

Early History of Strathmore Cricket Club

1971-72: A Marriage of Convenience

Picture the scenario in the winter of 1971: Alf Pearce, the elder statesman of local sporting administration, in his first year as President of Strathmore Football Club after 13 as its Secretary, as well as President and an 18 year member of Ormond Amateurs Cricket Club—then down to a single team based at Ormond Park which performed quite creditably in the “B” Grade of the Essendon Broadmeadows & Keilor Cricket Association, but which had no obvious recruiting area for the future.

An opinionated and youthful Tony Smith in his first year as Secretary of Strathmore Football Club, having just coached Strathmore Methodists Under 16 team to a premiership in the Essendon Broadmeadows Churches Cricket Association in what was to be the last of his eight seasons involvement with that team—the Churches Association having failed at earlier attempts to get a younger age competition started and so losing ground to the EBKCA morning competitions.

Strathmore Football Club at the start of a real boom period, a close knit group of young senior players who had come out of its junior ranks over the previous few seasons on the way to the Club’s second “B” Grade flag, and new teams to cater for the booming numbers of juniors, most importantly its first Under 11 in the then Oak Park Social Football League and even an unofficial Under 9 team.

So Alf and Tony decided it was time to put their cricket futures together and persuaded many of their friends from each of the three clubs mentioned to get together to form Ormond Amateurs-Strathmore Footballers Cricket Club.

OASFCC bravely entered seven teams in the EBKCA for its first season.

The firsts was based on the old Ormond Amateurs in “B” Grade, the second made up of Strathmore senior footballers in “C” Grade and the third comprising a rather mixed group of club officials, friends and promising juniors in “D” Grade. (The EBKCA only ran to four senior grades in those days.)

The Under 16 and Under 14 teams provided morning cricket for many boys from Strathy Meths and some of their mates, and we drew heavily on Strathmore’s new junior footballers to form two of the eight teams in the EBKCA’s inaugural Under 12 competition.

While the "B" Grade stayed at Ormond Park and the junior teams could be accommodated on the two concrete wickets then at Lebanon Reserve, we had to journey to the back wicket at Melrose Drive Tullamarine to find a home for our new senior sides, a ground that was to become very familiar to us over the years.

On the 2nd of October 1971, five OASFCC sides took the field, to be joined a fortnight later by the two Under 12s.

Highlight of the first round was the performance of Neil Poulton, who used to travel from Dromana to play football and cricket at Strathmore, making 59 n.o. and taking 4 for 2 and 7 for 20 as the Under 14s almost beat Keilor outright.

On 25th October 1971 local sporting circles were shocked by the news that Alf Pearce had died suddenly. Only the previous Sunday he had been talking of coming down to Under 12 practice to give the boys the benefit of his lifetime of cricket experience.

Brian D'Elton whose first official job at Strathmore had been as team manager for the Under 11s during the 1971 football season, who was playing "D" Grade while his sons Grant and Ross played in the 14s and 12s, and who is widely known for his later work with the OPSFL and their umpires in particular, was drafted to fill the enormous gap that Alf had left.

With the general good will of all concerned, we more than met our commitments on the playing field, although the signs were there that we would have a lot to learn about the other aspects of running a club.

Foundation Treasurer Val Sawyer's family had been the backbone of Ormond Amateurs and got heavily involved in all aspects of the merger. Eldest son Robert captained "B" Grade into the semis, while younger sons John and Trevor played in the Under 16s and 14s, as well as they and Val filling in wherever required on Saturday afternoons. In that "B" Grade semi-final, Peter Horsington (who was later to play for Strathmore when we progressed to turf) beat us single handed with an innings of 190 for West Essendon Youth Club.

The regular "C" Grade line up were to become some of the real legends of Strathmore Football Club—Chris and Tony Wheeler, Russell and Peter Sumner, Darrell Lynch, Trevor Kirk, Geoff Scott, John Ellis, Terry Brown, Peter Ransome and Russell Nicholson. However as cricketers their performances were not always flattering until a friend from Athelstone Football Club (with whom Strathmore had long exchanged end of season trips) in Adelaide, Greg Perkins filled in a couple of games while working in Melbourne with scores of 102 n.o., 161 and 17 n.o. for a season's average of 280.

Having only ever filled in in a couple of official games for Strathy Meths on days on which their juniors were not playing, Tony Smith was the obvious choice for "D" Grade captain, backed up by Len Kelly who had taken up cricket a few years earlier in his home town of

Benalla when he thought he was getting too old for tennis. We did not win a match. In fact only one batsman got out of the 20s for the season—Jim Slevison who made 54 in his debut before being given out hit wicket when he staggered backwards after edging a ball into his face and heading for hospital.

But it was primarily a team of great clubmen. Jack Casson whose research made the heraldic lion Strathmore's emblem had introduced his workmate Len Kelly to the club and graduated himself from goal umpire to a regular player. Jim Cuthell and Ian Ward both played in the first game, while a then 16 year old John Pickett also was there from the start. Later in the season, we recruited the likes of Ken Pridham, Ron "Boots" Martin and Graham Cox, two legendary characters for feats of youthful exuberance in local sporting circles, and David Nason (who recently made the dailies for his work as a journalist in Kampuchea) to make up the numbers. Meanwhile, Graeme Bishop whose elder sons already played in Strathmore junior ranks and Don Stretton who was recruited by Brian D'Elton were both establishing themselves as regular players for the future.

Our only real attempt at social fund raising in the senior ranks was a Sunday barrel at Kirky's which did at least teach the inexperienced administration how easy it could be to have fund losing functions.

However in our under age ranks, the boot was often on the other foot.

The Under 16s were coached by Robert Hilderbrand, one of the most talented junior footballers from Strathmore's early years and more recently well known as Ken Pridham's runner. Rodney Reddish was an obvious choice as captain and brought with him some of the Strathy Meths premierships players, of whom spin bowler Tim Pleuckhahn showed most benefit from the new involvement, as well as a couple of talented schoolmates in Phil "Benny" Rowe and Steve Carey.

After being thrashed by Dousta Stars in their first game and taking another hiding from an experienced Glenroy side, they fought back to roll Doustas in the last home and home game for a place in the semis, again against Doustas. With Tony Smith teaching many of the Doustas players at Buckley Park High School, having used Dousta's Graeme Harris in a football photo shot with Steve Carey for the front cover of More News and having recruited Michael Shaw (now captain of University 4th XI) to play football for Strathmore, these games were certainly the start of what became an intense rivalry between these great clubs. In the semi, Harris made 82, Shaw took 7 for 34, and we put it down to experience.

The Under 14s were coached by Kevin Conn, father of Graeme who was one of the first year members of the team. We had originally got to know the Conn family through the close links between Strathmore and Essendon Little League football. The captain, Peter Holley, had played for WEYC Under 14 the previous season where he was coached by the late Don McCabe, long serving Secretary of the EBKCA, as well as being captain Strathy Meths Under 16 seconds in the afternoon at age 12. Dean Anderson who is now one of the stalwarts of Strathmore Heights Cricket Club, Trevor Stevenson who was to have a long and

distinguished career with SCC and Peter Allanson, son of former Essendon Football Club Treasurer Noel, were three of the leading players who also found the new cricket club a logical extension of their Strathmore football involvement.

The boys went into the grand final undefeated despite a couple of close calls against an East Keilor side looked after by Graeme Leydin. Unfortunately the grand final was a different story with Allanson and Stevenson unavailable through Essendon Grammar School commitments, we faced another Doutta Stars team in which Mark Rowe and Simon Cookson created havoc with the ball and Robert "Gibba" Castellias played the innings of his life.

Tony Smith and Len Kelly together looked after the Under 12 A team which brought together some names which were to play a major part in the early history of the club. Back in those days, Under 12s played two day games without restrictions on batsmen and bowlers, just like everybody else, so it is hard to compare the performances to those of the modern era. It also produced some excellent cricketers who were not just living off football reputation, especially top bowler Trevor Pearce and top bat John Fowler. Other members of that first Under 12 team included Colin Brown, Steven Bury and Trevor Reaburn, all of whom you will read much more of later, handy spin bowler Sam Milligan, the second Stevenson brother Donald, Michael Cook son of Ken Pridham's long time team manager Tommy, and the incomparable all round sporting delinquent Craig Capdevila.

Then a couple of weeks into the season a rather well built gentleman wandered across the creek with his skinny little just ten year old kid looking for a game of cricket. The kid bowled pretty straight and spun the ball a bit, so it wasn't long till he joined the bigger boys in the "A" team. But the rules being what they were, neither Wayne Rowe nor his father Graham were called on to do all that much in their first season. Back in those days, first still played third in the semis and we came up against the best side in the new competition Westmeadows, coached by then EBKCA President Jack Davies, and including the Pinkstone twins Kel and Scott (both just started at Buckley Park) and Karl Silvera, who were a bit too good on the day.

Our second Under 12 team was looked after by the late Jack Eccles, another recruit through Little League connections, whose son John has gone on to be one of St. Johns Uniting's great players in the Churches Association. Although we had made up even sides for the "A" versus "B" game in the third round, it was not until round five that the babies had any real chance against the other young side of the competition, St. Phillips. In that game the opening bowling combination of Mark Slevison and Michael Thomson came together for the first time and rolled St. Phillips for 25 while John "Rocky" Files made 38 in our second innings.

Many of the junior players and officials went on an end of season trip to the Chalet Guest House in Lorne. Wayne Rowe was about the youngest in the party which made things a bit easier at home while Glenys Rowe was in hospital giving birth to son number four, Darren Andrew "George", the young cricket club's first baby.

Written by Tony Smith