

## DON GORMAN – AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE CHAMPION

Starting his lacrosse as a schoolboy in 1937 at age 14, Don Gorman made progress, and after playing with the East Torrens B Grade team during the first half of 1940, was promoted to A grade and in 1941, as an 18 year old, he shared the Dunks trophy (S.A. best and fairest as it was then known) with Bill Symonds.

Don Gorman gave credit to the late Earle Ellis, who was killed in Nagasaki serving his country during WW2, for his rise in the game. When schoolboy lacrosse was introduced a few years before the war, Ellis coached the Norwood Central School team, of which Don was a member. On Sunday mornings he often gave Don extra tuition.

Don played his entire career at East Torrens, from 1937 until his retirement in 1958, winning the club best and fairest on 7 occasions, including his final year of 1958.

Don Gorman enlisted in the army in August 1943 at the age of 20 and remained in the army until June 1945, although lacrosse competition was suspended from 1942-45 due to WW2, and as we know lacrosse struggled to recover following the war due to the loss of players and the lack of equipment due to import restrictions.

Don played at second home but was on the opposite wing in the State team which defeated Victoria 14 goals to 11 in 1946. It was the first time Victoria had been beaten on their home ground since 1906.

Women's lacrosse at Glenelg started in 1969 where Don Gorman, father of Anne, became coach in 1972 and coached for 3 years. Glenelg became a very successful women's club in terms of premierships and national representation. Anne Newbery (nee Gorman) was the first national representative from Glenelg.

The SALA Rising Star of the Year Award is named in his honour.



Don Gorman was clearly the leading player for East Torrens during the 1940's – 50's and arguably the leading player for S.A., winning the competition best and fairest award in 1941 (The Dunks Medal as it was originally known) and the Memorial Medal on six occasions between 1946 and 1957, including four consecutive wins from 1949 to 1952, and runner-up in 1953. He became the first lacrosse player to win the S.A. best and fairest twice when he was awarded the Memorial Trophy in 1946.



Competition was suspended from 1942-1945 due to the outbreak of WW2, thus he won 6 out of the 8 best and fairest awards presented from 1941-1952.

He represented S.A. from 1946 -1954, captaining the team from 1948 -1954, including being selected in the All-Australian team in 1947 and 1953, when carnivals were held every 3 years. While it may be surprising that he was not selected in the 1950 All Australian team we do know that he was ordered to bed with the flu during the carnival and definitely missed the all important final, and was clearly missed as Victoria won a low scoring game by 2 goals.

**S.A. Dogged By  
Bad Luck  
In Lacrosse**

From FIRST ON  
MELBOURNE, July 30.

Fighting against dogged luck, S.A. went down in the lacrosse carnival, which ended yesterday.

The first shock came when Australia's best attack and mainstay of the State team, Gorman, was sent to bed with the flu. Then F. Hansford could not take the field and Gitsam (ankle injury) had to go into the team and he was a passenger all day.

Even then, had S.A. been on the target, the result may have been reversed. Its shooting was shocking.

## **TESTIMONIALS**

With the passage of time it is difficult to obtain testimony to the greatness of our champions prior to the 1950's when Don Gorman played most of his career, which was severely interrupted by the Great Depression and WW2. Former champion and captain of the 1959 Australian team, Dudley Hamilton, offered the following comments:

“Don Gorman developed an attack to goal from the side of goal. He had beautiful stick skills, he was strong but not heavily built, a receiver who could finish. He was a very fast player, pretty nifty, and could change direction very quickly.”

In weighing up players from the late 1940's/1950's, Dudley Hamilton rated Allan Gandy as the greatest player of that era, different style to Don Gorman, and he had Don Gorman as number 2 - high praise indeed, and in elite company.

There is reference in newspaper clippings in the 1950's of Don Gorman being the “Bradman of lacrosse”, and while this was a very big call, it would appear that it originated from former Port Adelaide champion and leader Ken Forrest, who was not only a great for Port Adelaide but also represented S.A. on many occasions, and was selected in the All-Australian team in Perth in 1956.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is impossible for the players from the modern era to truly appreciate how difficult life was for people growing up after WW1, then enduring the Great Depression, and then another World War. It was difficult to make a living for many years after WW2, rationing took place, it was difficult to import lacrosse equipment due to import restrictions, and travelling to carnivals was difficult and expensive, and in those days you didn't jump on a plane and finish up at a carnival in an hour, it was probably a ship that took you to Perth.

So we have to view this era differently to how we view the modern era, and also appreciate that the attack players basically had no protection other than a flimsy pair of gloves and maybe a cloth hat, so if you were talented and scoring you invariably “Copped a belting!” They also only played carnivals every three years, whereas today they are played annually. During his career Don Gorman never had an opportunity to represent his country against another lacrosse nation.

This makes people like Don Gorman all the greater, and to be compared to and rated with Allan Gandy, this man must have been an absolute champion. Well played Don Gorman, the passing of time though has made it difficult to fully appreciate your greatness, but you were an Australian lacrosse champion.