

Early History of Strathmore Cricket Club

1975-76: Pushing the Limits of Growth

From time to time, a club which feels it has some weakness will develop a popular picture of just the type of person that was needed to overcome that weakness. For the young Strathmore Cricket Club, what was clearly needed was people around 30, mid way between the parents and the kids who made up the club at that time. (The one person in that age bracket, Tony Smith, did not really count because he had not yet developed the patience to cope with people near his own age.)

But for the Cricket Club in the winter of '75 wishing for more mature onfield leadership and for more stability in the administration, the man of the moment, especially in the very influential eyes of Rod Reddish, was John Wise. Seen to be a competent cricketer in his comeback during the preceding season and a computer systems analyst by profession, John became both Captain of our First XI and Treasurer of the Club. That pushed Tony back to the Secretary's desk, while one Norman Graham Rowe fulfilled his obvious destiny and became President.

Optimism clearly had no bounds during the winter as we committed to jumping straight from two to four senior teams, no doubt in some part because of an expectation of new players up from Under 16 and elsewhere, but most importantly to provide two games a Saturday for our most talented juniors. Backed up with planned additions of third Under 16 and Under 12 teams, this jumped out total from nine to 13 teams.

This was also to be a year of significant political activity towards getting all our cricket teams accommodated within the suburb of Strathmore. With Strathmore Methodists and Strathmore Presbyterians becoming Strathmore Uniting through a world wide merger of the two churches, we were able to put a convincing case that they should only retain a half share of one of the two concrete wickets then at Lebanon Reserve, with our first team taking over the other half share because of the much greater contribution that our club was making to junior cricket in the area.

But just one week before the start of the cricket season, Strathmore sporting circles were shattered by the death of Peter "Pecka" Ransome, driving home after the Football Club presentation night. The 23 year old Pecka was one of the real leaders of the strong group of young senior players who established Strathmore as an "A" Grade football club. He was also a respected member of the Football Club committee, coach of the Under 13 team which included many of our leading junior cricketers and one of the members of the "Strathmore Footballers" team on which the original OASFCC merger was based.

Despite this devastating effect on the morale of most of our officials and members, we complied with our commitment to field 13 teams on the first Saturday, and, even with the wisdom of hindsight, the decision to enter all those teams was not all that unreasonable. Only the third Under 16 team proved to be a continuing problem as it gave walkovers from time to time, while the senior depth was found wanting during the January holiday period, although a couple of mistakes by an over stretched administration made things look a bit worse than they really were.

Again rain curtailed some of the early games, with particularly disastrous effects for our senior team which was still trying to make its first finals, let alone win its way out of "C" Grade. During this period, the EBKCA was also growing strongly, so the competition standard improved a bit each year and our four senior sides were able to be strung out across the lowest four of the six matting-only grades provided.

The level of Strathmore participation in the EBKCA Under 21 side playing in the annual CUoV series should have been one of the highlights of the senior season, with Rod Reddish selected as captain and supported by Peter Slevison, Daryl Schimmelbusch, Steve Sullivan and Neil Reynolds. Rod and Peter were even nominated to try out for the CUoV Under 21 team to play in an interstate carnival. However, wet weather again played havoc and our boys hardly had a chance to prove themselves. (Needless to say, by this time Tony Smith had also become the EBKCA delegate to the CUoV.)

After another slow start to the season, our "C" Grade side started to put in some exciting performances, including an early December outright against Campbellfield in which Steve Sullivan smashed 66 not out in less than the 50 minutes we had been set to get 108 runs. That effort took this first year player's batting average to 178 at that point and helped him win the EBKCA batting average, despite being better known through most of his career as an opening bowler.

There was certainly a lot of activity at senior selection as players who produced any kind of form quickly found themselves promoted to a higher grade. Amongst the new names to earn more than one game in the firsts were Laurie Diss, Geoff Bell, Graham Rowe, junior football legend Steve Carey who was to take seven wickets in two consecutive one day games, and junior parent John Hough. On the 31st of January 1986, Normie and Dinger were supposed to be helping the holiday-weekend firsts avoid an outright defeat against Tullamarine, but instead rewrote the record book with a 150 run partnership, more than half of which came in sixes and with Normie taking 40 off a single (eight ball) over from a bowler named West.

To make the finals, the firsts needed an outright in the final game against Dousta Stars which had to be changed into a Saturday-Sunday game because of a ground clash. At the end of the first day, Doustas were 7/41 in reply to our 118, and then, like so many vital parts of their season, the Sunday was rained out.

The three other senior teams were led by Tony Smith, who despite that managed to play in all four senior teams at some stage of the season, Ossie Musumeci and Len Kelly. They all

managed the odd win but still finished near the bottom of their respective ladders. A lot of recruiting had to be done to get these teams in the field, with Lindsay Ellis bringing several of his mates from Glenroy High School, especially after the end of HSC exams.

Most of Lindsay's recruits could bowl a bit, including Steve McIntyre who picked up seven wickets for "E" Grade in the first game and Joe Scerri whose 9/22 off eight overs (with one run out) got that team its only win on 17th January. And according to More News "the bowler who has got the whole club talking is Mick McAughtry, who although he hasn't picked up many wickets yet, looks like developing into an extremely fast and useful acquisition." In his first game this skinny 16 year old had 11 year old keeper Paul Rowe standing back more than half way to the boundary at Oak Park Swim Centre.

Despite gaining use of Lebanon Reserve for one of our senior teams, we still had eight teams which had to be accommodated at the ground in what is now Melrose Drive, Tullamarine, and other spare wickets in different parts of the City of Broadmeadows. We were certainly not satisfied with this situation, so in the latter part of 1975 More News took a very keen interest in the opening up of discussions about the extensive thistle fields running from the Essendon Airport fence line down to and across the Moonee Ponds Creek—an undeveloped area which separated the two parts of the Strathmore Heights estate.

The fledgling Strathmore Progress Association, under the leadership of Lamart Street resident Alistair Fraser, held its first "Creek Day" family picnic at the site to encourage local residents to look at the potential of the area, for which the City of Broadmeadows had assumed responsibility for management and development. Our Cricket and Football Clubs had also set up a joint Development Sub-Committee under the leadership of the barrister and junior parent Frank Walsh.

Of course our massive increase in cricket teams correspondingly increased the need for funds to be raised through a social program and other special efforts. Our first major social function at Essendon Football Club Social Club attracted 112 people and produced "a profit of almost \$200—by far the best ever for a Cricket Club social function" according to More News. We also went to Picnic at Hanging Rock, the film that is, not the real thing, although the (temporary) disappearance of a couple of youngsters at the Football Club's earlier junior presentation picnic at the real Hanging Rock helped us to promote this function to a wider audience.

Despite the heavy demands on fund raising, we were still able to run a double wicket championship to make up a little of the cost to our dedicated but never wealthy founder Len Kelly for repairs to his car after an accident while taking his Under 12 team to an away match during the previous season. To try to also do a bit for the future, we sent several of our younger junior coaches to one of the early VCA Coaching the Coaches courses which was conducted at University High School.

While we really did have the numbers to run our nine junior teams, eight of the nine certainly didn't set the world on fire.

Even though the EBKCA persisted in giving the three sections at each under age level geographical names, there was no question that the "Central" sections were intended to contain the strongest teams, and our Under 16 A team found the going a bit hard at that level, despite a Brian Last Award winning performance from Craig Capdevila, the quality on-field leadership of Steven Bury, and the enthusiastic team coaching of Les Steele, one of the newest recruits to active service of the group of young senior players at the nucleus of the club.

In his fifth and final junior season, Colin Brown was again a consistent performer, while his cricketing father Russell again handled the scorebook, and Ricky Crump who had finished up as the replacement captain in Under 14 the previous season was clearly the best first year player. But in a very even competition, early washouts together with return match losses to Doutta Stars and St. Christophers left us one game out of the four, a performance More News devoted a page to analysing as the big disappointment of the season.

With Tony Smith and Len Kelly looking after the other two teams at least there was some hope of us meeting this ambitious commitment, and we certainly gave a lot of kids a game of cricket. But three walkovers given by the "C" team was a lesson that was well heeded in future seasons, even if with no wins they still managed to finish ahead of a Tullamarine team that got minus two points for the season. Almost all the names to appear in the three teams were quite familiar from previous seasons, although we were also grateful for some help from Coburg Cricket Club in finding us a couple of boys to ease the shortage when things got really tight.

But fielding three Under 14 teams for the second year in a row was certainly no problem. Again youngsters just out of junior ranks themselves, Trevor Stevenson and Craig Walker, had to be called on as coaches of the first two teams. Against conventional wisdom, that certainly did no harm as they became the only two Strathmore sides to make finals for the season. But the one person who did the most to ensure that the whole age group was properly presented was Geoff Gourlay, father of Michael who was on the borderline of the first Under 14 team, and uncle of current Cricket Club Secretary Peter. Geoff chose to do his bit for the club not by following his son but instead by being manager of the third Under 14 team, thus ensuring that all boys in the age group were properly looked after.

For the second year in a row, five Strathmore players made the Coburg Hatch Shield squad. While that team actually lost its first two games and missed the finals, a rare occurrence, Wayne Rowe won the award as its best player and Michael Thomson was one of its three other trophy winners. Rowie and Thommo were amongst the four boys with Strathmore connections to make the North Western Division State Schools team to play in the annual carnival at Mildura.

While we could comfortably field three Under 14 teams, only two other clubs could even field two. With the supposedly weakest 18 teams split East-West, our Under 14 B team did extremely well to make the finals in the East section. The captain and vice-captain for the Under 14 B semi-final were the legendary duo of Mark Eustice, in his first season of club

cricket, and Alistair Butcher. Their line up also included Mark Anderson, Ray Baxter, Terry Bishop, Mark Hall, Russell Hall and Mick Murray—all club identities of that era.

However, it was the Under 14 A team that really put its stamp on the 1975-76 season, with seven of the final year players in the side going on to back to back flags in Under 16 the next year. After a comfortable semi-final win against St. Christophers in which Wayne Rowe took another 6 for 31, we put Oak Park in to bat in our fifth consecutive Grand Final. In the first innings, Rowie didn't even get a bowl as Thommo and EBKCA bowling average winner Craig O'Gorman blasted them out in 10.6 overs, Thommo getting 4 for 9 and Craig 6 for 11.

Oak Park opener George Moore had the dubious distinction of carrying his bat to finish with five not out. David Ashen who had been our nemesis two years earlier in Under 12 went first ball as the first of a promoted Mark Eustice's three catches in the innings. We were also all out on the first day, but for 95, leaving the second day virtually a formality. Unfortunately Eustice didn't make it to the second day as his hand had an accident with some glass during the intervening week which required micro-surgery and kept him out for half the 1976 Under 13 football season in which he still won the EDFL Best and Fairest.

While our Under 14 section had the success on the field, our three Under 12 teams laid much of the foundation for the future of the whole club.

The Association also split the 18 Under 12 teams from 14 clubs into Central, East and West sections, from which the top two sides went straight into grand finals. Our first team finished third in the strong Central section while our thirds also got to third in the West—both very creditable efforts.

As well as belting record partnerships, Normie and Dinger also combined to look after their sons Piker and Minna and Darren in the Under 12 A side. Paul Crole who has just returned to our senior ranks had an excellent season with bat and ball and enjoyed the end of season trip to Cumberland River, while other regulars included Colin Dugard, Paul Hickey, Jason Hamilton, Brendan Trebilcock, Mick Kreuger and North Melbourne footballer David Dwyer. The Bells were also responsible for a few of our recruits in various teams including Mark Eustice, the Hough family and Grant Einsedel.

The Under 12 B team brought together Fred Youl and Keith Jackson who have done as much to make Strathmore Cricket Club work properly as any two people in its history. More News reported that the team may have had too many on-field leaders as their sons Peter and Bruce and Glen Bouckley were made house captains of three of the four houses at Strathmore North Primary School. There was a lot of movement of players between the three Under 12 teams, with other names to appear regularly in the B and C teams including Phil Hallinan, Roger Yallouz, Anthony Trevean, Gary McCall and Murray Price, along with numerous others who may be better remembered for their football exploits.

On the 29th November a rather undersized seven year old was selected for his second of three games for the season in which he played because his big brother's team were short. Picking up Keith Jackson's report in More News: "coach Youl brought on his tenth bowler for

the match in Stephen Bouckley who took the wicket of (their) third top scorer when at last a fieldsman in Andrew Huggins held a catch. Then Stephen on the last ball of the match bowled the tallest boy in the side for a duck to finish with 2 for 8. It was a great sight to see the boys spontaneously hoist Stephen onto their shoulders and chair him off the field." "F" finished that season without getting another bowl and with his bowling average of 4.00 intact, and many years later he still bowls as though he gets a very special reward from removing batsmen.

The third Under 12 team was looked after by first year Open Age players Steve Sullivan and Paul Fahey, which from time to time produced transport problems as both were too young to drive. Their efforts made them the obvious choice to share the Best Clubman award for the season. Playing against every team in their section three times, the Under 12 Cs frequently ran into Tullamarine players David and Darren Gellie and Neil Allison.

The end of the 1975-76 season also marked as much as any date could the gradual decline of the dominating evidence that Rod Reddish and Benny Rowe had had as our leading players over the first quarter of the club's history. Rod had taken a job as a computer operator with Ansett which involved shift work and which would leave him an irregular player over the seasons to come, while Benny was on the verge of a career as a VFA player with Brunswick, the preparations for which would reduce his availability at the business end of future seasons.

However the drop in their individual influence had been largely compensated for by their efforts in recruiting their own friends to play for the club, Les Steele and Steve Carey being the most conspicuous additions in '75-76, and by the growing influence of the slightly younger players who had come under their guidance during those early years. Another of their friends, Terry Ryan, was to join the club and take on an important role from the start of the new season.

On the first of June, Strathmore cricket and football circles were horrified to learn of the death of Tony Farrall from injuries received after another car came out of a side road and smashed into his on the previous evening. Only 20 years old, Tony is still remembered by many people as simply the best person they have ever known. He had already set new standards for the contribution that junior players can make to club administration, yet still looked certain to have an even greater future, both as an outstanding student in the third year of a university degree and as real team player who really enjoyed his sport.

While Tony had taken three years to overcome his natural loyalty to Strathmore Meths and join many of his friends at Strathmore Cricket Club, he was in many ways the natural leader of the group which had been the driving force behind the club. His name had been inseparably linked with Rod Reddish from primary school and scouting back before either of them had played either cricket for the Meths or footy for the Mores.

Within weeks it had become obvious that that close knit group of young adults were finding it impossible to come to terms with such a senseless loss, and while nothing immediately

reduced their participation in the Cricket Club, within two seasons, those personal bonds had weakened a lot more than they would have in other circumstances and the whole group drifted away from the Cricket Club and each other. A dozen players and officials who had got involved with the Cricket Club through Rod and Tony were suddenly not a long term part of the Club's future, and the hole they eventually left was to take a long time filling.