



Roger Federer with perpetual trophy



Warwick vase at Burrell Collection, Glasgow, Scotland



Cutting the silver sheet



Annealing



Spinning the bowl

# The making of the AUSTRALIAN MEN'S OPEN TROPHY

## THE STORY BEGINS

**A**part from New Year's resolutions, January is a time for the tennis. In the sweltering heat of the Australian summertime, this sport is played at an elite level and watched by live audiences of hundreds of thousands and by television audiences around the world.

Tennis Australia stages the Australian Open championship at the Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne. It is the first round of the four tennis Grand Slam events held each year – the others being held in France, UK and USA. The world tennis focus is on Australia. National and international elite tennis players descend on Melbourne to battle for the glory of being named champions of the Australian Open, be it for the Men's Singles, the Women's Singles or the Doubles Championships.

The Australian Open began as the Australasian Championships in 1905 under the auspices of the Australasian Lawn Tennis Association (later to be renamed the Lawn Tennis Association of Australia [LTAA]). It became known as the Australian Championships in 1927 and was renamed the Australian Open in 1969. The successor to the LTAA is known as Tennis Australia. Between 1905 and 1926, various different trophies were presented to the winners. In 1926 it was decided that a new elaborate trophy should become the future perpetual trophy for the winner of the Men's Singles prestigious championship. Accordingly, a trophy was commissioned through the Australian jewellery business Hardy Brothers.

The magnificent perpetual trophy is named after Australian tennis legend Sir Norman Brookes (1877-1968), a former Australian and international tennis champion and a former president of the LTAA. Since 1927, the winner of the Men's Singles title has not only achieved fame and glory but has also experienced the pinnacle moment of holding aloft the perpetual trophy, known as the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup. Who can forget the images over the years of Djokovic, Federer, Nadal, Newcombe, Rosewall and Laver, to name just a few, smiling radiantly with the mighty silver trophy cup held on high and with hundreds of cameras clicking to capture it for world-wide circulation?

In recent years the winners have not only walked away with record prize money, they have also been given, as part of the prize, a full size sterling silver replica of the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup. These magnificent replica trophy cups are made by a team of talented silversmiths working at W.J. Sanders in Sydney.

## THE PERPETUAL TROPHY

The impressive perpetual trophy is made of sterling silver and silver gilt, is hallmarked for London 1926 and carries the sponsor's mark of Hardy Bros. Its design is based on the Warwick Vase, an enormous and elaborate

ancient marble vase from the second century AD, found near Rome in the late 1770s in the grounds of Villa Adriana, the palatial villa of the Roman Emperor Hadrian. It came into the possession of George Greville, second Earl of Warwick who built a special greenhouse for it in the grounds of Warwick Castle. The vase has been a source of design inspiration since its transportation to England in the late 18th century, and today the original is housed in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow, Scotland. Three full size replicas were made, one of which is on show at Warwick Castle.

The trophy of our interest, the Norman Brookes Championship Cup, is on public display throughout the year in the vestibule of the offices of Tennis Australia in Melbourne.

When Tennis Australia decided that it would annually provide a sterling silver equivalent of the perpetual trophy for the Men's Singles champion, it took on the responsibility of funding the project and of finding a suitable manufacturer. W.J. Sanders, a Sydney silversmithing manufacturing business now in its second century of continuous operation, was able to accept the commission and the mighty challenge began for its craftsmen.

## THE MAKING OF THE TROPHY

Initially a mock-up was made in brass and bronze to iron out the many difficulties of producing such a piece. Only when the replica was perfected could the decision be made to proceed with the first silver trophy.

There were many stages. The first involved creating a bowl which needed to be spun to a diameter of 297 mm and height of 277 mm. Precise calculations needed to be made to assess the thickness and dimension of the sheet of Australian silver that had to be specially milled for the purpose.

The spinning process required a series of wooden chucks to be made that were the shape of the required bowl. Over the chuck the spinner could work to shape the silver sheet – cut beforehand to a circular shape assessed to be exactly the right size. No wastage.

A spinning project of this magnitude required nearly 30 interludes for the spinner to anneal the silver – a process whereby heat is applied to enable the silver to take the shaping required. If not done carefully or frequently enough, the silver would crack or melt.

The spinner also spun a base and a stem for the bowl to be attached to. A further square base was fabricated to enable the whole trophy to be put upon its square-topped timber pedestal.

Polishing the newly-spun bowl, stem and base came next – another specialised skill. Such a task involves three different finenesses of polishing compounds to bring the surface to the desired mirror-finish.

## DECORATIVE ELEMENTS

The decorative elements that needed to be chased on to the outer surface of the bowl were then sketched onto the bowl in their



Polishing outside bowl



Chasing lower leaves



Chased lower leaves



Trophy made by W.J. Sanders

exact positions. With specialised skill, the chaser set to work, hammer in one hand, chasing tool in other, following the marked lines and gently bringing a third dimension to the decoration. Approximately 80 hours were involved in her first mock-up on the base metal trophy. From the experience of the trial, she was able to complete the same task on the silver bowl in about 45 hours.

The main chased elements are ornate Acanthus leaves rising up from the base of the bowl, embracing the lower body of the bowl as it enlarges. Around the central bowl, on each side, is an elaborate chased depiction of the skin of a panther showing its head, legs and claws.

Of the cast decorations, the handles were the most difficult. The ribbed handles, depicting interwoven grape vines, include leaf decorations and elaborate curvaceous ends which are soldered onto the bowl. Spreading around the upper margin of the bowl from the branches on the handles are cast clusters of grapes, vine leaves, stems and tendrils. Other cast surface decorations include classical Bacchanalian masks in the form of heads of satyrs and associated adornments such as pine cone tipped staffs.

The finished bowl was then fitted to its stem, which in turn was attached to a square silver base. The gilding of the inner surface of the bowl was the last process. The bowl was filled with a gold solution and a current passed through the solution. Correct timing of the gilding process was vital.

The 4.64 kg trophy and its square silver base were then fitted to the square top of the timber pedestal. The full height of the trophy upon its pedestal is 430 mm. Then came the engraved plaque – with a steady hand and accurate spacing, the engraver copied the exact inscription on the original plaque onto a silver



Cast satyrs heads and staffs



Cast vine leaves



Engraved front plate

plaque for application to the timber base.

With warranted pride, the W.J. Sanders craftspeople gathered around the completed trophy. This team effort of 800 man hours saw each member making a vital contribution with his or her specialist skill. Tennis Australia is understandably very happy with their achievement.

## GAME, SET AND MATCH

Tennis Australia is to be congratulated for taking the initiative of upgrading the excellence of the trophy given to the Men's Singles winner of the Australian Open and for supporting Australian industry by commissioning an Australian company to make this trophy – a superb example of the skill and craftsmanship that can still be found within Australia.

Dennis de Muth and his team of highly skilled craftspeople at W.J. Sanders took on this challenge with a certain amount of cautious wisdom. With over 100 years of experience between them, each step along the way was approached with considered thinking and was successful in delivering the final product as per the original brief. There is no doubt that this highly skilled team will be able to provide this annually – at least for the next few years.

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