

TOM (TK) HARDY – CHAMPION MIDFIELDER/DEFENDER

Tom started playing at the Brighton Lacrosse Club in 1966, which at that time was a very strong club, and a lot of his sailing mates at the Brighton and Seacliff Yacht Club, including the famous Neill brothers “Who played what was at the time to me a strange game in the winter”, so eventually he gravitated to the lacrosse club to check it out a bit more and liked what he saw and became hooked.

Tom was 17 years old at the time and being too old for junior grades he played in the open age “C” grade team, which luckily for him was coached by Dudley Hamilton, the captain of the Australian team that played a number of games against the American team that visited in 1959. At the outset he played mostly as a centreman and in his second season, and was fortunate to train for two months pre-season at Brighton with the four SA representatives of the 1967 Australian touring team that participated in the first World Championship in Toronto (Peter Collett, Gary Rowe, Bruce Neill and Angus Neill). Later after pre-season selection trials, in his words “Partly due to the missing stars on the tour I’m sure, I was lucky enough to be selected in the top senior team, the ‘Brighton Yellows’. At that time the club was so strong we had 2 teams in state league, the other being the ‘Brighton Blacks’ as well as having ‘B’ Grade and ‘C’ Grade teams”. He was still playing football for his school and played a full game every Saturday morning before playing lacrosse in the afternoon.



Above is Tom with one of his greatest influencers, Dudley Hamilton

The following year 1968 the club only fielded one state league team and Tom spent the season in “B” Grade under the watchful eye of coach Brian Neill. In 1969 he returned to the state league team and was selected in the SA senior team playing Victoria in Adelaide, where they won 14 goals to 11. Tom played in the SA state team for the next three seasons, including the carnival in Adelaide in 1970 where the American Baltimore Lancers competed.

“A little sidelight of those times was a game I played some 5 minutes in goals for the Brighton state league team, the rules at that time, which have since changed, stated that if your goalkeeper was injured and had to leave the field, the opposing goalkeeper had to leave the field for five minutes, thus another member of your team had to play in goals for that period. Our wonderful coach the legendary Keith Roennfeldt (who we referred to as ‘Father’) was a great thinker and prepared for all eventualities, ‘Father’, knowing how good and essential Bruce Neill our goalie was to

our team, our arch enemy the 'fanatical' East Torrens Club, may play this card sometime, so Keith selected me as the default replacement goalie and for several Sunday mornings I donned the goalkeeper's pad and armed with a goalie's stick spent the full sessions of match play defending shots from the likes of Mike Raggatt, Roger Attenborough and Fred Neill - they told me I was doing a great job, which I did take with 'a pinch of salt'. Sure enough, in the next encounter with East Torrens this very scenario came to pass, Barry Vandeppeer left the field 'injured', it was probably the longest five minutes of my life and I did concede one goal to Barry's brother Leigh, ironically who I was standing, as usual, that day.

Tom shifted with work (You may have heard of it, small wine maker Thomas Hardy & Sons) to Melbourne in 1973 and played at Caulfield for the next seven seasons.

He represented Victoria in 1973 against his old state South Australia. In 1974 he started the season but was then away for some 9 weeks sailing for Australia in a World Championship in England in the Flying Dutchman class and doing some "Wine business".

TK returned to the Victorian team in 1977 for the carnival in Perth, where he was selected in the 'All Star team'.

In 1978 TK was selected in the Australian team that competed in the World Championships in Manchester, travelling through America and playing in Baltimore. In 1979 he played for Victoria in the carnival at home, which they won, where he played in midfield and in defence, and was selected again in the 'All Star' team.

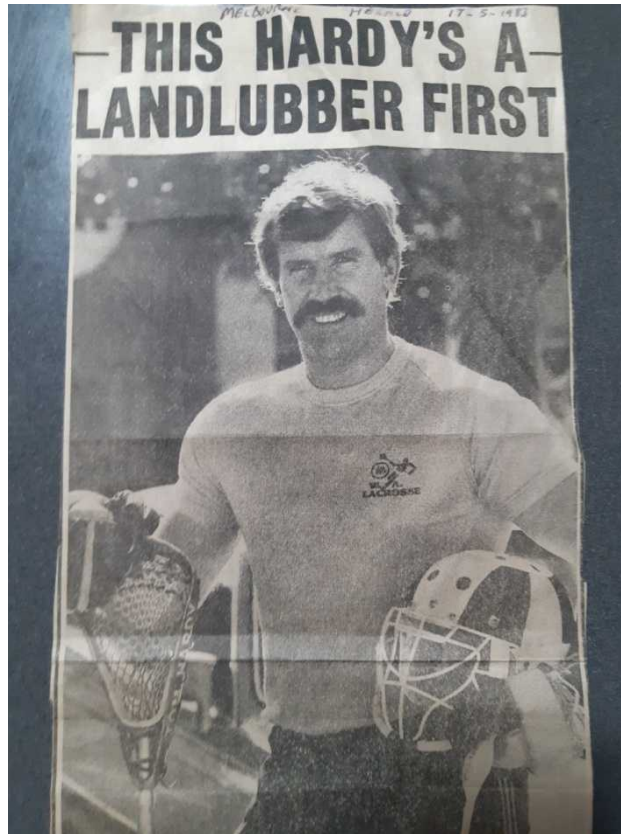
In 1980 employment with the family wine business took Tom to Western Australia where he played for Nedlands-Subiaco, where he was appointed captain-coach, a post he held for three seasons. In 1980 he was co-captain of the Australian team that played against the Rutgers University team in Perth.

In 1981 Jeff Kennedy and Tom were appointed co-captains and selectors for the Western Australian team. They took the team to Adelaide for the carnival, which they won, the first time Western Australia had won a carnival series outside of Western Australia since they began in 1910. TK was selected in the 'All Star team' again and was third in the voting for the MVP of the series.

In 1982 he was selected in the Australian team for the World Series in Baltimore, unfortunately in the final minutes of a warm-up game in Boston against the 'Brine Lacrosse team' just before the 'Worlds', his arm was broken and his participation in the series was limited to carrying the Australian flag at the opening ceremony, assisting on the bench and off field activities!!

In 1983 work brought him back to Melbourne and he was lucky enough to begin playing for MCC, where Bill Stahmer (Former Caulfield and Victorian team mate) was captain-coach at the time, "These five seasons 1983- 1987, being some of my most enjoyable playing days".

"Being a playing member of the MCC is a special privilege and I became quite involved in activities at the club including co-founding the 'Long Room Wine and Food Society' in 1984. Whilst I started with MCC in 1983 I had already been selected in the WA team for the 1983 Carnival in Melbourne, thus I played for W.A. in the carnival that year"!



In 1984 Tom played for Victoria in Adelaide; was also selected in the Australian team to participate in a demonstration tournament in conjunction with the Los Angeles Olympic Games. "We had a great tournament and I was fortunate to be one of four Australian players to receive a 'Certificate of Outstanding Performance' and a nomination for the '1984 Best Single Sporting Performance' at the annual 'Sports Australia Awards'".

The following year, 1985 I played for Victoria in the Carnival in WA. In 1986 I was fortunate again to be selected in the Australian team for the World Series in Toronto which was my final international appearance. Being 37 years old at the time, I was the oldest player participating in the Toronto World Championship.

Playing for the MCC team in the 1986 grand final was a memorable moment in my career, the first time MCC had been in a grand final since the early 1930's. Sadly, we didn't win but gave it a very good shot led by our inspirational Captain-Coach Billy Stahmer. In 2006 Bill organized a weekend celebration of this momentous club achievement, including a dinner at the MCG, it was a wonderful event, past players came from all parts of Australia and the world for that matter to be there.

In 1987, part way through the season Tom left Australia to work on a 'Pictorial Atlas of North American Wine', a two year project. In 1988 he bought an old chateau hotel, 'Chateau de Fleurac' near the city of Cognac in France, describing his time there as like running the legendary 'Fawlty Towers' on steroids!!!

Ironically, when he returned to Melbourne in 1992 just before the national carnival in Melbourne, along with the main states Victoria, SA and WA, there was a team from Queensland and a combined NSW/Tasmania team, coached by Billy Stahmer - they were short of a centreman, so he was co-opted into playing a few games until his left achilles gave out!!

Tom is perhaps the only player to ever represent the three main lacrosse states SA, Victoria and WA, each on numerous occasions, adding to those, his appearance with the combined team from NSW and Tasmania, he has thus has represented five states of Australia at a national level - it may be a while before that happens again!!

On returning to Australia and his old home state SA, he played in 1993 and 1994 in the Brighton state league team, playing his last state league game at 46 years of age.

Tom was fortunate to be physically capable to play lacrosse for 30 seasons in senior men's lacrosse, a testimony to his fitness and commitment.

TESTIMONIALS

ALEC INGLIS (Former state and national coach)

Tom is only a few years my junior. I have seen him most of his career with state teams, which he went on to play for the 3 main states. He also played for both Caulfield and MCC in Victoria.

I also had the pleasure to coach him in 3 Australian teams, 78, 82 and 84, as a defensive midfielder. His speed from defence to attack was fantastic. When he had his arm broken representing Australia in 1982 it was a significant loss to our team.

Tom was calm under pressure, a great reader of the game and a great bloke. A pleasure to coach.

RAY DUTHY (Former S.A. and Australian player)

I had the pleasure of playing with TK in various Australian teams between 1978 and 1986 inclusive. Tom was a superb athlete and his ability to sprint, dodge and clear the ball either as a defender or defensive midfielder was his forte.

This attribute and his capacity to intercept, invariably created many attack opportunities for the team and himself by virtue of his ability to create fast breaks. In fact, he was renowned for his backhand shot on goal which was more common in that era. I recall one such time when he ran the length of the field in the 1978 World Series in Manchester and put a backhand bounce shot into the top corner of the cage against the USA.

Tom was a consistent performer at club, state and international levels and was athletic, quick and had great stick work. In addition, I always felt that TK was a great team man and an unselfish team player at all times.

I would certainly rank him as one of Australia's, SA's, WA's and Victoria's best defensive midfield players whose length of time as a player was testimony to his skill and fitness level.

BILL STAHMER (Former Australian player and coach)

Tom's defensive attributes were second to none, a soft player who used his mental and skill level to control his opponent, along with directing his fellow defence players, at all times looking to turn defence into attack, very similar to the great Doug Fox.

Tom was a highly motivated team player, winning was the ultimate goal but he would help others in any way possible, be it the coach and or fellow team members.

Tom's ability with a longer pole was often overlooked, his passing to a forward when on the burst was a lot harder than most attack players, and he put it on a plate, Michael Raggatt, outstanding Brighton and S.A. teammate can attest to that.

One of Tom's best individual performances was at the 1978 world championship in Manchester when he stood the Canadian star attack player Mike French (MVP of the series and the leading scorer of the tournament) and kept him to one goal !!

When one looks at his longevity at the top level of lacrosse in both club, state and international levels, his dedication and desire to succeed stand out.

BRIAN GRIFFIN (Legend)

Brian included Tom in his All-star team as one of two best Australian defensive midfielders. High praise indeed.

GREATEST INFLUENCES IN TOM'S CAREER

Dudley Hamilton (Former Australian player and captain) – Dudley was my first open age/C grade coach, he was very good with technique and teaching you how to play correctly.

Keith Roennfeldt (Former champion and SA coach) - greatest psychologist of all time, he knew how to handle players and understood their idiosyncrasies.

Les Goding (My coach and friend since coming to coach Caulfield in 1974 until his untimely passing). A very humane leader who knew how to get the best out of his players, Les showed great faith in me during the down years of my career. From when I returned very unfit from my sailing exploits in 1974 through to the end of 1976 years when my work and family life took top priority. In 1977 when my lacrosse got back on track Les quietly shook my hand when I returned from Perth in 1977 as an All-star.

Allan Gandy: Allan was one of the greatest players our game has ever seen, I never saw him play, but when I arrived to work for our family's wine business in Melbourne as a 23 year old at the end of 1972, he really took me under his wing along with Jack Hodges the Caulfield stalwart!! Allan was always there to help and offer advice but only if you wanted it.

GREATEST PLAYERS I SAW

Brian Griffin- His absolutely silky skills and fierce determination to succeed took him to be the MVP in the first ever World Series in Toronto in 1967 until playing in the Carnival in Melbourne in 1983 at 42 years of age and being runner-up MVP plus being an All-star selection in the Perth Carnival in 1982 at 41 years of age.

Michael Raggatt - In his heyday the most explosive player I've ever seen, proving that in my early days with Brighton, when he twice threw more than 200 goals in a season, the only player to ever do this in the world at top level, a feat of 100 goals a season seems to escape the modern player!!

Peter Cann - Several times a World All-star selection, the best 'quick stick' goal thrower of all time, a clever thinker of the game and a wonderful team man and

teammate, renowned for pulling teams over the line in the toughest situations at the elite level of lacrosse.

John 'Keka' Butkiewicz - For a long stint the world's best face-off player and a great attacking and defending mid fielder.

Keith Daly - A tough outside forward who stood up and was counted in every game, a bloke you wanted on your team!!

Bill Stahmer - A resilient and creative attack player with the greatest desire to win I've ever seen in a player, or coach, just as good at handing out assists as scoring the tough goals!!

Jeff Kennedy - I played and coached with and against 'Joffa' at the highest level, he made it look easy with his creative and silky skills, you wanted him in your corner!!

Peter Collett - My hero and inspiration when I first started out in the Brighton state league team, a superb athlete and I believe one of the first truly mobile back-men, so much so that coach 'Father' Roennfeldt' played him in the face off (even though he was a left-hander) against Marty Verdins to negate and run with him!!

Ray Duthy - A complete midfielder, always in the right place at the right time, his never say die attitude, inspirational leadership, especially when the going was tough was outstanding, a top bloke to tour with too!!

John Carter - My first Australian coach in 1978, I played with and against John from 1967 until his retirement, an encyclopedic knowledge of the game, a calm and clever strategist, I learnt much from John, an under-rated and under-appreciated champion of our game.

Alan Rolley - Alan was a complete attack player, a fabulous 'feed' to many other great attack players, but capable of a big bag of goals when the opportunity arose, unselfish as he was uncanny!!

Doug Fox - One of the greatest goalkeepers our game has ever seen and I've seen plenty from Bruce Neill, Evan Jones, Murray Keen and others but Doug was so good to play in front of as a defender, such a cool communicative general that was never flustered. I'll never forget his famous call 'My ball spread' uttered as the goal shot still hadn't reached his sure stick!! A fabulous clearer of the ball turning defense into attack!!

MY GREATEST OPPONENTS

Over my career as a defender or a defensive midfielder, I had challenging players to stand or defend on, and I seemed to be able to adapt my style to negate them.

Players I found hardest were the super explosive stick handlers like Mike Raggatt and Peter Cann.

One other player who comes to mind who emerged in the latter part of my career was Dennis Newman. Whilst he more or less face dodged only one way, even getting a poke check in early and stepping back to catch him coming out of the dodge seemed to no avail, his power, timing and speed were so explosive - maybe I was getting a bit old?!!

Well played TK, a long and successful career at the top, let's toast you with a Siegersdorf Riesling!