

RON TWOMEY – CHAMPION LACROSSE PLAYER

Ron Twomey was introduced to lacrosse at age 13 in 1963 at the great lacrosse incubator that Williamstown became from the late 1950's-60's due to the legendary Mal Taylor, who organized local competitions at Williamstown on Saturday mornings. He was introduced to the game in U14's by classmates Gus Garnsworthy, Richard Tregear, Phillip Parker and Warren Burke.

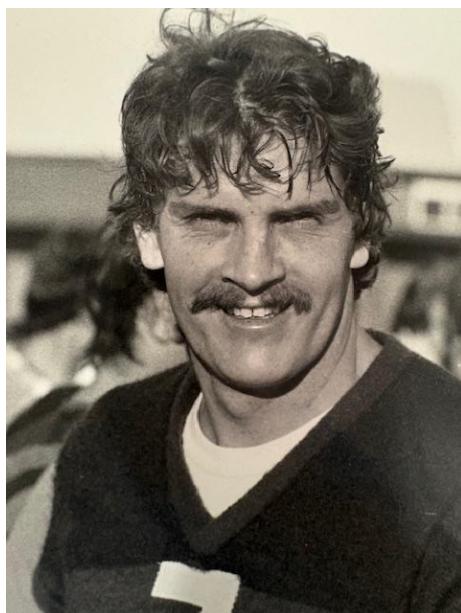
"My brother John and I reported to preseason training in 1963 at the Gloucester Reserve where we met Mal Taylor who handed each of us a stick and a ball each so we could get started on learning how to throw. To assist me he called over a young guy called Eddie and asked him to practice stick work with me. I had no stick skills however Eddie was very patient. In due course I found out his name was Eddie Toomey, and he had recently toured with the 1962 Australia team!"

I was a naturally shy kid who had no idea that my lacrosse journey, and the people I would meet on the way, would slowly transform and socialise me by giving me endless opportunities for personal development. I became a team player with a profound love for my club and our ideals. I grew up in the company of boys and men who modelled the way and provided guidance and encouragement, and ultimately the strength and determination to have a go at anything life presents."

Ron started in 1963 as a defence player and that team won the U14 premiership that year, and most memorably 1963 was the year Williamstown won the club's first ever A grade premiership. In 1964 Ron progressed to the U16's as a defender, where they won the premiership.

In 1965 Ron progressed to C Grade as a midfield/centre, where they won the C grade premiership, he was again selected in the U16 state team and played his first 2 games in A grade under Coach Frank Hogarth. In 1966 Ron progressed to B grade, where they finished third, and played 1 game in state league.

From 1967 Ron was established in the A grade team, the Fearons (Team captain in 1974), winning premierships in 1967-71 & 73 under Coach Frank Hogarth, and 1975-78 under Alec Inglis.



In 1979 Doug Fox and Rob Jackson invited Ron to Camberwell as player/coach, where he stayed for 2 years, making the A grade finals in 1980 for the first time since being reformed, and in that year Ron won Camberwell's best and fairest award.

He transferred back to Williamstown in 1981 with a view to coaching state league when an opportunity arose. While his application was unsuccessful he continued playing state league on the forward line for the next 3 years, winning premierships in 82 & 83 under coach Noel Smith.

From 1984 - 89 Ron played and coached in various lower grades until he reached 40, winning several premierships along the way.

State representation

In terms of state representation Ron was selected in the Victorian U16 team in 1964 & 65 and was selected in the Victorian senior team on 9 occasions (1968, 69, 70, 73, 75, 76, 78, 80, 82), captaining the team in 1976, 78 & 82, generally only missing selection when he was selected in the Australian team. In 1976 he was selected in the All-Star team and was co-captain.

National representation

Ron was first selected to represent Australia in 1972 for a world tour, followed by the 1974 world championship in Melbourne, and the 1976 world touring team where he was co-captain.



Ron in the 1974 world championship team in Melbourne

Box lacrosse

Ron played box lacrosse at the East Bentleigh facility (Blackfeet) for the few years it lasted in the 1960's and then the Williamstown box (Sea Wasps) arena for most of the 1970's. The Sea Wasps were formidable winning several box premierships.

In 1978 Ron was appointed assistant coach/captain of the Australian box team, under coach Ken Read, which played demonstration games against Canadian teams at the Edmonton Commonwealth Games. Sadly Ron withdrew from this appointed position after he was subsequently encouraged by both Australian field coaches to join the 1978 world championship training squad, but ultimately missed selection for the Australian field team, and regretting his decision to withdraw from the Aussie box team.

Interesting to note that Ron was trying out for the 1978 Australian box team that went to Edmonton, but in the end he was encouraged to focus on the field team. Ron would not only been a great leader and captain of that team, but his ability to play in close quarters, his face-off skills, stamina, shooting skills in close, and his defensive capability would have seen him thrive in Canada, something that many of his great field lacrosse peers would not have been able to do! You wouldn't want to be on the end of his defensive crosse-check!

Ron played 365 senior games with Williamstown and Camberwell, 20 games for Victoria and 31 representing Australia.

Administratively Ron was on the Williamstown committee from the early 70s to late 80s, President from 1982 - 87, and served as a VALA vice-president and on the match committee for several years.

BEST PLAYERS I HAVE SEEN AND MOST ADMIRE

I cannot list a few names as the best players I have seen because I played at Williamstown in a team of champions where we won 106 consecutive games from the season opening game in A Grade in 1967 until a great Malvern team ended our run in 1972, along the way winning 5 A grade premierships.

The best among these players and my guiding lights in the early days were Rod Cordell, Allan Rolley, Eddie Toomey, Alan Chiron, Phil Pearson, Micky Orr, John O'Keefe along with my former U14 team mates whose careers ran concurrently with mine, Gus Garnsworthy and Robert Flaherty.

The early 70s at Willy also gave rise to Ray Tatlow, John Butkiewicz (Keka), Dennis Newman, Peter Morley, Brian Smith, Geoff Spicer, Cliff Jennings, all of whom represented Australia.

I also had the pleasure to play with and against the greats like Brian Griffin, Michael Raggatt, Jeff Kennedy, Peter Cann, Ray Duthy, Roger Attenborough, Evan Jones, Peter Collett, Rod Scott, Bill Stubbs, Jeff Kelly, Barry Thompson, Ian Toy, Alan Bower, Keith Daly, Geoff Treloar, Graham Hill, Doug Fox, Graham Fox, John Carter, Peter Stiglich, Bill Stahmer, Garry Tillotson, who also represented Australia.

TOUGHEST OPPONENTS

As a defender in U16 I played against many of the people above however in senior grades I usually played in the centre and on the crease in man up situations. I often switched into the attack and played my last 4 to 5 years in State League in attack.

My toughest opponents in the centre were Peter Stiglich, Gary and Rick Tillotson, Ross Turnbull, Ted Hobbs and Ian Williams. The early 70's gave rise to our Willy Legend, John Butkiewicz (Keka) and 80's champion, Dennis Newman, however fortunately for me they were not my opponents. It was always a great privilege to start a game and gain possession for your team especially when you were competing against great centre players.



Ron winning the face-off against Keka in a practice match in 1974

Great defenders are great readers of the game, so positioning and timing are critical if you want to be effective against them. I played against some great defenders like Jeff Kelly, Alan Bower, Peter Collett, Ian Toy, Barry Thompson, however the toughest and hardest hitting defenders I faced over the years were Gus Garnsworthy, Ray Tatlow and Cliff Jennings at club training.

The two toughest lacrosse arenas I ever played in were Williamstown Fearon's club training and the box lacrosse at the arena in Williamstown. Training hard made playing relatively easy!

TESTIMONIALS

GUS GARNSWORTHY (Former Williamstown and Australian champion)

I have seen Ron develop from a junior with raw stick skills to a quality international lacrosse player with excellent stick skills. Ron began playing under the watchful eye of Mal Taylor and recalls Mal asking the record goal scoring forward Eddie Toomey to teach Ron stick skills. Ron's qualities were recognized by the state coach at the time, Terry Allington, when he encouraged us to call him Ron in preference to his nickname Ox. Terry recognized there was more to Ron than size and strength. Ron displayed these characteristics throughout his playing and coaching career.

Ron used his physical attributes to compliment his stick skills, particularly in the face off and in offence. He used these skills to great advantage when our team was in need of a physical presence to change the course of the game. We could always rely on him when "the going got tough."

Ron's leadership and support of our game was also evident while serving on the committee and as president of Williamstown as well as the playing coach of Camberwell.

MICHAEL RAGGATT (Former Australian champion)

As an interstate opponent in the U16s in 1964/65, Ron was already a great competitor, a clever face-off man, a strategic thinker, with great stick skills. He had to be closely watched for once he gained possession he was dangerous & creative. In both Vic v SA senior contests & Brighton v Williamstown matches, Ron was a regularly up there amongst the best and we enjoyed great rivalry & friendship over the years.

As his team-mate in the 1972 Australian Tour of USA, Canada & UK, I saw first-hand his team commitment, the professional manner in his game preparation & the energy & physicality he brought to the contest. Ron's team spirit, both on & off the field, set a high standard to those around him and his ability to bring others into the game, particularly in attack, was simply awesome.

I was fortunate to again play alongside him in 1974 world championship in Melbourne.

He was certainly a "go to man" when the going got tough & was much admired as a courageous champion of our game. He should be immensely proud of his magnificent personal & team achievements, throughout his career. Such is his popularity & the high respect he's earned, it's not surprising he's amassed a mountain of great mates!

Of Williamstown's enviable record of 106 consecutive games without loss, Ox featured in 87 of them...a champion in a champion team!

Ron is a player who I'd always pick in my team!

DOUG FOX (Former Australian champion)

Ron Twomey is among those on the top shelf of people I most respect in Australian lacrosse.

From my perspective, he would always have been an automatic first round selection in any team during his prime years. Effective everywhere on the field, he brought dominating skills to the face-off, a powerful presence to the midfield and defence, plus dangerous goal-scoring power to the attack.

Ron's decorated playing career over many years at club, state and national levels, speaks for itself. For me, he was regularly a feared opponent in club competitions as part of the mighty Williamstown dynasty. From 1968 onwards, he also became a

reliable and admired teammate in Victorian and Australian teams where he starred as a player and showed that he was a keen student of the game as a strategic thinker and tactician.

Ron aspired to coaching, and in 1979, he made a selfless decision to leave the comfortable success of Williamstown and take up a role as playing coach at my club, Camberwell Lacrosse Club. For two years, he travelled across the city through heavy traffic, three or four times per week, and used his prowess, leadership skills and strong character to inspire Camberwell's young team and lift us up from the lower end of the competition ladder. Only a man who cared for the game and had the vision to protect the competition by helping to elevate a struggling opposition, would make the sacrifice that Ron made.

Ron's dry sense of humour often amused teammates, none more so than when the 1972 Australian team thrashed the South of England team in London by 28 goals to 2. The locals warned us against complacency and repeatedly told us "Wait until you get up north" where we were to meet the All-England team at Manchester. As our team left the ground after we had demolished England 19 goals to 3, Ron grinned and announced in earshot of the England fans... "We mustn't have come far enough north".

It was a joy and privilege to play alongside Ron and, although our paths rarely cross these days, I regard him as a lifetime friend.

CONCLUSION

Ron Twomey was a very imposing figure at the best of times, 185cm (6'1") tall and weighing in around 95 -100kg. While he was strong, fast and aggressive there was nothing crude about the way he played, he just naturally played hard and wasn't into the cheap shots or late hits. He was serious and full of concentration, looking at him was like looking at a bull about to be released from the pen, he was intimidating without trying!

It is surprising that he says he was shy as he never came over that way, he was a man of few words, but when he did speak people listened and he always instilled respect. He was a leader and always led by example, he gave 100%, never seemed to get flustered, was always in the game, was highly skilful and difficult to match up against as he had speed and size, and when he bodied his opponent they would go down.

Ron Twomey may not automatically come to mind when you are picking your best players of all time but he is that piece of glue every coach and team mate would want in the team, he was always there and an extremely intimidating and difficult opponent, never gave up, giving it his all until the last whistle!

Well done Ron Twomey, a champion on and off the field, an ornament to the game!