

## Industry Evolution Not Revolution

**MAL HIGGS - President, Australian Liquor Stores Association**



**Despite a significant amount of head banging by wineries about everything from supermarket domination to the cleanskin culture, after 33 years as a liquor retailer Mal Higgs believes the liquor industry isn't in such bad shape.**

In fact the President of the only national retailer body, the Australian Liquor Stores Association, is positively upbeat about the current evolution of a more professional, sophisticated and customer-focussed sector.

"Ten years ago we were good buyers and very bad sellers. Our purchasing strategy amounted to screwing a supplier down, doing a deal, buying five pallets and then selling it off cheaply to get the stock out the door," he said.

"Our pricing strategy was all about watching the bloke down the road and then under-cutting him.

"Those days are gone - we're likely to buy smaller quantities more frequently for improved stock control and our selection and pricing strategy is all about understanding and meeting customer needs, which doesn't necessarily mean just focussing on price.

"There's just no place anymore for the corner grog shop with a cardboard sign out front and a bloke with a fag reading the race guide in a dark, grimy corner."

He's the first to admit that the last ten years have been cathartic for the industry.

Deregulation of liquor licensing, the unprecedented impact of supermarket owned chains and grocery giants and a plethora of products - from boutique beers, designer RTDs and spirits to the thousands of wine brands - has made his industry far more complex.

But he believes that out of this adversity has come a tough, resilient and more competitive sector.

### DEREGULATION DRAWS TO A CLOSE

"Deregulation has become a dirty word in Australian liquor retailing but, strictly speaking, the last ten years have been more about increasing competitiveness than deregulation," Mal said. "It hasn't been all bad."

"Victoria certainly started deregulating in the mid 1980s and that decimated their retail industry as we knew it at every level.

"But when the National Competition Council commenced the national competition policy process to make Australia globally competitive (which I might say was aimed at major commodities like wool, milk and water), we were sucked into the vortex by State Governments looking to pick up Federal money.

"For example in Victoria it opened the door for a large number of general liquor licenses everywhere from bookstores to butcher shops and while it didn't really do very much to market share or margins, it changed the responsibility of alcohol service from trained professionals to anyone who could make a cup of coffee.

"In NSW the change has been much less dramatic. We managed to negotiate a Social Impact Assessment as a measure of need for a new license and frankly it is hard to justify that the population needs more liquor outlets from a social or health point of view. So we haven't seen a blow-out in new bottleshops.

"Queensland had its own licensing system. The mandatory link between hotels and satellite liquor stores did create more than 2000 new stores because patrons - particularly women - weren't happy to go into hotels to buy a bottle of champagne next to a bloke in a blue singlet and stubbies. "But Queensland hasn't changed its licensing system to meet the NCC guidelines and hasn't received its competition payments - it's no easier to

get a new license in Queensland than it ever was."

Mal said SA and WA are still reviewing their liquor licensing laws but with strong lobbying by their associations in each state there are unlikely to be wholesale changes to the number of licenses or trading hours.

"Frankly the whole competition review process is drawing to a close.

Since the last Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting earlier this year, the next phase of reform will be more about productivity than competitiveness.

"Looking ahead I think changes in supermarkets will be slow - many consumers will still want to see alcohol and food separated.

"There is also a strong agreement across the states that alcohol and petrol won't ever be sold together so there will be no licensed service station.

"The Government has moved on and I really don't see there will many more licenses unless there is a real need in a community."

### THE CHAIN GANG

Surprisingly, Mal doesn't share the usual vitriol directed at the two major supermarket chains in Australia which have grown their joint market share from around 25% in the mid 1990s to at least 40% now - and as high as 50% for wine.

"It's a maturing economy and naturally there will be large players," Mal said. "They have certainly purchased a lot of stores - including my own former group - but I can't say that any of us were unhappy with what they paid. They paid a fair price for our goodwill, which enabled me to move on and buy more businesses.

"I think there is an unreasonable fear that the chains will wind up owning 80% of the industry but I can't see it. We have to remember that they own around 40% jointly - that is still only 20% - 25% each. I don't see that as a dominant share by any means.

"Now that they have brought the Hedley Group (Coles Myer Liquor Group) I can't see what else they can buy, without cannibalising their own stores.

Mal said the chains have given the other liquor store operators "a much needed shake-up" with the result that standards of service and management have improved.

The Retail Liquor Development Foundation, which has been sponsored by ALSA and Fosters, has offered more than 80 training modules to more than a 1000 store owners in the last year in everything from time management, strategic planning and OHS to face to face sales.

"We're a lot more professional than we used to be and I guess we expect our suppliers to have that same level of professionalism," Mal said.

While it can be argued that Porters and other franchises are "virtual chains" he defends such buying groups with his mantra of "meeting customer needs".

"People want to buy from branded outlets, they want specials and a broad range of wines and beers and spirits, and they want expert service," Mal said.

"Small independent groups can do that as well if not better than the large chains and we also develop better relationships with our suppliers.

"The understanding we have with S. Smith & Son for example is excellent - we understand their products, we understand how they want to get to the consumer and we are very open with them.

Mal said the critical need retailers have is a confident business relationship with their supplier.

"By that I mean consistent, transparent, equitable trading terms. We're not naive enough to think we can get the same prices as Woolies but we don't want to subsidise them either.

"I think we require much more strategic brand building now from wineries. It's no good sticking to your strategy until day 19 of the month

then throwing it to the wind and wheeling and dealing to meet budget in the last ten days.

"We look forward to investment on in-store promotion, but more so in product quality. I thoroughly support the "over-delivering - under-promising" message which Australian wine has used so effectively overseas.

### TRENDSSETTERS

Mal believes wineries have to talk to their retailers about consumer preferences and see them as a valuable market research partner.

"Wineries have to be much more across industry trends. For example the \$30 plus per bottle market is very slow yet we still get lots of wineries wanting to push product into that category," Mal said.

"There are some great wines which will still fetch that price but you can get so many good wines at \$12 to \$15 a bottle, why would consumers pay more."

What about the scourge of the wine industry - cleanskins?

"I think the cleanskin fad will die out," Mal said. "People are educated to buy on brand and while they might experiment with an unlabelled wine it won't be sustained. We don't want them either because they don't offer a point of difference in the store - we would favour home labels before cleanskins because at least there is a brand to which we can add value."

And what's hot in the varietal stakes?

"Pinot Gris, Pinot Grigio, Viognier are all big but from a low base. So is Rosé but again it is still quite small compared to Chardonnay," Mal said.

"The thing we have to remember is that today's customers are more confident and their expectations are higher."

### SOCIAL THREATS

Mal says the greatest threat to the wine industry - and beer, spirits and RTDs - is the changing community perception of alcohol.

"People are generally a lot more aware of what they consume and the harm that alcohol abuse costs is in the billions of dollars," he said.

"We have had zero to negative growth in alcohol consumption for more than five years - sales have only increased as a result of population growth and shifts in categories, for example from beer to wine.

"If people start actively choosing to drink less for health or social reasons we have a serious industry problem."

Mal was appointed to the visionary Drinkwise Board in October last year. Sitting alongside health reformers such as Trish Worth and John Saunders as well as ex-Constellation Wines supremo Stephen Millar, Mal said the organisation has a plan to research youth drinking habits then conduct a public education campaign to encourage moderation.

"We have to get across to young Australians that there is nothing wrong with having a drink - prohibition just has the opposite effect with young people. But we need to explain the levels of inappropriate alcohol consumption.

"I don't think enough awareness work has been done on the standard drink guide, for example.

"It's an inspiring initiative which will be funded by industry and is likely to have at least \$5 million to spend in the first year."

For Mal the future looks bright.

"It's all about evolution. From a gross profit point of view we're feeling positive and while I know many wineries are doing it tough due to oversupply, I've seen at least two previous wine busts and subsequent booms and most of those long term players - such as S. Smith & Son - are still calling on us and selling quality wines.

"We're all here for the long run."



# Winemakers Cooling Off On Warm Climate Regions

**Grape growers in the Murray Irrigation Areas are feeling the squeeze as winemakers who are spoilt for choice turn to cheap, higher quality fruit from cool climate regions.**

Grapes grown in South Australia's Riverland region, Victoria's Murray Valley and New South Wales' Riverina grape growing districts are being crushed out of the popular premium wine category as winemakers with an embarrassment of riches, turn to higher quality fruit currently at unsustainable prices from premium wine regions.

Murray Valley Winegrape Growers' Association Spokesman, Mike Stone, says a lot of 'old-hats' have said it's probably the worst state of the industry that they've ever seen and that many growers won't survive.

"It's the third year in a row that growers are accepting prices as low as \$130 a tonne to get their fruit off the vine and create some cash flow but they're not even treading water," Mike said.

"Our yields are down 10 - 15 per cent on the 2005 harvest of 440,000 tonnes which is a Godsend but another couple of hundred thousand tonnes still needs to be taken out of the system in order for the industry to return to balance.

"The problem is where is all of the excess fruit going? It's still getting picked and processed and it's just adding to the surplus," Mike said. Over the border in SA, Chris Byrne from the Riverland Winegrape Growers' Association says 'tonnes crushed' figures for 2006 are expected to be down 60,000 tonnes to 420,000 tonnes, but the lighter vintage hasn't helped grape prices.

He says the reduction is partly due to climatic conditions, combined with growers aiming to contain yields, but agrees that final 'tonnes crushed' statistics won't tell the true story because of grapes left on the vine due to unfulfilled contracts.

"Grape prices have declined 20 per cent across the board in the region in 2006," Chris said.

"The average price per tonne is \$380, which is borderline with the cost of production," Chris said.

Chris says talk of a vine pull scheme is unfounded and reactionary but says the reduction in price of cool climate fruit is putting pressure on growers.

"A lot of vineyards, big and small, are being squeezed out of the market which is very bad timing for the growers, considering forecasts suggest the industry will be back in balance in four to five years," Chris said. Secretary for the Riverina Winemakers' Association in NSW, Stuart McGrath-Kerr, says the region is on track to reach its 250,000 tonne forecast but concurs it's hard to predict the final figure as not all the fruit will be picked.

"There has been some mopping up of unpicked fruit at very low prices. The Chardonnay crop is up 30 per cent on 2005 so some of that is being pushed down the line into cask wine," Stuart said.

Semillon in the Riverina is also up an extra 8,000 tonnes to 45,000 tonnes.

The problem isn't just affecting Murray River Growers. Premium districts are also feeling the pinch.

Barossa grapegrower and Secretary of the local Barossa Winegrape Growers Council, Bob Taplin says the number of advertisements in local and metropolitan newspapers offering grapes for sale is a good indication of the current over-supply situation.

Bob says summer rains in the Barossa compounded the problem by increasing crop levels.

"Yields were much higher than initial estimates and some wineries have told some of their growers not to bring in the extra fruit, otherwise the excess would be sent home," Bob said.

"There have been some wineries taking advantage of the situation. One was offering two growers I spoke to \$100 a tonne for uncontracted Shiraz but they declined.

"It's not just young vine Shiraz that is left on the vine: there is good quality



fruit from established Barossa growers with mature vines," Bob said.

Barossa Chardonnay, Semillon and Cabernet are also affected.

Phillip Ryan, Secretary of the Hunter Valley Vineyard Association says that premium 'cool-climate' wine regions are feeling the pinch but the Hunter has fared well considering the current situation.

"Fortunately in the Hunter we've had a natural reduction of grape supply due to the season but some of the smaller producers who operate a bit tighter have reduced their intake," Phillip said.

"There will be very little left on the vine in the Hunter. We're lucky that we have a strong tourism market so cellar doors can move a lot of stock.

"There has been a slight downward trend with prices but the larger wineries here want to hold onto their growers so prices have held reasonably well," Phillip said.

Phillip agrees that excess fruit in 'cool climate' regions is causing headaches for the industry.

"These large plantings are coming on stream and the owners have had to bite the bullet and take the prices they can get. People who are bleeding need to get their grapes off the vine and it's impacting on everyone.

"It's an aberration in the normal viticultural cycle. Strategy 2025 and the subsequent tax breaks caused the wrong market signals, and we're paying for it now.

"You can't expect to double Australia's vineyard size in four years and not expect a hiccup," Phillip said.

Lawrie Stanford, Information and Analyst Manager from the Australian Wine & Brandy Corporation, can see an end to the current industry indigestion, with a return to balance predicted in four to five years.

Some even predict it could be as early as 2008.

"We've had a less than average national harvest of 1.8 million tonnes in 2006 which is favourable," Lawrie said.

"It gives us an opportunity to draw stocks down assuming sales remain

on target and you couldn't say that two years ago, when the 2004 and 2005 vintages kept adding to the surplus," Lawrie said.

"The problem is that Australia has entered into cheaper price points in the market to move excess stock and the quality is good.

"So we're developing a reputation for low price-high quality when we want to be at the high price- high quality end," Lawrie said.

## BIT ON THE SIDE

A fireman is polishing his fire engine outside the fire station when he notices this cute little girl next door, in a little red cart with little ladders hung on the side and a garden hose neatly coiled in the middle. The little girl is wearing a fireman's helmet and has the cart tied to a dog and a cat. The fire-fighter walks over to have a closer look.

"That's a lovely fire engine," he says admiringly.

"Thanks," says the little girl.

"The fireman looks closer

and notices

the little girl has tied one of

the cart's strings to the dog's

collar and one to

the cat's testicles.

"Little colleague," says the

fire-fighter, "I don't want to tell

you how to run your fire engine

but if you were to tie that rope

around the cat's collar,

I think you could probably go

a lot faster."

The little girl pauses for a

moment, looks at the wagon, at

the dog and the cat, then shyly

looks into the fireman's eyes and

says:

"You're probably right but then

I wouldn't have a f\*\*\*n siren,

would I?"



## World in Trouble

You know the world is in trouble when...

The best rapper is a white guy,

The best golfer is a black guy,

The tallest guy in the NBA is Chinese,

The Swiss hold the America's Cup,

France is accusing the US of arrogance,

Germany doesn't want to go to war,

The three most powerful men in America are named 'Bush', 'Dick' and 'Colon'

and

The Prime Minister of Australia is flanked by two senior ministers whose

names are Abbott and Costello!





## News from the Principals



### Jim Barry Wines

Parallax Design has been awarded the Golden Chair by the Adelaide Advertising and Design Club for the outstanding design of the Jim Barry Silly Mid On at their annual awards night on Monday 3 April 2006. The Gold Chair is the most coveted of the AADC awards and only one entry each year will reach this pinnacle. The most outstanding complete piece in the annual exhibition, recognised for both originality and excellence, is presented with the Golden Chair.

"The Parallax Design team has designed outstanding labels for all of our recent wines, I am thrilled for them to receive such a commendable accolade as they are a very worthy contender," Peter Barry said.

"Silly Mid On, a Sauvignon Blanc Semillon is the extension of our cricketing range of wines that originated after we purchased the Penola Cricket Ground in the Coonawarra region of South Australia and launched The Cover Drive Cabernet Sauvignon.

"As Silly Mid On is a fielding position fraught with danger, close to the batsman, requiring very good reflexes and always at risk of being struck by the ball, we developed three different labels to depict the danger and the craziness of the position.

"We wanted people to understand the position better and to have a laugh at the same time" says Peter. "And, of course, enjoy a great bottle of wine".

**Peter Barry**

### Nautilus Estate, Marlborough

A long, warm, summer ripening season in Marlborough resulted in an early harvest, with the first grapes for sparkling wine base being picked right at the start of March, some two to three weeks earlier than normal. The glorious weather continued throughout the early part of March, which meant that brix levels continued to rise steadily and harvesting continued in idyllic conditions.

Nautilus Estate's new white winery, which is located adjacent to the existing Pinot Noir cellar, opened just in time to receive and press the first Sauvignon Blanc grapes of the 2006 season and due to good planning and construction, everything went smoothly.

Nautilus Estate sold its quarter shareholding in local contract winery Rapaura Vintners in June 2005 and the last six months have seen a total redevelopment of the Nautilus Estate site at the junction of Sate Highway 6 and Rapaura Road, just a couple of kilometres from Renwick township. The landscapers have now moved in and once trees have been planted

and the grounds mature, it will be transformed into one of the more attractive winery sites in the Marlborough wine region; a "must visit" destination for anyone travelling there.

Great credit must go to Nautilus winemaker Clive Jones and his team, who not only spent the last half year working closely with the project managers while the site underwent redevelopment, but they have also succeeded in simultaneously making and putting out the finest set of varietal wines ever made under the Nautilus and Twin Islands labels.

**Clive Weston**

### Peter Lehmann Wines

Vintage 2006 has almost wound up at PLW, and for the first time in many years our winemakers have been able to take some time off during Easter to spend with their families, eat far too much chocolate and even swing a golf club without having too many worries on their plates.

Harvest in the Barossa for PLW started late and finished early, which meant that it was a very compressed vintage, and according to Wigo (PLW Chief Winemaker) "it wasn't just the athletes and swimmers at the Commonwealth Games that were under the pump".

Despite a few hot days early in proceedings, the weather settled down to where mild-warm conditions during the days and cool nights were the norm. In their own conservative way the winemakers were very excited about the vintage and after being pushed somewhat reluctantly, have suggested an early rating of 8/10.

"The condition of the fruit arriving at the weighbridge was terrific and the early indications are looking very promising for the whites, which are displaying some great varietal fruit flavours", Wigo suggested. "And the reds, particularly the Cabernet, are showing excellent colour and brilliant varietal notes...but its still too early to call and only time will tell."

On the marketing and sales front at PLW we are eagerly awaiting the new vintage releases for our 2004 Shiraz and 2005 Semillon.

The 2004 Shiraz will be our 25th vintage release for this stalwart label within our portfolio, and it will be a cracker not far behind the wonderful 1998 in richness and flavour.

As for the 2005 Semillon, Huon Hooke in his Wine column in the Sydney Morning Herald on Easter Saturday has already given the wine a huge rap.

"This wine has evolved from 10 or 15 years ago, when it was normal for Barossa Semillon to be oaky as all get-out. You couldn't taste the grapes for the barrels. Now they're saving money on oak and making a better

wine, and people are loving it."

He goes on to say that the '05 "...smells of lemon juice, fresh herbs and cashew nuts, with a slight veneer of toastiness... It has plenty of flavour and length, and fresh acidity that helps it go with food - fish, shellfish and crustaceans are ideal."

Finally, a little house-keeping news from the PLW Brand Management teams in Victoria and South Australia. We were all sad to say goodbye to Sue O'Toole from the Victorian/Tasmanian office earlier in the month as she and her husband Lindsay have decided to seek fame and fortune in the US. After three wonderful years managing the PLW brand in both states, Sue will be greatly missed by all the team at the Footscray office and in the trade in general. The good news is that Ed Scully, formerly with Distinguished Vineyards, has joined the team and with his vast knowledge of the Melbourne market will no doubt create a niche for himself and continue the good work established by Sue.

een a member of our Cellar Door team in Tanunda, as our SA Brand Manager. Since joining forces with the Adelaide office in early February, she has already made a significant contribution to our sales and marketing progress in the home-state.

**Malcolm Stopp**

### Pirie, Tasmania

Vintage was one of the earliest on record: we have picked some blocks in mid March that have been brought in as late as early May in some years. Why? It was not especially hot but the spring experienced abundant rain and lavish growing conditions. This seems to have accelerated development in the more protected inland valleys especially in the north of the state.

Crop loads have been average to good so it was not the scenario which lead to the rapid ripening in 2002 where extremely low yields pushed maturity forward very quickly. In common with 2002 we have had a very dry late February and March which seems to favour grape development in the critical post-veraison period.

First tasting impressions from tank are of some very good aromatic whites such as gewürztraminer, pinot gris and Riesling, sparkling bases. Reds seem slightly lighter than 2005 but with good perfume.

2006 will be known for its softness and abundant flavour in the better Tasmanian whites and reds and usefully follows 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2005 in a run of better than average years.

**Andrew Pirie**

### Winter Warmer

**The rain's coming down and you've been pottering around the house, stoking the fire from time to time. If you've managed to convince your butcher to bone a shoulder of lamb for you (which is the trickiest part of this recipe) there is nothing more inviting than sitting down to a slow-roast on a cold day. In the Barossa we are lucky enough to have Jan and John Angas' boned forequarter available at the local farmers market, but if you're not so lucky, choose your butcher well and be rewarded by this truly delicious winter dish.**

#### Slow Pot-Roasted Seasoned Forequarter of Lamb

2kg boned lamb forequarter  
 3-4 springs fresh rosemary  
 6 cloves of garlic  
 Olive Oil

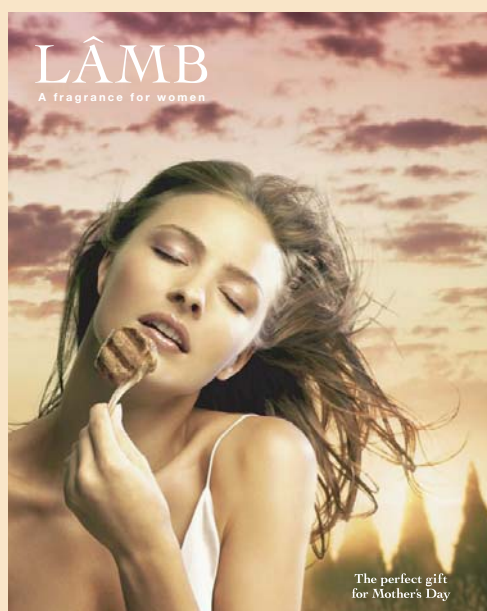
#### Stuffing

cup couscous  
 preserved lemon  
 1 onion, chopped finely  
 cup pinenuts or slivered almonds  
 teaspoon lemon pepper  
 1 teaspoon chopped fresh parsley  
 3 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme  
 sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Place couscous in a small bowl, pour over  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup boiling water. Cover and leave to stand for 5 minutes. Using a fork, separate the couscous grains. Discard flesh from preserved lemon and chop peel finely. Combine couscous and preserved lemon peel with remaining ingredients, season and mix well. Spread stuffing over boned

forequarter and roll as tightly as possible. Secure with kitchen string: season with salt and pepper. Place springs of rosemary, garlic and a little oil in the bottom of a camp oven or cast iron casserole. Place forequarter on the herb bed: cover and cook on the lowest heat on top of the stove for at least 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  hours. You may want to turn meat halfway through.

Serve with a creamy mash, green beans and a large format red wine for lunch on a cold, wet day Sunday.



### Key dates for calendar

#### WINE SHOWS

Melbourne 10 August  
 Brisbane 13 July  
 Barossa Wine Show 1 September  
 Perth 14 September  
 Adelaide 12 October  
 Hobart 23 November  
 National Wine Show - Canberra 23 November

#### SAMUEL SMITH & SON SALES CONFERENCE

19 to 23 June in the Barossa.

WINE AUSTRALIA is being staged in Sydney 14 - 17 July

2nd SHIRAZ ALLIANCE at Yalumba is 28 - 30 July

#### SAMUEL SMITH & SON TASTINGS

Melbourne 18 September  
 Perth 20 September  
 Adelaide 25 September  
 Sydney 26 September



CRICKET

## Text from Shane..

Just received a birthday card from my newest best friend Andre Nel, wishing me a "most unhappy birthday". If you ever want to meet a fruit cake give Andre a ring...or text him.



Looking forward to a nice long break, it's been pretty hectic the last few months. South Africa for the five one-dayers and three Test matches.

Getting rolled in the one day final was incredible after we posted over 400 runs. ...still I got 14/1 on the Sith Ifricans after our knock. Stuck it up them in the Tests which was very pleasing. It's like playing in the Zoo...they never stop screeching and abusing and sledging. Not cricket at all.

Then off to Bangladesh for a couple of quick Tests over in three days, off to the Casino (is there one in Banga?)...Pig's arse!!! Got the fright of our bloody lives and What's his name gets 8/108 in the first game. Jeez!!! Well I've got a pretty long break until the first Test against England which starts November 23 in Brisbane. Plonk as much dough on the Aussies as you can. We're a shoe in. And what will I be doing until then? I'm helping the bloke from Wridgways move my stuff out of the house in Brighton and then I'll be looking for new digs. Might spend a bit of time with me mate Eddie McGuire and do some work on my TV pilot "Text-tosser-rhone". It's an idea I've been working on for some time now, sort of like "Fastest Fingers First". The loser has to take her clothes off. ...should rate it's bum off.

Oh, I forgot to tell you I met this Bangladeshi pole dancer her name is Sinbad Otronnie and talk about sexy. She hasn't got a phone so I've been writing my text messages and posting them to her, haven't had a reply yet. The only thing that concerns me is that Sinbad is 6'7" tall and has a huge Adams Apple and goes to Footy training every Thursday night.

Well it's time to go now I'm off to Mums for Dinner and a few...wink, wink!!!

Yours in a spin,

Shane.

COMPETITION TIME

## King of the Jungle



Send in your caption for the  
Lion and the Jansz to  
[www.samsmith.com](http://www.samsmith.com)  
Best entry as selected by the editor will  
win a carton of Jansz NV and a carton  
of Jansz NV Rose.

WHAMMMMMM

I have mentioned Andy Johnson before, he is the young golf professional we have adopted until he anchors his feet in the gruelling world of professional golf.

He is a local lad and his dad, Ken, works with us at Yalumba. This is his second year of competition and Andy and I recently played the Pro-Am on the day before the South Australian Open at Tanunda Pines Golf Club.

It's a great memory but I now realise what a really good golfer looks like and exactly how they play. Beside the fact that they have every shot in the book and can hit a three wood to exact position, 300 metres up the fairway, they don't try anything stupid.



I learned a lot too and for all you fellow golfers here are some observations from my unspectacular but enjoyable round Don't ask a pro what club he used. No matter how good you think you are, if he has

hit an 8 iron, you hit a 5, easy back, easy down, keep steady, watch the ball, WHAM.

Always aim your shot standing behind the ball, pick a spot between your target and the ball ( approx 30 cms in front of the ball ), line up the club then your stance, now gently hit it. I have always aimed AFTER I lined up. This is wrong.

Do not attempt shots that are just plain stupid. For example a crack of space between two giant trees is not a shot, a 300 metre approach with the old favourite fairway wood over water is not a shot and the brilliant 4 iron out of the fairway bunker with the steep lip is always a special. I tried a few others but I'm too embarrassed to tell.

A pitch and run is infinitely easier around the green than a spot-on, deadly accurate, within one metre, wedge shot. If you are interested, Andy shot rounds of 71, 70, 67 ( equal course record ) and a 75 on the final day for a 5th place tied. The weather was atrocious all week.

Next stop is the West Australian Open in Perth at the end of May. I hope you all get to meet him at some stage. He is a hell of a golfer and one really nice guy.

QUARTERTIME

The 2006 external footy competition was launched on the evening of Thursday 13 April.

There are approximately 400 aspiring players attempting to make the Team of the Year 2006, one of whom will also become Captain. He or she will join the illustrious line-up of names forever etched onto the honour board in the clubroom. Names that evoke the spirit of the fearless tackle, sixty metre torpedoes and the shirt-front, names like Salkeld in 2000, Crase 2001, Hayes 2002, Smith 2003, Mickan 2004 and last season's pocket rocket, the inimitable Mary Billows. One New South Welshman, three South Australians and two West Australians, two ladies and three gentlemen. All champions!

One does not have to be Albert Einstein to calculate 22 rounds multiplied by 8 matches per round equates to 176 points on offer for the season. Given that the previous three winners all finished in the range 122 to 129 points, then it is equally obvious that unless you are averaging 5.75 points for every round, you are not going to be the skipper, at least not in this year.

It is early days, I know, but do not allow the leader to distance him/herself too far from your position. It is very difficult to comeback later in the season when the true top sides really begin to show their worth, week in, week out and upsets are rare.

The current leader board reflects rookies and good recruiting, there are a lot of new names on show but I am holding firm with the theory that experience will win through in the end, subsequently I watch with interest, the endeavours of Schneider, MacGechan, Grieve, Middleton, Ashton, Green, Dunsford and Butterworth. No matter the wind or the weather, these are the experienced, the rocks of the Yalumba Football Competition. Pay particular attention to Dunsford and Middleton. Both players have narrowly missed representing Yalumba in three consecutive Teams of the Year, being 2003, 2004 and 2005: Dunsford in the team 2004 and 2005, missing 2003 by a mere two points and Middleton in the 2003 team, missed 2004 by 3 points then back in the 2005 team. Watch them closely.

Here comes the rain, see you at half time.  
Good kicking one and all.

RUGBY UNION

## The game they play in heaven: Matt Giteau, The Six Million Dollar Man

Third party endorsements from sponsors plus his Australian Rugby Union contract will lift Matt's pay from \$750,000 to approximately \$ 1.6 million per year. This will change the face of Rugby forever. But who could blame him for moving from the ACT to the Western Force? The offer was just too good.

Eddie Jones, former coach said: "On that sort of money, he would need to deliver The Force a Super 14 Championship within two years. Matt is a fantastic player but he is not the best player in Australia and he is not the best player in the world." Many elite players will be naturally edgy about their own salary packages and his team-mates at The Force will all be feeling a little hard-done by.

The Force were exposed by their lack of depth in their inaugural season due to injuries to key players and will take some time to build their player roster and indeed compete as this elite level of competition.

At time of writing, rumours are rife of future signings, causing Queensland and the ACT sleepless nights as they do not enjoy the corporate support of the NSW Waratahs and the Western Force.

Once upon a time, there existed a 'gentleman's agreement' that no Super 12/ 14 player was to be paid more than \$100,000 per year from their respective franchise.

Players were topped up by the ARU if they were selected in the national squad, the Wallabies. This arrangement now appears over and talk of a 'salary cap' is being debated.

The ARU are facing a real dilemma with arguments for and against the idea causing heated argument within the rugby community. Under salary cap restrictions, players could easily be lured overseas for large unconditional contracts.

This situation will only worsen as other players sign with The Force and the Waratahs, particularly League players on confidential contracts.

SPORTING DATES TO REMEMBER

World Cup Soccer

Friday 9 June - World Cup Soccer begins beaming into Australian homes from Germany  
Sunday 9 July - Word Cup final

Key dates for Australia are:

Monday 12 June Australia versus Japan  
Sunday 18 June Australia versus Brazil  
Thursday 22 June Australia versus Croatia.



And how it will unfold:

Australia will finish second place in group F to Brazil THEN go on to play Italy in the second round on Monday 26th June THEN the quarter finals on Friday 30th June (accountants day) THEN the semi finals on Tuesday 4th July THEN the final of the world cup AUSTRALIA versus FRANCE will be Sunday 9th July. All pigs fuelled and ready to fly.

AFL & NRL

Saturday 30 September is the AFL grand final  
Sunday 1 October NRL grand finals

Racing:

Saturday 4 November - Melbourne Cup Carnival  
Tuesday 7 November - Melbourne Cup  
Thursday 9 November - The Oaks

Cricket:

Friday 10th November - The English cricket team's first fixture on Australian soil, to mark the commencement of hostilities, is a match against the PM's eleven.