

Joe Blogs – independent opinion!

Part I

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**TENNIS TODAY - Foundations. Future.**

The transition from amateur to Professional has been a rough ride for most sports in the last century or so and even now when most Pro sports seem well organised, there remain some serious complex challenges. Current financial issues will continue to wrench many on a wild roller-coaster ride. Climate and the population versus resources conflict are more concerning still! I wish us all well there... But let's focus on, something I hope to be able to lend some understanding on, Tennis.

Our very traditional game in some ways has evolved very little, say on a local level. Yet in the last generation at the "pointy end" -Pro Tennis- it has constantly grown and re-developing to compete with other entertainment for our time and hard earned. Sport is HUGE business like it or not. Not surprisingly then a real gap has opened up between local players, their volunteer based clubs or competitions and the multi millionaires and big money Pro associations. Less obvious though are the reasons why the most popular sport in Australia just the one generation ago has stuttered along to where we are now. We have been out manoeuvred by the likes of Cricket and Soccer especially at the "grassroots" level.

Don't get me wrong the Australian Open is world class. The work of Tennis Australia's professional team, lead by CEO Steve Wood, Director Craig Tiley & co is impressive. Corporate re-structuring, Coach education and more are global best practise models. That's super! But, as is so often asked, where are the kids? True, the latest Junior player systems such as "Hotshots"-modified games-and High performance development paths have exciting potential. To me there is still a crucial ingredient missing!

I must now confess to also being a fan of true FOOTball, Soccer like all games has it's flaws, however in this country it is an example of a popular healthy "grassroots" sport that has also had to fix it's hierarchy –at a national level it was a disgrace- the difference being that Soccer had not let the junior & social levels wither on the vine long term the way Tennis has. Sitting on it's laurels from the Golden days of old.

Tennis must engage this 21<sup>st</sup> century generation and it's Broadband paced lifestyle!

We all want more Australians shining for us all on the world stage, hell just a local Open winner would do, no? But what's going to happen when the Boomers finally hang up their racquets, Mum and Dad are too busy just paying the bills and all the kids that aren't literally glued to a Digital devise are at the skate park or the Crusty Demons? Who will run the clubs & comps then?

***Is Tennis still this nation's favourite?***

I think not. The love of our game once widespread like the ancient in land sea, has evaporated into seasonal rains(January) and scattered pools fighting off long term climate change. Of course we need quality, top players – Role models for inspiring our future - but we need quantity, playing strength in numbers most of all and urgently.

More questions than answers I have, true, but my feeling is strong. It's time to stop the top heavy emphasis TA –strong foundations first it's basic building principle- and prioritise local, social, community, base-beginner, fun and friends "grassroots" love of Tennis. If all you do is just keep skimming of the cream, the milk goes bad! Then you've got .....

Please let me know what you think!