

Hitting It for SIX

As the largest sporting club in Australia, the Melbourne Cricket Club is looking beyond the boundaries, with major redevelopments and innovative initiatives.

Images by Estelle Judah Photography

The Melbourne Cricket Club, or MCC, has been a pivotal part of Australia's sporting culture since it was formed some 176 years ago. Since that time, the club and the stadium it manages, the Melbourne Cricket Ground, have seen a number of evolutions.

Stephen Gough, CEO of the MCC, spoke to *The CEO Magazine* about the club's recent transformations and its plans for the future.

The CEO Magazine: After 18 years working for the Carlton Football Club, how did you utilise that experience in your role as CEO of the MCC?

Stephen: At Carlton, we also managed our own venue, albeit much smaller than here. We were having 24 matches a year. The challenge with both roles is really around running an individual sporting team while also running a venue and all the contracts and relationships that hang off that, plus the redevelopment of the facilities.

All that experience was the perfect training ground for this

role at the MCC. When I first walked in here, they were just about to start the feasibility study on the Northern Stand redevelopment, so my experience was helpful in understanding all the elements that go into making up a redevelopment, from how you're going to fund it to where the growth is going to come from.

Coming from a football team, it gave me a good understanding of the issues facing our key stakeholders—the issues that confronted the clubs that played at the MCG and how could we recognise and, if possible, resolve some of those issues. I think they were the experiences that proved very helpful in this role.

What are some of the challenges associated with playing at the MCG?

If you think about it from a club's perspective, you start the season knowing that you've got a long list of known expenses, like the cost of paying for your players, support staff, and admin. You've got some guaranteed revenue in sponsorship and AFL distributions, and a lot of other revenue is variable.

If your attendance is down, that'll hurt you. If your team's not winning, then functions, merchandise, membership, and attendance will all suffer. It's a very tough business, so the clubs are always looking at how they can safeguard their business by having guaranteed income that's not dependent on the team's form. Discussions around membership, reserved seating, corporate dining, and how best to improve yields are all areas that are very important to the clubs.

In 2012, you refurbished the Great Southern Stand. What's next for the MCC?

Yes. It's all complete, and the Great Southern Stand has been in operation now for around a year and a half. I think everyone's been pretty happy with the outcome. We've been able to upgrade and modernise some areas and improve some of the facilities and back-of-house work that was done, like the kitchens and cabling. Improved services and access and a better fit-out has certainly made that a welcome addition. Strong support from our hospitality partners—Spotless and Carlton & >

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United Breweries—has enhanced these facilities.

Our project with Yarra Park has continued to go from strength to strength and the park has never looked better. We have delivered water there throughout the summer months and reduced our consumption in the ground, so that's been a really good environmental story.

The next big thing on our radar is the Cricket World Cup. Coming into summer, we'll be hosting international and domestic cricket, and then we go into World Cup mode. There will be International Cricket Council requirements that the venue will have to adopt, and we'll be working very closely with the local organising committee. Hopefully, we can deliver a very successful World Cup here, particularly the final, which we last hosted in 1992.

We're confident that we know how to run big cricket matches. Last summer, we broke the record for a single day's attendance at a test match with more than 91,000 people here on the first day of the Boxing Day test against England. We think that the World Cup organising committee has made the right choice in having the final here because even if Australia don't make it, we think the cricket-loving fans will flock here and we'll have a full house for the final.

We're joint hosts with New Zealand. There's a pool of matches in New Zealand and a pool of matches in Australia. There'll be a fair bit of travel for the teams between the two, but New Zealand will play all of their early matches at home. I think there's a New Zealand versus Australia match in Auckland that'll definitely be a highlight. All those matches have been allocated between the two countries and across the states. We think we've got some great matches. We open the World Cup with Australia versus England, so that'll be huge. We have five matches in total including the quarterfinal and the final.

Test cricket in Australia is obviously such a big part of our culture, and to see the boys doing well really means a lot, don't you think?

No doubt about that. I think one of the great events in an Australian summer is an Australian-England series and to see it like it was. If



you had your doubts about test cricket, they were certainly allayed last summer.

You mentioned Yarra Park before. How have environmental concerns and considerations impacted Yarra Park, and what's involved in the management and development of the park?

We went to the government with a proposal suggesting that we could solve an issue that was affecting parks all around Melbourne with extensive drought years and the water supply under constant pressure to provide for parks and gardens. We came up with a solution to construct a water recycling facility and connect it to the sewer line and recycle water into class-A water. This would provide Yarra Park with all the water it needs, and send this water into the stadium for toilet flushing, as that is the MCC's highest usage, and for cleaning of the stadium.

We've now reached a position where we have been operating for a few years and have a very efficiently operating plant that is located below ground. It's a massive plant that reaches three storeys below the ground. We have reduced the MCC's potable water consumption by 50 per cent, and we have provided an independent, non-potable water solution for Yarra Park all summer. The park has never looked better. I think, as we continue with a few million dollars worth of landscaping

improvements this year, it'll look even better in another six months.

One of the challenges is that although we've improved the park's conditions enormously, we must continue to support the sporting precinct at Melbourne Olympic Park with Rod Laver Arena, Hisense Arena, and AAMI Park with car parking facilities here for major events there as well as at the MCC. We've been able to make the park a multi-use park so we can provide for passive recreation as well as supporting the major events.

What are the key principles or values that define the MCC?

I think that it's very much echoed in the mission statement, which recognises the MCC as a private club with public responsibilities. We have a lot of members, and we have separate sporting clubs within our club; but we also run a public asset, and we understand that the people of Victoria and Australia recognise that we manage the MCC and we've done that since 1853. It's an obligation, and we have to guard it and protect it for the people. It's regarded as the people's ground, and we live up to that mantle by the way we approach the task.

I think we are second to none in terms of our national sports museum and our commitment to sports heritage and the cultural heritage attached to sports in this country, particularly in Melbourne.




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It's a world-class facility, and anyone that's been to our museum could attest to that. I think we respect the heritage of sport more than anyone else. We have dedicated enormous resources to the museum, and our MCC tours are a real highlight.

I think not only do we manage a big public asset well for the people that come to the events, but we're also very conscious of our role in sports heritage. We hosted the very first game of test cricket in Australia and the first game of ODI cricket, as well as Olympic and Commonwealth Games.

We're the largest sporting club in Australia, with 102,000 members, and we have about 230,000 people on our waiting list; it's a very big club. Not only does it provide access to members into their area of the MCG, but we also run different sporting sections under the MCC banner. We have a cricket team, both mens and womens, and we also have teams for netball, lacrosse, tennis, squash, hockey, shooting, real tennis, bowls, and croquet. It's a massive organisation that caters to its members and hosts of others. •



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