

ALAN ROLLEY – AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE CHAMPION

Alan's mother, Lorna Saker, played lacrosse in 1937 for Williamstown when women's lacrosse was first introduced as a competition (Against YWCA), and as such lacrosse sticks were always around the house when Alan was growing up. As Alan recalls "I would run around the backyard with a tennis ball in one of my mother's lacrosse sticks as a small boy and throw the ball through a window of a shed with no glass in it". Alan's wife Yvonne (Walton) and their three daughters Martine, Brooke and Talina, were all excellent players and all represented Victoria. Alan's younger sister Pam Rolley and Yvonne's younger brother Robert Walton also represented Victoria and Australia. If you go back through the history of Williamstown you will also see that Yvonne's father and uncles also played with Williamstown.



Above is Alan playing in the Under 14 gymkhana at Malvern in 1957

Alan commenced playing in the local competition under Mal Taylor on Saturday mornings at the Gloucester Reserve in Williamstown in 1954 as a 9 year old, he then played in the Victorian Under 14 and Under 16 competitions from 1956 -1960. Although he played finals in most of these years the team was not successful in winning a junior premiership, but Williamstown, through its junior program, developed and managed by Mal Taylor, was on the ascendancy.

In 1961 in an attempt to even up the competition, the Victoria Amateur Lacrosse Association directed Malvern, Caulfield, and Williamstown to enter two teams of equal strength into the A grade competition. At the end of the season Caulfield Green were on top, Malvern Black second and Williamstown Fearon third and Williamstown Cities fourth. The Fearons and the Cities played off on the Fearon Reserve and they drew 6 goals apiece, however as the Fearons were third on the ladder they progressed and were beaten by Malvern in the preliminary final. Alan played that year in the Cities under Frank Hogarth.

In 1962 at the age of 17 he played A grade in the Williamstown Fearons.

In 1963 Williamstown Fearons finished 2nd after the home and away rounds but defeated Malvern 22-14 in the grand final at Orrong Park to win their first A grade premiership.

Alan played in A Grade (State League) premierships in 1963, 1965, 1968 -1971, and 1973 coached by Frank Hogarth, and 1975 -1980, and 1982 under Alec Inglis, a total of 14 state league premierships. He played for Melbourne University in 1966 as part of his obligations under the University Rule, where they finished fourth and were beaten by Caulfield who went on to win the Premiership.

He played a total of 352 state league games and scored a total of 1677 goals and threw over 100 goals in 1963, 1965, 1969, 1971 and 1972; and won Williamstown's best and fairest in 1964, 1968 and 1969. He is the fourth highest goal scorer in senior competition in Australia behind Michael Raggatt, Ray Duthy and Eddie Toomey (Who he played with at Williamstown throughout the 1960s and until 1972).

He won the Vince Healy Award for the best and fairest Victorian player in 1965 and 1969.

He represented Victoria in 1963 (Colts) and seniors in 1964 -1966, 1968 -1971, 1973, 1975 -1977, 1978 and 1981, a total of 13 representative years. He was also named All-Australian at the conclusion of the Australian championships in 1968 and 1970.

In 1967 Alan toured USA and Canada with the Australian lacrosse Tteam and played against top USA University teams prior to the first lacrosse world championship in Toronto, Canada. Australia came second to USA after beating both England and Canada. Alan left the team in Toronto to work for the Canadian Government carrying out surveys of Indian reservations in Northern Ontario.



Above is Alan scoring against Canada in Toronto in 1967. The chasing defender looks menacing! Fortunately Alan got the shot away in time!

Alan also represented Australia at the world championship in Melbourne in 1974 where Australia again came second to the USA. Alan was involved at Committee level and as vice president at the Williamstown Lacrosse Club for many years, serving as Records Secretary for 19 years and was awarded life membership in 1984.

BEST PLAYERS SEEN OR PLAYED WITH?

The best Williamstown players Alan played with include Eddie Toomey, Geoff Spicer Rod Cordell, Michael Orr and Ron Twomey and in later years John Butkiewicz, Peter Morley, Bryan Smith, Robert Walton and Gregor Garnsworthy.

TOUGHEST OPPONENTS

Roy Sloggett and Ron Alaimo (Malvern), Peter Collett (Brighton, South Australia) and Philip Pearson (training opponent at Williamstown).

Other great players he played against or saw include Alan Bower, Ian Toy, Peter Collett, Don Miller, Ivan Bryning, Geoff Treloar, Graeme Ross (Midfield), and Doug Fox (Goalkeeper).

TESTIMONIALS

GUS GARNSWORTHY (Former Australian defender)

Easily one of the best feeders I have ever seen or played with. "Rolls" was able to combine his accurate feeding with accurate shooting, sometimes appearing to curve the ball into the goals.

As a team mate watching from the other end of the ground, I could see others like Peter Morley, Eddie Toomey or Rod Cordell make cuts that only "Rolls" seemed to be aware of. Sometimes he would pass to and hit Eddie's stick whilst being closely marked by an opponent.

ALEC INGLIS (Former Australian and Williamstown coach)

Alan played the position of feeding from the back of the net and passed the ball to the cutting players at the front to goal.

Alan was fast, elusive and cunning, he always attracted the best defender of the opposition to try to curtail his strengths, generally to no avail. Assisted goals are highly prized by players, Alan was one of the best feeders of the ball that I have seen. On top of his 1677 goals in state league he also provided 673 assists from 1975-1982. These were only counted from 1975 onward, thus the assists for the first 13 years of his 21 year career in state league/A grade are not known, but do the maths and it was probably higher than his goals scored.

JOHN CARTER (Former Australian player and coach)

Alan Rolley was a player you needed to control or limit his influence. He was a rare breed, a feeding forward, if you don't give them the due respect they may not score a lot, but will give others scoring opportunities.

I remember having to stand him in state game in 1975, I didn't start on him, but he was doing some damage and the coach wanted me to shut him out. He was a very sneaky forward, once he had the ball he was very dangerous, either as a goal thrower or as a feeder.

He had a very upright structure, didn't have much of a pocket, he always had the stick in the right position and because of these attributes he could throw quite hard and very accurately. It was very important to cut down his feeding opportunities as there were generally many cutters with sticks waiting to be fed.

I had a lot of respect for him as a person and a player.

CONCLUSION

While Alan Rolley is not the highest goal scorer of all time in the most senior grade, the reader has to appreciate the fact that from 1960-1972, Alan Rolley played with another great forward, Eddie Toomey, and no doubt they stole goals from each other, and not many clubs would have had that calibre of players in the one team for a decade. The other cogent point is that Alan not only threw a lot of goals, but he was predominantly the key feeder from behind goals throughout most of his career, and as a result reduced his own opportunities.

Alan Rolley was a highly intelligent and skilful attack player and must be recognized as one of Australia's finest attack players over a long career.

Well played Rolls, a great career!