

Early History of Strathmore Cricket Club

1977-78: The Winds of Change

After Graham Rowe's two seasons as President had led the club to its highest point, he stepped down in favour of Russell Brown who was seen as having the senior involvement to push our senior team to higher levels. And Fred Youl managed to find in John Hough somebody to take over the job Fred had never wanted as Secretary, at least for one season.

Our first and second senior teams both found themselves promoted, with the old firm of Robbo and Stanley leading the firsts into "B" Grade, with Dinger and Normie leading the seconds into "C" Grade. From there we dropped to "F" Grade plus what turned out to be an official Under 18 team and a "Club XI" in the new six team Under 18 competition.

Unfortunately we had lost nearly half our previous season's premiership side: Colin Brown trying his luck in senior cricket, Russell Brown dropping down to help his mate Len Kelly with Under 18s, Des Purcell returning to his real home at St. Christophers, Rod Reddish's shift work stopping him having more than the occasional game in the seconds, and Peter Slevison concentrating on his football career. Their replacements included: Paul Beecroft a mate of Robbo's who was to play a big role in the next few seasons, John Dodd who had turned from an Under 14 tearaway into just about the best leggie to play in our senior ranks, Wayne English taking a year away from his long involvement bowling quick with clubs up Hadfield way, and Ron "Boots" Martin who found a bit of early form with the bat.

In the first two day game, it seemed as though nobody had told Doultas, as John Dodd returned the amazing figures of 6 for 57 off 4.3 overs, his first six balls producing 3/0 and his fourth over being recorded as 4224X664, the batsmen having crossed on the catch. Opening the batting, Stan alone matched Doultas's total of 146 and we went on to win by 201 after a partnership between the captain and vice-captain of 104 for the eighth wicket.

However, narrow losses were much more the story of our first season in "B" Grade, and towards the end, with the seconds somehow having a chance for the finals, it became harder and harder to find players willing to be promoted to fill gaps in the firsts. Fortunately the club had already found a number of good clubmen, especially some of our juniors, who were happy to play even when asked to help our well above their standard, but none of those efforts were more meritorious than that of John Joronen, a recent acquisition to the ranks of parent helpers who found himself filling in in the firsts in the last couple of days, indicative of the selfless contribution he has made to the club ever since.

There was one other bright spot. After Christmas the coach managed to secure the services of another of his friends with senior experience, Bruce Duncan who managed a 100 not out and an 87 amongst his four innings for the season.

After something of a slow start, the seconds started to win the close ones which the firsts kept losing and somehow managed to sneak into fourth place, as much on the performances of some of their occasional players as on the performances of any of their regular players, except of course for the Rowe family from which Normie picked up consistent runs and Wayne, still in his last year of Under 16, won the Association bowling average. In the semi-final, we looked to have it won with East Keilor teetering at 7 for 110 chasing our 221, but Rod McKelvie had other ideas and the game was eventually called off when he got his century. For the Mores, the dominant performance for the game came from Mick McAughtry who followed up his highest ever score of 71 with a haul of six wickets, which in the finish blew out from 6 for 29 off his first 15 overs to 6 for 70 off 24.

Under Terry Ryan's leadership, "F Troop" had an influx of Strathmore senior footballers reminiscent of the early Strathmore Footballers part of OASFCC. With the wisdom of hind sight, it was hardly surprising that only John Pickett and the Lynch brothers saw out the season, Darrell taking 13 wickets in a game against Campbellfield as we nearly snatched an outright and beating Brett by 0.05 in the bowling averages, while Brett evened up in the batting department. The team managed to win five games and introduce a lot of new players to the club.

The Under 18 side finished up doing a bit more than just entertaining the large number of juniors and just-out-of juniors that we had available on Saturday afternoons. It also managed to cement the previously irregular involvement of Trevor "Sticker" Reaburn, Gary "Penguin" Whight and Ivan Little in the Club, thanks to the example that Russ and Len provided as the team leaders. Mark Slevison also appreciated the gentle step up from Under 16s and won the comp bowling average. Mark must have especially liked Westmeadows as he took 7 for 16 against them in the opening match and made 67 in the return game.

With the influx of players into "F Troop" many who we thought would get a game were missing out, so we entered a "Club XI" to fill the bye in the Under 18 competition from the first two day game. However when that day came around, as has happened so often over the years, a few drop outs in the higher grades saw us scratching for players. Fortunately there were still plenty of Under 14s around, so Darren Bell, Paul Rowe and Brendan Trebilcock did not just make up the numbers but went on to be three of the Club XI's best performed players over the season. The team actually won a couple of early games and lost two others by a single run, but after Christmas things got a bit harder.

Undoubtedly more players played Saturday afternoon cricket with Strathmore in 1977-78 than in any season before or since, but a quick look at the number of players used in each grade showed the writing was on the wall. Of the 55 spots each week, usually only about 30 were filled by regular players, the rest being made up from an enormous pool of start-stop players and fill-ins, most of whom could not be expected to have any real involvement in the future of the Club.

In junior ranks we were still riding high, with only the long quest for an Under 12 flag as any kind of challenge.

However it says something of the gradual weakening of the spirit of the club's early days that we took the easy way out with team entries and dropped our third Under 14 team on the basis that too few players were coming up from Under 12s, with the obvious result that within weeks of the start of the season More News was bemoaning the lack of opportunity for us to enter extra sides in both those age groups. Some of our early leaders had lost a bit of their edge and had a bit of difficulty coming to terms with the influx of more conservative parents who had replaced the young players who had got the club started without ever realising that there could be limits.

In our first few seasons, many of our under age players were self-motivated leaders who would set their own goals and chase them. But now they were being replaced by a group who had a lot more parent support and sometimes a bit of pushing. And as the season progressed it became obvious, again with hind sight, that a lot of those players could no longer see the challenge in performing to their best in the prestigious Under 16 and 14 A competitions.

Retaining seven of the premiership side and bolstered by Eustice, Gale, Gourlay and O'Reilly, amongst others, the main question about the 16 A team was what to do to keep them interested. After playing a major role in introducing participation rules into the EBKCA and working alongside the likes of Len Kelly, Tony Smith must have finally started to understand what participation was about as he appointed the only two of his seven veterans who had not had previous leadership roles as captain and vice.

The team blasted its way through the pre-Christmas matches, showing supreme arrogance against Moomba Park with four regulars missing the first week for the schools carnival and another SCUBA diving, we played three short, and with five out for 44, those five adjourned from the heat at Boeing Reserve to the comfort of Paul Viney's lounge room a few doors away while the last two wickets added 72, before the last was thrown to give Thommo and O'Gorman the 29 balls they needed to have Moomba 6 for 15 at stumps and all out for 21 early the next day. We went on to win that outright and get the team back together to score 343 in the last game before Christmas with Knightsy getting 112.

Of the four players who went to Shepparton with the local schools' team, Knightsy was captain and was selected in the Victorian schools side to play in Perth. After some persuasion, our Under 16s tried out en masse for the Essendon Dowling Shield team. Four made the squad and Rowie was named as captain, but after two games Essendon Cricket Club reverted to type and replaced him with the younger brother of one of their senior players. While that slap in the face may not have been the only reason for our Under 16s' loss of momentum after Christmas, it certainly is the basic reason that most promising Strathmore Under 16 players since then have preferred to try out for University rather than Essendon for Dowling Shield.

Irrespective, Thommo's efforts quickly spread his fame as a fast bowler Melbourne-wide, and it was a great disappointment to the West Bentleigh club which invited us to visit them for Sunday Under 16 and 14 games that Thommo and a couple of others did not see fit to

make themselves available, with the consequence that we did not put up much opposition in either game.

After managing to lose two of our three games after Christmas, we went into the semi against Moomba Park, won the toss on an overcast morning and put them in. It immediately started to drizzle, our bowlers soon lost their grip and we lost the match, in a disappointing end to an outstanding bunch of junior cricketers.

For the record: it is well known that Thommo chose to concentrate on footy, Rowie lost interest over the next few seasons, O’Gorman who won the Brian Last Award and yet another EBKCA bowling average that season did his back, Viney went to the races, Hammo never really thought of going on with cricket, McCaff made the seniors as a keeper before playing at Lorne and never coming back, while Knightsy is of course our current senior coach.

The Under 16 B team did its usual job of providing back up to the first team and were often able to take up some of the surplus players from Under 14s. They even won a couple of games and were competitive in most of the others. Alongside some of the first year players moving up and down, a couple of the most regular names to appear were Mark Hough who was becoming a handy bowler and Knightsy’s extrovert schoolmate Alex Amici.

The Under 14 A side contained a list of names which are even more significant in the history of the club, but after the four one day games More News was already concerned that our Under 14 A side were likely to miss playing in the Grand Final for the first time in the club’s history. This was despite the efforts of Bell, Rowe and Trebilcock both with the Club XI and with Coburg’s premier Hatch Shield team. With support from Paul Crole, Paul Hickey, Matty Walsh and up and coming first year players Jason Hamilton, Bruce Jackson and Peter Youl, it is hard to see now how this team could have struggled to make the finals before bowing out to Douttas in the Semi. However neighbouring clubs West Essendon and Doutta Stars dominated the competition all season, with West only losing one wicket while beating us outright at our only meeting.

Meanwhile the Under 14 B side contained an equally big share of the future of Strathmore Cricket Club, with names like G.Bouckley, R.Dixon, P.Hallinan, G.McCall, D.Mason, J.Psaltis, R.Surgeon, A.Trevean and A.Walsh as well as a couple of very interesting recruits: Peter German now that he was too old for Little Aths and Craig Henwood, actually from our Under 16 B team of the previous year where he had helped out his neighbour Steve McCrystal before it was noticed that he was young enough to have another year in Under 14s. They also managed to grab a finals berth in a grade which at last included four other second sides, only to bow out against Westmeadows 2nds after a batting collapse in the Semi.

Unlike the year before in which we had won six out of six semis, we lost five out of five from Under 14 up, but in Under 12 it was a different story. With East Keilor and Westmeadows

following our example of running three Under 12 teams, the Under 12 C section was at last a true reserves competition made up entirely of clubs' second and third sides.

After the disappointments of the previous two Grand Finals, Normie again buttered up for a final fling at landing us an Under 12 flag. While his third son Minna could hardly have been expected to improve on his amazing bowling performance from the year before, he was backed up by the rapidly improving Rodney Joronen plus a few others from up Mascoma Street: Geoff Barker, Craig Leggo, Robert Monk, Victor Psaltis and Drew Thompson. To these were added a few names which are better remembered for football exploits: David Mangels, Danny Seow and Leo Tobin.

The B and C teams were looked after by well known junior football coaches Ron Hannant and Arthur Bouckley, who certainly knew what participation was about as well as having a taste for victory when the opportunity arose, and whose sons were only two of many well known names in those teams. Luke Thomas put in a good all round effort and like Daffy in the A team won the EBKCA bowling averages for the season. Greg Simpson, uncle of Shane and Anthony, who was to become one of our better junior slowies took five wickets from five balls in the last home and home game. Geoff Slater was the youngest member of a family which was well known around Strathmore, his brother Kevin scoring for the team and Geoff going on to be selected in the A team for the finals before taking on positions of leadership in later seasons. Shane Fisher's father Frank was also to become a committee member in seasons to come.

The Bs finished on top despite two losses to the Cs when the coaches tried to even up the sides, and the Cs finished a creditable 10 points out of the four in sixth place. As well as the players who were up and down to the Bs, Brendan Dumesny somehow found Strathmore Cricket Club from his home in Reservoir in the first of a productive four season involvement with the Mores. Jason Cuthbertson and Rodney Youl were also amongst the 45 boys who Arthur counted playing for the C team at some stage of the season. The rapid improvement in the C team was shown when they played the second best team in the last game before Christmas when they got within 31 with F both top scoring and bagging 5 for 15.

In those days, participation had not gone all the way, and we played football style final fours, so with wins in our respective second semis, we had to wait a fortnight for the Grand Finals which both turned out to be against Westmeadows. The A team managed 9 for 101 from their 20 overs with Daffy top scoring and four run outs, but it was all too much for their opponents who were bowled out in 14 overs with Barker taking 4 for 14. In the Bs it was a different story with Leggo surprisingly dropped and top scoring and only a couple of footballers in Mick Duggan and Glen Pridham adding much to the final total of 72 all out with 4.2 overs still available. Then after a good start Westmeadows suddenly forgot how to run between wickets and had five run outs as they crashed from 0 for 37 to be all out 10 runs short with 5.2 overs remaining.

In fact Normie had not won the first Strathmore Under 12 premiership, Ron had beaten him by a few minutes, but nobody really cared.

So the season ended with another two flags, taking our total to eight in seven seasons and covering all age groups. However the club was changing from its “don’t wait” attitude of early seasons to a greater conservatism and some important events on the horizon were to set a course for our next decade to be dominated by the two innovations of the late '70s: an increasing emphasis on senior success and an increasing influence of parents who were prepared to put cricket on for their kids without asking those kids to put much back.

While Boeing Reserve had been opened up for some of our teams, Edgar Smiley’s con job in getting the residents of Strathmore to snobbishly vote themselves out of the City of Broadmeadows and into Essendon was about to put the development of a real sporting centre at Boeing Reserve back more than a decade and force us into another round of upgrading our Lebanon Reserve clubrooms which we still shared with Pascoe Vale Uniting on Saturday afternoons and senior training nights.

And with the most dynamic Executive it has ever had under the Presidency of Jack Davies, the EBKCA was about to open its own indoor cricket centre at Glenroy Valley and to launch its own turf competition on five new wickets being provided by the cities of Essendon and Broadmeadows.