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## Another open letter to the SA tennis community.

*- The journey is just as important as the destination -*

It has been quite a while since the last update and the reason for that is quite simple - It has been busy....very busy. There is much going on, perhaps too much, but we are pushing hard because, like all of you, we want to see constant improvements in our tennis.

I have no doubt that some of you feel we are not progressing quickly enough. However, I must say that I do find it fascinating that the expectancy levels within our tennis community have grown exponentially in the last 18 months. Maybe it is because we live in a quick-fix society where instant gratification is seen as a right and not a privilege.

I have, to an extent, fallen into that trap in recent months and have become frustrated by the glacial progress in some areas. However - I need to remind myself that often the journey is just as important as the destination.....and we are on a long journey.

So, let me update you on our journey in more detail.

### Growthpoint Junior Nationals:

It is a great story for TSA that we had our biggest field in over a decade this year, but the event has now become too big to manage, especially when rain affects the schedule. In addition, due to the sheer number of courts

#### **A few recent highlights:**

1. Fed Cup promotion.
2. The biggest junior national field in a decade....and then it rained!
3. Securing two new commercial partners in the form of BNP Paribas and Wiphold.
4. The first ever series of ITF beach tennis tournaments in SA....in Gauteng nogal!
5. The launch of our TSA Coaches Mentorship Programme.

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required, Bloemfontein is now the only viable host venue. As a result, we are considering a radical over-haul of the event for 2019.

A few of the strategic questions we are wrestling with – include:

- Positioning of the event? Is it high-performance or mass participation?
- Time of year?
- Should it be played at altitude or at sea level?

Meanwhile, some of the changes being debated right now include:

1. Reducing the field and making it more of a performance event.
2. Keeping the draw sizes as is and rather having separate age group nationals at different times of the year – e.g. an U12/U14 nationals and a U16/U18 nationals

I am very interested in 'crowdsourcing' some views on the matter, so please feel free to send your ideas on how we could redesign Junior Nationals to [info@tennissa.co.za](mailto:info@tennissa.co.za).

## Let's talk about gossip!

A few comments on the tennis gossip grapevine. It will always be there, however, I would actively encourage anyone who has a concern to rather contact me (or anyone else at TSA) - rather than to speculate.

An example - I recently heard talk (from a few sources) that some parents, players and coaches believe that our recent TSA junior high-performance camp in Stellenbosch cost R500 000 for 2.5 days.....To put it bluntly - If we were spending R500 000 (or anywhere close to that) on a weekend camp then I deserve to be fired as CEO of TSA with immediate effect!

TSA will continue to grow our investment in our junior structures and will always be unapologetic about that, but we will always try to do it wisely and prudently. We have worked hard to stabilise the finances of the Federation over the last year and a half and we will not do anything to jeopardise that.

A story to demonstrate my attitude on how TSA should be spending its money.....I will be at Wimbledon for a few days during the second week – for several interesting meetings and a bit of tennis of course! I am very grateful to be able to be receiving accreditation, via TSA, but that is the extent of the Federation's contribution to my trip.

I have personally paid for my own flights, accommodation and daily expenses in London. I am not telling you this to try and portray myself as a

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wonderful guy (indeed my partner, the lovely Sacha, reminds me daily that I have my fair share of faults), but rather to demonstrate my belief that all our available funds need to be invested back into our structures and players.....and not used to pay for administrators to travel overseas.

Our President, although he does not make it public knowledge, also does the same and pays for all of his own travel and accommodation, while on TSA business.

## Investing in our structures:

Our recent partnership with Wiphold, to support female high-performance tennis, has caused quite a stir. The sponsorship sees Wiphold support three new initiatives:

1. A travelling squad of six female players in the under 16 age group, who will play selected Junior ITF events in Africa.
2. An annual Next Gen camp and tournament for up to 32 of the country's emerging young female players.
3. A high-performance squad of eight players, which will act as a feeder into the Fed Cup team.

### **Rene Plant on the Wiphold Next Gen Camp:**

"It was an amazing four days of camaraderie off the court and a hard work ethic on it. The fitness and mental toughness sessions were of great value and the tournament was fiercely competitive but played in an excellent spirit."

Our U16 squad launches shortly and we have just completed our first ever Wiphold Next Gen camp – ably led and directed by Fed Cup Captain, Rene Plant. The Wiphold project is a fantastic female oriented initiative and one that will grow in the coming years.

Speaking of camps, and as mentioned above, we also recently held our latest junior national squad camp in Stellenbosch. For all you coaches out there - the objective of these camps is not to replace or interfere with the personal programmes of individual players, nor to change their technique, but rather to offer a different perspective and support where we can.

For example - two things that have really struck home is the worrying state of fitness and conditioning amongst our junior players, as well as the limited focus on mental toughness and mental training. We believe we can provide some support in those two areas.

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As a result, at our camps we offer physical testing and benchmarking for each player, using some of the best sports scientists in the country. This information is then shared with individual coaches and parents. Meanwhile - at our Stellenbosch camp, a lot of time was spent on the mental side of the game.

The above concerns raised are of course generalisations and do not apply to every junior player, but if I was a parent I would be enquiring with my child's coach, as to how much time is being spent on these important facets of the game.

## Registered Coaches:

Which brings us onto coaches....

What follows is a website link to our database of registered coaches in South Africa: <http://www.tennissa.co.za/w/coaches/coaches-listed-alphabetically>

Once again, if I was a tennis parent I would be checking to see if my child's coach is on the list. If not – I would be asking them why not?

Maybe they have valid reasons for not registering, but my question is why do they not wish to be accredited and recognised by their governing body? True, our system needs plenty of improvement – I would be the first to admit that – but there is a basic ethical principle that applies here.

### **Did you know?**

Registered coaches in South Africa receive significant discounts on Lotto Sport Italia clothing, Rudy Project eye wear and High 5 Nutrition Products.

For more information contact:  
[coaching@tennissa.co.za](mailto:coaching@tennissa.co.za).

P.S. Coaches – if you are registered and somehow don't appear on the list please contact [coaching@tennissa.co.za](mailto:coaching@tennissa.co.za).....not me!

## Transforming and growing tennis:

Following a comprehensive tender process, Atteridgeville in Tshwane has been selected to host the latest Growthpoint Development Centre. The Eastern Cape is the next focus area for a Growthpoint Development Centre. Further to that a TSA team has identified a preferred venue in the Province, but this can only be confirmed once we have fully engaged with local government regarding facility upgrades.

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A hidden jewel within our structures is the eThekweni tennis development programme. They are doing some fantastic work down in Durban and must be complimented for their dedication and hard work.

Finally - I am very excited about the potential of our new BNP Paribas Coaches Mentorship Programme. More details on the programme can be found via the following link: <https://www.tennissa.co.za/w/blog/new-bnp-paribas-partnership-announced>

### In the pipeline:

So, what else are we up to? A fair bit...but my typing hand is growing sore, so I will mention three and then quickly wrap up this newsletter....

1. **Clubs:** Growthpoint Top Guns will be returning later this year. The big enhancement (inspired by feedback received from clubs and players) is the creation of A and B divisions for the 2018/19 event.
2. **Schools:** We are busy evaluating a very interesting opportunity to launch a national high-schools tennis championship for the 2019 academic year. There is much work still to be done on this project, but if it comes off then it will massively raise the profile of high schools tennis in South Africa.
3. **Membership:** We are also busy over-hauling our membership proposition. Our membership tiers (tournament v social v scholar v seniors) are far too confusing and we do not offer enough value to our members. The aim is to re-launch this, before the end of 2018 and we are confident that players, provinces and clubs alike will see massive improvements....so watch this space.

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**Do you have some ideas about how we can improve and grow the sport in South Africa? If so, please contact me via:**

**[richard@tennissa.co.za](mailto:richard@tennissa.co.za)**



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