

QUARTER BY QUARTER



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WRITER

CUP OF HOPE

The annual Sawatzky Cup charity tennis event raises awareness about rare diseases, honouring a mate who lost his life to one



Sawatzky Cup charity tennis tournament founder Norm Burns with the trophy and mascot, Roosco. Pic: Riley Churchman

The Sawatzky Cup charity tennis tournament is all about winning off the court. The annual event is growing in stature as a signature event of Perth's summer as it raises awareness and funds for Rare Voices Australia, the national peak body for Australians living with a rare disease.

A single-day doubles tennis event for men and women, it is named in honour of Ross Sawatzky, a tennis stalwart who died in early 2020 at 48 from the rare autoimmune disease, hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis (HLH).

"Even though around 100 competitors are busting their guts on the day — and the eventual champions are handsomely rewarded for their efforts — this tournament isn't actually about winning," says tournament founder and director Norman Burns.

Presented by Zarraffas Coffee Currumbine, the Sawatzky Cup will be played on the grass courts of Alexander Park Tennis Club on Saturday, January 11. The cup's mascot, Roosco, sports the colours of Sawatzky's favourite AFL team, North Melbourne. Burns and a few of his tennis mates came up with the cup concept at Sawatzky's wake and it was held the following year.

"Rossco was a big unit, a more than handy player and a pretty straight shooter," Burns said. "One day we were playing and someone noticed he had a badly bruised ankle. His retort was he probably banged it while drunk and we all kind of laughed it off. But alas that was the first sign of HLH and it is a condition that is very hard to diagnose.

"And unfortunately once identi-



Ross Sawatzky and daughters Zoe and Teagan. Picture: Sawatzky family.

fied it is usually fatal in adults. Rossco went from a gung-ho guy on court to losing his life in just a few months."

The event had 40 competitors and just one sponsor in its first year. "I guess I ran with it early, mainly because I didn't work full-time and organising anything properly takes a fair bit of effort," Burns said.

"In the four years since it has grown and grown and grown.

"Now I have around 20 sponsors, including international brands, and players are coming from all over the metro area and beyond. I've secured all of these sponsors from scratch — cold-called them all. I probably put 5000 man hours into the event each year. This year has a record field of more than 100 men and women, including some of the State's top players. It's kind of generated its own wave."

Burns has long-term plans to expand the concept interstate and even internationally.

"There are more than 7000 identified rare illnesses and diseases," Burns said.

"Rare Voices Australia is the perfect target charity for the tournament because they encompass all of these.

"In some cases there may only be one or two individuals with a certain condition and it's hard for them to be heard above the noise, so that's where RVA comes in advocating at Federal and State level.

"Without the Sawatzky family's blessing, of course, the tournament wouldn't get off the ground — and I am cognisant that every time the Sawatzky Cup is held, pretty close to the anniversary of Rossco's death, it is a difficult time for them.

"But Rossco would be stoked,

maybe even a little embarrassed, that there was an event in his name, with some of the top players in the State taking part, and all for a worthy cause."

Burns will lean on decades of experience as a sports journalist to bring a "pro level" look and feel to the Sawatzky Cup.

"That means getting the right type of sponsors on board, having professionally taken images on the day," he said.

"Having Scotty Walsh, from Scotty's Media, shoot the day is invaluable as we get pro-quality shots that can be used to promote the tournament in the corporate arena and through the media; it's a massive step up from the usual club-player-with-an-iPhone type coverage."

The unique teams format is inspired by the Davis and Billie Jean Cups.

"While it is all doubles, it is really a team event in which the captain can shuffle their players as they see fit," Burns said.

"I'm interested in community minded and ethically responsible brands or individuals getting on board for Sawatzky Cup sponsorship. Rare illness and disease can affect anyone, any time, any where and of any age, whether you're wealthy or blue collar.

"I want the Sawatzky Cup to be a holistic event with a point of difference from your average club tournament.

"And we want to be able to raise a beer each year to Rossco and say 'this is for you mate'."

For more on Rare Voices Australia and the Sawatzky Cup, go to <https://sawatzkycup.journoportfolio.com/>



NAUGHTY CORNER (Inspired by Nick Kyrgios)

So now it's official. World cricket is run by India's governing body, the BCCI.

The "penalty" the International Cricket Council handed out to Virat Kohli for breaching Law 2.12 of its Code of Conduct — 20 per cent of his match fee and one demerit point — was pathetic.

The current coach of India, Gautam Gambhir, was handed a one-match Test ban for hitting Shane Watson with his elbow while taking a run in 2008.

Kohli's collision with Australian tyro Sam Konstas warranted the same punishment but such is the power of the BCCI it was never going to happen.

Ask this question: would Kohli have shoulder charged Mitch Marsh? Or Travis Head? This was the behaviour of a bully.

Former Australian captain Ricky Ponting says it could have flow-on effects. "I don't think it is harsh enough. Let's have a think about the enormity yesterday, this is probably the most-watched day of cricket all around the world," he told Channel 7.

"Imagine if that happens in a grade game on the weekend. I think people will think that is almost acceptable now. He is a role model, he is someone that the cricketing world looks up to, so I personally don't think that the fine was harsh enough."

FIRST QUARTER

Two-time world boxing champion Louisa "Bang Bang Lulu" Hawton has retired.

Born in Fremantle with Filipino heritage through her mother, Hawton (12-2-6KOs) held the WBO and WBC titles in multiple weight divisions.

The 39-year-old mother of two, who stands at 153cm, is also a former professional skateboarder, achieving a ranking of No. 7 at the World Cup.

In September, the Fremantle flyweight took the WBA Oceania title off Sydney-based Viviana Ruiz.

"After an incredible decade in boxing, it's time for me to hang up my gloves. This journey has been WILD . . . so many of my dreams fulfilled," Hawton announced on social media.

SECOND QUARTER

Ukrainian boxer Oleksandr Usyk talked the big talk and walked it too, in defending his WBA (Super), WBO and WBC world heavyweight titles by unanimous decision against Britain's Tyson Fury in Riyadh.

Despite being disadvantaged in height, weight and reach, Usyk won 116-112 on all three judges' scorecards as he again defeated Fury after his success in May made him the undisputed champion.

Asked pre-fight what he would buy Fury for Christmas, he replied: "A chocolate rabbit."

THIRD QUARTER

Contrary to popular theory, Sam Konstas' ramp shots were not honed in the backyard.

"In the backyard, we did have the auto-wicketkeeper, so the ramp (shot) was out of play," his older brother Billy Konstas said after Sam's bold half-century on debut.

FOURTH QUARTER

West Australian golfer Min Woo Lee is one of five Aussies to have already qualified for the US Masters at August next April.

The tournament takes the top 50 in the Official World Golf Ranking at the end of the year. Lee squeezed in at No. 49. It will be his fourth Masters.

Adam Scott takes his automatic place as the 2013 champion, Cameron Smith thanks to his 2022 British Open win and Cameron Davis after tying for 12th at Augusta this year. Jason Day is ranked 37.