

1976 AUSTRALIAN TOUR

Written by Alan Chiron with contributions from several members of the team along with articles from the booklet that Alan Chiron pulled together and provided to the team following the tour

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Not long after the 1974 World Championship in Melbourne The Australian Lacrosse Council (ALC) had committed itself to sending an Australian team overseas in 1976 to play matches in England, Canada and the United States of America, with preparations made for the tour circa mid 1975. While the process is not evident it would appear that the coaches, tour management and the team were pretty much selected by ALC., noting that national championships were not held in Australia in 1975, so we don't know how the team was selected, but there was a focus on youth and development.

Selecting an international team is a difficult process and the selectors can choose only from those able and willing to make the tour, those who can raise the funds and afford the time off work or studies. Thus a touring side may not be the best side possible if we are playing at home but it is evident that this was a young team, full of quality with a mixture of experience, and with only 6 players who played or were selected in the 1974 Australian team that participated in the World Championships in Melbourne, although we note several players originally selected in 1976, who subsequently withdrew, were also in the 1974 team.

To ensure that the best team was chosen from those who had offered to make the trip, the state selectors made a report on those available from their states. The report stated their views as to the relevant capacity, character and temperament of the candidates with a classification A-D as to their suitability, ranging from "very good forward, top state standard" to "not up to standard" and "past prime" to "health and fitness suspect". The original team selected was announced in an ALC General Circular on 24 October 1975, with Rod Scott (Co-captain), Ross Turnbull, Gary Downsborough (WA), Mike Raggatt and Barry Thompson (SA) subsequently withdrawing from the team and being replaced by Bill Stahmer, Jeff Kennedy, Leigh Vandeppeer, Jeff Kelly and Jack Tomlin. Ray Duthy was appointed Co-captain to replace Rod Scott.

Thus the final team selected had a mixture of experience and youth with 15 of the 23 players under 22 years old, with Bill Stahmer, Leigh Vandeppeer and "Barney" Frederick the "Most mature" players in the team, all turning 27 that year. This group formed the foundation of Aussie teams for the next decade. This was also the first Australian team to tour overseas without the legendary Brian Griffin, who at this stage had retired from international lacrosse.



Back row: Ted Clayfield (Tour Director), John Forrester (Coach), Warren Hobbs, Leigh Vandeppeer, Mark Balinski, Gary Kennedy, Paul Lynch, Mike Hilsberg, Doug Carter, David Joy, Peter Cann, Evan Jones, Alan Chiron (Manager), Frank Poat (Asst. Coach)

Middle row: Alan Bower, John Butkiewicz, Gus Garnsworthy, Ray Duthy (Co-Capt.), Ron Twomey (Co-Capt.), Nigel Hudson, Allan Frederick, Bill Stahmer & Jeff Kelly

Front row: Jeff Kennedy, Geoff Spicer, Joy Clayfield (Physio), Gary Tillotson & Jack Tomlin

The team of 23 players and 5 officials were supported by 30 wives, girlfriends and other lacrosse supporters and were, in most cases, billeted with locals. The supporter group of 30 comprised Don & Merle Hobbs, Bill & Merle Taylor (Bill was a referee on the tour), Frank & Agnes Hogarth, Arthur & Dot Pearson, Frank & Ena De Kusel, Lionel & Gwen Garnsworthy, Frank & Regis Hynes, Ron & Irene Attenborough, Rob Pettit, Algy Taylor, Roy Masson and Rowley & Nancy Martin.

The WAGs were Kathy Duthy, Mary Spicer, Regis Garnsworthy, Marilyn Twomey, Lynne Vandeppeer, Jill Frederick, Di Stahmer, Kathy Kelly & Louise Hoppenbrouwers.

The final playing list and coaching composition of the Australian touring team consisted of Head Coach John Forrester and 8 players from SA, Assistant Coach Frank Poat and 4 players from WA, and 11 players from Victoria.

The logistics of properly preparing the team for the almost 6 month period until departure were established and included setting up a focused and hard working training group in Adelaide led by John Forrester, in WA led by Frank Poat and in Melbourne with the biggest group led by Ron Twomey. A mid term camp was also held in Adelaide and two training sessions were held in Melbourne immediately prior to departure. Regular communications between groups and progress reports were included. In addition the touring group management and physiotherapist were in Melbourne.

Ron Twomey recalls “The 11 strong Melbourne training group was a very united and focused group. We had fitness training sessions on Wednesday nights at Caulfield racecourse with time trials for running the tracks and climbing the steps of the grand stand. We also trained every weekend and the positional make up of the training group enabled us, with the addition of a goalkeeper, to form a team for scrimmage matches. When the team assembled in Melbourne prior to departure for fitness trials and match play the Victorian boys showed they were in peak condition and ready for action”.

The touring party assembled in Melbourne on Friday 19 March, where all interstate members of the party, including the supporter group, were billeted by the Victorian families of the touring party. A welcome party was held at the Oxford Hotel. The team had training sessions on the Saturday and Sunday at Williamstown, and following the Sunday training session the supporter group attended a meeting at Williamstown Lacrosse Club where the coach and the tour director laid out the plans for the trip and stressed the point that the players would always take preference over the supporters with regard to accommodation and travel arrangements.

As to the cost of the tour for players a Melbourne newspaper article of the day quoted Alan Chiron advising that the travel cost of the tour over 8 weeks, excluding discretionary spending, was about \$1,700 per person. Given the high cost of international travel in those days the tour cost seemed quite reasonable, probably because the team at least was billeted everywhere they went. It is interesting to note that given the advances in air travel since the 1970's, with long haul, highly efficient jet engines, the cost of travel 45 years later is not much different, yet the cost of living around the world has skyrocketed, thus overseas travel for lacrosse teams is now much more affordable, and of course we now have 4 weeks annual leave.

On 22 March 1976 the Australian lacrosse team and entourage departed Melbourne, flying to Sydney to connect with the Qantas international flight to Los Angeles via Fiji and Hawaii, on an eight week trip that would take in the best of the lacrosse world in the USA, Canada and England. We would play 13 games, winning eight of them, losing five, with one cancelled due to snow falling in Toronto.

The tour started in Los Angeles, then on to Miami, Virginia, Baltimore, Rutgers University, at New Brunswick (New York), Syracuse and then Toronto before flying to Manchester and then to London where the team played its final game.

The tour commenced with a 5 day break before the first game against the South Californian All Stars. Slow start for the first game but we won it 18 – 6.

Accommodation for the team for the 6 days in California was at the Los Alamitos Naval Air Station whereas the supporters were put up in a motel. While at the base some of players went for a stroll or jog on the runway and were quickly rounded up by the military police and told to get off the runway!! Apparently one of the players also was having trouble keeping his food or beverage down one night, fell out of his bunk and unfortunately vomited into the coach's bag below and then closed the bag and went back to bed! Perhaps not the ideal start to the tour or international playing career!!!



Above is Gary "Top gun" Kennedy checking out the latest jet technology

The time in LA was great as it gave the entourage the opportunity to visit Disneyland, Marineland and Knott's Berry Farm as well as free time after training each day. The shopping at the local PX was also exceptional with everything for sale at what appeared to be ridiculously low prices, and apparently after the first arranged visit, the entourage was told that they were not to return as they had effectively cleaned out the PX and major restocking was required. They did in fact get a further opportunity to buy some specials from the store.

The team flew from L.A. to Miami for three days of activities, which included a tour of the Everglades, to see the alligators, and a game against the South Florida All Stars, where the team had a great win, 31 – 5.

On board another aircraft, from Miami to Roanoke in Virginia, and then a 50-mile bus trip to Lexington to meet our billets. The countryside is very pretty and well worth the view. The town is heavily connected with the Washington & Lee University and the Virginia Military Institute, which was attended by George Washington, Robert. E. Lee, Omar Bradley & George C. Marshall, some of the very well known military and political leaders of the USA.

Our first game was against one of the good collegiate teams, Washington & Lee. They got a jump on us in the first quarter 4-0 until we scored 3 quick goals in 80 seconds to close the quarter 4-3. Our team was having trouble throughout adjusting to their bar checking and slashing the hand and arms. Second period was 3-3 and third period 4-3 to be 9-11 down. We went missing in the last period and lost 15-10. The below zero temperatures were very difficult to play in following the 98 degrees Fahrenheit temperatures experienced prior to the game in Miami and California.

From Virginia we took a bus through to Baltimore where the team had a 12-day stay. The team got to see Mount Washington play University of Maryland, along with a crowd of 5000. The atmosphere was fantastic and a great way to start on the first night, and then it was sightseeing and training for the rest of the stay.

We visited the Lacrosse Hall of Fame at John's Hopkins University, took a trip to Washington with visits to the FBI Building, the Lincoln & Jefferson memorials, the Smithsonian Institute & the White House.

Ron Twomey recalls a particular training session in Baltimore prior to the game against Mount Washington. The team had a scheduled morning training session at the home of the Wolf Pack. All players were there on time and ready to go however our manager and both coaches were AWOL and we had no idea where they were.

"I grabbed the opportunity and for the hour or more ran what I thought was a great training session with the full cooperation of all players. We practiced our full field clearing and riding skills and prepared well for the task ahead. We finished training just as the car arrived with the manager and coaches, who had somehow got themselves horribly lost and were very unhappy.

The game against Mt Washington was a ripper. Australia scored the first goal within 15 seconds, then the Mounties took over and held the lead until 3 1/2 minutes from the end, when we levelled at 19 goals each. With just under 2 minutes to go, Ray Duthy scored and we were in front for only the second time in the game. We held on for the remaining minutes of the game to win 20 – 19.

According to "Keka", "Having beaten Mt Washington by a goal in 1972 and again in 1976, in the last minute, the locals were not impressed and obviously were looking for revenge. As a result of the unexpected loss they didn't turn-up to the after party they arranged, so we ended up drinking all their beer 🍺🍺. It was all over the press next day".

We visited Annapolis and watched the Navy versus Denison game. It was interesting to watch the game played to the American rules but the game takes too long with all their timeouts.

Our second game in Baltimore was at the University of Maryland and after a very even first half the team ran out of legs due to illness (Flu) and we lost 22 – 10. We were most disappointed as we believed that we could at least get within 4 goals of this team.

More sightseeing around Baltimore and then we had our third game in Baltimore against Chesapeake L.C. Our best start of the Tour with a 6 – 1 lead at qtr. time. Chesapeake kept at us for the rest of the game and at one stage we were two men down because of penalties, yet managed to recover the ball to score, and we won 13 – 11.

The farewell party after the game was a ripper and the bus trip to New Brunswick (Rutgers) was very quiet. A very quiet university town with the main industry being the Johnson & Johnson medical complex.

Three games of lacrosse were played this day, high School, a second team university game and our game against Rutgers University. We made a slow start but improved in the second half to win 18 – 7.

Another bus ride from New Brunswick to Long Island to meet our next billets.

The game in New York was played at Hofstra University against Long Island Athletic Lacrosse Club and was the first time that we had played on an Astro Turf surface. We had problems picking the ball up, the ball seemed to just keep rolling, and the surface was brutal if you ended up on it, and before we knew it we were down 11 - 0 at the quarter time break. With a bit more concentration we began to pick the ball up and outscored Long Island 16 – 11 in the last three quarters of the game, going down 22 – 16.

After some sightseeing, including the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty and Times Square we packed our bags for the final sector in the USA and travelled from New York City to Syracuse by bus and arrived at Syracuse University to catch up with our billets. The university facilities were unbelievable, an indoor running track, Astro -Turf stadium and full facilities for washing and Laundry. No need to wash your clothes, there is someone there to do it for you!

Barney Frederick recalls “We met Chief Oren Lyons at his Iroquois reservation in Syracuse. They had a crude box court with no Perspex above the wall and two Iroquois teams played a demonstration game for us. Several of us were honoured when Oren personally strung new box sticks for us.”

Being a university town there was not a lot to do except tour the campus and train. Our game against Cortland State, our second on Astro – Turf and under lights was a great game and once again we proved our fitness by coming from three goals down, at half-time, scoring 10 goals to 4 in the second half to run out winners 15 – 11.

A mellow morning when we all met up at the airport for our flight to Toronto. The billets that looked after us right through the trip, had accepted us as part of their families and, it was hard to say goodbye to the U.S.

We arrived in Toronto late at night, due to airline problems, (May have been the reason for all the bus travel throughout the States), and we were then transferred to a motel as the Canadian billets were not sufficiently organized to accommodate the team.

The midweek game against Canada was cancelled due to heavy snow which gave us plenty of time for sightseeing around Toronto and Niagara Falls.

On the weekend we played in a four team competition with Long Island, Mount Washington and the Canadian team.

On the Saturday we played Canada and defeated them 27 – 12 whilst Long Island beat Mount Washington 21 – 17.

The Championship game was between Long Island and Australia, and Mount Washington played Canada, in the consolation game, on the Sunday.

The two games were played in good spirit and the crowd of about 1,500 really got to see some good field lacrosse with Mount Washington beating Canada 21 – 16 and Long Island defeating Australia 26 – 24.

Ron Twomey felt the Canadian International field lacrosse tournament was a wonderful experience for the team and gave us another chance to play Canada,

following our loss in Melbourne in 1974, and to play Long Island following our recent defeat.

“The local newspaper reported the experienced Aussies beat the newly formed Canadians 27-12 but I can tell you they were a national team and they were not holding back so the result is probably Australia’s biggest ever win against Canada. Note also by comparison their game against Mount Washington where they had an early lead and were down 9-8 at the half and only lost to Mount Washington 21-16. Also worth noting Mount Washington had twice defeated Long Island that season.

The showdown game against Long Island was a lost opportunity but our ambitions were almost realised. They led the Aussies 25-17 late in the game however a few positional changes by us and an emphasis on fast breaks out of the centre, which we generally dominated, and we were firing, closing the gap (7 goals to 1) before being defeated 26-to 24. I have no doubt at all we only needed a few more minutes to win as they had lost control and we were full of confidence”.

After 6 weeks of touring and playing lacrosse in the USA and Canada we boarded our plane for the overnight trip to England from Montreal, flying with JAL, with one transit stop at Anchorage, Alaska. Arriving in Manchester after a long tiring flight a reception at the Stockport Town Hall at lunch time followed, which saw a lot of the team in bed early that night.

Ron Twomey recalls from his previous tour in 1972 that this part of the tour, the Atlantic crossing, was the most tiring and when the team is most vulnerable physically. He believes Australia made a strategic mistake by agreeing to play England almost immediately after arriving in England. The previous touring team was able to acclimatise and play a lead up game before an international test match.

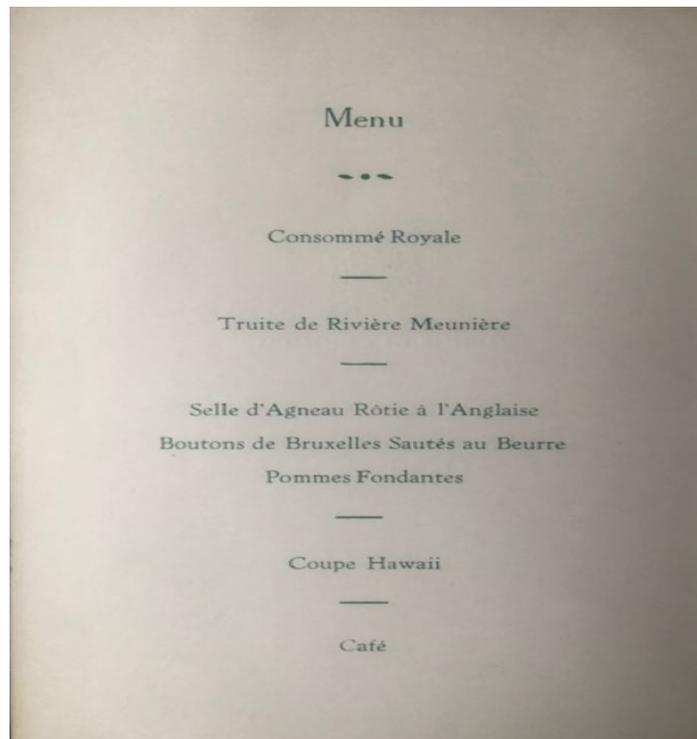
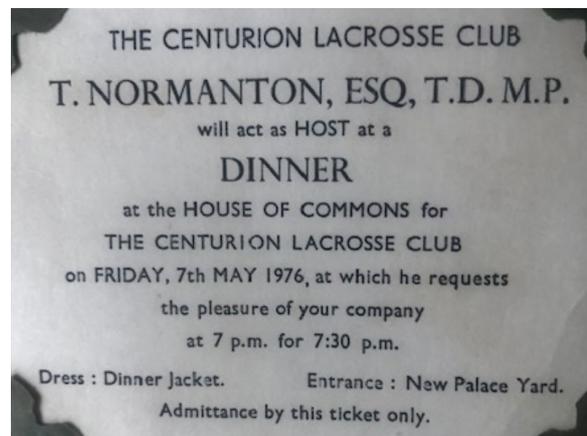
Practise on Wednesday morning was followed by yet another reception, at the Greater Manchester Council Chambers, which was an attempt by the English officials to obtain guarantees of financial support for the World Championships in 1978.

The team had a light run on Thursday morning in preparation for the game against England, which was played in the twilight, without lights, and by $\frac{3}{4}$ time we had problems recognising players, let alone seeing the ball. The English team played a tight zone and we had problems penetrating their defence. England won this game 15 goals to 11. As Ray Duthy recalls “It was that dark, and given we pass fairly flat, compared to the English looping style, I passed a ball to Paul Lynch who didn’t see the ball let alone the passer!” A game that should not have been lost but the long tour, the overnight flight and the lack of lighting took their toll.

The “Poms” may have beaten us during the game but we kept up with them at the after game celebration.

We flew down to London and transferred by double decker bus with a trailer for all of our bags, to the Eccleston Hotel, where we met our billets.

The officials and the captains (Party of 6) attended the customary Centurion Club dinner at the House of Commons, and this was one of the highlights of the tour. The Club uses its influence and money raising facilities to promote the sport of lacrosse throughout England, and have a tradition of inviting our management and captains to this wonderful location and dinner.



Above is the menu for the H of P dinner, which surprisingly is in French!

Game day on Saturday saw the Australian team at the Police House School where we played the ELU President's team which consisted of 6 – 8 of the All England team plus London teams players, along with Victorians Neil Clough and Chris Milne.

The Iroquois Cup game between the South of England premiers and the North of England premiers was played as a curtain raiser to our game.

Our game was a little one sided as we had decided that we would revenge our loss in Manchester and we won quite easily, 31-4.

Tour stats

The key stats for attack were as follows:-

| | Shots | Goals | Assists | Points | Conversion% |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Paul Lynch | 47 | 18 | 44 | 62 | 38% |
| Peter Cann | 117 | 50 | 9 | 59 | 43% |
| Leigh V'peer | 109 | 32 | 11 | 43 | 29% |
| Ray Duthy | 84 | 33 | 9 | 42 | 39% |
| Jeff Kennedy | 47 | 17 | 26 | 43 | 36% |
| Geoff Spicer | 49 | 14 | 17 | 31 | 29% |
| Ron Twomey | 44 | 20 | 10 | 30 | 45% |
| John But'wicz | 76 | 21 | 5 | 26 | 28% |

While detailed goalkeeping stats are not available we note that Australia had 689 shots, for 244 goals (35% conversion), with 203 saves by the opposition, thus the balance is shots not on goal which must have been 242 . From the records the opposition scored 175 goals with 205 saves, but we don't know how many shots didn't hit the goals or keeper. The only game where Australia was significantly outscored was the game against Maryland where Australia was defeated 22-10, however it needs to be noted that weather in two matches impacted the outcome of one game in the U.S. and one in England, along with the inexperience on Astro-turf in the first game against Long Island.

With the completion of the games we travelled across to Europe and enjoyed a 5 day tour. On our return to England we had a great night at the hotel and the following day boarded our flight to Tokyo (Or Hong Kong for the Western Australian contingent), where we had 3 nights, at the expense of Japan Airlines. It was all free time in Tokyo and the team members made up their own itineraries, visiting the city and buying the latest electrical goods including tape decks.

This was a great tour, 13 games for 8 wins and 5 defeats, everyone enjoyed the lacrosse and the sights that we had the chance to see, and the team and entourage camaraderie was very good.

It was also a very good learning curve for the players whowould make the trip to Manchester, in 1978, for the World Lacrosse Championships.

This was a very successful and harmonious team and entourage and the following are some anecdotes from some of the players:-

Keka - Tillo got his nick name "Frank" when he saw the great Frank Urso play at the Mount Washington Ground for Maryland, where Tillo said Urso reminded him of himself!!

Dutchy - There was the “Sleeping Nose” contest on one of our bus trips which Alan “Cyrano de Bowserac” Bower won by a significant margin! The contest was conducted by Jack Tomlin, seen below in the photo.



I also recall having to present medallions to the team in Manchester and introduce the players. Jack Tomlin came to the front and opened his blazer to reveal a t-shirt with “Pommy bastards” emblazoned across it! Didn’t go down that well with team management!



I also remember well we played W&L University in Lexington, Virginia at temperature of 28 degrees Fahrenheit (Below freezing if you haven’t done the conversion!) and having just come from Florida where it was 100 degrees, it was a shock to the system and with our uniforms being so flimsy, thin and way too short, several players came down with pneumonia and missed our next game.

I don’t recall any major injuries on the trip but a few of us lost a fair bit of skin playing Long Island on a very old Astroturf surface at Hofstra University. It was our first ever game on Astroturf but was like playing on asphalt and we had difficulty adjusting to

the ball rolling more than usual. We were 11-0 down but recovered to lose 22-16 in a quality game against one of the top US club teams which was coached by US Head Coach Tom Flatley and included legends such as Tom Postel, Stan Kowalski, Mike Thearle, Ron Fraser, Dave Devine, Mike Waldvogel and Bob DeMarco.

Given the inexperience and youth of the team, the results were very good, particularly given that illness interrupted the middle part of the tour. In particular the wins against the top club teams Mt. Washington, Chesapeake, Rutgers University, Cortland State and of course thrashing Canada 27-12 in Toronto were memorable.

The Australian team made an excellent impression on the American public generally, and particularly the hosts who billeted them, with many stories recanted by the American hosts. As Co-captains Ray Duthy and Ron Twomey both recall it was a very harmonious group, and given there were 63 members in the party the organizational skills of Alan Chiron and Ted Clayfield over the 8 week period was exceptional.

An extremely well conducted tour, particularly considering the size of the team and supporter group, with clearly outstanding camaraderie and friendships developed, which became the launching pad for the Australian team for the next decade.

Well played Australia