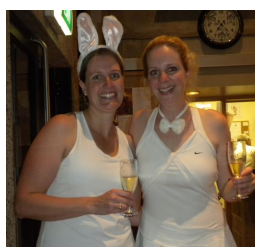


THE BOOMERANG

BY JOHN MEARS

For club-level amateurs, this is the Super Bowl, the Olympics. Held over two weeks in January at the Royal Melbourne Tennis Club, or RMTTC, the semi-annual Boomerang tournament in court—or, as they say in Oz, “royal” tennis—is the biggest, most anticipated, and best-attended handicap doubles tournament in the world. Competing for the Boomerang Cup were some 34 teams, coming from three clubs in Australia, one club in the US, and many clubs from England.

As with most handicap doubles events, the tournament was a mixture of spirited play on court mixed with friendly socializing off the court. Many teams sported whimsical names that illustrated the mix of competition and conviviality: the Hobart Devils, the Hardwick Hooligans, the Mad Hatters (from Hatfield House), the RMTTC Poseurs pour La Gallerie, the Newmarket Tipsters. The prize for the best name, however, went hands down to five lovely local Melbourne ladies, the RMTTC Penthouse Pets, who played all matches in Playboy-style outfits complete with bunny ears!



*The Penthouse Pets
in uniform!*

Over the two weeks of play, the 34 teams competed in six round-robin pools, with the top-ranking teams going on to the round of 16 and knock-out elimination. My team, the Newmarket Nasties, had a great tournament, winning our pool and making it to the final four. In the semis, however, we came up against the RMTTC Galacticos, captained by Julian Snow, one of the world’s top amateurs, who had assembled other top amateurs into an awesome squad. Yet the event was off handicap, and Julian’s team had never won in the past. This year, however, Snow went on to capture the Boomerang Cup. I had played against Julian in several matches in the last Boomerang and knew what to expect—just one astonishing shot after another.



*No hard feelings:
John with Julian
Snow after the semis*

Concurrent with the team competition was a handicap doubles in an A and B division, roughly below 40 handicap for the A and above for the B. Some ninety pairs competed, many being hybrid teams with a local paired with a visitor from abroad. Almost all visitors are billeted with resident families (significantly reducing the total cost of the event), and many doubles teams had host and guest playing together. The A event was won by our own Kip Curren, playing with a “20 something” (both in age and handicap) James Gould from Melbourne. Kip fielded the only US squad, the Newport



*The Kipper preparing
for victory in the
doubles!*

Patriots, and his team made it to the final four in 2009.

I had the hardest time off, not on the court. I pretty knew what to expect with the tennis, but I was not at all “in shape” for what happened at night. Coming from tame, genteel Boston, I was not even close to being able to keep up with the world-class, Olympic level party animals who are typical at the Boomerang. For example, on the night of one of the big social events, I was, after five solid hours of eating, drinking, dancing, and partying, very ready to head on home to bed and sleep. But alas, not to be, as my hosts (who had driven me) repaired straight to the tennis club for the after-party bash, lasting well into the wee hours. I was later mortified to discover that someone had taken a photo of me, totally passed out on a sofa, which was for several days projected on a large TV in a slideshow in the club lounge!



John in the early part of the party -- before the crash!

The tournament can be characterized as endless tennis, endless socializing, and endless fun. In addition to the two excellent courts and many other indoor facilities, the club has a delightful garden with tables and a pool, where many players and guests linger in the summer sun each day, sipping drinks and socializing. In the evening the club is party central—drinks flowing from the bar, delicious food from the caterers, and loads of excellent tennis. There are four major social events to punctuate the two weeks: an opening cocktail party at the magnificent Melbourne Club,



John and host Howard Mason before a doubles match

modeled on the traditional men’s clubs of London; a dinner and dance in the members room of the MCG, or Melbourne Cricket Ground (second largest stadium in the southern hemisphere), with lovely, evening views of the cricket pitch; the president’s cocktail party for overseas visitors and their Melbourne hosts at the tennis club (with the best prawns and oysters I’ve ever tasted); and the final presentation dinner at the Melbourne Museum. Many of the Brits spent their unscheduled hours at the nearby MCG to watch some silly game that’s somewhat similar to baseball, and just a short distance further is Melbourne Park, where that other game that’s not “real” tennis is played. The Open is easy to get to and very accessible on a day pass.

Despite some early rains at the tail-end of the terrible flooding, the weather was bright and balmy. The weather, the sport, and the fellowship all go to make the Boomerang a must-do event for all lovers of court tennis. Yet the biggest attraction of all are the local residents; the Aussies are not only world class athletes and party animals, they are also world-class hosts, really the kindest and most-welcoming people you'd ever want to meet. The next Boomerang will be in January 2013, so consider forming or joining a team; I guarantee you'll love it. I be there for sure.