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20th December 2019

A year-end open letter to the SA tennis community.

*“Hard work does pay off and there are no short cuts in life.
Success is to focus on goals and not obstacles” – Jeff Coetzee.*

A new Director of Tennis, an ATP Challenger, several new \$25 000 ITF World Tennis Tour events for men and women, BNP Paribas RCS Rising Star Tennis (featuring Kevin Anderson) - to name but a few - it has certainly been an interesting few weeks, months and indeed year for Tennis South Africa.

In short, there is lots to be excited about as we approach 2020, but there remains a daunting list of challenges to tackle and in all honesty, we are only starting to scratch the surface of what we could be as a sport in South Africa. So, what is our approach to tackling these challenges?

The TSA head office philosophy is built on four key pillars:

1. We need to be **focused**. We are a small team and we cannot try and do everything at once.
2. We need to be **pragmatic**. ‘Pragmatic’ is defined as ‘Solving problems in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist now, rather than trying to follow theoretical or idealised theories or concepts.’
3. Everything we do needs to be **sustainable** and still be in place in 5-10 years from now.
4. We need to build a **HOW culture** in our organisation (more on that later).

1000-piece jigsaw puzzles.

Building on the above four key pillars, and to really understand what we are trying to do at TSA head office, you need to view tennis in South Africa as a

A few project highlights in 2019 – Part 1:

1. Hosting of several new ITF tournaments – including the Spring Open, the Samaai Junior Open (Grade A event) and the Tuks International.
2. Launching BNP Paribas RCS Rising Star Tennis (National primary schools championship).
3. Signing Kevin Anderson to play an exhibition match against Lloyd Harris in early 2020.
4. Taking over the operations of Wheelchair Tennis in South Africa from July 2019 onwards.
5. Growing the BNP Paribas Coaches Mentorship Programme from 45 coaches in 2018 to 96 coaches in 2019.



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1000-piece puzzle. At times it feels like we are trying to build that puzzle in a car, travelling 80 kilometres per hour on a bumpy dirt road!

It is perfectly natural for tennis people to focus on their specific corner of this jigsaw puzzle. If you are a junior tennis parent you will focus on the junior tennis section only, a coach on the coaches section only, a seniors player on the seniors section only etc. However - If you only focus on your section of the puzzle, then it is very, very easy to criticise the Federation, because you may only see one or two pieces being slowly added.

If you are to zoom out and look at the puzzle in its entirety, then the process starts to become more interesting, with pieces being added, to different areas of the puzzle, on a consistent basis and you also start to see there is a plan unfolding. If you are reading this as - a junior parent, or a coach, or a seniors player, you need to understand that we cannot focus exclusively on one part of the puzzle. It also means we sometime need to make difficult decisions and so, unfortunately, our immediate priorities might not always be aligned to your priorities.

That being said, I hope that the 'a few project highlights in 2019' sidebars in this letter provides the reader with a sense that some progress is being made. Also, a quick comment on these sidebars. No mention is made about any players. This is deliberate as over the festive season we will be running a series, on our social media platforms, highlighting the achievements of several South African tennis players and teams in 2019. That series should be viewed as supplementary to this letter.

Our new Director of Tennis.

The recent appointment of Grand Slam winning coach, Jeff Coetzee, has been very well received by the wider South African and international tennis community. You can read more about his appointment and the focus areas of his new role via the following link <http://www.tennissa.co.za/w/blog/jeff-coetzee-named-new-director-of-tennis>

A few project highlights in 2019 – Part 2:

6. Appointing Jeff Coetzee, as our Director of Tennis.
7. Securing the rights to bring an ATP Challenger 50 event to South Africa in 2020.
8. Launching several new ITF World Tennis Tour \$25 000 events - taking place in March 2020.
9. Renewing Growthpoint Properties headline sponsorship of TSA for a further three years - commencing July 2019 – covering juniors, seniors, transformation, junior national squads and Top Guns (national club champs).
10. Concluding a partnership with North-West University that will see the first multi-surface facility (including clay courts) in SA operational in 2020.



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Securing a current Wimbledon and US Open winning coach is a significant coup for TSA and there is little doubt Jeff will play a significant role in the growth of our Federation in the coming years. Let's hear from the man himself:

"A key focus area for this role is communication and my immediate priority is to build stronger relationships with our players, parents and coaches. As a tennis nation we have huge natural athletic talent but need to benchmark ourselves against the best in the world and then deliver on those benchmarks."

Jeff was the unanimous choice of a TSA selection panel that included TSA board members, as well as Natalie Grandin and Neville Godwin. However, it must be stressed that we also interviewed some other outstanding candidates and we would love to get some of these people more involved in the Federation in the coming months.

More international tennis in South Africa.

Quite rightly, people within local tennis circles criticise the Federation for not bringing more international events to South Africa (although there is nothing stopping anyone reading this from sticking their hand up and assisting by opening doors or raising funding themselves....Henico Schalekamp being a great example to follow.) However, this is an area we are starting to **focus** more and more on and are starting to deliver on in a **pragmatic** and **sustainable** way. Indeed, we recently announced a new block of international events taking place at North-West University in March 2020 – specifically:



Week of	Men	Women	Venue
2 nd March	ITF World Tennis Tour \$25 000 Event	ITF World Tennis Tour \$25 000 Event	Potchefstroom
9 th March	ATP Challenger 50 Event	ITF World Tennis Tour \$25 000 Event	Potchefstroom



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Why Potchefstroom? Well North-West University (NWU) are investing millions of Rands in their tennis facilities. When completed the new facility will be a world class hub for tennis – across hard courts, grass courts and clay courts. Furthermore, NWU are providing essential services that makes the above-mentioned events commercially viable. As a guide - the total cost for the two weeks of tennis in Potch is in excess of R3.5m. This is not an insubstantial amount.

The September block (Samaai Junior Open, Spring Open and Tuks international) of ITF events are planned to continue in 2020 and we would also like to create another block of \$15 000 events in June or July - possibly from 2021 onwards. This would especially benefit our US College players who tend to return to South Africa during the Northern Hemisphere summer.

On the subject of international events – we are also very pleased to confirm that we will be hosting the Under 18 African Junior Championships in February 2020 in Gauteng. This is the Confederation of African Tennis's premiere event and it is great to see the tournament returning to South Africa, after an absence of several years.

BNP Paribas RCS Rising Star Tennis.

A big focus for the Federation over the next few years is growing schools tennis. This year we launched our new primary schools championship. Hopefully we will be able to do the same with high schools in the coming few years.

BNP Paribas and RCS are proving to be fantastic partners for our local game and Rising Star Tennis is an exciting project that we believe will galvanise primary schools tennis in the coming years. However, the event has also demonstrated in very stark terms how much work we need to do to grow tennis in primary schools across all communities in South Africa. That being said there are some fascinating stories emerging from our first year – one example: We are now collaborating with the Sandton Sports Club in a pilot programme that will see the club adopt 2-3 primary schools in Alexandria with the aim of entering these schools in Rising Star Tennis in future years.

Did you know?

As a registered coach or member of TSA you can access discounts at both Sportsmans Warehouse and Tsogo Sun Hotels. For more information please contact [**info@tennissa.co.za**](mailto:info@tennissa.co.za).

Are you a WHAT Person or a HOW Person?

“Don't tell me WHAT we need to do, rather tell me HOW we are going to achieve it” is a common refrain in the TSA office. I see lots of WHAT people on social media and unfortunately there are more than a few WHAT people in



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our tennis. A WHAT person tells you WHAT is wrong with tennis and WHAT TSA should be doing. But a WHAT person can't tell you HOW to achieve the WHAT. With all due respect my (almost) 6-year-old daughter can identify most of the WHAT's that need to be achieved by TSA. The HOW is more challenging as it requires a focus on delivery and indeed action.

Fair enough the TSA office is paid to find the HOWs, but we are a small team – who are punching above our weight – and we need help. As such my 2020 challenge to the wider local tennis community is to proactively embrace a HOW mindset. For example – if there is a challenge in your province, are you sitting back, waiting for the TSA office to get involved, or are you sticking your hand up and looking for proactive HOW solutions? A great example of a HOW mindset is the junior committee in Gauteng North. They are doing some great work in the juniors and schools space.

To paraphrase Albert Einstein – “Don't be the person who finds the problem in every solution.”

What does 2020 have in store?

There is a lot to look forward to in 2020, but also a daunting list of problems, challenges and issues to deal with. Three focus areas (this is not a definitive list) for 2020 will include:

1. Infrastructure – We need to work more closely with our provincial structures to raise investment, to improve our tennis facilities across the country. This is a complex and long-term project but we have some ideas.
2. Women's tennis – Watch this space you Future Stars of the WTA!
3. A new membership proposition – I know I have been talking and writing about this for some time. Less talk and more action Mr CEO!

My future at TSA:

Several people have approached me in the past few months saying they have heard rumours I will be leaving TSA shortly....They obviously know something I don't.

In the spirit of transparency, I would like to clarify my situation.

I have about a year (give or take a month or two) left on my contract. I fully intend to honour my existing contract and am in discussions with the powers that be to extend my stay for a further two years (up to the end of 2022).

A two-year extension is a good option for both parties – there is lots of unfinished business at TSA, but sports administrators in SA have a habit of over-staying their welcome. So, there will come a time (soon) when I will need to hand over to a new, fresh and energetic CEO, who will be better equipped than I to help take Tennis SA to a higher level.



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And finally - thank you.

To the TSA Board of Directors (especially Gavin and Riad) for their guidance and support. I make special mention of our President and Vice-President because they work 365 days a year on tennis matters – all on an unpaid basis.

To the TSA office staff who have a much tougher job than I do. You are to a man and woman all stars.

And finally, a special festive season thank you to the hundreds and hundreds of volunteers, administrators and officials who work across the country at all levels of tennis, for little or no pay. Thank you for everything you do. Without you our sport would not exist.

A happy holiday season to all within tennis - have fun but stay safe!

***“Lots and lots of small improvements can add up to big changes.”
– Unknown.***

Do you have some ideas about how we can improve and grow the sport in South Africa?

If so, please contact us via info@tennissa.co.za with some of your HOW suggestions and comments.