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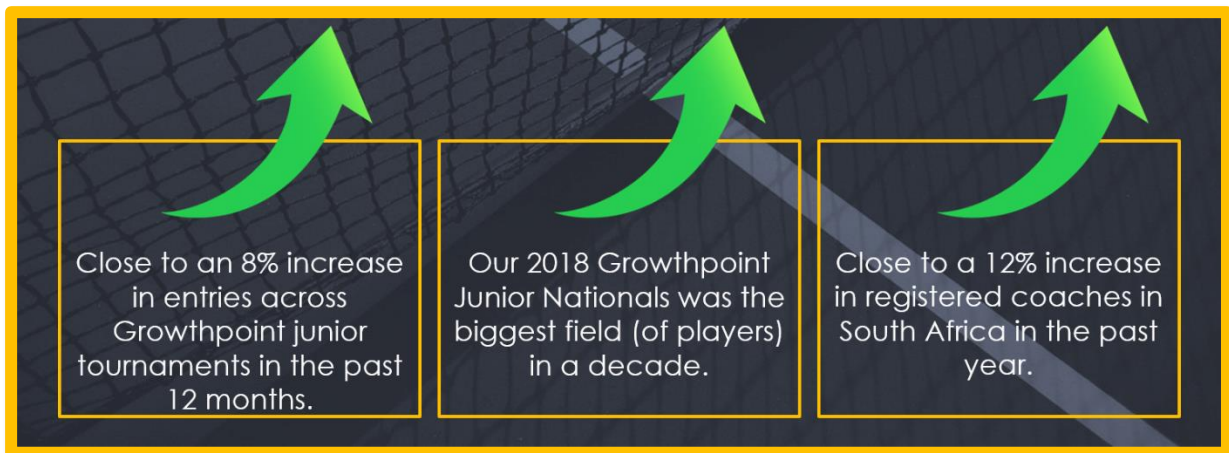
14th December 2018

A 2018 end of year letter to the SA tennis community.

A very wise person said to me the other day...."Ok, so in your two years at TSA, the Federation has signed a few sponsors and launched some new initiatives, but is tennis in South Africa actually growing? Oh, and please remember to pick up the kids from school tomorrow...."

That person speaking was my wife (of course) and yes I did remember to pick up the kids....but she does ask an important question – are we seeing progress in local tennis?

I have no doubt everyone reading this letter will have an opinion (people in tennis being a very opinionated lot) – some will be positive, some will be negative, and some will be mixed....such is life. Opinions are interesting, but I am more interested in facts, and the data suggests we have progressed – especially in the last year. Here are some examples:



Anecdotally these green shoots of progress are supported by a recent conversation I had with the CEO of a leading South African retailer. This retailer (who has a national footprint and sells most tennis brands) has seen encouraging growth in sales across their tennis category, in 2018.

Please don't misinterpret the above....this is not an attempt to sugar-coat the many challenges we face - facilities and tennis in rural areas being two issues on my mind right now (amongst many), but I believe it does demonstrate that some of the programs we have implemented in the last 18 months are starting to move the needle. If I can use a running analogy - we are 10km into our marathon....we have run a good 10km time, but we have a long way to go.

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The local tennis ecosystem:

The collective performances of Kevin Anderson, Raven Klaasen and Lloyd Harris, in 2018, have clearly helped raise interest in tennis in South Africa.....and full credit must be given to these players for their achievements.

I have recently concluded that TSA should never take credit for producing a WTA or ATP player – Ultimately this is down to the player, his/her family support network and coaching team. However - TSA's role is to create an ecosystem that makes it as easy as possible for our best players to make it on the international stage

This is very much work in progress, but some of our recent attempts to strengthen the local tennis ecosystem include:

- 1. Bringing more international tennis to South Africa:** TSA was recently awarded a prestigious ITF Junior Grade A event for 2019 onwards. This is a massive coup for South Africa because there are currently only five Grade A events in the world – for example: The Orange Bowl in the USA is a Junior Grade A event. A date and venue announcement will be made early next year, but it is set for late September – following on from the Curro ITFs in Stellenbosch. Special thanks must be given to our Vice-President and President for securing us this event.
- 2. Providing more financial support for our emerging players:** Something which has flown beneath the radar, but which has recently come into effect is the Growthpoint Thrive Fund. Thanks to the generous support of our headline sponsor, Growthpoint Properties, 12 junior high-performance black players (6 boys and 6 girls) have started receiving some financial assistance. The first funding cycle runs from November 2018 to the end of June 2019.
- 3. Creating more sustainable opportunities for black and/or female coaches:** The BNP Paribas Coaches Mentorship programme, which launched in 2018, returns in 2019 and, thanks to an increased investment from BNP Paribas, will double in size in year two.

Registered coaches in SA.

2016: 635.
2017: 670.
2018: 749.

Source: TSA
Coaching
Department.

Life's a beach:

It will surprise many reading this letter, but beach tennis is a key part of our plan to develop our tennis ecosystem. Currently underway, in the Eastern and Western Cape, is the KIA Summer Slam beach tennis tour – a series of ITF

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sanctioned events. Beach tennis may appear, to many within the tennis community, to be a frivolous and light-weight form of tennis, but we believe it is a powerful vehicle for introducing our sport to non-tennis players.

I often use a simple example – if you were to place a child, who has never played tennis before, in front of a classic hard court and a beach tennis court, respectively, and then were to ask him or her to choose - which do you think the youngster will gravitate towards first? Ten times out of ten the choice is beach tennis.

In the words of Tony Robbins – *“If you do what you’ve always done, you will get what you’ve always gotten.”* Simply put, we need to evolve and embrace new ideas and concepts, if we are to grow. This beach tennis project may be a glorious success, or it may be a glorious failure, but one thing I can guarantee you is that it will be glorious!

The KIA Summer Slam – beach tennis tour.

The final event of the KIA Summer Slam – in Plettenberg Bay – is, from a prize money perspective, one of the five richest beach tennis tournaments in the world.

Seniors tennis:

I don't often write about seniors (veterans) tennis in these letters and in hindsight this partly reflects the arms-length relationship seniors tennis has historically had with TSA. This is set to change in the new year. Indeed 2019 will see Seniors tennis working far more closely with the TSA office and becoming a fully integrated department within the Federation. A key area of seniors tennis that the TSA office – especially myself – will be getting actively involved in is the 30-45 age group. This is a critical demographic for tennis because:

1. Many in this age group are in, or are about to move into, business decision making positions. For obvious (sponsorship) reasons we need them to look favourably on tennis.
2. Research shows us that a child is more likely to play tennis if their parent/s play tennis. This age group are parents of young children or are likely to have children shortly.

This age group has different needs to seniors players aged 55 and above. Time, family and work pressures mean that leave days and flexibility, rather than finance, tend to be key drivers. A new 30-45 age group committee has now been created - specifically tasked with looking after the needs of this group.

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Indeed, several tournament enhancements for the 30-45s are already planned – starting with the Gauteng East Seniors event in early 2019.

New focus areas for 2019:

Over the last two years we have taken the deliberate decision not to try and tackle every challenge at once, but rather focus on a select few priorities. I respect this approach may be frustrating to some of you, but I firmly believe that focus is the only way to deliver meaningful progress.

However, every year we try and do a bit more - which brings me onto some of our focus areas for 2019:

1. **Growing participation:** Investing in schools tennis.
2. **Raising awareness:** Bringing high profile international tennis to SA.
3. **Delivering more value:** Launching a new membership proposition that delivers greater value for players and coaches alike.

There are some exciting developments in the pipeline, for all three of these areas, so watch this space....

In conclusion:

Finally – a special festive season thank you to the many volunteers 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.

P.S.

Oh, and one more thing – if all goes to plan then 2019 could be the year of **clay courts in South Africa**....look out for some exciting news in the new year.

As ever please send your feedback and constructive criticism directly to me at: richard@tennissa.co.za. For example - do you have any ideas to help rejuvenate rural tennis? I can't reply to all suggestions received, but I do read all of them.

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