

Early History of Strathmore Cricket Club

1976-77: Achieving Onfield Dividends

The growth spurt we had attempted had proven to be very taxing and our fund raising tapered off a bit towards the end of the season. So, during the winter of '86, Tony Smith was again kicked sideways to Treasurer and Fred Youl was somehow drafted as our new Secretary. We also realistically gave up on the idea of three Under 16 teams bringing us back to the prospect of a stable twelve teams, and we decided to run our fourth Open Age side under "Under 18" conditions, including two over age players for transport, to try to show the Association that this could be a viable format for the future.

And in the middle of winter, Tony's column in the football season More News devoted a page to justifying the fact that club officials sometimes seem to have individual favourites amongst the junior players, concluding: "It would almost be sufficient to say of our new 'star' that he was nearly as dangerous as his mother —everyone connected with Under 9 would know I was talking about Joseph Selvaggi, and when we finally got to meet him at last Sunday's family night (that is what they're all about) we could understand why other clubs can't believe that he really is Under 9—he doesn't act like it any more than he looks like it."

The Cricket Club inner circle had also slightly revised their ideas as to the kind of person that was needed to break our tradition of being the best side out of the four in "C" Grade, a position that after three years was looking less and less appropriate for the biggest club in the EBKCA. Our updated idea was to get a captain-coach with real experience at a higher level and the charisma to win the players support, and for that we recognised that for the first time we might have to pay something. We even talked about Philip "Nobby" Robinson who had had a long Sub-District career opening the bowling for Coburg and who had also been a ruckman in Strathmore senior sides as being the ideal role model for the position.

Finally we got around to asking Nobby if he knew anybody with qualifications like his own who might be interested in taking the job and he said he would be happy to do it himself.

Over the previous couple of years we had built up an expectation that Brendan Trebilcock's father Stan, one of the best players in the Association, would eventually retire from the since defunct Broadmeadows (not to be confused with the later Sub-District club) and finish his career at Strathmore alongside his son. A similar situation had also been building up throughout the five years that Russell Brown had helped out with son Colin's junior team before they both headed off to Russell's long standing commitments at the higher level of VJCA competition.

Tony Smith's position on the EBKCA Executive ensured that when one of his radical colleagues, Des Purcell, needed a break from the all consuming demands of senior, junior

and administrative involvement at St. Christophers that he spent a season playing for Strathmore. And we were also able to welcome a couple of very handy players from the country whose careers had brought them to the city in Kerry "Herbie" Windridge and Gary Crowe. So with names like Reddish, Benny Rowe, Schimmelbusch, Slevison, Sullivan and Stevenson well established at a senior level, there was certainly not going to be any lack of depth to handicap our quest for some real on-field success in senior ranks.

For a club historian, 1976-77 was a rather strange season as nothing of significance went amiss, and our on-field team and individual performances rewrote the record books. So about all we can do is to briefly mention the various teams' performances along with those records before trying to recall the real drama of six grand finals.

There is also very little to recall about the social and fund raising side, where a crackdown on membership and match fees, backed up by a cup sweep and a "Century Club" which aimed to sell 200 \$1 tickets each week, wiped off the previous season's deficit. We had club cricket caps on sale from November and the senior success combined with a few new personalities made our Thursday and Saturday nights at the clubrooms a lot more viable. In fact we were able to wait until the end of the home and home games before we ran our only major social function, a dinner dance at the North Suburban Club.

"C" Grade steamed through the season with hardly a care in the world, except when our first real coach injured his shoulder in a car smash and the young Moomba Park club showed us that we would certainly have to beat them if we were to win promotion. For a club that really boomed and bust during just a fraction of our history, Moomba showed us a bit about putting on proper afternoon teas and about getting new grounds and rooms built. Stan Trebilcock also showed off his ability winning the Brian Last Award, the EBKCA bowling and our club batting and bowling, the latter with a remarkable 56 wickets at 5.80.

For the first time in our history, our second senior side was more than competitive, playing in "D" Grade. With the mature influence of Geoff Bell, his next door neighbour and vice-captain John Hough, Graham Rowe and Fred Youl on a couple of tearaways like Mick McAughtry and Craig Capdevila, they certainly had the basis for success. And with the oft debated exception of the overworked president, they succeeded in their other main objective of keeping players coming up to the firsts.

After just one game with the club, enough was known of Terry Ryan's leadership capabilities to make him captain of our third team with support from Ossie Musumeci. They had the dubious distinction of opening their tally for the season with two points for an outright loss after tying on the first innings. But in the next round, the other Trebilcock, Glen, in his second match for the club, made sure we were the team winning outright with 5 for 33 in the first innings and 7 for 18 in the second.

While their only remaining win was when Reddish, Slevison and Binch were only available for an "E" Grade one day game on the second day of the first senior two day round after

Christmas, the team more than did its job of pushing players up to the higher teams. A particularly pleasing effort was recorded by Peter Cuthell, the second son of one of Strathmore's great sporting club families who had often just been there to make up numbers during his junior career, but who developed into a very handy bowler, clearly winning our club averages for the season.

Our "F" Grade cum Under 18 side was looked after by, yes you guessed it, Tony Smith and Len Kelly who also shared responsibility for our two Under 16 teams on which "F" Grade sometimes drew heavily. This was just about the only Strathmore side in which the batting performances outshone the bowling, Steven Knight and Alan Tepper getting early undefeated centuries, and Trevor Stevenson getting what is still a club record score of 172 n.o. in that January one day game, batting through all of the 26 still eight ball overs in the days before senior one day bowling restrictions.

We again provided a substantial portion of the EBKCA side for the CUoV Under 21 series, which, after starting on a winning note, made it to the quarter finals by the narrowest of percentage margins only after we had had to add two more Strathmore players to the five already selected to cover for a couple from other clubs who did not arrive.

That quarter final however clashed with the first round of a new "Westfield Knockout Cup" in which we were the only "C" Grade club invited to participate, so we had to spread our resources pretty thin. This resulted in the then 14 year old Stevens, McCaffrey and Knight, being last minute additions to the Under 21s while only four of our previous day's senior team were available for the Cup match against Aberfeldie. Neither team was successful on the day, but both put up very creditable performances in the circumstances.

Four Strathmore players made the North Western schools team. Wayne Rowe became the first Strathmore player to make Essendon Dowling Shield for several seasons, while five made the Coburg Hatch squad for the third season in a row. Andrew O'Reilly, who Mick Gourlay had recruited from our old rivals Oak Park, made the Broadmeadows squad, with both Coburg and Broady getting to the semi-finals of the Hatch competition.

The EBKCA finally got its act together and held five games against junior sides from the East Suburban Churches Cricket Association in the first of what has continued to this day as an annual event. Strathmore had three players in the Under 16 team, four in the two Under 14s and six in Under 12s. And the EBKCA won all five games, starting another tradition.

Of course, Strathmore also had far and away the most under age teams, only East Keilor running to second teams in both 14s and 12s, while in each of those age groups only one other club was prepared to field a second team. And the junior age groups were finally graded on the basis of the expected strength of the teams into and actually known as the A, B, C, etc. sections. Except of course that at the more numerous Under 14 level, the B and C sections were actually divided east-west. And with still only 18 Under 12 teams split into two

sections and playing football-style final fours, both our second and third teams found themselves in the B section competing against some quite strong opponents.

Returning to coaching an "A" team four years after he had finished out of the running with the same group of boys in Under 12, Tony Smith had obviously not yet heard about participation. Only 15 boys were given any chance in the team that season, five of them basically as fill ins playing twelve games between them, and two others playing irregularly because of other sporting commitments. We often went into games with nine players, but at least that gave a couple of others a chance to bat and bowl in the B team. And on the bowling front it was even worse than that.

Only six bowlers were used at any stage of the season, three of those getting 67.5 overs between them and taking a combined 25 wickets for 260 runs. That three were Mark Slevison who went on to win a bowling average for our first senior team, Steven Knight our current senior captain-coach, and Ricky Crump who had been our best first year player the season before. The trouble was the performances of the other three: Thommo took 52 wickets and was the quickest Under 16 bowler we have ever seen, O'Gorman picked up 49 at the other end and another EBKCA bowling average trophy, and in the odd innings when it got past them, Wayne Rowe picked up 39 wickets with his spinners.

But in reality, the side could not bat. Rookie keeper Steve McCaffrey slogged 304 for the season, and four other members of the grand final side had averages between 15 and 20, with the other six contributing only 322 runs for the loss of 38 wickets. The first match was typical. Our opening pair blasted Westmeadows out for 17 in 7.4 overs, we lost five wickets slogging 22 for a declaration in half the time, and Rowie took all 8 wickets to fall during the rest of that one day game. They let you go for outright in one day games back then, and we even got one the next week.

The only time we got found out was against the undefeated Doutta Stars when we declared at 5/210 with McCaff just back from a broken arm on 102 dropped seven times. Despite having them 3 for 36 overnight, we had given Douttas an extra 16 overs to bat and failed to break a big partnership between David Kirby and Craig Hicks until they were on the home stretch. The next round with Thommo getting back into a bit of form, we set Westmeadows 84 to win outright after they had made 99 in the first innings and blasted them out for 49.

Facing another season with the only second side in Under 16 competition, Len Kelly was much more into getting players involved as there seemed no end to the new names appearing from week to week. Len was also very fortunate to have Steve McCrystal as a very keen leader on the field, and was Steve delighted to write the report for More News on their team's first and only win for two seasons. While Steve was rewarded for his efforts with the number 11 batting spot in the Under 16 A grand final, the other notable name to surface in that team was Warwick Kingston.

A group of parent officials who have played a big role in Strathmore Cricket Club to this day started spilling into Under 14, with Geoff Gourlay taking over the first team, while next door neighbours Geoff Bell and John Hough looked after the other two teams.

A very strong Under 14 A line-up cruised through most of the season with only a narrow loss to Doutha Stars and their final round game against undefeated leaders St. Christophers cut short by a second day wash out. That St. Christophers side was coached by the same Des Purcell who was having a season with our seniors and included his protégé Mark "Bomber" Thompson, the other demon Thommo of EBKCA juniors in that season.

The batting and bowling restrictions then in force in Under 14 meant the wickets and runs were shared a lot more widely than in the 16s, but we still managed to get four regular bowlers with single figure averages, already five year veteran and captain Michael "Maurie" Gale getting 21 wickets at 8.14 while Mick Gourlay got 16 at 5.88. The recruiting of Andrew O'Reilly to keep wickets not only freed up Mark Eustice to bowl, but also boosted our batting as Andrew got to the retirement score in five of his nine innings.

Under 14 B were just about the success story of the year, with a line up dominated by players straight out of Under 12s they got to the finals of a competition with no other second teams. Brendan Trebilcock, Paul Crole and Colin Dugard regularly performed well, while Paul Rowe and Darren Bell added some quality whenever they were not required in the A team.

Despite the EBKCA's effort to even out the junior grades, splitting 28 Under 14 teams into four seven team sections meant cross bye matches which scheduled our A team to play the bottom team in the B competition. Faced with this knowledge, our clever selection committee decided to use this opportunity give Gourlay, O'Reilly and Eustice a run in the seconds against a horrified Tullamarine, for which Neil Allison got a pair and his brother Marty might have done likewise if they hadn't batted him down the list in the second dig.

The third side did the job that was expected of it, providing a game for quite a number of boys over the season and not really troubling the competition except for a big victory in their match against Pascoe Vale's only side, in which Patrick Barnes scored 55 not out in the same round that his brothers Michael and Anthony recorded their personal best scores for the season in Under 14 A and Under 12 C. The Under 14 C team at least had one regular performer with the bat and ball in Tony Crapp who, along with a couple of his team mates, won a place in the 14 B finals team on the basis of those efforts.

Having given an unacceptable number of walkovers the previous season, we were a bit concerned when we were unable to get a third Under 12 side into the field for the first game, but that was quickly rectified, and with a bit of filling in in higher age groups during the holiday period, we got to the last round before school cricket cut a swathe through our Under 14 ranks and we decided that giving a walkover to top team Airport West would at least save them having to find a replacement ground as theirs was unavailable.

The Under 12 A team had just about the strongest contingent of parent officials you could have wished for with the club President, Secretary and Minute Secretary all having sons in the team, along with the Football Club's Under 11 A, Under 9 A and Under 9 Reserves coaches. And most of the other names in the side—McCall, Kreuger, Psaltis, Trevean—have important places in the history of the club.

In this first season of all one day matches in Under 12, our bowlers certainly had not learnt that it is supposed to be hard to get wickets under one day restrictions. Of course you were still allowed to go for outright and the bowling limit was only four eight ball overs, but with the tearaway Jason Hamilton getting 38 wickets for the season and spinner Minna Rowe getting an incredible 52 (plus one filling in in Under 14 C) the standard of Under 12 batting must have improved a bit during the following decade.

As well as these two boys bowling almost the same number of overs for the season, they returned the amazingly close averages of 4.553 and 4.558. Minna also made 322 of runs and managed to come second in the Brian Last award, one point behind the unrestricted Stan Trebilcock and with half again as many points as the previous winner. And Jason had a big game on the 20th of November when he took 7 for 11 and 5 for 13 against Glenroy, including hattricks in each innings.

The Under 12 B side was looked after by Lindsay Leggo whose son Craig was one of a group of players many of whom lived in Strathmore Heights and who started around the same time—names like Geoff Barker, Robert Monk, Drew Thompson, Adam Middleton and Jason Tullberg. While our team was clearly stronger than the other second sides, this competition was very unbalanced as we could go from scoring an innings total all out for six in one match to getting our opponents out twice for 11 and 16 in another.

The thirds were of course almost always on the receiving end, but were kept together and no doubt happy by the previous season's Under 16 captain Steven Bury. They did however manage to upset East Keilor's second team in a mid-season game in which David Mason took 5 for 4 and Rodney "Daffy" Joronen took 4 for 4. It is interesting to see Daffy's scores progress from 12 not out in that game to a 24 not out after the Christmas break and a 50 not out in the last game, with of course his share of low scores along the way. Christopher "Butch" Bell and Bruce Cottier made their cricket debuts with this side which also catered for a number of junior football identities.

So the club reached the business end of the season full of running with six teams in the semi-finals, and then the 64 to 1 chance came home and they all got through to their respective grand finals, with the senior eleven giving us a real a fright as our last pair had to put on eight to get us home. Of course Peter Slevison and Steven Sullivan were a pretty handy last pair to throw that challenge at, both winning club senior batting averages at other stages of their careers.

Against Moomba Park in the Grand Final things didn't look too good as we were bundled out for 148, but this time our bowling struck form and only allowed them to make 92 in reply.

With an outright still a possibility, our young-old opening combination of Trevor Stevenson and Stan Trebilcock put on 76 to put the match beyond doubt. Keeper Carman showed great consistency with the bat to notch scores of 63, 37 and 55 when he had only managed 140 runs during the rest of the season, and Stan picked up ten wickets for 78 runs in the finals. So we collected our first senior flag and it was on to "B" Grade to see how far the Robinson magic could take us.

The seconds had to win their semi-final and so declared at 9 for 183 with what they hoped was enough time and runs to bowl Airport West out. After an early wicket, the game looked to have slipped away as their second wicket put on 104 before they suddenly collapsed to be 8 for 131 and the boot was on the other foot. As they crept closer, Capdevila was brought back into the attack and blasted out their last two batsmen, both lbw, with only 9 runs to spare.

In the Grand Final against Dousta Stars, a 130 run partnership between Rod Maddern and Greg Vistarini set Doustas up with a total of 286, despite excellent bowling by Mick McAughtry. And despite opener Neil Reynold's lone hand of 81, the target was always a bit beyond us, as Robbie Clare and again Maddern and Vistarini bowled us out.

After St. Christophers declared the first day of the Under 16 too wet when they had to beat us, even our fragile batting line up was likely to survive for most of one day, which it did until we declared to have a few minutes bowling in which Thomson and O'Gorman snapped up a quick five wickets.

But batting first in a three day Grand Final was all too much and we were out for 87 with only Rowie's 33 offering any real resistance. By the end of that day Doustas were 2 for 50 and cruising. We held Thommo out of the attack for the first eight overs of the second day as they edged closer, but then he came back firing on all cylinders. They eventually got to the lead, still with seven in hand but then Thommo struck back to have them all out just 22 runs ahead and the game was alive again. By stumps on the second day we were 5 for 79 and the talk was more of survival than of any declaration.

The third day dawned quite damp and our run rate fell away until we eventually got bogged down at 9 for 110 and decided it was as good a time as any to bring on the bowlers. This time wickets fell steadily, the last leaving them 22 runs short with time to spare. Thommo's Grand Final figures of 23.2 overs, eleven wickets for 64 remain the standard by which other 15 year old bowlers can be judged, but they are also a reflection on the excellent fielding standard developed by that group of boys over their time together.

In the Under 14 A semi, a fine double of 56 not out and 3 for 12 from Michael Gourlay left us clear 69 run winners against another Dousta Stars team, which was also the only Under 14 team to have beaten us during the season. In our sixth consecutive Under 14 Grand Final, some tight bowling had the undefeated St. Christophers team all out for 156 off 42.5 overs,

but despite Andrew Ainsworth working around his Essendon Grammar School commitments and a 50 not out from Andrew O'Reilly, we eventually fell 16 runs short.

Despite having lost to Oak Park with Eustice in our side early in the season, the Under 14 B team more than reversed that effort with a 51 run win in the semi-final in what was certainly the most meritorious of all our finals performances. Paul Crole and Tony Crapp both got 2 for 6 off their limit of six overs while Brendan Trebilcock got 37 opening the batting. Then faced with what looked on paper as a winnable Grand Final against fourth placed Hadfield, we found we were really out of our depth, managing only 68 in reply to their 4 for 200. However for this team, just getting to a Grand Final was an outstanding achievement.

Our usually competent Under 12 batting line up also gave us a fright in their semi as we set yet another Doutta Stars team only a 70 run target before bowling them out for 53. In the Grand Final, the batting got its act together and scored 6 for 122 off the available 20 overs, a fair target for a Broadmeadows side which was known to be capable of pushing the runs. Despite Bruce Jackson's four overs only conceding 3 runs, the chase was soon well and truly on and the game went right to the wire.

Unfortunately, excited spectators put enormous pressure on the scorers in the vital final overs and when the last ball was bowled nobody really knew what the result was. But when the dust had died down and the scores had been checked and rechecked, it turned out that Broadmeadows had got up by just one run. So Normie's quest for our club's first Under 12 premiership was going to have to wait a little longer.

In 1976-77 we had finally produced a viable cricket club at all levels, and so looked forward to being able to put a bit more energy into advancing our senior teams through the ranks. While it was admitted often enough that a lot more workers were still needed, nobody at that point realised that getting so far in six years must have been starting to take the edge of at least some of the people who had made these successes possible.