



## Some Thoughts on Seniors Tennis

Reg Trevaskis, President Tennis Seniors Australia  
January 2012

### Introduction

Following the completion of the successful Team and Individual championships in Perth, and also as a result of numerous points raised at the Presidents meeting and the Annual General Meeting, I thought it appropriate to set out some of my thoughts about the current “state of play” in Tennis Seniors, as well as the challenges we are facing and some suggestions and ideas as to how they may be met.

I should emphasise that although the new Executive met once in Perth, there was not the opportunity at that meeting to talk much about future plans and strategy, so these thoughts and comments are predominantly my own. Nevertheless, I feel the membership at large has a right to know what my broad thinking is as we head into a new year.

### Executive

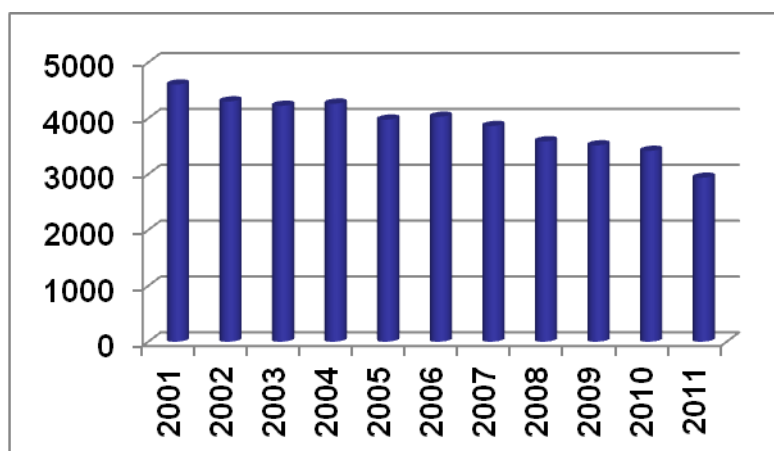
Essentially we have a new team – 3 new members and with Yvonne Stanton and I having served only one year. Notwithstanding that, I am very confident that we have the skills, determination, sense of urgency, and knowledge to make considerable progress, and I give you the assurance that we will work hard to do just that.

Running TSA is not unlike running a business – and between us we have a good knowledge of the senior tennis scene with considerable years of involvement in play and administration in various States, plus a sound range of business skills across a range of disciplines. As an international player of repute, Peter Froelich will bring a new dimension to the team.

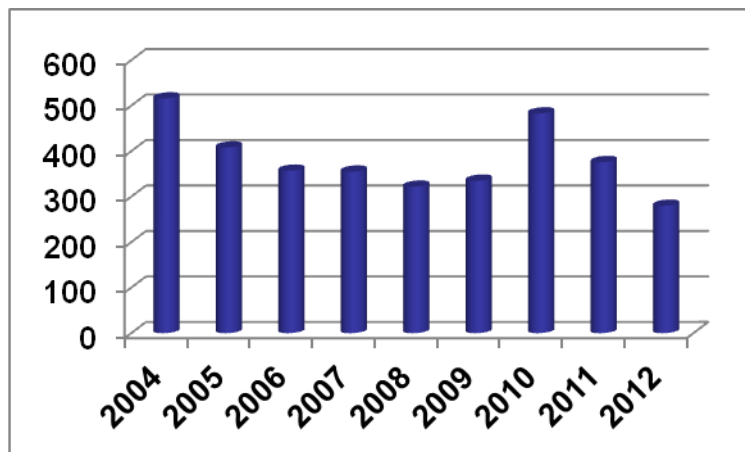
Perhaps one area where we do lack some background is in communications and marketing, particularly electronic, which is so important if we are to take the seniors tennis message to a much broader audience through the MYTENNIS database. I am working on this by trying to co-opt some knowledge and talent to the Executive, from our membership base.

### Major challenges and opportunities

Undoubtedly, our major challenge lies in arresting and reversing our declining membership and participation levels. The two bar charts below tell a very convincing story, particularly in respect of membership.



Membership numbers 2001 to 2011



**Entries to the National Championships 2004 to 2012**

In my view, our tournament players are generally well catered for with 37 ITF or National Ranking tournaments throughout the country (some still to be confirmed) The position does vary by State and it very pleasing that in WA for example, we have been able to obtain ITF sanctioning for the WA Championships in October, and there is the possibility of a further ITF event in that State. Obviously we have to ensure that ample world and national points ranking tournaments continue to be in place for our players.

However, our major growth opportunity lies at the more social level – the strata below the “competent” tournament player. Comprehensive research has shown that not only does tennis have the 4<sup>th</sup> highest “level of passion” amongst seniors, but also 76% of seniors surveyed enjoy the fun and social aspects of tennis – 18% want to play again and 70% of those have played before so presumably they have some level of competence. And we estimate that there are potentially over 60000 seniors in the various databases around the country. What exciting statistics!! We need to capitalise on this by attempting to provide as many social/Round Robin/fun orientated opportunities as possible in the various States, and not only in the major centres. I know that this is easier said than done and in some States is compounded by the lack of courts and resources, but the Member Associations (ie. Tennis NSW, Tennis Qld etc.) are willing and able to help us. That is why we need meaningful and productive Service Agreements with them.

### **Australian Teams Event**

The Australian Team Carnival (and I wish we would call it a “carnival” rather than a “championship”) also has great possibilities to attract new players. The perception out there is that “I am not good enough”. However, the increased number of divisions and expanded age groups promote the idea of playing with friends or forming teams from a region, but still playing proudly in your State colours, without detracting from the high standard of play that will continue in the top divisions. We just need to market it correctly (including perhaps formalising a billeting system and/or airfare deals if possible) – why can’t we have 150 or more teams participating, provided courts allow?

### **Temporary memberships**

I am pleased to say that some States no longer offer temporary memberships. It is disappointing to me that in one State, approximately 40% of the ladies on the ranking lists are temporary members, and there are indeed players who have been selected to represent Australia who are in this category also. One can only draw the conclusion that they do not see value in paying a full seniors membership fee. Is it a possibility therefore, in conjunction with removing temporary membership fees, to reduce or even remove full membership fees so as to entice those players on to our permanent membership lists, and then be able to market to them and keep them up to date with our news and views?

### **The “Pay for Play” trial (PFP) in NSW and ACT**

The debate above about membership fees and the level at which they should be pitched, leads logically to the issue of the PFP. This is based on the philosophy that “the more you play, the more

you pay” – players in these two States in 2012 will therefore pay no seniors membership fee but instead will pay a “levy” of a few dollars in most cases, for every event they enter in a sanctioned tournament or event. There is some researched evidence, not conclusive in my opinion, which suggests that seniors would prefer a PFP model rather than incur the cost of membership, so the trial is about testing that theory. Obviously there are going to be those who don’t like it, because at the end of the day, depending on how many events you participate in, you may end up paying more overall. But it should not be overlooked that this is also about trying to develop a model that will attract more new or previous players to our ranks, and simply meeting the needs of the majority of our “customers”. Again, in my humble opinion, the philosophy of “user pay” makes a lot of sense – I accept that the more toll roads I use the more I should pay, or the more I consume, the more GST I should pay. I know there are many who will not agree with me on this! The trial will be interesting.

### **Australian Championships**

Our national event is our premier event, and should remain so. There is as you know, heaps of debate about whether the Championships should be held at a different time of year or whether they should be split from the teams event, and I think it would be a brave call to do either of these on the evidence that we have at present, or on the comments that I get from many players.

I am hopeful that within a week or so we should be in a position to advise everyone as to where the event will be held in 2013. I know there are some who are critical of the ACT for not hosting as per plan. In my view, the ACT had no option but to opt out of hosting the Championships due to the reconstruction of the main centre not being completed in time. The alternative of holding the event over 14 or more locations would not only be a logistical nightmare, but would also detract from what I see as one of the major attractions of this event – the “togetherness” of all, or nearly all, playing at the same venue.

Regarding the teams event again, TSA conducted a survey during 2011 on this question, but I must concede that the number of responses were disappointing and therefore not conclusive in my view. 76% of respondents who played the teams event said they would continue to do so in January. Amongst the 24% who said they would not, the reasons were largely about needing more divisions, too much tennis etc, not about the time of the year. From the sample of those who had not played the teams in recent years, 62% said it was not because it was in January. Economic and cost considerations seem to be a big factor irrespective of when the event might be held. Rest assured that the Executive will continue to give serious consideration to beneficial changes that we think may be necessary. However, it’s a bit of “damned if you do, and damned if you don’t”!!

### **ITF and IPIN**

I know that for many of you, the introduction of the IPIN has been frustrating and confusing, but for the entire seniors tennis world, I think we have to accept that it is here to stay, and we should not discount the notion of more tournaments going to electronic entry in the future. Please remember that the cost of the IPIN will go from US\$20 to US\$30 in November of this year, but if you play only one ITF/IPIN event (singles or doubles) in 2012, you will not be charged for your IPIN membership in 2013. At least the strength of our currency is in our favour!

Likewise, some of the new ITF rules and regulations have proven to be challenging for our Tournament Directors. One of the options that the States have of course, is to convert their ITF events to National Ranking events, but that will mean that participating players will not be able to earn international ranking points. Our own Steve Longworth continues to work with the ITF, as we do, to make the whole process more manageable and user friendly. The State Presidents have asked me to make contact with Presidents in other countries and “compare notes” on IPIN and ITF matters, and I have already been in touch with my counterparts in New Zealand and South Africa. The saga will continue to evolve!

### **Conclusion**

I assure you once again that your Executive will continue to work diligently towards improving seniors tennis for all participants, and we will post updates such as this on our website from time to time to keep you advised of our progress. I know we will not keep everyone happy, but we will do our best to satisfy the majority!

Comment or questions: email [regt@tpg.com.au](mailto:regt@tpg.com.au)