

Early History of Strathmore Cricket Club

The First Decade

Written by Tony Smith in 2002 in preparation for an even shorter presentation to our 30th anniversary commemoration.

I hope this doesn't come out as being too egocentric, but I'm not sure how to write myself out of the story of the cricket club's first ten years, in each of which I was an office bearer, lower grade senior captain and junior team coach.

My involvement in cricket started when I was born into the womens cricket club which my mother had founded the season before.

But it took me until I was 24, and we started Strathmore, for me to actually follow both my parents into long playing careers.

It is also impossible to completely separate the story of the Cricket Club from the story of Strathmore Football Club with which we have always shared substantial membership and facilities.

The footy club gave us a way to jump start rather than needing to start from scratch, as they had had to 16 years earlier.

It also gave us some strong traditions of how to do things right which ultimately came from it's founding father Sid McGain, whose eldest son Ian was a close school friend of mine.

When we first entered the then EBKCA in 1971, it was as Ormond Amateurs-Strathmore Footballers Cricket Club, drawing not just on the footy club's young and enthusiastic seniors and burgeoning junior ranks, but also on Ormond Amateurs.

The connection there was the involvement of long term footy club secretary, Alf Pearce, in that single team EBKCA "B" Grade club, so named because they played down the freeway at Ormond Park.

The other foundation stone for the cricket club came out of my eight year involvement with Strathy Meths juniors which had culminated in a premiership in my last season there.

Rod Reddish had been the star player, not just with the Meths but also alongside some Meths teammates and the likes of Graeme Matson and Andrew Gilbert with the north west metro side which won the schoolboys carnival.

The Meths had pushed unsuccessfully for the local Churches comp to start an Under 13 grade to better accommodate the needs of players like Peter Holley who captained an Under 16 team at 12 and Trevor Reaburn who started playing at six.

This was more than solved by the EBKCA launching an Under 12 grade in 1971 in which Strathmore provided two of the initial eight teams, alongside an Under 14, an Under 16, the Ormond Amateurs team staying in "B" Grade, a Strathmore Footballers team in "C" Grade and a scratch team in "D" Grade.

Just 23 days after the new cricket club took to the field for the first time, and nine days after the start of Under 12 competition, Alf Pearce died suddenly.

We had to learn very quickly how to get on with things while respecting his memory, for the first of quite a few times over 31 years.

Having revisited the detailed histories of our first seven seasons that I wrote for More News around 1989, there is way too much interesting detail to try to do justice to it all in ten minutes tonight.

So I'm going to try to focus on what might be seen a generation later as the significant trends, backed up by an absolute minimum of unforgettable moments.

With Brian D'Elton stepping into the breach as president, we got through the first season on good will, making semi finals in each age group and the first of six consecutive Under 14 grand finals.

Len Kelly and I looked after the first Under 12 team consolidating a friendship which enabled us to play complementary roles for much of the decade.

That team introduced a couple of cricketing fathers to the club, Graham Rowe and Russell Brown, who were to follow my and Len's one year turns as president with longer terms of their own that between us were to cover the rest of the club's first decade.

Our second season saw the sudden disintegration of the Strathmore senior footballers team and irresolvable problems in relations with those from Ormond Amateurs.

Meanwhile the juniors went from strength to strength, winning grand finals played side by side in Under 16, with Andrew Gilbert as captain and no adult coach, and Under 14, with Rod Reddish as coach.

So in the winter of 1973 we bit the final bullet and became simply Strathmore Cricket Club.

Recruiting in the most general sense follows interesting patterns.

While a club has a natural geographic catchment and also attracts a trickle of odd bods who remain largely unconnected to the rest of the members, much recruiting seems to follow branching trees that can ultimately be traced to a few individuals.

No matter who else did what else for Strathmore Cricket Club, during our first few years, Rod Reddish was the club's heart and soul.

Rod and his school mate and 71-72 Under 16 team mate Phil "Benny" Rowe stepped straight from coaching our two Under 14 teams in 72-73 to the leadership of Strathmore's new senior team which started out in "C" Grade in 74-75.

Their recruits, whether dating back to Strathy Meths, from school or from footy, include many who have made major contributions, both then and now, names like Steve Carey, Ian Binch, Neil Reynolds, Daryl Schimmelbusch and many many more.

As important was Rod's influence on boys a couple of years younger including Peter Holley, Trevor Stevenson and Ron Temminghoff who became both secretary and Under 16 B captain-coach at 14, and who brought us many more recruits.

Adopting our new name brought a resurgence of good will, especially from some mothers who formed a fund raising Womens Auxiliary led by Marj Reddish and Joan Thomson.

Joan's influence went way beyond her year as club treasurer.

But basically we got through those first few years on brash optimism, never worrying whether a team might have to face going through a season winless when we had but a hint of the numbers needed to put it in the field.

We were soon clearly the biggest cricket club in the EBKCA, even while our seniors still languished just outside the four in "C" Grade.

The direction and level of involvement of core senior footballers in our young cricket club was greatly influenced by the death of Pecka Ransome in 1975.

Then the bonds that held the cricket club's own band of young seniors together were more than tested by the death of Tony Farrall in 1976, the names Reddish and Farrall often having been spoken in the same breath since their primary school days.

However we were very lucky with the quality of parents who got caught up in the cricket club, sometimes via a first involvement at the footy club.

By 1976, the frustration of trying to get our senior side to a level more appropriate to the club's overall strength provided the impetus for the kind of more targeted recruiting that the footy club had gotten into for similar reasons a few years earlier.

The first achievement was to retain Colin Brown and gain his father when Colin finished in Under 16, the next was to finally snare Stan Trebilcock, and the third was to gain a credentialed captain coach in Phil Robinson.

They combined with the young talent already in our senior ranks to win our first senior premiership in 76-77 and with it a place in "B" Grade for the following season.

The same year Wayne Rowe, Michael Thomson, Steven Knight and a few talented mates backed up their Under 14 A flag from the previous season with an Under 16 A flag as first year players.

The next year, not only did Graham Rowe's coaching finally break our unlikely drought in Under 12 premierships, but Ron Hannant backed it up with the Under 12 second team, winning the first of what were to be three consecutive premierships for his son Anthony and a group of other boys as they moved up into Under 14s.

Either side of the Hannants were teams that contained a Youl, a Bell and a Bouckley, to say nothing of many other names that have become synonymous with Strathmore, a climate into which Rod Joronen, Adam Preece and many others made their first step.

The Youl parents, Fred and Rae, quickly became the backbone of the club, while Fred's separate partnerships with Keith Jackson and Geoff Bell strongly influenced our direction in many areas.

In our tenth season, on the same day my coaching managed to get in the way of a fourth Hannant premiership as we lost the unlosable grand final, Geoff Bell got up with a second Under 14 side.

That side was already becoming the heart of the new generation, including Jason Cuthberston whose parents were to take on much of the burden in years to come.

Also around that time the brothers Anderson arrived at the club and slotted in instantly into Under 16, Under 14 and Under 12 teams, the eldest, Ian, being destined for major roles.

Meanwhile, Phil Robinson had passed on the mantle of responsibility for our senior side to Bruce Duncan who then passed it to another friend of theirs, Paul Beecroft, who is also a long time friend of the McGains.

However we were already starting to get into a pattern of more stability and often better performances in our second team than our firsts, a pattern which long typified Strathmore's history in both sports.

Meanwhile our senior grading was becoming more a matter of EBKCA, Council and Football Club politics than of our on field efforts.

Formation of the EBKCA's new turf competition propelled us into the top matting grade, yes this was before synthetic wickets started to gain a hold, for a season before we too decided turf was our way forward.

Throughout our first decade we had had an uneasy coexistence sharing the old rooms and training nets on Tuesdays and Thursdays with Pascoe Vale Uniting, who had long had use of one of the two concrete wickets at Lebanon Reserve.

But when the footy club saw the attractions of having one turf wicket rather than two concrete wickets on the oval, change became inevitable.

The heady atmosphere and naive optimism that got us past all manner of difficulties in our first five seasons had been gradually replaced by steadier hands, but this only added to the fundamentally decent principles on which the club was founded.

Reading through our early history yet again, the number of people who contributed to where Strathmore Cricket Club is today is staggering and many many names and stories didn't make the cut tonight.

However one name that must not be left unmentioned is Slevison, whether for Jim and Val's support from their positions of influence in football circles, or from Peter and Mark cropping up frequently as important members of some of our more successful sides.

Our especially strong junior history also touches on the history of representative cricket, in particular with Strathmore boys playing a major role in Coburg's tradition of Hatch Shield success.

We were also very much involved in the growth of inter association competition which has always in part been to foster healthy respect between leading players of all clubs as an important tactic for advancing the true spirit of cricket.

Our history includes many individual performances, such as F's 2/8 when Mr Youl gave him the last over of his first game as a 7 year old filling in and which didn't even get him another bowl that season. Participation rules were still in the future.

It also includes many notable performances against us, including Tim Stapleton playing for WEYC's Under 16s against the combined Under 14-Under 12 team we drafted to make up our Under 16 B numbers for a January game.

Another lasting impression of our first ten season were the many chances we were able to provide for talented juniors to play in lower senior grades in the afternoon.

But I have to wonder if it must have been a different person when I see my name up there six times as treasurer. Money and I have become the worst of enemies.

It took me until my second break from here to realise one vital characteristic that has helped make Strathmore Cricket Club.

We have always taken ourselves seriously, and whether it is blame or credit I must take my share of it for that.

At Taylors Lakes I discovered that there are other valid ways to run a large and successful club. The core groups of parents and kids who got Taylors Lakes off to a similar jump start only ever really did it to have fun.

Neither approach is inherently right nor wrong, but they are quite different. And now the wheel has fully turned with a valued Taylors Lakes player official, Mick Keohane, following his son to Strathmore and taking on an important role here.

To me, tonight really marks the 20th anniversary of my first departure from Strathmore for three years at Lorne, a departure I did make it back from for another go around, but which isn't for me to mention tonight save for one little story.

In the shadow of the superstar team, one memory has never left me of a little kid who bowled a ball on to the top of the nets and decided, despite having never been quite so brave before, that he was going to do his duty and climb up and get it.

15 years later, not only has that boy's life turned out ok, but his father is now secretary of the Cricket Club.

Also in the mid-80s, I attended the 40th anniversary reunion of the club my mother had founded and which is still going strong today. At that function, my mother and her life long friend and co-founder Norma Johnson were presented with Life Memberships of Donex.

The interesting connection here is that Norma Johnson's nephew also went on to become secretary of Strathmore Cricket Club, after first doing a stint as captain-coach. This nephew is not just here tonight, but he, Bruce Stephens, is now going to take over to tell you about our second decade.