

IN THE SWING

Squash Wellington Newsletter



From the Chair

Kia ora koutou and welcome to our 10th edition of In the SWing. WOW, 10th edition in what has been an even more disruptive season than the last. Despite that, so much has happened across many of our clubs and that's not just tournament wise. I would like to acknowledge all the amazing volunteers who have continued to drive club initiatives that have enabled clubs to grow their membership bases despite COVID, again!

This month we had quite a bit to celebrate, especially off the back of another fantastic awards evening where we celebrated excellence at an individual, team and club level. We had a fantastic turn out, over 85 people in attendance, thank you for making it an enjoyable night. Good luck to our district winners who qualified for National Awards this year. They are Club of the Year - Khandallah, Volunteer of the Year - Kath Greenhough and Coach of the Year - Matt Green.

As we go to print the districts around NZ learned what their traffic light status would be from Friday and as expected Wellington moves into 'Orange'. While a high-level view of this has been shared directly from Squash New Zealand, more detail is expected over the coming days so watch this space. We'll share this via email and social when it comes to hand.

2021 WELLINGTON JUNIOR OPEN

The month started off with the 2021 Wellington Junior Open Championship. It was great to be able to run the tournament after two previous date changes. There was great representation across most of our clubs as well as visitors from Hawkes Bay and Marlborough.

The matches across the divisions didn't disappoint with quality battles, including some epic rallies, showcasing the amazing talent in our junior space.

We crowned new champions with home girl, Maiden-Lee Coe (2) defeating Keira Thompson (3) and taking the honors for the Girls Open. In the Boys Open, home boy and Wellington number 1 Junior, Oliver Dunbar (2) battled it out with Canterbury number 1 Tom Marshall (1). In a thrilling 4 setter it was Tom who took the victory on this occasion. Congratulations Maiden-Lee and Tom.



Congratulations to all the winners and players across all the divisions.

Big thank you to Chris McKenzie, Nicki Gibbs and the team at Kāpiti Squash Club for putting on a wonderful tournament this weekend. Not one but two!

We are so lucky to be able to still run tournaments and especially wonderful to give all the juniors a tournament despite all the disruptions, especially the cancellation of NZ Junior Nationals.

WELLINGTON MASTERS WRAPUP

Congratulations to the Masters of Masters Series winners, Riana Roussouw and Kent Hawkins. A fiercely competitive series where there was no more than 6 points between 1st and 3rd place which shows how extremely close it was.

Played over a series of 6 tournaments with the best of 5 determining the final scores, the series was well received.

Thank you to the following people who helped bring our Masters initiatives to life this season.

- MoM Series Sponsor, Richie Hoare of TotalFlow Plumbing
- Skillsoft Digital, Kath Greenhough for sponsorship of the Skillsoft Wellington Masters Tournament
- Louise and Chris Sinclair for generous donation of the trophies for the MoM series and Masters Interclub. Look out for the interclub trophy next season.
- Masters working group for your contribution to the initiatives and driving these within your clubs.
- All MoM series host clubs and members for the fantastic effort to make the weekends fun for all involved including the generous rolling kai provided.

Lastly, a huge thank you to our Masters Convener, Bryan Smith. Your drive, enthusiasm and dedication to progressing these initiatives has been invaluable and appreciated by all. Whakawhetai koe.

FEATURE ARTICLE: DEEP DIVE* WITH MATT GREEN

Our feature writer Catharine Sayer persuades Squash Wellington's Coach of the Year 2021 to take a break from polishing trophies for a telephone discussion on all things squash.

**Disclaimer - deep diving not endorsed by Matt Green Squash or Squash Wellington; hurt, injury, embarrassment and hilarity at your expense may follow. Coaching rates for movement and ghosting sessions available on request.*

Matt comes in so many guises – family man, club coach, youth worker, performance coach, A-grade player, masters' squad leader – that it's difficult to know where to start. Eventually we settle on friendly banter about him photobombing the Khandallah crew at the Squash Wellington awards. Turns out neither he nor the Khandallah members gave it a moment's thought, since his hours putting players through their paces there means he's practically part of the furniture.

In truth, Matt doesn't need to photobomb any shots, being a local star in his own right after winning Men's Masters player of the year two years on the bounce and taking the top coaching bauble. He's not keen to talk about trophies and awards, instead preferring to give insights into aspects of the game and life that make him tick.

As we talk, his enthusiasm for the game shines out. While there are references to squash's heyday and boom years of the 1980s, there's no wistful nostalgia or a harking back to a time when things were done better. Indeed, he's quick to point out current successes and give credit to the squash community. He's a relentless optimist, peppering his speech with phrases such as "fantastic", "passion" and "growth potential" and exuding an aura of vitality.

Squash flirt

Proud to play for Tawa who he credits for his warm welcome onto the district squash scene some 3 years ago, Matt is a self-confessed squash flirt, sharing his passion for the sport as a regular coach at Tawa, Khandallah and Red Star and as a competitor in district tournaments and for the Wellington senior and masters' representative teams.



Bargain hunter

There's a strong sense that what's lurking in his psyche is a desire to repay others' investments into him. Growing up on the Isle of Wight off Britain's south coast, he became hooked from the moment his father thrust a racquet into his 12-year-old hands.

By 15, a local coach impressed with the potential of Matt and his squash buddies offered a deal most youths would readily refuse – free nightly coaching provided they turn up without fail. Miss a session and the deal would be off. Suffice to say a bargain was struck, and that one coach's investment not only led to county representation for Hampshire at junior and senior levels, but left a deep impression about the value of having a coach with steadfast belief in one's capabilities.

Passion

Keeping the deal wasn't purely fuelled by principles of integrity and commitment; while those traits are undoubtedly there, it's obvious that a healthy dose of passion for squash was involved. He laughs about his band of "court rats" scurrying to hit shots in the dark after running out of tokens for the lights and I can't help but laugh too, not at their senseless devotion, but at how those token-fed light meters - seemingly ancient relics to Matt - are still found at a few New Zealand country courts.

When we run through the various roles he's held in and out of squash, a common theme of striving to get the best out of people emerges that makes his transition from hardworking junior to accomplished senior to full-time coach unsurprising.

Let's not get Matt wrong, the competitive juices still flow freely and Matt seems to maintain his A-grade status with ease. Indeed, two of his proudest squash memories are of playing: getting to the British O35 club championships finals with Bexley and of representing the Isle of Wight at the Island Games. Once I hear that these games are an exclusive version of the Olympics for coastal types, I immediately start to mentally compile Island Bay's hosting bid. Nevertheless, the people skills he's gained from involvement in social sector roles, such as youth worker, homeless advisor, church leader and festival organiser contribute heavily to his success as a coach.

Whipping-boy

While there have been stints of full-time coaching since Hampshire rep days, Matt's taste for it returned after he became what he self-deprecatingly refers to as the "whipping-boy" of the Bexley club's elite coaching team. This large, southeast London club qualifies regularly for the top-tier British "PSL" inter-club competition, featuring Europe-based pros and the up-and-coming British talent on its playing rosters.

The whipping-boy role involved Matt, on his day off from the day job, hitting with pros in drill sessions and practice matches. It wasn't entirely selfless: not only did the sessions keep Matt's own skills sharp and earn him the odd game as a fill-in, it was the perfect cover for quiet observation as to how the player-coach (Ben Ford) went about his business.

Rewards and challenges

When quizzed about the most rewarding facet of coaching, Matt is reflective. He chooses not to reach for the obvious success stories of his top player and multi-year supreme player of the district, Evan Williams, who has experienced consecutive stellar seasons. Instead, he speaks of his thrill in witnessing transformation at any level of the game, offering up the example of a beginner previously unable to hit a ball being able to return a feed five times in a row.

When pressed on the rewarding aspects of coaching a pro, the example is more technical: witnessing the perfect execution of an agreed pattern of play spins Matt's wheels, despite no-one but him and his charge appreciating the collaboration and effort expended in the preparation of that fleeting moment.

I can practically see Matt's eyes light up as he fills me in on the groundwork for this kind of input - technical analysis of the pro squash game and opponents' strengths and weaknesses. We talk about a shared love of watching squash as fans, and the players on the circuit that excite us, but Matt clearly relishes - and has some knack for - taking the fan experience much further by breaking down the action into its shot and movement combinations.

Grassroots squash

Being a coach, player and parent, we inevitably riff on the "state of the game" theme and here Matt is careful to qualify his thoughts as "inexpert" and "from a limited sideline perspective" despite reluctantly agreeing with my observation that his exposure to all levels of the game is far from limited.

Matt notes how courts at leisure centres and private gyms are in decline in the UK, victim of council- or owner-led conversions into more lucrative alternatives but that the club scene – the New Zealand model we're familiar with – is thriving. This he puts down to the passion and drive of club committees and Matt talks with admiration, reverence even, of the spirit and energy of events pulled off by highly motivated volunteers.

The best clubs, he considers, whether in Egypt, New Zealand or the UK are able to help beginners, regulars and pros alike feel like they belong, can compete and can improve and Bexley is a shining example of this. There are plenty of New Zealand examples that come to mind also. Anything, he says, that is alive grows, and squash is no exception, so we should be alert for, nurture and celebrate signs of growth in our clubs.

Being familiar with UK squash centres of excellence and a frequent visitor to the new Hutt City premises, it's no surprise that Matt identifies district facilities as generally in need of some TLC. However, he still manages to surprise by not advocating for major capital investment. Instead, he urges clubs to think through the eyes of a first-time visitor. Noticeboards with out-of-date content are a particular bugbear and at this point I flinch and make a mental note to attend to my own club's display of sponsors' logos, most of which have long ceased business. It's the little things, people.

Growth opportunities

Our wee detour into the less shiny aspects of our sport is quickly over as we move onto avenues for local growth. Here Matt's positivity and solutions-focus comes to the fore by diving into market growth opportunities, pointing out that integration with school sport is yet to be systematically tackled. "Wouldn't it be great," Matt muses, "if every club adopted as its mission that no child in its catchment leaves primary school without having tried squash?" Yes Matt, indeed it would. He observes that a child's formative years for picking a few sports to run with under the 'balance is best' mantra are in the later years of primary school, but it's rare for squash to get a decent look-in at that stage.

And there's more – he's thinking big. "Rather than leave each club to figure it out, there's an opportunity here for a national programme to be devised, rolled out locally, and with the spin-off benefit of ticking off national coach development objectives". It's difficult to object, the force of the proposition being compelling.



Thumbs up, New Zealand

The Bexley experience doesn't have an obvious counterpart in our district but Matt is still full of praise for other aspects of our game, in particular the women's game. To locals, our growth in women's participation may not appear significant, but to a relative newcomer, our stats are impressive. Matt remarks on the high number of women willing to play competitively for points at interclub and tournaments and while we don't have time to contemplate the reasons, it seems like a compliment to local efforts, and yet another example of Matt preferring to credit community rather than individual achievements.

Surprisingly for a country with limited media outlets, NZ also scores a 'highly commendable' rating from Matt for its media coverage of squash and minority sport. At this point I'm gearing up to graciously receive praise for New Zealand's premier squash fanzine, In the SWing, but, having already secured his 2021 Squash Wellington awards, his accolades are directed towards the more mainstream media. He's enthused about hearing radio snippets of Paul Coll's and Joelle King's international successes, wryly observing that the British Open would be lucky to score a mainstream media mention in Britain, even if won by a Brit.

Busy, busy, busy

While we could bang the squash world to rights all afternoon, reality hits when Matt reminds me that he has places to go (hint: small, sweaty boxes) as do I (large, sterile offices) and it strikes me that the boy done good: with 25 individual lessons to run a week and 4-5 group or squad events at peak season, one of us at least is living the squash dream. In Khandawa.



LOVING OUR DESIGNERS' MAHI

Those who attended our awards in person can't have helped noticing some new trophies that make Squash Wellington really stand out from the crowd in awards season.

For its new Wellington Masters Series, SW was lucky enough to be gifted bespoke artisanal trophies for presentation to the men's and women's series winners each year. The awards were designed and crafted by Louise and Chris Sinclair from the Tawa Squash Club. Made with Rimu and Purple Heart specially imported from South America and chosen for its unique natural red wine colour, the trophies are tāonga of which SW are proud to be the kaitiaki.

Chris is to be credited for the design, for which he took inspiration from yin and yang, the two complementary forces that make up all aspects and phenomena of life. Yin is a symbol of earth, femaleness, darkness, passivity, and absorption. Yang is conceived as maleness, light, activity.

Chris, whose woodcrafting skills range from joinery using recycled timber to kitchen design, was responsible for the execution. Heartfelt thanks to the Sinclairs for their generosity. Tu meke!



Not only did the series winners (Riana Roussouw of Tawa and Kent Hawkins of Hutt City) receive these beautiful trophies but they were also presented with green blazers inspired by the suave series logo cooked up by Bryan Smith and Myles Sayer and executed by Myles. While the jackets were a tongue-in-cheek nod to the prestigious US Masters golf championship, given the renown of our own Master of Masters squash series, the prize was fitting.

Many thanks to our talented designers and the Masters convenor for ensuring a really special end to the season for the masters community with these unique awards. Ka pai.



AWARDS WRAP UP

Club Khandallah	Senior Woman Maiden-Lee Coe
Team Island Bay E-grade Superchamps Men	Senior Man Evan Williams
Coach Matt Green	Junior Girl Maiden-Lee Coe
Jade Wilson Memorial Ann Smith	Junior Boy Oliver Dunbar
Volunteer Kath Greenhough	Masters Woman Nicki Gibbs
Referee Brett Simon	Masters Man Matt Green
Initiative Mana Summer League	Most Improved Sophia DeNardi-Gonzalez, Ben Jones, Kayla Scott, Harman Brar
Social Media Island Bay Facebook	Most Competitive Damien Hickling
Slazenger Cup Khandallah	Most Competitive Club Hutt City

WOMEN INTERCLUB WINNERS

Div 1 - Hutt City 1
 Div 2 - Thorndon 2
 Div 3 - Mana 1
 Div 4 - Upper Hutt TuIs
 Div 5 - Kapiti 2
 Div 6 - Upper Hutt Fantails

MEN INTERCLUB WINNERS

Div 1 - Hutt City 1
 Div 2 - Masterton 1
 Div 3 - Khandallah 1
 Div 4 - Otaki Haruatai
 Div 5 - Upper Hutt 2
 Div 6 - Thorndon 3
 Div 7 - Masterton 2
 Div 8 - Khandallah 3



COMING SOON

3 Dec - Miro Homes Wainuiomata Doubles
 7 Dec - Tawa Xmas Ham & Turkey (Fully subscribed)
 10 Dec - Red Star Doubles
 16 Dec - Mana Summer League
 16 Dec - Masterton Double Trouble Tournament
 17 Dec - Thorndon Summer Open (Fully subscribed)
 - waitlist available
 17 Dec - Festive Season Social Tournament - Club Kelburn