

New coach sets Tullamarine on five-year plan for pennant glory

BY LANCE JENKINSON
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TULLAMARINE Tennis Club has the potential to become a powerhouse in Victorian tennis, according to its new professional coach Matthew Gregory.

The 27-year-old said the Catherine Avenue-based club had the infrastructure and ambition to reach the top of the mountain over the next five years.

"Absolutely. They've got six first-class courts that won't be affected by water restrictions and the committee is dedicated," he said. "This is a fantastic facility."

Gregory's immediate goal is to create a solid junior foundation that will eventually feed the senior ranks.

Then it is a matter of guiding the club into the higher ranks of Tennis Victoria's pennant competition. Gregory needed little time to be accepted as the new coach.

His credentials are impressive both on and off the court.

As a secondary student at St Bernard's College, he was involved in the various Victorian junior tennis squads.

Gregory earned a junior world ranking after reaching the quarter-finals at an international event in Auckland, New Zealand.

The East Keilor resident eventually played in satellite tours, but not before a stint in the United States.

A college scholarship was his next calling after an invitation from Austin Peay University in Tennessee and he featured on worldwide sports network ESPN while competing in the NCAA tournaments.

He said the passion involved in the college sports program in the US was an eye-opener.

"There is so much school pride over there - it's like you're playing in a Davis Cup match. And they've got billion dollar budgets."

While Gregory will have to make do with the facilities provided at Tullamarine, he brings a vast bank of knowledge from his coaching duties in the US. He worked with the US Tennis Association as a head coach in the region covering Kentucky, Ohio, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan and coached at the New Albany Country Club, run by former international tennis star Mary Joe Fernandez.

Now, he has a new challenge. Relishing his time back in the city of Moonee Valley, he wants to send Tullamarine rocketing up the pecking order in Victorian tennis, alongside the likes of Essendon, Maribyrnong Park, Glen Iris and Dingley.

"Within five years, that'd be my major goal," Gregory said.

President Marg Mugavin said the appointment of the new coach would ensure the club prospered in a new era.

"The club is very excited about having Matthew on board and looks forward to working with him to improve our club and players, no matter their age or standard of play," she said.

With more than 200 members, Tullamarine has a strong presence in a number of competitions, but is always looking for more players.

If you are interested in joining the club, contact Secretary Donna Camilleri on 94365527 for more information.