

JOHN BUTKIEWICZ – AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE CHAMPION

John “Keka” Butkiewicz started playing lacrosse at the age of 11 in Mal Taylor’s local junior competition in Williamstown in 1962, riding his bike from home in North Altona to Williamstown.

He stopped playing in the local competition after only one year but played at Altona North Technical School and later joined Altona Lacrosse Club at the age of 16 as a midfielder in their C grade team, which was the only team they had at that time, as the club had moved to a new ground in North Altona (Bond Reserve), which was just over his back fence.

Mal Taylor, a giant in western suburbs lacrosse at the time convinced John to join Williamstown in 1972 (aged 21) in order to develop his lacrosse career. In 1972 he started in Division 1, progressing to State League later that year, then selected for Victoria in 1973, and he was selected in the 1974 Australian team following a withdrawal due to injury the day before the first match.

He got the nickname “Keka” from his coach in 1972, Alec Inglis, who couldn’t pronounce Butkiewicz (Pronounced “But key a witz”) so Alec called him Keka, after the footballer Sam Kekovich.

Always looking to take his game to a new level he practiced face-off techniques using the back of a chair in the lounge room at his parents’ home, where another stick was attached to the back of the chair.



From 1973 there was no looking back, he played in a record 5 World Series, the 1976 Australian team world tour, 13 national carnivals and 351 state league games for Williamstown, all over a period of 27 years, finishing his career in 1990 at the age of 39. Thus he only missed a national championship when he was representing Australia.

At club level over 27 years he threw 829 goals with 228 assists and won the club State League best and fairest on 8 occasions (1975, 1976, 1979, 1981, 1983, 1987, 1989 & 1990) at a time when the Williamstown club was at its strongest.

On the state and national arena he won the Vince Healy (Best & fairest award in Victoria) in 1975-76, best and fairest senior Australian Carnival 1985 & 1987 and 8 time All Star Australian team (1977, 1979, 1981, 1984-1985, 1987-1989).

In terms of World Series performances he was selected in the All World team 1978 & 1982 and best midfielder 1978 & 1982.

Off the field he was inducted as a Life Member of the Williamstown Lacrosse Club in 2001.

His highest accolade perhaps would be that he was the first lacrosse player to be inducted into the Sport Australia Hall of Fame (1990) of which today there are only two, the other being Brian Griffin. Another great honour was carrying the Olympic torch through Violet Town, Victoria in 2000.



In terms of whom he would rate as his toughest opponents worldwide over the journey from 1973-1990 he chose 3 Australians – Warren (Teddy) Hobbs, Gary and Rick Tillotson.

The quote from the Sport Australia Hall of Fame at the time of his induction: “In world lacrosse he was recognised as the leading ‘face-off’ player of his era; however always saw himself first as a midfielder. In the ‘face-off’ position Butkiewicz was responsible for fundamentally redefining the concept of play in this position and his methods have been copied extensively. At one stage the United States changed the local rules to remove ‘face-offs’ due to Australia’s dominance however that was only short lived. Today ‘face-off’ techniques developed by Butkiewicz are still used extensively both nationally and throughout the world.

Butkiewicz represented Australia a record five times at the World Series, an event played every four years”.

What else can you say but what an amazing career, well done Keka!