

Twenty twenty vision

Vermont South's major problem in its 20-year history has been finding the facilities to keep up with the club's popularity and success

Vermont South Bowling Club was established in 1994 through an initiative from the Vermont South Tennis Club, which was looking to find a sport to keep its aging members active and have them remain within the club. With extra land granted from the then Nunawading Council and finance arranged through bank loans, an eight-rink synthetic green and new clubhouse were finished in 1994 and as a result the bowling club will celebrate its 20th anniversary in May 2014.

The Club started Pennant competition with two Men's teams and one Women's side. They achieved early success in 1995-6, winning a Division 9 flag. They have progressed through the ranks to reach First Division on two occasions in the Saturday Pennant competition and have also been very successful in Midweek competition. The club currently fields eight Saturday teams, six Tuesday teams and two night Pennant sides.

The initial surface, installed in 1994, failed after five years and the contractor went out of business so the club was forced to resurface the green to maintain its Pennant teams. Members were asked to contribute through low interest or no interest loans with the Tennis Section also helping out. At the first meeting members pledged over 70 per cent of the required funds ensuring the project would proceed.

From the first season with around 48 members, the club grew to around 130 members by 2004; the new members were mostly new bowlers and keen to play Pennant. The pressure was on to give everyone a game but with only one eight-rink green this required players being rotated in and out to try to achieve some balance and give everyone a game.

As a result the Committee investigated the possibility of installing a second green to accommodate the growing membership. This required gaining more land from the local council and taking two tennis courts from the Tennis Section. By working up a full business plan and with careful financial control, the club was successful in gaining support from Whitehorse Council who contributed around 50 per cent of the project cost.

The club decided to raise the balance through a bank loan and asked local banks to tender for the Club's business. After going through this process the club gained the required loans and also gained a long-term sponsor as it became involved with the local branch of the Bendigo Community Bank in Blackburn South.

The full project included a major extension of the clubhouse and another eight-rink synthetic green, both with disability access. The works were completed in 2008 with a total cost of over \$1.2 million. At the same time the club was granted a federal government grant for water tanks and these were installed by the time as the new green becoming operational.



With a concentrated drive for new members that included direct mail to over 14,000 households within the surrounding areas, the Club saw membership numbers increase to over 250 within 3-4 years, and is still continuing to hold around this figure. The club is active in developing junior clinics for school children, plus running clinics each Wednesday for adults with disabilities. The club takes its responsibility to the community very seriously.

In 2012 it became evident that the first green was nearing the end of its life end and a decision was taken to replace it. After a very long and exhaustive process the club took the bold decision to install a 'Pro-Shot' synthetic green that will be the first of its kind in Victoria.

KCL Sports, the successful contractor, has been installing similar surfaces in NSW and SA for many years. These greens have proven to be very reliable over a very long time and have been giving good consistent bowling for all the clubs with few problems encountered. The installation took place in May this year and over 2-3 weeks 25-30 members worked on or around the green doing everything from ditches, gardening & levelling (see picture above).

KCL Sports principal John Hastings, has said, "We are hoping that this will give Pro-Shot an introduction into the Melbourne market for their surfaces and are only too willing to discuss their surfaces with interested clubs". The old surface was recycled and utilised by local cricket and football clubs instead of just going to a tip.

The club has a very active social committee and has visited Bali, Fiji and Norfolk Island and bowled with local clubs in each country. The next trip is to the Cook Islands in May 2014, where they will bowl with the local clubs.

The club will be organising a major tournament on Saturday, 5 April, 2014 to be sponsored by KCL and will be issuing invitations to interested clubs and players to come and experience the green. Anyone interested can reserve a spot by ringing Gary Simmons on 0418 343 853.

