final, including a quarter final victory over Mulgrave's highly consistent 7th seeded Rayleen Cooper, 21/17, 21/12, and Commercial Club's 6th seeded Michael Brigden, 21/13, 21/14.

Chu hit the ground running early in the first game of the final against Alex Brigden, and was virtually never headed, capturing the match, 21/11, 21/17, but both players left everyone in no doubt that they would be reaching far greater heights in the not too distant future.

The Lakes Open Classic's major sponsor Michael Smits (Big 4 Whikers Holiday Village), took out a unique double by claiming both the C Grade Singles and Doubles National Grand Prix titles this year.

JOHN BROADWAY D GRADE

This event, which was established in honour of one of our great ambassadors for the sports of Squash and Racquetball, contained an enormous variance in player's ages, including three juniors, in the end it was two of the younger brigade who reached the final, both locals, Commercial Club's thirteen-year-old Xavier Brigden and Wodonga's fifteen-year-old Zach Tamburini.

In their penultimate matches Brigden ousted top seeded Scott Haberecht, 21/14, 21/13, with Tamburini overcoming Wodonga's Nicola Baines, 21/14, 21/12.

In what was a most entertaining final Tamburini staved off a determined challenge from Brigden to claim the title, coming back from a game down, 5/21, 21/16, 21/13, and totally reversing his first-round loss in this event last year to the eventual winner.

To compensate for his semi-final loss, Scott Haberecht was declared the winner of the National Grand Prix D Grade Singles event.

HEIDI TUGEND E GRADE

This event, which was named in honour of one of South Australia's most popular Racquetball and Squash players, was also a Melbourne Cup field with twenty one lining up, including seven Grand Prix debutants, plus two members of the Haberecht family, Mum - Tracy and oldest son Harrison, with Harrison getting the ball rolling for his family by ousting Wangaratta's 6th seeded Mitchell Hobbs in the second round and Commercial Club's 3rd seeded Gail Mulloy, at the quarter final stage, both in straight games, before overpowering Commercial Club's 2nd seeded Lillian Brigden, 21/7, 21/14, in their semi-final.

Meanwhile, the Commercial Club's Peter Fagan was creating havoc in the top half of the draw, claiming three scalps along the way, including GP debutant David Grant in straight games, Wodonga's 5th seeded Tasmin Fischer, 16/21, 21/12, 21/9, , to face off in the semi-final against SS&A's surprise packet Neil Vandergeest, who had earlier ousted the events top seed Jacqueline Wilcock, in the second round, which Fagan won 21/16, 21/13.

In what was another marathon and exciting final, the thirteen-year-old Haberecht displayed great poise and temperament to overcome the indefatigable Fagan, to claim the 114th point and the title, 21/15, 18/21, 21/18.

There was some good news for Jacqueline Wilcock as she was announced as the E Grade National GP Champion for 2019.

F GRADE

This event was a classic South Australia versus Victoria showdown, with South Aussie GP debutant Grace Siviour eventually triumphing over Westerfold – Bayswater's top seeded Jessica Wilcock, 18/21, 21/8, 21/7.

In their respective semi-finals Wilcock came out on top against another South Aussie debutant Ashleigh McDonald 21/6, 21/7, with Siviour overcoming Wodonga's Marnie Shannon, 21/7, 21/6.

Jessica Wilcock made it a double for Team Wilco, by taking out the National GP F Grade Singles Award.

JUNIOR BOY'S UNDER 13 YEARS

This event contained four North East juniors including last year's runner up Connor Haberecht and semi-finalist Blake Sutcliffe, with the ten-year-old Haberecht going one better than last year and being declared the victor over SS&A's Sutcliffe, 21/17, 21/7, and making it a double for the Haberecht family.

In their respective semi-finals Haberecht defeated Harrison Coulthard, with Sutcliffe overcoming Vithiyaram Kugathasan, 21/16.

Connor Haberecht was also declared the National Grand Prix Junior Boy's Under 13 Champion for this year.

JUNIOR GIRL'S UNDER 13 YEARS

After acquitting herself very well in the F Grade event where she won every match, Commercial Club's eleven-year-old Amelia "Boss" Brigden was declared the winner of the Junior Girls Under 13 event, which she also won in 2018.

SINGLES		
Grade	Winner	Runner-Up
Men's Open	Cam White (VIC)	Tom Steward (VIC)
Women's Open	Sarah Fitz-Gerald (VIC)	Judy Kool (VIC)
A	Luke Suters (NSW)	Brandon Smits (VIC)
B	Jack Quinlivan (VIC)	Marcus Horvat (VIC)
C	Justin Chu (NSW)	Alex Brigden (NSW)
John Broadway D Grade	Zach Tamburini (VIC)	Xavier Brigden (NSW)
Heidi Tugend E Grade	Harrison Haberecht (NSW)	Peter Fagan (NSW)

F Grade	Grace Siviour (SA)	Jessica Wilcock (VIC)
Junior Boys	Connor Haberecht (NSW)	Blake Sutcliffe (NSW)
Heather Meldrum Junior Girls	Amelia Brigden (NSW)	N/A

DOUBLES		
Grade	Winners	Runners-Up
Open	Wilcock/Steward (VIC)	Pedersen/French (VIC)
A	Suters/Petts (NSW)	Horvat/Tiet(VIC)
B	Sommerfeld/Sutcliffe (NSW)	Jack & Antonio Lo Iacono(SA)
C	Sal Lo Iacono (SA)/Coffey (QLD)	Cooper/Heyen(VIC)
D	Woolley/Tamburini (VIC)	Amelia & Xavier Brigden (NSW)
E	Dunk/Carle (NSW)	Braddy-Nelson/Haberecht (NSW)

SINGLES EVENTS



Men's Open – Cam White, Ross Falconer, Tom Steward, Daniel Chu, Garry Pedersen, Peter French



Women's Open – Sarah Fitz-Gerald, Judy Wright, Michelle Sutcliffe, Sue Dunlop, Ross Falconer, Sally White



A Grade - Luke Sutera, Brandon Smits, Tim Paramore, Ross Falconer



B Grade - Jack Quinlivan, Ross Falconer



Marcus Horvat, Ross Falconer



C Grade - Justin Chu, Alex Brigden, Ross Falconer, Mark Treloar, Will O'Connell





John Broadway D Grade – Ross Falconer, Zach Tamburini, Xavier Brigden, Elaine Broadway, Dionne Hartley



Heidi Tugend E Grade – Mitchell Hobbs, Ross Falconer, Harrison Haberecht & Peter Fagan



F Grade – Grace Siviour, Ross Falconer, Marnie Shannon



Junior Boy's Under 13 – Blake Sutcliffe, Connor Haberecht, Sarah Fitz-Gerald



Heather Meldrum Junior Girls Amelia Brigden & Sarah Fitz-Gerald



President's Award – Connor Haberecht, Andrew Sobolewski



S&RV Award Junior Girl - Amelia Brigden & Sarah Fitz-Gerald



S&RV Award Junior Boy - Cam White & Xavier Brigden



CLUB CHALLENGE 1ST Commercial Club, Ross Falconer & Mark Treloar 3RD Wodonga – Marion Baines

DOUBLES EVENTS



Club Challenge 2ND SS&A – Connor Haberecht



Open - Garry Pedersen, Peter French, Geoff Wilcock, Tom Steward



A GRADE- Andrew Sobolewski, Ross Falconer, Chris Photis, Marcus Horvat, Sylvia Tiet, Scott Petts, Luke Suturs



B Grade – Ross Falconer, Nicola Baines, Jack Quinlivan, Adrian Sommerfeld, Cory Sutcliffe, Antonio & Jack Lo Iacono



C Grade – Matt Westman, Ross Falconer, David Parkinson, Sal Lo Iacono & Ken Coffey



D Grade – Ross Falconer, Di Bailey, John Rawson, Helen Woolley, Zach Tamburini, Amelia & Xavier Brigden



E Grade – Denis Olsson, Ross Falconer, Peter Fagan, John Carle, Harrison Haberecht, Frank Dunk, Kai Braddy - Nelson



Bagpipes Player Extraordinaire David Suters

The Changing of the Guard



The South Australian Haka – Ashleigh McDonald, Antonio & Sal Lo Iacono, Grace Siviour, Jack Lo Iacono

Words: Paul Vear

Special Presenters: Ross Falconer & Mark Treloar

Photos Courtesy of Geoff Bayes

Live Streaming Courtesy of Leon Faustini & Reneon

