

THE NATIONS IN 1980 – WORLD BOX LACROSSE CHAMPIONSHIP

Written by John Nolan with invaluable assistance and photos from Rob Potter, Doug Mildren, Rob Carter and Terry Denton

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Following the inaugural Australian box lacrosse team tour and participation in the 1978 Commonwealth Games in Edmonton the ALC was showing a greater interest in box lacrosse, and received a report which emphasised the following points:-

- Before the Canadian trip, the style of box lacrosse in Australia was principally field lacrosse played on a box court. In Canada it was quite a different game, and evoked tremendous spectator interest.
- Since the Canadian trip, participants from several states set about promoting the game and obtaining suitable box facilities. The Williamstown Lacrosse Club several years ago built a box lacrosse facility, but it was not of adequate standard or size. An alternative facility was now needed. This would involve having a stadium or hall that could house a box about 65 metres by 30 metres, able to provide spectator space, having good lighting and occupying a central location.

At the July 1979 meeting of ALC it was announced that an “All Nations” box lacrosse championship would be held in Canada in 1980, possibly in July, and applications for coach and manager must be in the hands of the A.L.C. Secretary by 1 October 1979. It was also announced that the Australian box lacrosse championship would be held in Perth in February 1980 where the Australian team for the “All Nations” would be selected following the championship.

It was imperative that proper box lacrosse equipment be available and be used. This would include box sticks, rib and kidney pads, shoulder pads, goalie hockey pants and throat guards, etc., to ensure participants were adequately protected to allow them to play the game as it is in Canada.

The game might be organised around four to six clubs, or on a combined team basis in each state and each team would need 12-20 players. The game was strenuous, and when properly played, 20 players would certainly be needed.

In Victoria the Williamstown box lacrosse committee became the VALA box lacrosse committee and S.A. and W.A. were also promoting box lacrosse with enthusiasm. The South Australian association approved the expenditure of \$3,000 to establish a permanent facility for box lacrosse at the university gymnasium. The players who had participated at Edmonton in the Commonwealth Games proved to be excellent promoters. In 1979 Australia was the only country outside Canada that played box lacrosse. The ALC retained control of all forms of lacrosse in Australia, so the first national tournament was conducted in Perth in February 1980 under their general authority and proved to be a great success.

All applicants for selection in the 1980 Australian team completed an application form and were given a brief information bulletin regarding the tour well in advance of the championship in Perth in February 1980. At that stage the coach (John Nolan) and the assistant manager (Rob Pettit) had been appointed but there were no applicants for the role of manager until after the championship, when Bill Taylor agreed to take on the role on the proviso that his wife Merle could join the tour as they had agreed to take a holiday at that time. This was of course agreed to and

Bill's experience and expertise were essential, and he was tested on many fronts early on in the preparation of the tour.

Box lacrosse was now active in the 3 southern states and the 1980 championships were staged at a purpose built, albeit temporary facility, at Wanneroo, which was well managed and promoted, and included TV coverage by Channel 9, led by the charismatic Bruce Walker. This was fundamentally brought about by the tireless organizing and marketing efforts and skills of Greg Kennedy, who was a member of the 1978 Australian box lacrosse team as well as the 1974 Australian field lacrosse team.

All seats for the Saturday final contest were pre-sold. Although few Western Australians had seen the game played, the Western Australian Lacrosse Association entered a team along with South Australia and Victoria. In the final game South Australia defeated Victoria by 23 goals to 9.

All 3 states had invested in Canadian players to assist with Rod Banister (Goalkeeper) and Ian Fennell assisting and coaching SA, Paulo Brunoro and John Davies assisting Victoria and Dave Evans assisting WA., most of them from Vancouver.

The Australian team to participate in the "All Nations" tournament in Vancouver from 10-17 July was selected after the national box lacrosse championships in Perth in February 1980. The selectors for the All Nations were John Nolan (Coach), Ken Read (1978 Coach), Greg Kennedy and Peter Koshnitsky, all of whom were members of the 1978 team, and were assisted by several Canadians, including Rod Banister and Dave Evans. The selectors met after every game to consider candidates for selection and it was pleasing that unlike many previous overseas tours there were at least twice as many candidates as positions. The selectors agreed that the playing contingent should be increased from 21 to 25 due to the duration of the trip, the experience to be gained and injury factor inherent in such a trip. This was a very wise decision in retrospect.

Given that S.A. won the inaugural championship in Perth it was not surprising that they dominated the numbers by state in the team, with 14 from S.A., 4 from Victoria and 7 from W.A., 25 in total including 3 goalkeepers. South Australian referees Greg Miller and Bob Benger also formed part of the party and refereed most of the warm up games to the "Nations" and were an invaluable part of the team when they weren't called on to referee. They were paid for the matches they refereed but generously donated the fees to the team kitty. Greg Miller was also invited to participate in the "Nations in 80" as part of the referee panel and did referee a few games.

The team selected was as follows:-

SA – Peter Koshnitsky (G), Peter Brown, Tony Carbone, Terry Denton, Rob Carter (Co-Captain) Kevin Humphrys, Allan Jennings, Phil Kestel (G), Wayne Little, Peter Mathwin, Doug Mildren, Rob Potter, Glenn Revell & Gary Shepley.

Victoria – Graeme Antrim, Steve Ellis, Mark Jennings (Co-Captain) & Max Madonia

WA – John Ballarine (Co-Captain), Les Buchanen, John Denic, Campbell Faulds, Graham Palmer, Alan Ramsay & Deryk Swinger (G).

John Nolan (Coach), Bill Taylor (Manager), Bob Pettit (Asst Manager), Greg Miller (Referee) and Bob Benger (Referee).

Preparation for the “Nations” was a 4 day intensive training camp in Adelaide over Easter along with training twice weekly in each state. Clearly it meant more in Adelaide given the numbers they had in the team, with Victoria and W.A. more focused on fitness and limited training together in groups of 4 or 7.

The 4 day Easter training camp from 3-7 April was an outstanding success with all players showing the keenness and spirit required which allowed the team to cover a lot of ground in a short period of time. The team trained for approximately 16 hours over 5 sessions and played a game against a team comprising 5 top Canadian junior A players and many experienced S.A. field and box players. The program included goalkeeper drills, pick and go, backhand passing, power plays, 2 on 3 defence, bounce passing, defence on picks and scrimmaging. Given the team had never trained together before this was invaluable experience. Team funds were applied on an equalized basis for all interstate players to attend the training camp in Adelaide.

While the lack of numbers and venues made training difficult for the Victorians and Western Australians, a program including weights (For upper body strength), distance running and box lacrosse fundamentals was established and was supervised by Peter Koshnitsky in S.A., John Ballarine in W.A. and John Nolan in Victoria. Several players expressed interest in going to Canada early to gain more experience, including goalkeeper Peter Koshnitsky, and this was granted. The need for physical fitness as a prerequisite for success in this game was stressed and a few players were put on notice that they would have to improve in this area.

As anyone who worked with Bill Taylor knew he was meticulous with his organization and given he was a banker was always leaning on customers to “Assist” with product or sponsorship in some way. Bill was at loggerheads with ALC early on as after making a tentative booking for the party of 30, ALC decided, without consultation, that departure would be “On or before 30 June”, without any consideration given to the consequences. Bill Taylor stated “Qantas could only accommodate us on 29 June, that flight being the only one with sufficient seating within reasonable proximity to the date we requested, which put us in high season and shoulder or lower fare prices were not available. It was now too late to change airlines, but Qantas accepted my arguments on preferred dates and they will stick with the original “Shoulder” airfare prices, which I gladly accepted! There was also agitation in Adelaide from a few members wanting to leave early, accompanied by lobbying and involving the SA executive, and the matter had to be put down quickly with a stern directive from ALC”. Total interstate fares were spread over the whole group, including those who had departed earlier, as per the ALC requirements for equity.

What we did learn from the 1978 tour was that the uniforms had to be larger than normal, materials appropriate for a hot indoor climate had to be used, thus the uniforms were made in Canada. Tracksuits were made locally and they were of excellent quality with embroidery for \$25 each.

Being an Olympic year all endeavours for major sponsorship were fruitless although Adidas donated one T shirt per member, STX kindly donated each player with a Protec helmet and the federal government provided \$10,000.

As far as souvenirs were concerned Bill had learnt a lot from the 1978 tour, particular how popular our T shirts and kangaroo pins were. A redesigned T shirt was sourced locally with sufficient quantity for opponents and billets, and a further quantity was purchased by individual members for trading. These T shirts were in hot demand wherever we went in Canada and the U.S.A. and even though we took 522 with us, this was not nearly enough.

Following the team camp in Adelaide and only 6 weeks from the date of departure, the team executive became aware of 3 withdrawals from W.A., none of whom had notified the team officials of their intentions. The time lost in verifying their withdrawal precluded many of the suitable alternates being selected. As a result their \$200 deposits were forfeited, which frankly wouldn't have covered the airfares to the training camp from Perth! One of the 3 had not paid his deposit, and was unwilling to do so, which necessitated the WALA stepping in and paying it and having him reimburse the full amount. Bill wasn't happy!

As a result Paul Mollison, who was a member of the 1978 team and who was in Canada at the time was selected, along with Peter Ballarine from W.A.

Another drama arose 2 weeks before departure when Gary Shepley, who was perfectly suited for the Canadian game, was diagnosed with the mumps, which caused mayhem to say the least, with several players in the S.A. squad not having contracted mumps before. Sadly Gary had to withdraw from the team, and fortunately none of the remaining S.A. contingent came down with the virus. As a precaution the SA players who had not contracted mumps before did not join the touring party 3 days prior to departure from Melbourne due to the risks of spreading the virus and joined the team at Melbourne airport on the day of departure. Given the timing it was not possible to find a replacement for Gary Shepley, which was a big loss. Thus instead of a full team of 25, we were reduced to 23, with 3 goalkeepers, thus only 20 runners, which was lower than required due to the number of games to be played, the intensity of the indoor game and the potential for injury.

The team departed Melbourne for Sydney at 4.30pm on Sunday 29 June, then boarded QF5 for a 14 hour flight to San Francisco with an overnight stay. The following day the team flew to Calgary where the team was billeted by the ANZA Club, as they were in 1978. The team undertook its first training on 1 July and was greatly assisted throughout the tour with coaching from Taki Vohalis and goalkeeper Rod Banister.

Rod Banister had been in Adelaide for much of the previous six months, based in Adelaide and helping the S.A. team develop their box lacrosse skills, in particular assisting the goalkeepers (Peter Koshnitsky and Phil Kestel), which had a major impact on the team's improvement and this was borne out in their success at the inaugural national championships in Perth in February 1980 along with selection in the Australian team to play in the All Nations later that year.

Unfortunately when the arrangements for the pre-Nations leg of the tour were made the Australian management was not made aware of the distances and travel times of the first 2 legs from Calgary, and were assumed to be relatively short. While the trip to Rossland was thought to be about 5 hours by bus, it was difficult going through the mountains and the transit time was over 10 hours, with the team arriving in Rossland around the time the game was expected to start. So the team had to quickly change into playing gear and play a game, which was most unsuitable given the travelling they had undertaken that day, let alone in the last week, and it showed in the result with the Redmen winning 12-7.

From Rossland the team then bussed back up into the interior of B.C. to Armstrong where the 1978 team played the local Shamrocks. Again, it was another long day in the bus and not conducive to conditioning or lacrosse and it was not clear why the team was on such an indirect path to Vancouver, with long days on the bus, without some good quality opposition. The result was a 19-11 loss after being up 6-3 in the first period.

The entourage left Armstrong the following morning and arrived in Vancouver that afternoon, with the team being accommodated at the Simon Fraser University. Funny story about that later!!

The two Canadian teams represented the best of the east and the west. The Coquitlam Adanacs finished on top of the table in the west and the Brooklin Redmen finished on top in the east. The North American Natives team included six players from the North Shore Indians (Vancouver) along with stars from Ontario, Quebec and New York State. The two "newbies" to box lacrosse, Australia and U.S.A. rounded out the five way contest.

The first warm up game in Vancouver was on 5 July against North Shore Indians.

On 6 July the team took the ferry to Vancouver Island, a 2 hour trip and a bus trip to Nanaimo to play the mighty Nanaimo Timbermen, which they narrowly lost 13-10 followed by a game the following night against Esquimalt in Duncan, also on the island, losing 16-5. In the game against Nanaimo the home team had 75 shots to our 39 whereas against Esquimalt we do not have a record of shots but we do know the Australian keepers had 57 saves compared to 41, which would indicate our opponents had many more shots on goal than we did.

Returning to Vancouver on 8 July for the official arrival and opening of the tournament at Simon Fraser University and on 9 July a press conference followed by a banquet.



Back row (L to R): Bill Taylor (Manager), Rob Pettit (Asst. Manager), Phil Kestel, Graham Palmer, John Ballarine (Co-captain), Peter Brown, Peter Ballarine, Steve Ellis, Wayne Little, Doug Mildren, Paul Mollison, Peter Koshnitsky, Mark Jennings (Co-captain), John Nolan (Coach), Rod Banister (CS) & Taki Vohalis (CS) Middle row: Les Buchanen, Allan Jennings, Peter Mathwin, Rob Carter (Co-captain) Tony

Carbone & Graeme Antrim Front row: Bob Bengner (Referee), Glenn Revell, Rob Potter, Kevin Humphrys, Terry Denton, Max Madonia, Deryk Swingler & Greg Miller (Referee)

The above photo was taken at Coquitlam Sports Centre, and for some reason an official team photo was not taken, this photo came from the CLHOF in Vancouver, thanks to Paul Parnell who sent it to Doug Mildren. Why wasn't a team photo available as is the case in all tours, particularly given Bill Taylor's attention to detail is hard to fathom. A team photo was not possible in Australia, as was probably planned, due to the possibility of mumps being carried over from Adelaide, thus it would have to have been taken in Canada, and given the itinerary the earliest possible opportunity would have been when the team arrived in Vancouver.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

The first game of the "Nations" was against Canada West (Coquitlam Adanacs) on 11 July at Coquitlam in front of a full house, with the Adanacs far superior in the shooting and accuracy departments, with 21 goals from 73 shots (29%) compared to Australia 7 from 32 (22%). What the stats doesn't highlight is the shooting accuracy and defensive capability of the Canadians, despite solid goalkeeping from our Peter Koshnitsky. Kosh was clearly our best player with 52 saves from 73 shots, with Kevin Humphrys our best court player with 6 shots, 2 goals and 2 assists. While Graeme Antrim was only available for the last two matches of the tournament due to injury, the team lost Steve Ellis and Glen Revell early in the first period of the first game, both due to broken bones in their feet, thus 3 down before "The Nations" really started!

The second game of the tournament the following night was against the Can-Am Warriors or North American natives at Kerrisdale Arena, Vancouver, which was probably the worst result of the tournament for Australia, with a loss of 26-4, with Kevin Humphrys throwing 3 of the 4 from 9 shots. Again the Warriors had 63 shots for their 26 goals (40%) whereas Australia again could only get away 32 shots for 4 goals (13%).

On 13 July the team took the ferry back to Victoria, Vancouver Island and trained that afternoon, and the following morning prior to their match against the U.S.A. on 14 July in Victoria. This was the match between the two nations where box lacrosse was not their normal game, their game was field lacrosse, and clearly the Canadians and Native Americans could run rings around both teams at "Their game". The game was all tied up after full time and in extra time the Americans threw 3 goals, with Australia going down gallantly 16-13 in extra time. Australia at least had more shots this time, having 63 shots to U.S.A.'s 46, with Australia having 41 wild shots (Not hitting the goal or keeper) compared to U.S.A.'s 21. Again Kevin Humphrys chipped in with 3 goals, Mark Jennings with 3 also, Tony Carbone with 2, and probably the best player for Australia. As for the goalkeepers Peter Koshnitsky made 30 saves and the American John Yeager, voted best afield, made a miraculous 50 saves.

According to the coach in his report "The game against the U.S. was the proudest moment of the tour as far as I was concerned. Lacking two key players through injury the team demonstrated the courage, concentration and desperation required to win. Due to the unbelievably bad refereeing the match was extremely rough and tough and in my opinion the U.S. team got away with some very cheap stick checking whereas our team seemed to be constantly penalised for insignificant infringements. Had the refereeing been consistent and to an acceptable standard I believe we would have won and the game would not have gone to an extra time situation.

During the last period we constantly had one or two players at a time in the penalty box yet we came from behind and levelled the game. Unfortunately we lost the game in extra time but the team demonstrated what it was capable of and while it was another loss it was an excellent performance and a crowd pleasing game”.

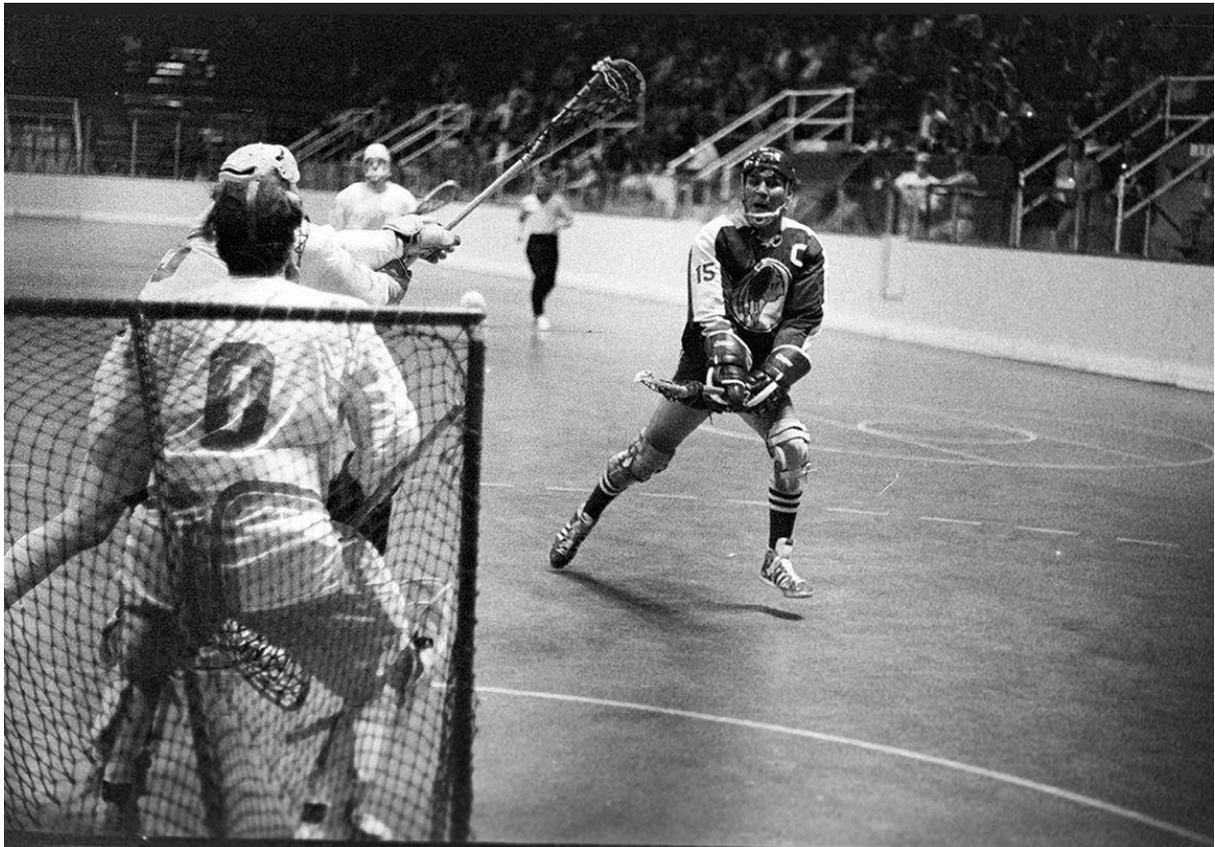
The final game was against Canada East (Brooklin Redmen) on the evening of 15 July, where the team came up against the tournament favourite and went down 20-7. While we went down we picked up our shot making taking 50 shots compared to Canada East's 55. What needs also to be explained here was that after an exhaustive week of games, training and travelling, the team which started the tour short of the number expected, with one goalkeeper injured, 4 top players out injured from the start, forcing the coach, normally a goalkeeper, to play as a runner in the final match, to make a total of only 20 players. The result also underscores the skills of the Canadians, not only in shooting accuracy but in goalkeeping skills, they are brilliant at it, and in this final game goalkeeper Ken Wentzell saved 43 shots out of 50!! Our top scorer was Wayne Little with 4 from 7, Kevin Humphrys was always in there with 7 shots as was John Ballarine.

In the coach's report he states “While I respect the box lacrosse skills of these three teams and accept the fact that they are capable of defeating us, I will not accept the fact that we should have been beaten by such large margins. It appeared to me that defeat was accepted at the end of the first period. The physical and mental stamina was missing at times and had this been present the margins could have been significantly lower. Having said that these teams were playing their game, were highly talented and experienced, we were learning.”

The semi finals were held at Victoria and the final in Vancouver was between Canada West and the Native Warriors, which the Adanacs won 16-11.

Canada West's Dan Wilson was named MVP for the tournament, scoring 30 points and winning 3 game-star awards. Australia captured the most sportsmanlike team honours.

There was interesting observation on the morning of the final - seeing a lacrosse ball being thrown from several storeys high from the dormitories of the Simon Fraser University, where the various teams were billeted, by a member of one of the teams playing in the final that night!!! Have you ever seen a ball thrown from the fifth floor of a building? Can you imagine how high it can bounce or the damage possible?



The support from the BCLA and CLA was outstanding from Australia's point of view, with Taki Vohalis with the team from the start, helping to teach the players the finer points of the Canadian game, along with Ric Richards, who was invaluable support in 1978, again stepping in to help the Australian contingent wherever he could. The CLA Liaison Officer John Tobias was also incredibly helpful and supportive. Both the manager and coach wrote to Ed Linstead, President of the CLA, expressing their gratitude for the exceptional support and assistance received. The tournament was extremely well run and was sponsored by CP Air, and they never missed a beat.



Thanks to Rob Potter, who has a great memory and kept everything, he has provided a photo of the bottle of sparkling wine that all players and officials received at a pre-championship banquet for the "All Nations in 1980", not sure how good the quality would be, doubt that it would be in the Champagne class, but a generous

gesture and a great memory. Also shown above is the medal presented to each participant by the CLA, with a large medal with ribbon and smaller medal without a ribbon.

On 19 July the team farewelled Vancouver and bussed to San Francisco, travelling through Washington and Oregon as well as the California Redwoods, arriving in SFO on 20 July where the team was billeted by the North California All-Stars. Field lacrosse games were played at Berkeley University against the North California Champions on 22 July and the North California All-Stars on 24 July.

The team completed its tour and departed San Francisco for Melbourne on 25 July, landing in Sydney and the respective teams departing to their home states on 27 July with TAA (Remember TAA, which became Australian Airlines which in turn became Qantas).

In his Team Manager's Report to ALC Bill Taylor made the following comments on team behaviour. "There were no official complaints regarding team behaviour, there were comments about bad language. From a playing perspective there were no complaints at all and the team was awarded the trophy for the Most Sportsmanlike Team at the "Nations". Many favourable comments were made concerning the team dress uniform and general appearance of the team.

5 players declined to travel to California notwithstanding their bus fares and accommodation had been booked and paid for, and were required to travel with the team to San Francisco, and in each case their \$100 bond was forfeited.

One player went "Walkabout" in Vancouver and the team had to enlist the help of Bill Templeton from the ANZA Club, who was such a great help in 1978, to track him down and bring him over to Vancouver Island to rejoin the team. No further action was taken - a stern look from Bill Taylor was enough!!

The coach in his report made several observations and points:-

- In assessing our performance I must draw a comparison with the 1978 team of which I was a playing member. That team had the best team attitude, discipline and maturity that I have ever seen. They lacked the experience and overall skills of the 1980 team but made up for it with guts and determination, and a wonderful team spirit. The 1978 team however was not playing against the calibre of players we experienced in the "Nations", and that should be taken into consideration.
- Several players in my opinion didn't have the maturity and mental hardness to accept the pressures of constantly travelling, training and playing.
- The best players throughout the tour in my view were Kevin Humphrys (Easily the best and fairest), Steve Ellis (Only played one game in the "Nations" due to injury), Wayne Little, Peter Koshnitsky, Tony Carbone and Mark Jennings. Kevin Humphrys to me is an example of "It is not the size of the dog in the fight, it is the size of the fight in the dog!" Time and again he took on heavier and tougher athletes and came out on top. The players who in my opinion contributed off the field were Doug Mildren, Glen Revell, Mark Jennings, John Ballarine, Bob Carter, Graeme Antrim, Les Buchanen and Peter Brown.
- On several occasions I found it necessary to discipline players for not adhering to curfews and attendance at training and matches. The players

concerned accepted the disciplinary action issued and there is no need to provide names or reasons for discipline.

- I record my appreciation of Bill Taylor and Bob Pettit for their efforts in planning and preparation for the trip and performing so admirably during the trip. We were a team before we left, and a stronger team when we returned. Thanks also were extended to Ric Richards from the BCLA, who again was our shepherd as he was in 1978, a wonderful man, along with Taki Vohalis and Rod Banister for their input and coaching assistance, as well as Clive Carr and George Tillotson from ALC for their communication and liaison prior to departure.
- Too much time has been expended for us to not learn and develop box in Australia. The game is vigorous and exciting and has so much to offer the sporting public of Australia, and believe me it will develop when suitable venues are located and more senior field players realize its potential and enjoyment.

While the results might not look encouraging on paper we had taken several major steps from 1978 to 1980, playing against far superior teams, who were playing their game, and we and the Americans struggled then as the Canadians did at field lacrosse championships at the time. They are both called lacrosse but they are completely different interpretations and no doubt both "Amuse the creator"!

We learnt a lot about the great game of box lacrosse, in my view far more spectacular to watch, far more skilful to play and master compared to field, but in the end we returned to field competition. With kids growing up playing field as their primary game it is difficult to adapt to box, you need greater passing and shooting accuracy, great goalkeeping and defending nuances when attack players are picking and rolling around you.

Overall we learnt a lot, we did our best and above all we came away with a lot of respect for Australian lacrosse and the game was starting to take hold in Australia.

Well done Australia.