

GRAND SLAM

Ex-premiers fight tennis uni campus

FORMER premiers Jeff Kennett and John Cain are allies in a bid to block a planned university campus with student housing at Melbourne's tennis centre.

The former foes both want the State Government to protect the sporting precinct from the controversial development.

The *Herald Sun* has learned Melbourne Park chiefs are ready to call for expressions of interest from developers to build a university on land next to Vodafone Arena that is now used as a bus car park.

La Trobe University has already drawn up plans for a \$100 million campus, including a six-storey, 400-room accommodation tower for foreign students.

The project has split the 12-member Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust, which controls the land.

Former Labor premier Mr Cain, dubbed the father of the tennis centre, yesterday called for a full investigation into any proposed development.

Fiona Hudson
city editor

"It is a sporting precinct. I'd take some convincing that to use it for education purposes is an appropriate use of the land," he said.

"To plonk a six or seven-storey building there for student accommodation requires more investigation. I've got great reservations about the capacity of education institutions to manage anything."

Mr Kennett said a university at Melbourne Park could endanger one of Australia's greatest sporting precincts.

"It is not the place for a university. It should be opposed and fought as strongly as possible," the former Liberal leader said.

"We don't need more accommodation. We have our university and learning precincts.

"This continual grab for land and expansion is just not warranted — and it's certainly not warranted on that location."

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Are we being served

Fiona Hudson
city editor

Tennis fraternity divided

THE plan to serve up a university at the home of tennis has divided leading figures in the sport.

Australia's best-ever female player, Margaret Court, who has an arena at Melbourne Park named after her, said the proposed development was sad.

Tennis centre custodians would probably regret it if a university went ahead, the 11-times Australian Open singles champion said.

"I can't see it being done for any reason that makes sense," she said.

But legend Rod Laver, whose name adorns centre court at the site, said he had no objection.

"I don't know much about it ... I think it could be great," he said from California. "I have no great objection, no."

Leading female player Nicole Pratt said she was baffled by the plan.

"You'd always like that area to stay tennis only," she said.

"The thing you notice most around the precinct is car parking is diabolical,



Margaret Court



Rod Laver

especially when the tennis is on. This will only make it worse.

"It seems strange to put university students in the middle of ... the MCG, the tennis, Olympic Park and the rugby."

Several sources have told the *Herald Sun* that Tennis Australia, which runs the Australian Open at Melbourne Park, is strongly opposed to the development push.

But officials are united in refusing to comment.

A spokesman for Tennis Australia president Geoff Pollard said: "It is something we're looking at in conjunction with the

Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust."

Trust member and Tennis Victoria president Hamish Macmillan also declined to comment.

Former Davis Cup coach Tony Roche said he needed to know more about the plan.

"I can't get a feel for how it would work and how close it would be to the courts," he said.

Former Wimbledon champion Pat Cash said he didn't think a uni campus would be a problem at the site. "It's a great location, it's one of the best sports areas in the world," he said.

Sports Australia Hall of Fame chairman Neale Fraser said he needed more details, but would support the idea if Tennis Australia and the trust did. "Those people know what they are doing," he said.

Davis Cup stalwart **John Alexander**, who was behind a recent development at Adelaide's Memorial Drive tennis centre, questioned whether a university was appropriate for Melbourne Park. "It'd be better kept as a sporting thing," he said. "It needs something that will service the entire community."

Leading coach **Peter McNamara** said he was aware of the university plan and supported it.

"Education and sports go together. We are a very sports-mad town ... but it's good to be flexible," he said. "Everything is possible in Melbourne; that's why we're such a liveable city."

Frank Sedgman, winner of Wimbledon in 1952, said the idea sounded good.

"I imagine it's not being used much the rest of the year," he said.



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As well as intruding on the sporting heartland, the planned university would add to traffic congestion around the busy area, Mr Kennett said.

He said the common ground between him and Mr Cain reflected the strong personal interest both took while in office to develop the tennis centre as a world-class venue.

"I hope the current Premier also takes a passionate interest in the area and will intervene," he said.

Tennis Australia officials, who run the Australian Open tournament, are believed to be privately opposed, but will not comment publicly.

Melbourne and Olympic Parks Trust chairman Graeme Samuel said the project was in its early stages and would need approval from the State



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Government. The trust expects to call for expressions of interest from developers early next year.

Mr Samuel said he envisaged a sports-oriented university that would build strong links to surrounding venues, including the MCG and Olympic Park.

As well as lecture theatres and student accommodation, the complex could include a gym, pool, health spas, restaurants, shops and other facilities.

"The object is to bring more and more people down into the precinct," he said.

"If you use vision and lateral thinking, it is

amazing what (ideas) can be brought up to actually enhance that whole precinct."

Mr Samuel said any approved development would leave room for the Australian Open tournament to grow.

"The whole of the northern car park could take another six or seven courts," he said.

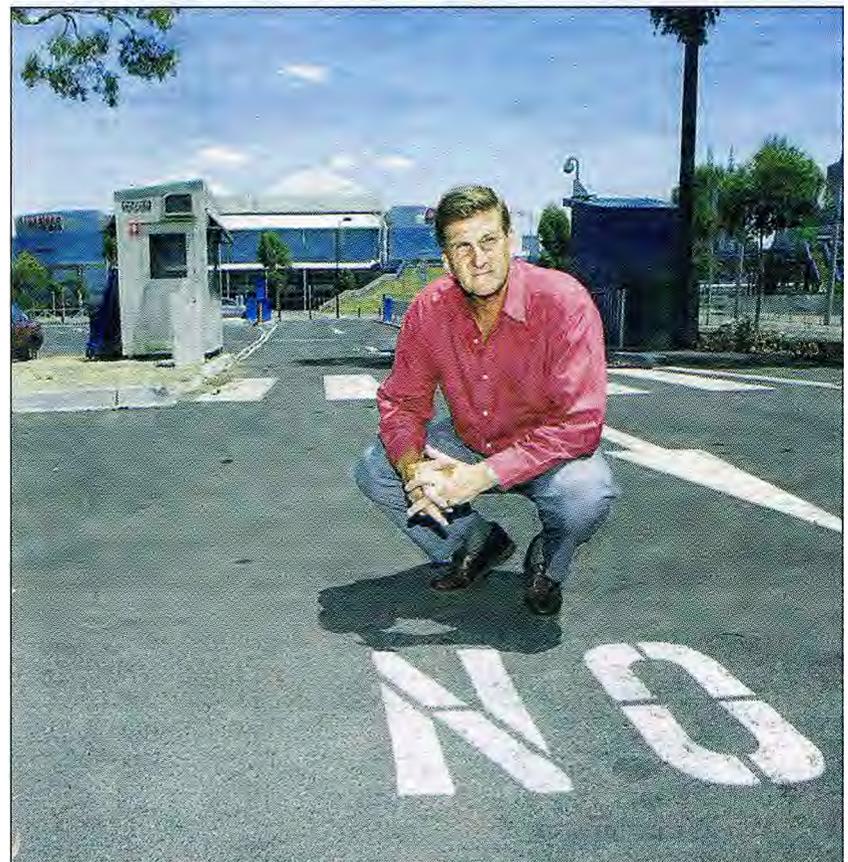
La Trobe University approached the trust with the idea about a year ago.

The *Herald Sun* believes the trust resolved at a meeting last week to call for expressions of interest from other parties as well.

Sources close to the project told the *Herald Sun* the Government was very keen on it.

But a spokeswoman for Premier Steve Bracks said she could not comment.

Have your say:
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Protest: former premier Jeff Kennett. Picture: DAVID CAIRD