

OCEANIA SQUASH REPORT

I am pleased to report that there have been a number of positive developments in Oceania Squash in the last year.

Successful Oceania Masters Championships were held in Nelson, New Zealand, in October 1996 and in Rarotonga in the Cook Islands in June of this year. Masters squash is very healthy in the region and annual regional championships seem to be firmly established.

There has been some encouraging progress with the development of squash in Papua New Guinea in the last 12 months with the corporate sector showing some interest in supporting the sport and a junior development program planned for Port Moresby.

Papua New Guinea participated in the squash competition in the Arafura Games in Darwin (Australia) with some success. These Games attract athletes from South East Asia and the Oceania region with the squash competition organised by the Northern Territory Squash Association which is a squash Australia member association.

The 1997 Oceania Cup is to be held in the Cook Islands in October and is expected to attract 6 of the smaller countries of the region. At the time of writing, four countries have confirmed their participation.

The Annual General Meeting of the Oceania Federation (now held biennially) will be held at the time of the Oceania Cup.

One of the disappointments in the last year has been the decision to exclude squash from the South Pacific Games which are to be held in Guam in 1999. Squash was included in four consecutive Games from 1979 to 1991, however it was unfortunately not included in the Tahiti Games in 1995 and has again been overlooked for Guam. I should point out, however, that it was always going to be a difficult assignment to get squash onto the Guam program given the lack of facilities in this American territory.

One of the initiatives taken by Col Clapper, the Oceania President, has been to communicate with various authorities in Guam and in American Samoa with a view to convincing the American Armed Forces to construct squash facilities in these countries.

The last year will unfortunately be recorded as a difficult year for both New Zealand Squash and Squash Australia, especially from a financial perspective. Both countries are going through a period of major change involving restructuring of the administration of the sport to ensure that squash has a healthy future in our countries. And for both countries, increasing participation is the top priority.

Despite these difficulties, for the second successive year Trans-Tasman junior tests were played; this time between the respective Australian and New Zealand teams which took part in the recent World Junior Women's Championships in Brazil. The tests would appear to have assisted the New Zealand team more than the Aussie girls who won the test series but did not perform so well in Rio. By contrast, the kiwi girls performed extremely well to reach the final of the World Teams' Championship.

In terms of development of the sport in the smaller Oceania countries, a Sydney club hosted a group of New Caledonian players towards the end of last year and the top New Caledonian junior player has recently spent 2 weeks at the Australian Institute of Sport Squash Unit in Brisbane.

An invitation has been extended by Australia to the smaller countries in the region to assist them in the development of squash by accessing Australian Government funds for appropriate projects.

Butch Gifford, the former NZ Squash Development Officer, will be carrying out various developmental activities in the Cook Islands at the time of the Oceania Cup in October for the benefit of all of the participating countries. Butch is an ideal person to perform this role and on behalf of the Oceania Region I would like to thank the WSF for assisting with this project.

Another project which has been initiated involves the small island nation of Niue. The government of Niue is providing support for the development of squash and the Oceania Federation's strategy is to use people from Niue who now live in New Zealand to assist in the development of squash in their 'home' country.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the work carried out for the Oceania Region by Col Clapper, the Federation President, over the last year. He has devoted a large amount of time to the Federation, entirely in a volunteer role and often without much feedback or support.

Ron Griffiths
Vice President, Oceania.