



2024 PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Traditionally I have saved the last paragraph in this report to thank our small (but growing) band of volunteers for their ongoing commitment and contribution to Volleyball Ballarat and the experiences that we all enjoy as a result. This year I think it is more important than ever to make that acknowledgement upfront, not just for the work you do on the ground but also towards our broader vision and strategy development. We have had another amazing year of continued and accelerated growth, retained our high team numbers and experienced a notable increase in young people seeking participation opportunities. This is evident in both our competition and our training program numbers, which continue to attract new participants on an almost weekly basis. This does not happen by accident.

I never like to single out individuals, but I will make an exception this year to recognise the immense time and effort that Fiona Abbot has contributed to Volleyball Ballarat, particularly over the last couple of years. Her warm and inviting personality, can do attitude and willingness to lead change has been a big part of our success and has just been recognised by Volleyball Victoria who awarded Fiona the 2024 Victorian Affiliate Volunteer of the Year at this year's Annual General Meeting. In a sport that is growing across the state at all levels; to be acknowledged above others is a significant achievement and we all congratulate and thank Fiona for the work she continues to do and the leadership she shows.

Our biggest challenges continue to be court access and volunteer time and capability. To address these challenges and plan for sustainable growth, we spent much of 2024 working with Nat from Pro Sport Coach on a new strategic plan and a Women and Girls strategy. We engaged members in workshops, took steps to increase our capacity, and leveraged the Pro Sport Coach platform for efficiencies. Thank you for your help, Nat, and to the Victorian State Government for the grant support that facilitated this work.

As a result, we have taken significant steps over the last 12 months to address these identified challenges, and I am pleased to say that our relationship with Basketball Ballarat continues to strengthen and we now have expanded court access on Monday nights at the Minerdome. This means that as the standard of players developing in the association increases, we can provide the next levels of competition so that the development trajectory can continue. In 2025 we are elated to see the re-introduction of a Women's only competition after nearly 30 years of mixed gender offerings only, along with the trial of an invitational Men's Premier League.

The strategic plan also commits us to continue to provide existing social, competitive, and representative volleyball playing opportunities, with a core mission to deliver exhilarating volleyball experiences that foster connections, promote fitness, and enhance the enjoyment of the sport. Our summer/winter competition structure supports members who participate in other sports seasons and our local University student population (we thank ACU in particular for their ongoing support of their students and providing them with the opportunity to play with us) while our training programs provide the entry point into our participation pathways. To supplement this, we also ran a junior development camp at Selkirk Stadium during the September school holidays which was very well supported by athletes from Ballarat and Western Victoria. Our thanks go to Ross Sullivan for his coordination and Head coaching alongside local Olympian Tamsin Barnett, to our other coaches and to the RAD Centre for their support.



Over the next five years, we aim to significantly expand our offerings such as an annual camp, including introducing a junior competition, and adding additional senior grades (as demonstrated with the Women and Premier League) where demand, capability and facility capacity exist. Achieving this growth will require targeted recruitment strategies for specific demographics, including students in Years 7-9, University students, women and girls, and most importantly, new volunteers to support these strategies.

We have managed some targeted recruitment to support these expanding association and committee activities recently, and I am excited that some new leadership will focus on relentlessly empowering and inviting new people to get involved and contribute.

From a broader volleyball community aspect, our Annual Skins tournament is well and truly cemented in its new home on the calendar, retaining its successful slot two weeks after Warrnambool's Seaside tournament and leading into round 1 of State League. This timing provides an opportunity for VVL Clubs to have one more hit out before the season starts, Regional Associations another step in their Country Champs preparations, and for recreational teams, a competitive opportunity earlier in the year. Building on the 35% increase in team entries seen in 2023, and 33% increase in 2024, 2025 saw a record 67 teams compete for more than \$10,000 in Skins and prizemoney. Our ability to work closely with other organisations including Ballarat Basketball, City of Ballarat and Ballarat Grammar meant that for the first time, we have unfettered access to all courts at Selkirk Stadium, at the new and improved Rintel Centre. With 12 courts across 2 venues, it eased the pressure on our volunteers and significantly improved the user experience for all attendees.

A very young and inexperienced Volleyball Ballarat team journeyed to the Latrobe Valley for the Country Championships on the June long weekend in 2024. Despite this, our Men's team managed to win the Men's Division 3 Gold Medal, defeating Geelong AVA in the final. Liam Holding was recognised as the Divisional MVP and an All-Star 7 player. Gabby Loughheed (playing for Warrnambool) was also selected in the All-Star 7 in Division 1 Women, and Ballarat's Georgie Hassell was selected in the All-Star 7 in Division 2 Women, although representing Surf Coast Volleyball Association.

A number of our members continue to access the pathway into the Victorian Volleyball League through Phantoms Volleyball Club. We were able to host both a preseason selection trial and a round of VVL during the year. It is now an essential part of the fabric of regional volleyball in Western Victoria and continues to contribute to the state's expanding demand and capacity and we recognise Ben Hassell's significant contribution as President of Phantoms VC.

On a personal level, it has been an honour and a privilege to serve as President over the last 12 years. Thank you to everyone for their support and willingness to get involved and look for new and innovative ways to improve. I look forward to seeing the growth of our amazing community continue.

Damon Minotti,
President