

# REVIEW OF 2019 ESRA OPEN RACQUETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 2019 edition of the ESRA Open Racquetball Championships, played out at the totally refurbished Westerfolds Bayswater Squash and Racquetball Centre, was highlighted by the capacity field in the Men's Open event, although not surprisingly the King of Racquetball Cam White claimed the title, plus extended his unbeaten record into its nineteenth year, 2018 National Grand Prix Circuit Champion Sue Dunlop going one better this year in this event and annexing the Women's Open Crown, plus Brandon Smits, Jessica and Jacqui Wilcock winning both the singles and doubles events in their respective grades.

## SINGLES EVENTS – SPECIAL PRESENTER – IAN CHALMERS

### MEN'S OPEN



*L-R: Matt Bayley (Plate Winner), Cam White, Garry Pedersen, Steve Andrewartha & Ryan McCarter*

With the capacity field all competitors realised that they were going to have a tough day at the office, as the winner would have to win at least four gruelling matches to come away with the major share of the prize money on offer.

After dispatching local hope Rob Hay, top seeded White faced a quarter final encounter with five times Australian Open champion and regarded as the best stroke maker in the sport, Geoff Wilcock. Although Wilcock displayed his full array of tricks and stretched White to the limit in the second game, the King prevailed, 21/7, 22/20, and moved into what proved to be an enthralling semi-final against Westerfolds Bayswater fifth seeded Ryan McCarter, who had overwhelmed 2018 National GP Circuit Champion Peter French, 21/6, 21/13, in their quarter final encounter.

It was point for point between White and McCarter in the first game, before White kicked up a gear near the end to claim it 21/17, then was always on top in the second against the game McCarter to take it 21/12.

Whilst top seeded White was proving impregnable in the top half of the draw, perennial finalists second seeded Garry Pedersen and third seeded Steve Andrewartha were close to their best form cutting a swathe through the bottom half, with Pedersen toppling Wagga's Craig Ambler, 21/14, 21/10, and Andrewartha overcoming Lilydale's relative newcomer to racquetball Nathan Lindner, 21/19, 21/12, in their respective quarter final encounters, to set up another "war of attrition" semi-final to decide who would have the next opportunity to dethrone The King.

Pedersen took control early and never relinquished his lead against the "Never Say Die" Andrewartha, taking it out 21/16, 21/11, to advance to the final stanza, but it was White's all court game, incorporating his impeccable length and width, plus invoking his incredible short game, which once again took him to victory, and consigning the ultra-consistent Pedersen to the runners-up position, where he has finished in seven out of the past eight Victorian GP Circuit events that he has competed in.

Unfortunately, Andrewartha had to forfeit his match to decide 3<sup>rd</sup> and fourth placing against Ryan McCarter.

## WOMEN'S OPEN



Although injury and unavailability took its toll on player numbers for this event, the field did contain 2018 National Grand Prix Circuit Champion Sue Dunlop, who last year was runner – up to Judy Wright in this event, but this year went one better and in the final defeated former junior squash champion Aeron Skidmore, 21/7, 21/9.

To reach the final Skidmore held on against Mulgrave's Sylvia Tiet, winning 22/20, 5/21, 21/14.

*L-R: Sue Dunlop, Sylvia Tiet.*

## A GRADE

Following his domination of A Grade events in 2018, Matt Bayley was kindly escorted into the Men's Open ranks for this year, leaving what looked on paper a wide open A Grade field, although very little was known on how Westerfold's James Long would perform having not played in a GP singles event for over eighteen months.

Long ended up being the event's wildcard, defeating all the other four players in their five-man round robin, each match being two games to 21 points with points won determining the result, including top seeded Craig Royale – Young, 42 to 32 points, and third seeded Jamie Evans, 41 to 36 points.



*L-R: James Long, Jamie Evans, Steve Theologou*

Evans claimed second position when he narrowly defeated 2018 Victorian B Grade GP Circuit Champion Steve Theologou in the final match for the day, 38 to 36 points.

## B GRADE



*L-R: Brandon Smits, Blake Caspersz*



*Matt Pritchard*

A very even field of seven faced the starter for this event with most interest focussing on Lakes Entrance's Brandon Smits, who was returning to the tournament circuit after a break of five years.

Well it did not take long for Smits to demonstrate that he is going create havoc in B Grade this year, removing seventh seeded and 2018 Victorian C Grade GP Champion Anthony Dzioba, in the quarters in straight games, and then third seeded Sam Koper in a tough semi-final encounter, 21/11, 15/21, 21/14.

In the top half of the draw was top seeded and 2018 B Grade GP runner-up Blake Caspersz, who took out fifth seeded Leo Dounis 21/16, 22/20, to reach the final stanza, but it was Smits who took control of this match early and never relinquished his lead to take it out, 21/11, 21/14.

### C GRADE



*Robert Collins*



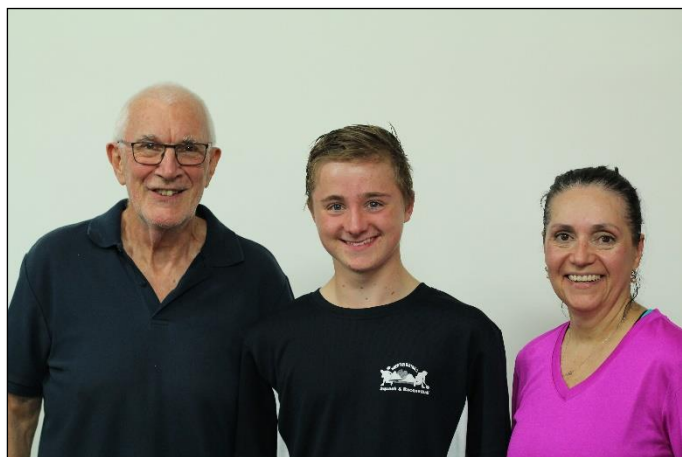
*L-R: Phil Alger (Presenter), Shaun Quinn*

The unknown quantity in this event was Mountain District's Robert Collins who was making his GP debut and was pitted against several of the game's stalwarts.

Collins in fact went all the way, overcoming sixth seeded Zac Thomas in the quarters in straight games, second seeded Michael Smits, 21/18, 17/21, 21/9 at the semi-final stage, then Wangaratta's Shaun Quinn, in the final, 21/15, 21/7.

To reach the final climax Quinn had come from a game down to oust top seeded Ross Falconer, 21/22, 21/10, 21/17, and fifth seeded Denise Skidmore, 21/14, 21/13.

### D GRADE



*L-R: Nelson Howard, Elsabe Du Plooy (Plate Winner)*

This event contained our indefatigable "Godmother" of the sport, Wangaratta's Heather Meldrum, five GP debutants, a sprinkling of players rising through the ranks, plus Dromana's fifteen-year-old Nelson Howard.

In the end it was Howard who stole the show, coming from a game down to overcome one of the tournaments sponsors, Daniel Jones, Owner of Bakers Delight Wantirna, in the final stanza, 14/21, 21/14, 21/2.

In their respective semi-finals, both finalists literally fell over line against their opponents, with Howard defeating Leanne Haley, 21/14, 19/21, 21/17, and Jones edging out Paul Johnson, 22/20, 21/22, 21/19.

## E/F GRADE



L-R: Tony Holland, Jacqui Wilcock



Jessica Wilcock

This was a combined event with the Wilcock sisters, Jessica and Jacqui, featuring along with Knox City Councillor, Tony Holland. Jacqui Wilcock claimed the E Grade title, defeating Holland, 21/17, 21/13, with Jessica being awarded the F Grade crown.

SINGLES		
Grade	Winner	Runner-Up
<b>Men's Open</b>	Cam White	Garry Pedersen
<b>Women's Open</b>	Sue Dunlop	Aeron Skidmore
<b>A</b>	James Long	Jamie Evans
<b>B</b>	Brandon Smits	Blake Caspersz
<b>C</b>	Robert Collins	Shaun Quinn
<b>D</b>	Nelson Howard	Daniel Jones
<b>E</b>	Jacqui Wilcock	Tony Holland
<b>F</b>	Jessica Wilcock	None

DOUBLES		
Grade	Winner	Runner-Up
<b>Open</b>	S. Andrewartha/G. Wilcock	C. Stevenson/D. O'Donnell
<b>A</b>	S.Tiet/J.Smith	M. Horvat/C. Mihan
<b>B</b>	B. Smits/S. Quinn	None
<b>C</b>	P. Swan/T. McFarlane	S. Fry/M. Smits
<b>D</b>	M. Lane/G. Dowling	D. Nemes/R. DeMeester
<b>E</b>	Jacqui & Jessica Wilcock	

**DOUBLES EVENTS – SPECIAL PRESENTER – PHIL ALGER**



*Open - L-R: Charlie Stevenson, Steve Andrewartha, Geoff Wilcock, Darren O'Donnell*



*A Grade - L-R: Marcus Horvat, Sylvia Tiet, Justin Smith, Chris Mihan*

*B Grade - L-R: Brandon Smits, Shaun Quinn*



*C Grade - L-R: Terry McFarlane, Paul Swan, Michael Smits, Steve Fry*



*D Grade - L-R: Richard DeMeester, Mark Lane*



*E Grade - L-R: Jacqui & Jessica Wilcock*

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Photos: Courtesy of Jodi Wilkinson