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31st July 2017

A third open letter to the SA tennis community.

"It's a process, it's a process, it's a process. Change takes time."

Anyone who has been to visit me at TSA HQ in Centurion will have seen this quote pinned on the green board in my office. It is there to remind me that we are on a long journey - a journey that requires plenty of hard work, no short-cuts and a healthy dose of patience.

Many people in tennis will only be satisfied with our Federation once the SA Open has returned and we have 10 players in the Top 100 singles rankings of both the ATP and WTA rankings.

That is fair enough, I can't disagree with those sentiments, but I am sure most of you will understand that those sorts of changes take time...and realistically we are talking years not months!

That being said - hopefully, you are seeing REAL signs of progress and feel that tennis is on an upwards trajectory.

Tennis Players in SA.

A recent International Tennis Federation (ITF) study shows there are just under **700,000** tennis players in South Africa.

(Source: ITF, 2016).

Giving tennis space to thrive.

The most recent step forward was securing Growthpoint Properties, as the headline partner of TSA. More information on this sponsorship can be found on the TSA website at: <http://www.tennissa.co.za/w/blog/growthpoint-gives-tsa-space-to-thrive>.

Growthpoint have been great to deal with so far – very honest and straightforward. We are looking forward to a long and productive relationship with them. Hopefully many of our junior players and parents have already seen the Growthpoint effect at our TSA Series events (now rebranded as the Growthpoint Super 8) – in terms of

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great branding, quality trophies for the winners and off the court enhancements. Like everything at TSA, this is still work in progress and I was particularly unhappy with a satellite venue at one of the recent Growthpoint Super 8's, but overall, I believe these events are going in the right direction.

When the Growthpoint sponsorship announcement was made, most tennis people seemed excited about the news, but a few were asking some tough questions on social media, including –

- What about a sponsor to bring back the SA Open?
- What about more Futures and Challengers?
- What about looking after our professional players better?

These are all fair and valid questions and areas we are not ignoring. My response to each is as follows:

1. Times are tough right now and we are very fortunate to have secured five sponsors (of varying sizes) since the start of 2017. Especially at a time when many Federations in SA are struggling to attract sponsorship.
2. Sponsorship is about finding a property or event that is aligned to a brand's marketing objectives. You can't force a brand to sponsor something they are not interested in. During our discussions with Growthpoint we obviously talked about international tennis events, Futures and Challengers but it became very clear they were most interested in grassroots tennis and being able to engage with tennis players across the country, hence their subsequent sponsorship of Juniors, Clubs and Tennis development.
3. We are working behind the scenes to bring more international tennis to South Africa. This is important because it raises the profile of the sport, but these events are expensive and so will take time to get up and running.
4. In terms of our professional players - we are working on something at the moment to assist them.

Communication.

Another big focus for TSA, in recent months, has been on improving communication and information sharing – these open letters being a manifestation of that intent...yes I acknowledge that this is very much a work in progress and we still have room for improvement in this space, but I don't think anyone can argue that we are not trying.

Tennis Players in SA.

44% of active players in South Africa are under the age of 24.

(Source: ITF, 2016).

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The new TSA website has been a big improvement, as a communication platform, and has received some very positive feedback. One great new feature on the website is the new club finder functionality that allows you to find a club near to you. If your club is not on the application, then please let us know and we will add it ASAP.

We have also started sharing more, what I would call, 'behind the scenes information' on our website. For example - people are intrigued by what gets discussed at board meetings – so we have started releasing key take-outs from TSA board meetings:

<http://www.tennissa.co.za/w/blog/tsa-june-board-meeting--selected-highlights>.

Tennis Players in SA.

60% of active tennis players in South Africa are in managerial positions.

(Source: ITF, 2016).

Sustainability, foundations and awareness.

Ok....so we've secured a major new sponsor but there are lots of challenges to overcome so what are we focusing on now? Our focus for the remainder of this financial year (which concludes in March 2018) is best summarised by the below graphic – Sustainability, Foundations and Awareness:



Our main priority, since I started at TSA late last year, has been on ensuring the financial sustainability of the Federation. With Growthpoint and our four other partners on board we are now in a solid position.

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However, sustainability is not just about generating a cash surplus at the end of the financial year, it is also about investing to grow interest, participation and high performance. Our focus now moves onto investing on the foundations of the sport and (almost in parallel) growing awareness of tennis in our country.

So, a few things to look out for in the 'Foundation' space over the coming months:

- **TRANSFORMATION:** The launch of our first TSA Development Excellence Centre - watch this space.
- **SCHOOLS:** A big new initiative around red ball tennis events at school level.
- **CLUBS:** The launch and roll out of the new Growthpoint national club event.

And finally....junior national selectors.

We recently advertised for applications for a new 5-person panel of national junior selectors. The list of applicants has been impressive and we are in the process of drawing up a short list for telephonic or skype interviews. We aim to interview the short-list by the second week in August and intend to name the panel before the end of August.

One of the first tasks of the new national selection panel will be to select the national age group squads for the 2017/18 calendar year. These squads will be announced during the Growthpoint Masters event that takes place in October in Potchefstroom.

The selection criteria framework now in place for the selection of junior national teams can be found at: <http://www.tennissa.co.za/w/play/national-teams-selectors-criteria>

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

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