

# REVIEW OF 2017 ESRA OPEN RACQUETBALL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Words: Paul Vear

Special Presenter: **Simon Vu, Chief Executive of Wantirna Bendigo Bank**

Photographer: Jodi Wilkinson



The 2017 edition of the ESRA Open Racquetball Championships, played out at the Knox Park Squash and Racquetball Centre, was highlighted by the Dromana Dynamo Steve Andrewartha claiming the only Victorian Grand Prix Circuits' Men's Open title he did not annex in 2016, which means he is the current titleholder of all six championships, a remarkable performance, world number 49 squash player Christine Nunn completing a unique double, after earlier this month taking out the opening Women's Open event on the Victorian GP Circuits for both Squash (the Mountain Districts Open), and now for Racquetball, the ESRA Women's Open, Lilydale's Tyler Blanchard doing similar in his events, plus five entrants each from the Brigden and Baines families, to catapult overall tournament entry numbers to one hundred and thirty four.

## MEN'S OPEN



*L-R: Steve Andrewartha, Simon Vu, Peter French, Garry Pedersen, Chris England*

The 2016 Victorian Grand Prix Men's Open Champion Steve Andrewartha finished the year 2,535 points above second placed Peter French, but both players failed to reach the ESRA final last year, and this year's high quality field contained seven of the top eight players on the Victorian Ranking's table, including last year's finalists, Garry Pedersen and Chris England.

In his penultimate match, Andrewartha was impregnable against his Dromana stable mate Chris England, not allowing him into the match at any stage, winning 21/9, 21/10.

The big guns in the bottom half of the draw were the Geelong pair, French and Pedersen, and although they have played a “zillion” practice and tournament matches against each other, no quarter is ever given, but on this occasion French avenged his loss to Pedersen at the final GP event in 2016, the Lakes Classic, holding on to win 21/16, 22/21.

The final stanza had everything with the opening game going point for point, with Andrewartha surviving a cliff hanger 22/21.

Andrewartha gained a sizeable early lead in the second game with impeccable driving tightness and length, plus a very accurate short game, but French fought back late in the match before succumbing 21/16, and Andrewartha making it six tournaments “on the trot,” with French having been runner-up in four of them.

#### WOMEN’S OPEN



*L-R: Christine Nunn, Simon Vu, Judy Wright, Leah Bolton, Sue Dunlop*

Although 2016 ESRA Open winner Sarah Fitz-Gerald was missing due to building new squash courts in Western Australia, great anticipation still surrounded this year’s event with seven times Australian Open Women’s champion, and 2016 ESRA Open runner-up Judy Wright, seeded to meet world number 49 squash player Christine Nunn in the final, which was the eventual outcome.

With two matches under her belt, Nunn stormed through the first game of the final to take it 21/12, but Wright has been in this situation many times before, so her second game fight back which she eventually secured 21/19 was no surprise to anyone.

In the decider, Nunn took control early and never relinquished her lead to take it out 21/10, and record her unique season opening Grand Prix tournament victories for both squash and racquetball.

In their respective semi finals, Wright overcame Caulfield’s Leah Boulton, 21/18, 21/8, whilst Nunn outpointed Geelong’s Sue Dunlop, 21/9, 21/12.

## A Grade



*L-R: Simon Vu, Alex Baines, Peter Baines, Dean Milligan (plate winner)*

Although an extremely strong A Grade field faced the starter, it was Wodonga's highly talented Father & Son, Peter and Alex Baines, who faced off in the final.

Top seeded sixteen year old Alex, who won the 2016 Australian Open A Grade crown as a fifteen year old, was meeting Peter, runner-up in this event last year, for the first time in a Racquetball GP event.

The first game went point for point until Alex broke clear towards the end, then established an early lead in the second which he steadily increased to secure the match, 21/18, 21/8, and claim another GP title and bragging rights for the four hour drive back to Wodonga.

To reach the event's climax, Peter overcame top seeded Chris Rollauer in a marathon match, 22/21, 15/21, 21/17, whilst Alex overcame 2016 Australia Open A Grade runner-up Anthony Hain, 21/10, 21/15, in their respective semi finals.

## B Grade



*L-R: Simon Vu, Jamie Evans, Dave Whan (plate winner)*

Mt. District's Jamie Evans made his GP tournament debut in 2015, and played in only three C Grade events during that period reaching the final in all, winning two, including the 2016 ESRA event, so he was kindly escorted into B grade for 2017, where he faced in the first round Squash Australia Board Member and top seeded South Aussie, Dave Whan.

Although Whan had spent the past two weeks completing high altitude training at Falls Creek, which included daily thirty kilometre runs, Evans wore down the affable Whan in an absolute marathon, 20/22, 21/16, 21/14.



Evans then overpowered Mulgrave's Lance Cowan 21/17, 21/15 in their semi final to reach another final.

Whilst Evans was methodically working his way through the top half of the draw, former world deaf squash champion Peter Walters, was cutting a swathe through the bottom half, which included taking out Geelong's third seeded John Phillips, and Wangaratta's second seeded Jason Hawkins, both in straight games, to join Evans at the pointy end of the event.

After nearly seventy five minutes of unbelievable rallies, comebacks and counter punching, Evans was able to claim the one hundred and first point and the match, 21/15, 11/21, 21/12.

### C GRADE



*L-R: Simon Vu, Tyler Blanchard, Philip Gerontzos (plate winner)*

*Nicci Rossouw, Matthew Bayley*

One player making his GP tournament debut was Lilydale Club's fifteen year old Tyler Blanchard who won the Division Two event at the Mt. Districts Squash Open, so he was after a unique double as well, although he had an extremely large field to overcome.

After overcoming Albury's eighth seeded Michael Brigden in straight games, Blanchard had the temerity to knock over Lakes Entrance's top seeded Michael Smits, 21/19, 21/19, then fifth seeded and Squash and Racquetball Victoria Board Member Lao Biesbroek, 21/18, 21/17, to reach the final climax.

Meanwhile, another GP debutant Mulgrave's Matthew Bayley, was putting the sword to all and sundry in the bottom half of the draw, including Mt. District's Wilson Swan, Monash Uni debutant Heng Taing, and "Wangaratta Warhorse" Michael Barclay, without losing a game.

As with many other singles contests at this event, the final was another lengthy encounter with Blanchard finally capturing the title, 20/22, 21/16, 21/7, and in the process emulating the efforts of Christine Nunn.

### D GRADE



*L-R: Paul Vear, Floyd Cowan*

*Simon Vu, Carolyn Ayres (plate winner), Brian Richards*

This event contained a number of the sport's stalwarts, plus two fourteen year old girls Nicola Baines and Calista Gerontzos, who are going places in the game, but in the end it was two of the stalwarts who made it through to the decider.

After taking out Wangaratta's "Godmother" of the sport, Heather Williams, Baines ousted Corio's top seeded Ben Bell 21/13, 21/18, and then lost a gruelling semi final to fifth seeded South Aussie Brian Richards, 22/20, 20/22, 16/21. In his earlier quarter final Richards eventually prevailed over fourth seeded Mt. Districts Carolyn Ayres, 18/21, 21/10, 21/18.

In the lower half of the draw Gerontzos overcame Bairnsdale's Chris Kool, 21/11, 21/12, before succumbing in another marathon to Mulgrave's second seeded Floyd Cowan in their quarter final encounter, with Cowan then overcoming Corio's third seeded Elisha Mitchell, 21/10, 21/19.

Cowan captured his second GP title when he came from a game down in the final to win, 9/21, 21/13, 21/16, and deny the popular South Australian an interstate victory.

#### E GRADE



*L-R: Simon Vu, Cheryl Brigden, Nelson Howard (plate winner), Heather Cook*

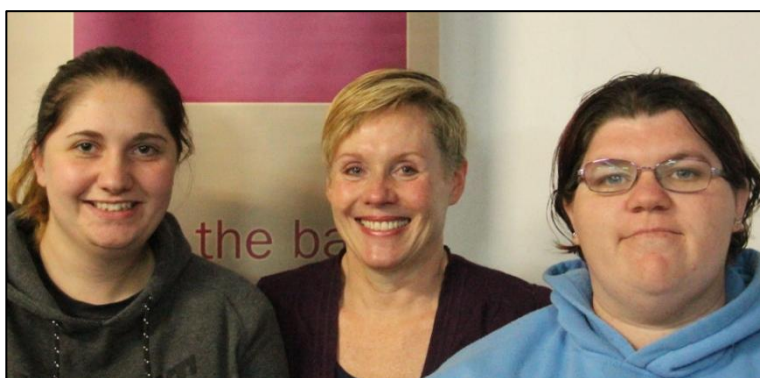
Five juniors, three locals, plus two country players faced the starter to decide who would claim the major silverware for this event.

In the end it was the Mother of three juniors participating in the ESRA Championships, Cheryl Brigden, who showed both talent and stamina to claim the title after four long and exhausting matches, with the decider over Mt. Districts third seeded Heather Cook, 21/16, 22/21.

In their respective semi finals, Brigden won a nail biter over local hope Mandy Eves, 19/21, 21/17, 21/17, with Cook denying a Mother and Son final, overcoming Alexander Brigden, 21/18, 21/12.

#### F Grade/Junior Under 13's

This was a Geelong versus Albury round robin event with Commercial Club's Lillian Brigden finishing on top of the Corio pair of Danica Morgan and Tegan Goulding in the F Grade event, with Corio's Ella Partington and Commercial Club's Xavier Brigden winning the junior titles.



*L-R: Lillian Brigden, Simon Vu,*

*Tegan Goulding, Nicci Rossouw, Danica Morgan*



*L-R: Ella Partington, Fiona Smythe*



*Xavier Brigden, Simon Vu*

SINGLES		
Grade	Winner	Runner-Up
<b>Men's Open</b>	Steve Andrewartha	Peter French
<b>Women's Open</b>	Christine Nunn	Judy Wright
<b>A</b>	Alex Baines	Peter Baines
<b>B</b>	Jamie Evans	Peter Walters
<b>C</b>	Tyler Blanchard	Matthew Bayley
<b>D</b>	Floyd Cowan	Brian Richards
<b>E</b>	Cheryl Brigden	Heather Cook
<b>F</b>	Lillian Brigden	Danica Morgan
<b>Junior Girls</b>	Ella Partington	None
<b>Junior Boys</b>	Xavier Brigden	None

DOUBLES		
Grade	Winner	Runner-Up
<b>Open</b>	S. Andrewartha/G. Wilcock	J. Bosch/A. Rundell
<b>A</b>	J. Souness/J. Smith	A. Lander/P. Bedford
<b>B</b>	M. Horvat/C. Mihan	D. Whan/J. Phillips
<b>C</b>	R. Cooper/M. Bayley	Marcel & Sam Koper
<b>D</b>	G. Dowling/M. Lane	M. Lee/ M. Bayley
<b>E</b>	J. Barton/H. Cook	D. Morgan/T. Goulding



Doubles Special Presenter – Nicci Rossouw – President of Squash & Racquetball Victoria



**Open Doubles – L-R: Steve Andrewartha, Nicci Rossouw, Jon Bosch, Andrew Rundell, Geoff Wilcock**



**A Grade Doubles – L-R: John Souness, Justin Smith, Nicci Rossouw, Peter Bedford, Adam Lander**



***B Grade Doubles – L-R: Nicci Rossouw, John Phillips, Dave Whan, Marcus Horvat***



***C Grade Doubles – L-R: Nicci Rossouw, Rayleen Cooper, Matthew Bayley***





***D Grade Doubles – L-R: Nicci Rossouw, Mark Lane, Marguerite Lee, Glenn Dowling***



***E Grade Doubles – L-R: Nicci Rossouw, Heather Cook, Tegan Goulding, Danica Morgan, Jeanette Barton***