

Davis Cup king

Neale Fraser's love of tennis and his country has always shone through during his long and successful career.



Legend of the game

The foundation for international success has continued across half a century



Todd Woodbridge
President, The Australian
Davis Cup Tennis Foundation

The Australian Davis Cup Tennis Foundation was established in 1971, with the principal aim to promote the sport's development through the funding of young players who showed Davis Cup potential.

The foundation assisted this by either direct player or team assistance, or by providing financial support for selected player development programs conducted by Tennis Australia.

The foundation was also founded with the aim of recognising and honouring both past and present players who represented Australia as part of the Davis Cup competition.

Since it was formed, the foundation has provided more than \$2.2 million towards various programs.

All these funds have been raised primarily through membership subscriptions and various other fundraising activities.

Neale Fraser was a founding member of the foundation and for 48 of the 51 years of its existence, he has held the position of either president or vice-president.

In September 2022, Neale announced he would be retiring from the board but fortunately for the foundation he will remain as the patron.

Neale's contribution to the foundation and his tireless advocacy and work on its behalf has been the cornerstone of its success.

Not only has he contributed his business acumen but also his strong links with the International Tennis Federation, Tennis Australia and players who have represented our country.

On behalf of all the foundation members, we thank Neale for his magnificent contribution to the foundation, to the Davis Cup competition and to tennis in general.

WORDS **Leo Schlink**, former
Herald Sun chief tennis writer

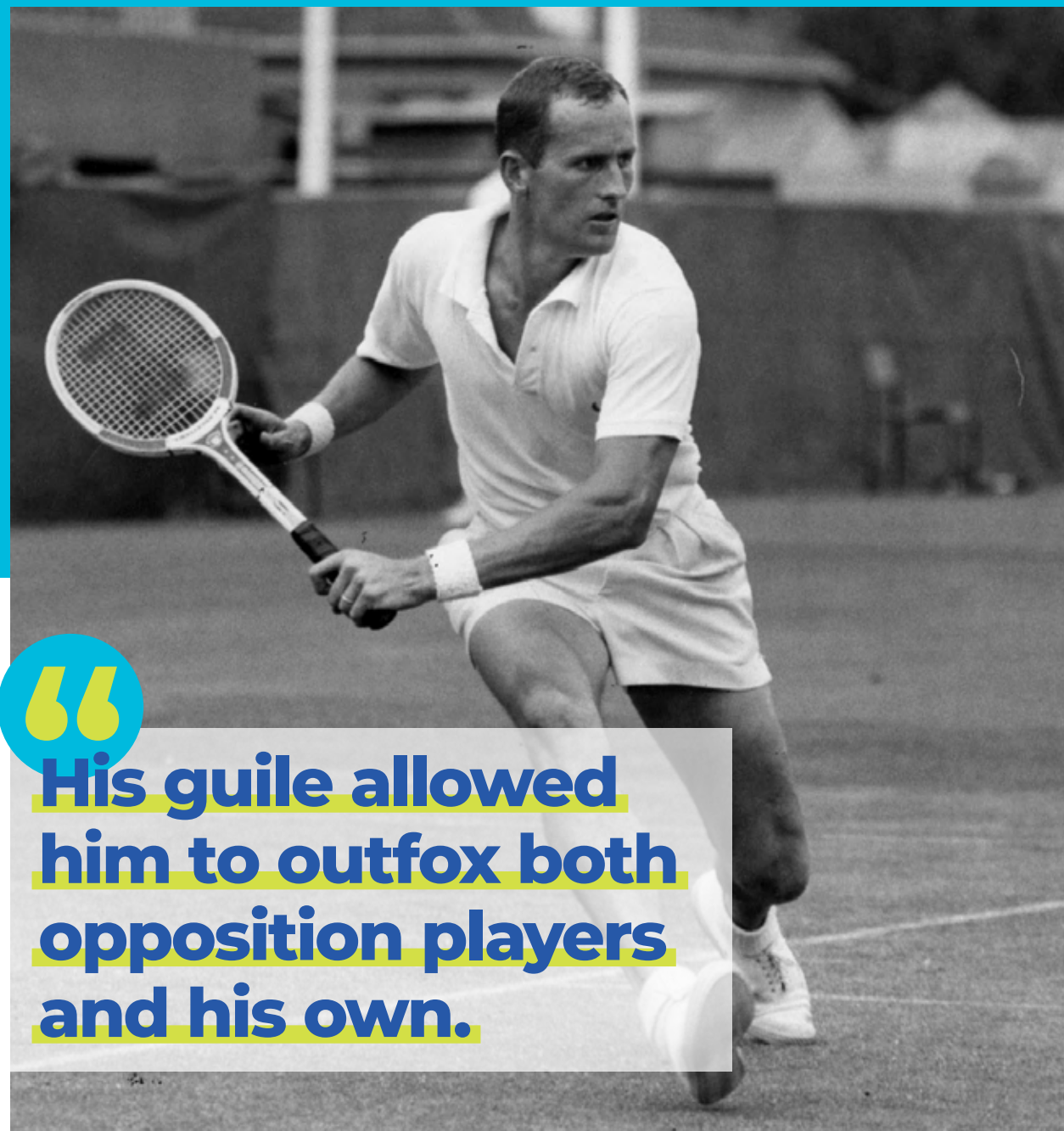
Instinctively averse to contrivance and exaggeration, Neale Fraser might wince at oft-used observations that "green and gold blood runs through his veins" or that "he lives for Davis Cup".

But, after a storied association with virtually every conceivable aspect of Davis Cup stretching from 1958 until today – 64 years and counting – and for all of his famed practicality, Neale Andrew Fraser will have trouble convincing anyone even remotely familiar with his passion for Australian tennis, in particular, and Davis Cup, in general, that either of those contentions are false.

At 89, 'Frase' remains a towering figure on the international tennis landscape, as a multiple Grand Slam champion in every discipline – singles, doubles and mixed doubles – a former World No 1, winner of eight Davis Cup trophies (four as a player, four as captain) and, for decades, a champion of Dwight Davis' competition.

As one of just seven Australians to have captained the nation in Davis Cup since 1950, Neale also holds the record for the longest reign as captain (23 years) and, after being succeeded by John Newcombe (and Tony Roche), then John Fitzgerald, Pat Rafter, Wally Masur and Lleyton Hewitt, Neale has remained as invested in Australia's fortunes as much as when he was first selected to join Harry Hopman's squads in the 1950s.

For all of Neale's stunning Davis Cup achievements – titles in



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1959, '60, '61 and '62 as a player followed by tactical genius from sidelines in 1973, '77, '83 and '86 – he treasures the lifelong bonds he formed with both his playing contemporaries and those who followed generations behind.

“I was fortunate enough to captain Australia in 75 ties (for a 55-20) record and we won four championships,” he said. “But I’m absolutely delighted that the players I had as captain over the years, they remain personal

friends of mine. I think about how fortunate I am that players such as Wally Masur, Fitzy (John Fitzgerald), Killer (Darren Cahill) and Cashy (Pat Cash) are still in regular contact.

“It’s the same with the other fellows, too. Rod Laver and Ken Rosewall are good friends and it’s great that we can reflect on those times in Davis Cup.”

Though retired as captain since 1993, visions of Neale cossetted in a courtside lounge chair – implacable to onlookers but

churning wildly internally – remain vivid. Among many other qualities, Neale’s attention to detail was phenomenal, constantly reminding his charges of the value of winning the first points of service games, while his guile allowed him to outfox both opposition players and his own.

As Pat Cash struggled with Mikael Pernfors in the 1986 final at Kooyong, Neale convinced the future Wimbledon champion that Pernfors was tiring when the



Neale Fraser, Rod Laver, John Newcome and Fred Stolle at Wimbledon in 2019; with John Alexander after the 1977 Davis Cup victory; in 1986 with Peter McNamara, Paul McNamee, John Fitzgerald and Pat Cash after beating Sweden in the final.

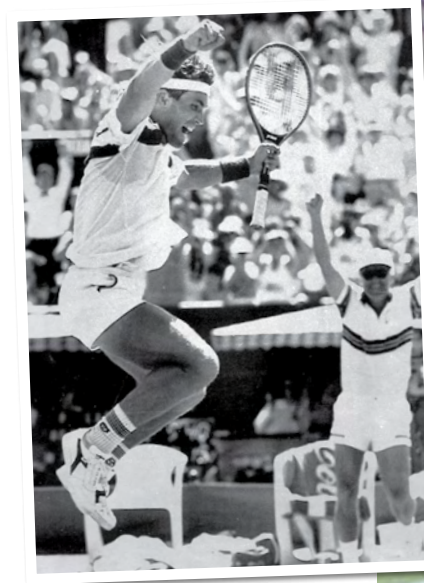


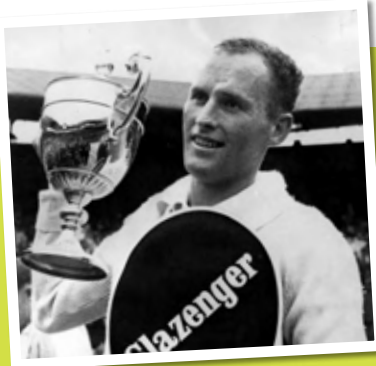
Swede held a commanding two sets to love lead. The bluff, based on little more than hope, worked as Cash lifted, broke serve and returned to Neale at the change of ends with: “You’re right, Frase, he is getting tired”.

Neale’s love for beating all opponents was legendary, but defeating the United States always seemed more meaningful – especially since the Americans had dominated the competition since

Australia’s 1967 triumph against Spain.

With professionals banned from Davis Cup, the US ran amok with five titles from 1968-72. When the ban was lifted, Neale and Wayne Reid began the process of fielding what he contends was the greatest team to set foot into Davis Cup battle – Rod Laver, Ken Rosewall, Newcombe and Mal Anderson. “We spoke with Newk at Wimbledon and he immediately said ‘yes’,”





Neale Fraser for the record

Singles champion
Wimbledon 1960 (above)
United States 1959-60

Doubles champion
Australian 1957-58, 1962
French 1958, 1960, 1962
Wimbledon 1959, 1961
United States 1957, 1959-60

Mixed doubles champion
Australian 1959
Wimbledon 1962
United States 1958-60

Davis Cup
1955-63
Captain 1970-93

Neale Fraser was a strong athlete known for his big forehand and fearsome lefty serve. A Wimbledon champion and dual US singles winner, he was unlucky to miss out on his national title in three finals.

Against Rod Laver in 1960, he held a match point, only to lose 8-6 in the fifth set. In 1959 and 1960 Fraser dominated the US championships, winning the singles, doubles and mixed titles in both years.

A committed Davis Cup player, he finished with an imposing 18-3 record. Fraser's commitment to Davis Cup continued for 24 years as captain. Fraser guided Australian teams to victory in 1973, 1977, 1983 and 1986.

In 2008 he was awarded the ITF's highest accolade – the Philippe Chatrier award for outstanding achievement in tennis.

Source: Tennis Australia



**It is the greatest
team in Davis
Cup history, in
my opinion.”**

Australia's winning Davis Cup team in 1973 included Geoff Masters, John Newcombe, Mal Anderson, Neale Fraser (captain), Rod Laver, Ken Rosewall and Colin Dibley. Right: Alexander smashes a forehand during their 1977 tie against Italy at White City in Sydney.



championship-clinching victory over Adriano Panatta. Roche set the standard on the opening day by trouncing the accomplished Panatta before Alexander downed Corrado Barazzutti.

Six years later, Australia prevailed without a top-50 player on its books.

“We were favoured by the draw that year,” Neale recalled. “We beat Great Britain at Memorial Drive when ‘Cashy’ made his debut, then we beat Romania in Brisbane, also on grass. ‘Fitzy’ played his best tennis at White City in Sydney on grass in a team containing (Yannick) Noah, (Henri) Leconte and Guy Forget.

“That got us into the final against Sweden on grass at Kooyong. The Swedes decided to put (Joachim) Nystrom in singles over Stefan Edberg and Fitzy beat Nystrom, which was huge because we had to play Edberg in the fifth rubber so Cashy was the lynchpin. We won the doubles with Eddo and Paul McNamee and then Cashy destroyed Nystrom (6-4, 6-1, 6-1) in the first of the reverse singles.”

In 1986, Cash led Australia to the last championship of Neale's captaincy. “Cashy was magnificent,” he recalled. “He beat Edberg on the first day and then combined with Fitzy to beat Edberg and (Anders) Jarryd in the doubles. He played (Mikael) Pernfors in the reverse singles and was down 2-6, 4-6 and then came back to win the next three sets 6-3, 6-4, 6-3.”

Neale would guide Australia to two more finals – the 1990 decider against a formidable US team, falling 3-2, and again in 1983 against Germany in Dusseldorf where Michael Stich led the home team to victory.

“Looking back, I had a great run,” Fraser said. “It was an honour to play and captain Australia in Davis Cup. But the real pleasure has been in the friendships with so many great fellows over the journey. I'm very fortunate.” ●

Neale recalled. “Laver and Rosewall weren't at Wimbledon but they both said they would give it a go. “Being the modest fellows they are, they thought they might be a bit old.

“They were magnificent and they beat the Americans 5-0. It is the greatest team in Davis Cup history, in my opinion.”

Australia's rout in Cleveland remains one of the most lopsided and emphatic final displays in Davis Cup history.

In 1977, Australia overcame a challenging draw to host Italy in the final on grass at White City where John Alexander advanced to his finest Cup moment with a

