

PRESIDENTS REPORT 2020

2020 began much as most years do, planning, preparing and generally getting into the business of running sport. Bushfires punctuated the beginning of the year and air quality seemed to be the largest issue we would face. An Air Quality Policy was created and at least one club did fundraising for the victims of the horrendous bushfires

During Feb, we held what would turn out to be the only National competition for the year. Our Junior fencers featured prominently on podiums; full results can be found on: www.ausfencing.org. Within the next few months, competitions and events were postponed and then cancelled one after the other, then all fencing was suspended. The AFF gave guidance in the beginning and all activities required ratification. We got the first sketchy information about a Coronavirus called Covid-19. At that time, I don't think many people were ready for the havoc it would reek on our lives and on sport.

By April, our centre was closed then the closure was extended. There was much scrambling to get gear and try to re-accommodate training. Pivot was a word that we used and became a regular occurrence with squad on, then off, then on again. Training went online as did all our activities. During the longest lockdown in Australia, FV focussed on providing training and social interaction. We also understood that many members were facing mental health challenges on top of the difficulties of living through a pandemic.

We engaged Dr Lee Naylor to facilitate Mental Health Webinars and then Mental Health First Aid courses. 25 people in our community are now trained in Mental Health First Aid. We then extended this idea and provided a short series of Coach Professional Development which we called 'Coach on the Couch'. Social engagement in the form of 'Social Sunday's' & Cuppa with Kayt were regular additions to our calendar.

Return to Sport plans were also a major fixture of 2020. For the High-Performance training to take place an RTS was submitted to the Federal body created for this specific purpose. That initial document of over 4,500 words was submitted and approved. Our plan was the fourth plan in Australia to be approved, behind the NRL, AFL & Motorsport. A huge achievement in itself!

Club administrators were also required to add even more hours of work to their normal workload, with RTS plans and CovidSafe plans submitted to FV. These were then complied and submitted to relevant State Government bodies. These plans changed with every small change in restrictions and the process was repeated more often than I could count. This time was for me, full time and arduous, but necessary for the sport to continue. I spent countless hours in Zoom meetings with Vicsport and government advisors, reading Restricted Activity Directives & press releases from the Chief Health Officer trying to reconcile and distil information for our members. I completed all of these to the best of my ability at every point.

During one of these Vicsport Zoom sessions, a small discussion about broadcasting turned into a longer discussion and a project which has, excuse the pun, taken up a lot of our collective bandwidth. Four sports worked together to create a proposal for our events to be livestreamed to Kayo. The Foxtel group were allocated funds from the Federal Government to support 'underrepresented' sports. The sports are Croquet, Dragon Boat Racing, Ultimate & Fencing. We were successful in our proposal and FV have been allocated \$50K towards our production costs. A first for each of the sports and a huge

opportunity to showcase our sport. One that will move fencing into new and uncharted territory in 2021 and beyond.

The board moved to online communications and meetings and were hugely supportive of not only each other but all our community. Work was created for those whose livelihoods rely on fencing. To say it was a trying time would be a minimum aptly used phrase. The difficulties and challenges faced by sport in general and fencing in particular, cannot be understated. However, the board rose to every challenge and did not shy away from any difficult decisions or actions.

FV held over 300 Zoom sessions, including our AGM, squads, referee seminars and upskilling sessions, fitness, cooking (Vlad's Shakshuka & Kayt's cheats pizza were definite highlights), information webinars, coffee & catch-ups. The cost of all these sessions has been borne by Fencing Victoria.

AFF capitations were refunded for fully affiliated members. We gave our members the options of rolling over, being refunded or donating the figure to FV. We are, to my knowledge the only state association (in fencing) to do this. A large portion of our membership chose to donate the fee to FV, a wonderful statement of the community we have created here in Victoria.

FV also created a position of Diversity and Inclusion Officer to assist our own members from the LGBTQI+ community to feel supported and have a voice. This role has been filled by Tuulia Ijas and we look forward to continuing to work with her in this space.

Fencing Victoria was one of 86 sports that lobbied the government to create a voucher program for under-privileged children to be able to participate in sport. I was subsequently chosen to be part of the stakeholder group to create this program, which launched at the beginning of 2021 after much work during 2020.

We also took the opportunity to use this down time wisely creating a new website as well as centre maintenance being ramped up with every piste being lifted, cleaned, re-wired and re-laid. It was also scrubbed to a high shine. This level of maintenance had not been undertaken since the centre was opened.

On a lighter note, thanks must go to Libby & Meredith for their artwork, Libby is responsible for the FV logo seasonal and event icons and Meredith for the covid fencer picture all of which we have used numerous times thus far. Great job, thanks ladies!

So many other projects and work was done behind the scenes with grant proposal, survival funding paperwork, changes of restriction level and near daily changes, the team that comprises the FV board supported by Robyn Hunter in the Operations role should be congratulated for all their unwavering work and support of Fencing in Victoria.

Today, after 11 years on the board, I stand down and my fervent hope is that not only have I assisted in moving the sport to where it is now, but also laying foundations for greater things to come.

Kayt Spano