

President's Report to the AGM of the Australian Backgammon Federation (Inc)

It is a well-worn cliché to say “it’s been a hell of a year” ... so I won’t. Instead, I would like to reflect on what we have achieved as a backgammon community over the last year.

I knew that I was filling some rather large shoes by stepping up to the role of President of AusBGF after the untimely passing away of our dear friend Eva Bitel last year.

At the subsequent AGM I stood for President and you kindly accepted me into that role.

I set out a charter of what I would like to achieve:

- 1) Board to meet on a more regular basis – at least every two months... and provide communique of outcomes from meeting to members
- 2) Produce a regular Newsletter
- 3) Explore ways of getting more people playing more often
- 4) Explore ways of increasing membership
- 5) bring proposal for National Rules to the Board
- 6) Increase activities aimed at making AusBGF more relevant to players and increase national reach.
- 7) Continue development of National Ratings system
- 8) Find some way of marking the contribution of Eva Bitel to Australian BG.
- 9) Continue support for selected premier events
- 10) Identify other policies that may need to be developed
- 11) Explore International affiliations

I am happy to report that we have ticked off on many of those matters and have made progress on just about all of the others.

We have met via video link, but not as often as we could have. Thanks to Shane McNally, a wonderful newsletter has been produced and there is a promise of more to come. The Rules subcommittee has been considering options, with consideration being given to the UKBGF’s model of prescription versus the USBGF’s more principles-based approach.

Numbers three to nine have gone hand in hand, partly in response to the single biggest challenge facing Australian backgammon in 2020.

I refer of course to the closing of backgammon venues due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19.

This forced a serious re-think on how backgammon is played around the country. The Board made the somewhat controversial decision to include online tournaments in the National Ratings database. This had been given a partial dispensation for selected events by our UK counterparts, but the decision here galvanised players around the country.

The situation was helped by the rise of newer online platforms and the continued improvement of existing ones.

If my personal experience in playing in and running tournaments this year is any guide, I was organising local Canberra tournaments that regularly included players from Melbourne, Adelaide, Sydney and Newcastle as well as further afield; I played in Club tournaments in Melbourne and Adelaide; we played an international series against New Zealand (thanks to AJ Marquette in EnZed); played in well run National tournaments (thanks to Reece and the team in Melbourne, Robert Disney in Newcastle and Gary Stavrou in Sydney); and planned and participated in the inaugural Eva Bitel Tournament.

I hope the latter continues to develop as Australia's premier online event – there were certainly lots of learning to take from that, things that could have been done better. Overall, I think it was a huge success and a fitting tribute to Eva.

Through all of this I could sense the spirit of competition for placings on the National ratings – we have seen Saeed Nourmohammadi, Hossein Haydari and Simon Ustick jostle for positions at the top, the emergence of some newer players and the long-awaited return of some established players (I'm thinking of the likes of Steve Roberts, Tim Chambers and Tim Hochgrebe, just to mention a few names).

Thanks to Simon Woodhead for his ongoing support in managing the national database and helping to track through some of the teething issues. I truly believe that without the National Ratings scheme we would not be in the position we are today but would have continued in isolated pockets based around Clubs with a precious few national events. We do look forward to 2021 and the return of those events, but also continuing the online associations we have forged. It would be remiss of me not to also thank the local tournament managers in each affiliated club – they are the ones entering the results and the system would not run without them.

The emergence of all these tournaments has provided a boost to membership – John Symon provided valuable support through this and took great delight in keeping us up to date with membership and financial matters.

I would like to thank all Board members for their contributions through the year, particularly the Executive of John Symon, Kevin Jessup and Ian Dunstan who provided a valuable sounding board for the many wild ideas floating around in my head. David Kinston in particular was also ready, willing and able to provide a robust perspective (which is a rare commodity). I know that Carol Wakelin is not standing for re-election and I thank her for being there in trying times!

Wishing You Happy Rolling in 2021... unless you're playing me!

Dr Greg Ash
President

16 December 2020