

Squash Wellington AGM – Chairperson’s Report 2016

As they say “time flies when you’re having fun” and as having fun is a key part of playing squash, it’s no surprise that another year of squash has passed by and we’re starting the 2017 season.

I would like to be able to report that our sport is thriving, that our player numbers are growing steadily, and our clubs are all in a robust and sustainable financial position. Unfortunately, this is not the case and whilst it would be premature to say that our sport is in crisis I believe it is fair to say that action is required if we are to avoid this happening.

Squash NZ’s strategic plan set the goal of growing player numbers by 1,000 per year over a five-year period. Last year they went back by 1,000 so the target for this year is now 2,000 new players. It is unlikely that this will be achieved.

Most clubs lack volunteer numbers, with most of the work being undertaken by a small number of club members who over time simply become exhausted. Things slip, and before we know it important maintenance hasn’t been done, events aren’t held and we find that we no longer have the resources to catch these things up.

I know that this doesn’t apply to every club (after all they are all different). Some clubs are doing well but I wonder how sustainable this is. Research undertaken by Sport NZ revealed that aside from stand-up paddle-boarding every other sport either went backwards or just held their own in terms of player numbers. Squash in the UK lost 100,000 players last year so the issues we face are not isolated to New Zealand.

I don’t presume to even begin to know what the answers to these issues are, and doubt whether there is a “silver bullet” but I do believe that change is needed, and soon.

It was for this reason that at the national forum and Squash NZ AGM in early December last year, Squash Wellington tabled a remit proposing the adoption of a unitary delivery model. The objective of this remit was to simplify the organisational structure of squash in New Zealand, to make better use of our very limited resources (both people & finances) and improve and indeed ensure that we are delivering our

sport so that it meets the needs and expectations of players across the board, including at grass roots level.

This resulted in a full morning workshop on this topic facilitated by David Hawes from Squash Canterbury and myself. It was clear that the challenges we face apply across the country. The upshot of this was that we boiled down the issues to three big things:

1. A disconnect between Squash NZ, the Districts & Clubs from a planning & delivery perspective
2. A lack of resilience
3. Lack of growth in participation

Since the forum a working group has been set up to:

- Review the current organisational structure and function of squash in New Zealand and how organisations work together. Compare this with other sports and other squash playing countries and jurisdictions.
- Identify any disconnects that exist between SNZ, districts and clubs
- Review the effectiveness of Memoranda of Understanding between SNZ and the Districts, recommending changes if required: investigate options for MOA's between districts and clubs.
- Develop a proposal to establish coordinated planning cycles across the country.
- Shortlist options for a sustainable structure, including analysis, that will optimally deliver the annual plans.
- Review current use of, and continuity plans for funding & resources (financial and people) and identify opportunities for improvements.
- Establish what succession planning is carried out at all levels of the sport and recommend best practice to be applied.
- Review existing market research to understand market needs in relation to squash.
- Identify how the actions from 1 and 2 above will affect participation growth and provide recommendations, including analysis, to be adopted by SNZ, districts and clubs that will increase participation.

The working group will be required to report back to the SNZ and Districts by 31 May, 2017 with draft recommendations for feedback. Final recommendations to be provided by 15 June 2017

All I can say at this point is “watch this space”.

For our part the board have prepared a draft "Statement of Strategic Intent 2017 - 2021 which you should have received along with the rest of the documents for the AGM. We would appreciate any input and ideas that any of you may have to this and the working group. There are no dumb ideas, and in fact I think the more left field we get the more likely we are to come up with some smart solutions.

So, to the year in retrospect:

We've had some good results on the court – from our juniors right through to our masters:

Abby Palmer & Jamie Oakley won the Wellington Junior Open, Scott Galloway won the NZ under 19 title and hopefully next year will be moving on to PSA events as a senior. Kobe Fleming was a member of the NZ secondary schools team that beat Australia in the trans Tasman competition, whilst Kobe, Charlotte & Diana Galloway and Campbell Webster all made national development squads. The Wellington Open was won by Evan Williams and Becky Barnett, and Emma Millar was selected for the NZ Women's team. The Wellington Masters was won by Willie Bicknell & Debs Dunbar, and Sam Atkins won his first national masters title taking out the 35-39 age group.

The District superchamps is still doing well both from a participation numbers perspective and from the spirit in which it is played. Hard out on the court, and social off it. Unfortunately, of our Wellington teams only our Thorndon B grade men made it to the final at the nationals.

I know that many of you have also achieved at a personal level so congratulations to all of you and apologies to anyone I haven't mentioned. I encourage you all to keep trying, because if you're like me, all you have to do is outlast everyone, wait for someone to get injured, and or play for another district and you could be in for a shot at a title!

On a more sobering note, we almost lost Ray Leevey at the NZ Masters games in Whanganui and it was only the action taken by the people on the scene to start CPR immediately that saved Ray. Being there at the time really brought home to me the need for each and every one of us to learn basic resuscitation and for clubs to make a defibrillator a number one priority.

I would like this opportunity to thank the rest of the team and the other board members: Dayne Far, John Kirkup, Barry Ryan, and Brad Watts for their contribution.

We have had some great discussions and had to handle some tricky situations and I think that the variety of opinion has ensured that the decisions reached have been the right ones.

Thanks to Shane Johnston for his work on our finances. Shane makes some very important observations in the financial report, particularly in relation to our sources of funding which are an on-going challenge as less money becomes available each year – something that is exacerbated by the natural disasters that have struck in recent years. Shanes comments link directly to the issue of resilience and sustainability I mentioned earlier, so I encourage you all to read these and provide us with your views on this issue.

To the many volunteers, committee members, players, coaches and referees who give up their time to support and promote the game of squash – thank you.

Tony Nelson – you are a legend. For many years now you’ve kept our senior interclub competitions running smoothly. That’s in spite of people like me putting teams in late or adding players that screw up the seedings. Thanks Tony for your patience. Simon Yorker has also done an absolutely outstanding job with Junior Interclub and I think the new format is proving to be a hit. I’d also like to give a plug here for Simon’s tournament control app. If you haven’t used it; I recommend that you do.

A big thanks to our convenors: Gareth Fleming - Junior Convenor, Dru Reid – Referees Convenor and Willie Bicknell Team Wellington Convenor (and also Wellington Masters when I defected to Auckland).

All of you are the people that make a difference; and frankly without your efforts we would be struggling.

Our thanks also go to our funding partners and sponsors, including: The Infinity Foundation, Lion Foundation, New Zealand Community Trust, Pelorus Trust, Pub Charity, Waiwhetu Distributors, A-Z Flooring.

And of course there’s Bickers. I don’t think that there’s much that I can say about and thanks I can give to Willie that hasn’t been said by all the chair-people that have preceded me. But, in the course of the last couple of years I’ve come to learn how absolutely passionate Willie is about squash. I’ve learnt never to ring Willie expecting a 5 minute conversation as they invariably morph into an hour as we try to solve the challenges for squash between us. On a number of occasions, I’ve rung Bickers as I’ve left Hutt Park after work and then sat parked in my garage in Island Bay for another 15 minutes as we carried on our conversation. Willie, I totally love and respect your

passion and commitment. This coupled with your knowledge of the game & connections to the people within it throughout the country has been absolutely invaluable to me as I've endeavoured to interact with Squash NZ and the other districts. We really could use a hundred more like you.

Finally, I'm really pleased to see that we have some new people putting their hands up to come on to the board this year. We need all the help we can get as we all have other commitments (both planned and unplanned) that from time to time prevent us from contributing as fully as we'd like to.

I look forward to the year ahead optimistic that we will meet the challenges to our sport head on, but at the same time being realistic about what we can achieve to make it more accessible, sustainable and above all, just as much, if not more fun than it is now.



Warren Hall
Chairperson
Squash Wellington

