

Sporting Revival at Leinster

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The story about the revival of recreational sport in Leinster is one of true community spirit.

Four years ago Staum Main and her family arrived in the town and immediately noticed a lack of any after-school recreational sport for children.

As a resident and mother of four, Staum was keen to provide the local kids with the opportunity to build their confidence and sporting ability through a regular sporting program, so she turned to tennis, a sport she knew well.

“I could see there was great potential to get something up and running,” Staum explained. “Leinster has beautiful weather and fantastic sporting facilities provided and maintained by BHP Billiton, but they weren’t being used. There seemed to be plenty of enthusiasm for an outdoor recreational program, but no-one to drive it forward.”

Having been a WA State seeded tennis player 20 years earlier, Staum drew on her experience playing Pennant and social tennis to offer the local kids regular coaching after school.

“As a child I was coached by Rod Kildarie and Arthur Marshall and remembered a lot of the drills they taught, which in combination with some online research, gave me the confidence to coach kids’ tennis.”

Staum sought enrolments from interested children through local community facilities including the Telecentre and School Gazette and received 45 names, from which she put together two groups for weekly coaching: one with kids aged four to 10, and the other 11 to 16.

The program proved popular, and as many of the participants’ parents saw how much their kids were enjoying the lessons, came forward to offer their assistance.

As the program grew, so too did the need for new equipment. Staum had initially provided the racquets and balls herself, but approached BHP Billiton for sponsorship in 2005*.

“BHP’s support has been invaluable. Their sponsorship has allowed us to purchase new tennis nets and balls suitable for all levels of play. We’ve also bought extra tennis racquets so that we can loan them to beginners who haven’t had a chance to buy their own, given that Leinster doesn’t have any sporting shops. We’ve also purchased a whiteboard for tournaments and a fantastic tennis ball machine.”

With BHP’s support, tennis has really taken off in the town. For the past two years, Leinster Big Kids Club, a community-run after school program for older kids, has provided professional tennis coaching during the school holidays. The BHP-sponsored program sees professionals from Perth

travel up for a two-week tennis clinic, to complement Staum's regular weekly coaching lessons. Staum also received some professional coaching tips as part of the clinic.

Given the popularity of the Leinster tennis program, Staum, in conjunction with BHP Billiton, is looking at ways to ignite interest in other sports among local residents, particularly the children.

"I am now a committee member of the revived Leinster Sport and Recreation Association. With the help of BHP Billiton, we are looking to offer the community the use of sporting equipment including tennis rackets. We as a group see this leading to children becoming more interested in sporting activities as a recreation and not just a sport."

"As one of only two closed mining towns in WA, Leinster enjoys outstanding support from BHP Billiton through their sponsorship of community-based events and provision of many free recreational facilities including a swimming pool complex, fully equipped gymnasium, squash court, tennis and basketball courts, netball courts, indoor cricket facilities and a full sized football oval. They are very committed to supporting sport and recreation in the community, which is fantastic, because unlike most city kids, the local children don't have as many opportunities to participate in a range of different sports. So with the help of BHP and a lot of dedicated people in the community, we're ensuring that our children don't miss out on the fun of recreational sport."

Two years ago Staum was diagnosed with cancer, which hindered her ability to coach and threatened an end to the program. The support provided by BHP Billiton, particularly towards the purchase of a new tennis ball machine, has allowed the highly popular program to continue.

In the four years since children's tennis commenced, many parents and other interested residents have become increasingly involved, with Leinster now hosting Monday night tennis for all ages and Thursday morning tennis for ladies.

"Beginners are always welcome," says Staum, "and after a few lessons are usually playing confidently within a couple of weeks."

It seems there's nothing like sport to unite a community and the people of Leinster, with the help of Staum and others like her, together with BHP Billiton, are working towards making recreational sport a part of life for everyone in the town on a long-term basis. There are currently plans to start a local kids' after-school cricket competition and a range of other sports for boys and girls of all ages.