



“We had a walk around and words can’t describe how bad it was. I was tearing up just seeing how these families lived in order to survive.”

Kooyong’s Andrew Whittington gives back in the Philippines through Project 6 Foundation

Kooyong Foundation player and 2019 Club Champion, Andrew Whittington has played several ITF events in the Philippines during his career. When he visited at the end of September, however, it wasn’t about rankings points, prize money or tournament play...

by Jon Aspin

On this trip, he was there as an ambassador for Project 6 Foundation, the not-for-profit coaching and physical education development charity that’s reaching out to some of the marginalized parts of South East Asia through tennis and sport.

Andrew travelled to the Philippines on September 28th with its founder and director, Daniel Buberis, as well as its International Director of Coach Development, Brett McLennan, for a week-long series of free coach education workshops, coaching camps and tennis clinics in orphanages, schools and local tennis clubs.

All up, the trio travelled close to 1,000 kilometres to regions including Manila, Agoo La Union in the north, Sta Rosa Laguna in the south, and Smokey Mountain, which is just outside the sprawling Manila capital of over 12.8 million people.

Together with Roland Kraut, P6F’s Development and Education Coordinator in the Philippines, they managed to

reach over 300 enthusiastic children — some of whom had never picked up a racket before — and delivered coaching development workshops to over 50 young Filipino coaches.

While at first they linked up with one of Kooyong’s global reciprocates, the Manila Polo Club in Manila, (where they delivered coaching to some local school children), Andrew said that the next five days were particularly ‘eye-opening.’ “We’re a very lucky country in Australia,” he said after digesting the whole experience. “I’d travelled to the Philippines before, but basically I was in hotels, training, playing and then on a flight home.

“Being amongst these people and these communities for that week was something else entirely. Spending that time has changed my perspective and really made me appreciate the way we grow up in Australia; especially the ability to play tennis at a place like Kooyong.” The toughest, most emotional part of the trip was the visit to Smokey Mountain, a rubbish-

dump slum that is home to approximately 400 families, along with a nearby population of around 10,000, all of whom survive by scavenging in the dumps’ raw open trash.

“This is something I’ll never forget,” Andrew said. “We had a walk around the slum and words can’t describe how bad it was. I was tearing up just seeing how these poor families lived in order to survive.” “It hit me like a ton of bricks, but at the same time, because we were carrying tennis rackets and balls with us, the kids were coming up to me smiling, asking about tennis. I was lost for words.” Putting the agonizing sadness of such extreme poverty to one side, Andrew said he was proud of what they did in the Philippines to help seed the work of Project 6 Foundation. Registered as a charity in Australia at the end of 2018, Daniel officially launched the foundation at his own former orphanage in Quezon City (part of the Greater Manila area) in March this year.

Having met Daniel (or ‘Bubes’ as he is known amongst the wider Australian tennis community) when he was at Tennis Australia as an elite strength and conditioning coach, Andrew had little hesitation in saying yes to becoming an ambassador.

Considering ‘Bubes’ a mentor, more than just a coach, Andrew says he’s ‘on board’ with his foundations broad goals of developing the wellbeing of children through sports and physical education, and providing opportunity in places where there might not have been any before. “I know what I was like growing up, and playing all kinds of sports, not just



tennis, really helped me in terms of my social and cognitive development,” said Andrew.

“Now that I’ve seen what I’ve seen over there, it’s important to me now, especially knowing how I’ve been brought up over here, and the advantages we have in Australia, that I’m able to pay it forward in some small way.” ■