

2023 PRESIDENT’S REPORT

Coming into the start of 2023 State League season saw the club begin with high hopes of what the 2023 would be. The year begin with as usual with our trails, which this season brought about a return of several past players back into both our Premier Men’s and Women’s programs. Along with the influx of new players both our programs enter the preseason tournaments with high hopes of what 2023 could bring. An early season highlight from these tournaments was both of P1 men’s & women’s winning their respective divisions @ the Ballarat Skins Tournament, which only strengthen the belief in both groups heading into the VVL Season.

The year started off with a bang, with our P1 men’s team putting the whole division on notice with an emphatic win over the reigning premier Renegades, this along with strong early season from the majority of teams laid the foundation to enable 3 of our teams to qualify for finals. While our P2W & RM1 both struggled throughout the season, with many players being exposed to an higher level than they were possibly ready for, it was positive the vast majority of the players grasping these opportunities and not being overawed by the standard of volleyball presented to them.

While both our PM2 & RW2 lost their 1st semi final, our PM1 side were able to make history for our men’s program by winning their premier 1 final since the inception of the program. Ultimately the boys would fall to Monash in the prelim final, it was still a fantastic result, note the only 2 teams the boys loss 2 during the season were the eventual finalist.

Of note during the year the club welcome back into the fold Paul Freckleton as our PW1 coach, Paul has had a long association with our club and was pleasing to have him back involved, especially with our womens program.

The club was also fortunate to welcome ex-Australian representive Paul Sanderson to the club, following his relocation to Ballarat last year, Sando brought not only a level of play the club had yet to see but also a vast level of experience with him which has already assisted our club. Along with his collection of club MVP, Sando also collected the VVL MVP & Vipers MVP for the AVL season.

During our end of season presentation the club also bestowed the honor of our club person of the year award to be renamed the ‘David Berry Award for club person of the year. This was to honor Dave for the tireless work he has provided our club since the formation some 10 plus years ago, 2023 saw a fitting receipt in Tayla Sjogren collection the award.

2023 also saw Nathan Berry become the 1st player to represent our club for 150 VVL games during our home round in Ballarat, a fantastic achievement from Nathan who has been a foundation player for our club from the very start. We also saw our 2nd women play 100 games with Kara Johnson also collecting her millstone during our Ballarat round, adding to this Henry Murnane became our 12th Mens player to play 100 games during the year.

A major positive to come out of the year from a club perspective was the support from our members for our social functions. The club saw large numbers attend our in season Trivia Night and Rerserve Raffle, with both events providing valuable fundraising opportunities for both the club and the BCNA, we also saw a massive turn out for our post season awards night. 2023 marks the 1st time since post COVID that our off court support to these events has returned to these sorts of highs.

I would also like to thank our Committee for the hard work and countless hours they have given to the club behind the scenes. 2023 was from my point a view a very rewarding year, with the tireless work from both the current committee and past committees over the past few years finally bear results both on and off the court. While the committee did not necessarily have the numbers, I would like to see to make the task easier on everyone, the committee certainly step up and went above and beyond what is asked of them in handling any issues that was presented to us. Hopefully 2024 will see more of our members volunteer their time to enable to keep the club going in a positive direction.

The club would like to thank all our coaches for the support they have provided during the year, without these people stepping up to the role we would not be able to field teams. A big thanks to our head program coaches David and Paul for all they hard they put in during the season, not only to their teams but each program as a whole.

Finally, I would like to thank our main sponsor, Bendigo Stadium, for the support they provide the club and also to our member Associations for once again providing us with resources, players, volunteers and support to enable our club to be successful.

Hopefully in 2024 season will bring more success both on and off the court for the club, as we continue to grow the club and enable the opportunity for Western Victorian Volleyballers to play at the state league level.

Once again thank you everyone for their help in 2022 and we look forward to seeing you all again in 2023.

**Ben Hassell**

**Phantoms Volleyball Club President**