

GORDON ELDER – LACROSSE REFEREE

1975 – 2020



Gordon Elder can clearly remember the first game he refereed, it was in 1967 when he was still playing, in those days if your team had a bye you were allocated to referee. My game was a B grade game between Footscray and Coburg and he can distinctly remember Tom Finnigan from Coburg coming up to him at the conclusion of the game and commenting what a good job he did.

Fast forward to April 1975, when after some efforts to try and establish myself in the Malvern 'A' Grade or State League team, and after only the first match of the season, he realised it probably will never happen. His mind cast back to that game in 1967 and Tom's comment and it was then that he made the decision to become a professional referee and be a member of ALRA.

His introduction to refereeing was to run 6 games with an experienced and senior referee as mentor and he was very fortunate enough at that time to be teamed up with the best in Victoria and Australia, Don Reyment, who took him through the basics and set me on the path he is still treading, as a referee 46 years later. His first game was an 'A' grade game Melbourne University vs Williamstown. It was unusual for someone to come into officiating at 26 years of age, but truly the best decision he made, as far as lacrosse is concerned.

“The early years were a big learning curve and I was thrilled to be selected to go over to Western Australia for my first senior carnival in 1977 and regularly after that until 2003, a total of 17 appearances at senior Australian championships. I was fortunate enough to have officiated in games with some legends of the game with a front row seat. To name a few, and apologies for ones I have not mentioned, Peter Cann, Jeff Kennedy (Western Australia), Ray Duthy, the Hobbs brothers (South Australia), Graeme Fox, John Butkiewicz, Ken Nichols, Bill Stahmer & Rob Stark (Victoria).

“On the International front, I will never forget going to Baltimore, Maryland for my first World Championship in 1982. All the razzamatazz, officiating in front of sellout crowds at John Hopkins University, with entertainment and mixing with all the participants in Tent City after the matches. In 1990 at the World Championship in Perth, this was the first time the Japanese had lined up as one of the teams to compete in the World Championships. Canada featured the Gait Brothers with sublime lacrosse skills and to be held at the WACA was a highlight. My final World Championship was in Manchester, England in 1994. At that series, the Iroquois joined as part of the games and I particularly remember the game between them and Canada, it was a no holds barred clash and there was certainly no love lost between the 2 teams. The game between Australia and Canada was a ripper with Australia going into the play off with the USA and getting the silver medal.

“I also officiated on 2 international tours; one in Japan in 1989, where Australia played its first international game against Japan, which the Aussies won convincingly. How that country has grown in skills since. The other tour was to the USA in 1990, where the Aussies, played against a number of club teams including Long Island, Mount Washington and Maryland. The highlight of this tour was being billeted in people’s homes, so you really had a feel for true American hospitality.”

Starting in 1975 you would expect Gordon to have officiated in quite a few games and up until 2019 his total number of games is 1057, which does not include the hundreds of practice matches and state team trials. Unfortunately with the 2020 season abandoned in Victoria, he hasn’t added to that tally, but God willing, he hopes to pull on the striped shirt for 2021. His allocations to games now mainly involve Div. 2 and 3 games although sometimes when referee numbers are short, he does get the occasional Div. 1 or State League game.

“I am very proud personally to have been around so long, which incidentally has included refereeing in 23 State League finals.

“Some of the referees I have been fortunate enough to have shared the field with are Lindsay Scott, Peter Knight (W.A.), Peter Noble and Mark Polden (S.A.), Graeme Reddaway, John Nolan, John Harris, Neville Balfour and more importantly my mentor, Don Reymont (Victoria), who I attended my first World Championship with in 1982. Again, apologies for people I have not mentioned.”

During those 46 years the game and refereeing has changed quite a lot. The uniform is quite different, those cute little shorts from the 70s are no longer to be seen, the rule book has changed many times, interpretations have been introduced, and the game has more latitude in terms of stick checking, pretty much following the American game.

“Some of the nicknames over the years amongst referees are The Oaf, Twinkle Toes, Chopper and Hater, I have been sworn to secrecy, but they know who they are”.

It is amazing for anyone to be still refereeing at age 72 after 46 years, that pea in his whistle doesn't seem to be disappearing, let's hope it has more years in it as does Gordon.

Perhaps the only other Australian who may have refereed more games, and who is slightly older than Gordon is John Harris, who would certainly have started before Gordon. Gordon has been a top-class referee from 1975, has refereed at the highest levels possible over 46 years, and is acknowledged as one of the best referees Australia has ever produced, by his peers and assessors.



Gordon would not be out there today without the active support of his wife, Christine, who has been behind him all the way and been a great servant of the game herself with many years as secretary of ALRA (Vic).

Well done on a fabulous career Gordon, and more importantly for still being out there at the age of 72.