

GRAEME FOX – AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE CHAMPION



If you had to select a family of lacrosse champions or brothers you probably would start with Doug and Graeme Fox, both highly skilled, who performed well at all levels of lacrosse. Graeme is 11 years younger than Doug but they both represented Australia in 1974 at the World Championships in Melbourne when Graeme was only 18.

Graeme grew up in a lacrosse family, father Frank began playing for Box Hill in the mid 1920's before moving to YMCA and then eventually Camberwell in 1933. He represented Victoria in 1938 and had a long career playing predominantly as a forward for Camberwell and then with CGI when they merged with Glen Iris. He played his last game at the age of 52, and coached the Surrey Park U16 team for 2 years, overseeing a premiership in 1971.

As Graeme "Grinner" notes "Older brother Doug was a huge influence on my sporting life in general, and more particularly lacrosse from when I first picked up a cut down stick at the age of about 3. Many hours were spent with him in the backyard catching and throwing, dodging and shooting – we had a chicken wire construction that acted as the goal in lacrosse season and as the wicketkeeper in cricket season. I'm still amazed at his patience in being prepared to spend so long with a little, and no doubt at times very annoying brother 11 years his junior".

As an eleven or twelve year old, he recalls playing juniors in the morning and then going to watch Doug play for Melbourne University in the afternoon. "Doug was certainly my greatest mentor and role model, but I also enjoyed watching Ferg Stewart 'do his thing' on the midfield and in attack for Uni. Although Doug could lay claim to being one of Australia's greatest goalkeepers, goals held little attraction for me – there was much more fun in throwing them! In my early senior years, I was very fortunate to be able to play with both Doug and Ferg in teams at Surrey Park, but possibly my most treasured lacrosse memory was playing with Doug (as captain) in the 1974 Australian team at the World Championships in Melbourne".



Graeme Fox in action with Tom Hardy and Ray Duthy in the background

Grinner represented Australia at four World Championships and through these, was able to play with many of the greats of Australian lacrosse and also against some fantastic players from the other countries. Two thrills from International games were playing at Hopkins University in Baltimore at the '82 World Championships final in front of 13,000 spectators and being hosted by the Iroquois team in 1986 at the Onondaga reservation where we were treated to a feast, learned of the important place that lacrosse has played in the lives of the Iroquois people and were introduced to an amazing local game called Fireball (which could best be described as a 'soccer-like' game played at night with car headlights around the boundary lighting the way; a kerosene soaked animal hide ball is lit which can be kicked or hit and the game continues until the ball 'goes out'). Apart from the thrills of playing at the top level, I have been lucky to form lifelong friendships with teammates from Victoria and other states as well as friendships with lacrosse people from overseas. Lacrosse has given me the unique opportunity to explore the world in a team environment and has provided me with lifelong memories.

Graeme commenced playing with Surrey Park U12 in 1966 (Coaches David Spreadborough snr and Barrie Moore), played U16 and C grade in 1970, and in 1971 played U16; B and A2, playing A grade from 1972.

The University Rule in Victoria required Graeme to play for Melbourne University from 1973-76, for which Graeme had no issue, as did his brother Doug, and like Doug he was fortunate to be playing at Melbourne Uni when they had strong teams and were A3 premiers in 1974 and played in A1 in 1975 & '76.

Following completion of studies Graeme returned to Surrey Park where he played State League from 1977-93, playing in four premiership teams (1981, '84, '88 & '93). After his retirement from state league lacrosse he played in and coached Division 1 and Division 2 teams from 1994-2003.

Grinner represented Victoria in the U16 in 1970-71, the Colts in 1973 and the senior team from 1975 to 1987 (Excluding the years he was representing Australia at world

championships) other than 1985. As he put it, "With two one year old daughters he simply could not afford to travel to Perth".

Graeme Fox represented Australia at 4 world championships: 1974 Melbourne, 1978 Manchester, 1982 Baltimore and 1986 Toronto. When asked about why he didn't play in any touring teams he brushes it off and says "I was too busy playing cricket for Melbourne Uni", which was a strong district cricket team, which he went on to coach.

AWARDS

All-Australian teams- 1979, 1983 & 1987

1974 Full Blue Melbourne University

1979 Vince Healy and Isaachsen trophies (Best and fairest state and national)

1985 ALC Certificate of Merit

1996 Life Member - Surrey Park

COACHING

1975-76 Camberwell U12's

1977-85 & 1989-90 Surrey Park U12's - U14's

1995-2003 Surrey Park D1 and D2

2004-2006 Assistant Coach and Coach Surrey Park SL

Administratively Graeme was Secretary of the Melbourne University LC from 1974-76 and Secretary of Surrey Park LC from 1990-93 and 2003-08.

Clearly while a very talented player he gave back to Surrey Park in spades as a coach and as a tireless administrator. He was also a very talented cricketer, opened the batting for Melbourne Uni and Ringwood in district cricket first elevens for many years, coached Melbourne Uni in his later years and received a half blue for his efforts.

GREATEST PLAYERS

Many stand out and trying to limit the number of fantastic players to a small list is an impossible task.

I was fortunate to be able to play with some nearing the end of their careers as I was starting my career, in particular Brian Griffin, Michael Raggatt, Jeff Kelly, Ron Twomey & Roger Attenborough.

For the middle years of his career he includes Jeff Kennedy, Peter Cann, Brian Smith, Ray Duthy, Ken Nichols, Peter Morley, John Butkiewicz, Warren Hobbs, Gary Tillotson, Gus Garnsworthy, Steve Mounsey & Doug Fox.

At the end of my SL playing days, some wonderful young players were emerging who I really enjoyed playing with: Chris Brown, Cameron Toomey, Andy Stewart, David Spreadborough & Darren Gibson.

COACHES

I was lucky to be coached by a number of wonderful coaches, but probably two stood out particularly for me (especially as they were coaches at my club, as well as at the international level). They were Terry Allington (A master tactician) and Denis Trainor (a great motivator and people manager).

TOUGHEST OPPONENTS

Alan Bower - I was particularly pleased when he transferred to Surrey in 1984!

Robert O'Keefe – most annoying because he just ran with you and didn't try to check until the last minute; you never knew when it was coming.

Internationally; the way it was played, you never really had the same opponent for very long but Jim Burke and Mark Greenberg were highly respected.

TESTIMONIALS

RAY DUTHY (Former Australian player and captain)

Graeme "Grin" Fox was one of Australia's great attack players (after his early days as a midfielder) in the Australian team from the mid 1970's and through the 1980's. I was fortunate to play with him in those teams and many players benefited greatly from his uncanny ability to find teammates open around the goal.

His greatest attributes were a very balanced game temperament, an ability to absorb a lot of pressure and still deliver the ball to someone in a better position, an innate capacity to read the play and probably the first player I can recall to perfect the "look away" pass. He was also an incredibly consistent performer at all levels who was tough, resilient and rarely dispossessed, and was a groundball beast. In addition, I always respected that Graeme was a consummate and unselfish team player at all times.

I would certainly rank him as one of Australia's and Victoria's best players whose longevity in the game was testimony to his skill and fitness levels given the defensive attention he endured in the attack roles he played.

DENIS TRAINOR (Former Australian player, coach and selector)

Whenever there is a gathering of lacrosse aficionados arguments often erupt as to who were the best players in the various positions and one question that often arises is "Who was the best ground ball player?"

Every team, whether it be club, state or Australia has one who stands out. They can scrimmage, gather the ball and finish with a goal, assist or pass. They usually have many skills, they can handle the rough and tumble in a scrimmage as well as one on ones.

In all my years as a player, coach, selector and Australian representative one player stood head and shoulders above the rest in all levels of competition – skillfully tough, aggressive, alert and smart – Graeme Fox was that player, he won the ball every time.

Graeme Fox had the body of a bricklayer, the hips and knees of a weightlifter, a very agile and complete lacrosse player.

THE LATE BRIAN GRIFFIN (AUSTRALIAN PLAYER AND HALL OF FAMER)

Interestingly I asked the late and great Brian Griffin several years ago for his All-Star team and he provided the following attack players – Allan Gandy, Michael Raggatt, Peter Cann and **Graeme Fox**. That in itself is high praise indeed for anyone mentioned. This testimonial was provided with the approval of Brian's son, former Australian player Scot Griffin.

CONCLUSION

Graeme Fox and his older brother Doug were clearly two of the very best brothers to represent Victoria and Australia, and represented Australia in the World Championships in Melbourne when Graeme was 18 and Doug was 29.

“Grinner” was an understated, humble and laconic champion, never much to say but when he did say something it was worth listening to, an extremely modest champion. He would surprise many if they were not on their toes with his skills and ability to score, he was a very alert player and able to quickly recognize there was an opportunity with a defender who wasn't paying enough attention or respect. He had the ability to fly under the radar and when the enemy lost contact he would strike.

Grinner, unlike a lot of champion lacrosse players, was and remains extremely altruistic, and throughout his playing career and beyond has always made a significant contribution to his club(s) in an administrative, coaching or general supporting capacity.

Graeme Fox - champion player and a champion person, well done on a great career and importantly, service to the game.