

ALF EVANS – LACROSSE CHAMPION OF THE HICKORY ERA

In an article in the “Argus” dated 5 September 1953 regarding the 1953 grand final between Malvern and Caulfield, it mentioned that “Malvern are the clear favourites and will be led by Alf Evans, who at age 41 won the VALA best and fairest award (Vince Healy Memorial Trophy).” So, clearly and remarkably, he was not past his prime at that time, but he did retire at the end of 1954.

In 1953, he was also captain and coach of the Victorian team that won the carnival. Do they still have playing coaches?

Former champion Roy Sloggett wrote “In 1952-3 when Alf and I were in the same team, Alf spent most of his time behind the goals, with the ball being passed to him regularly. He was like a general leading the troops, and the forwards knew to make fast moves towards the goals. Invariably he would put the ball in their racquet with a good chance to score. He certainly had very good racquet skills.



Alf Evans as captain-coach of Malvern

He has a record that, most likely, will never be beaten - seventeen A grade premierships - and that must surely include him among the all-time greats of the game. In my view, he had as good a lacrosse brain as anyone I knew and as a coach and captain, could articulate his instructions extremely well. It was a great privilege to play with him and have him as captain and coach.”

Alf Evans was a tall and strong attack player, who could direct traffic and feed players from behind goal as well as score prolifically himself, bulldozing his way around or through defenders from behind goal to score.

According to the history of the Malvern Lacrosse Club “100 years of success” written in 2002, it mentions that “Alf Evans has the distinction of playing in the greatest number of A Grade premierships in Victorian lacrosse, and possibly Australian

lacrosse. He played in the 1934 -1940, 1944 -1948, 1950 -1954 (total 17), captain on eight of these occasions. He represented Victoria on many occasions, was captain and coach of state teams and generally supported the game in all ways possible (V.A.L.A. committee member, executive member of Malvern)."

Again with the assistance of Roy Sloggett, who played with and under Alf Evans as captain and coach for much of the 1950's "Alf Evans was the playing coach and captain of the Malvern A team from 1952 -1954, and following retirement he coached Malvern in 1955 and 1956. I do not know the situation before 1952, however I believe that prior to 1952 the captain of the team was automatically the coach. In other words there was no specific indication who was coach in documents of the time but if Alf is named as captain of Malvern premiership teams prior to 1952 in the Malvern history booklet, he would also have been coach."

Alf went on to coach Williamstown from 1960-62, the only coach from outside the Williamstown club at that time to coach one of their senior teams.

Alf returned to Malvern to coach the C grade team in 1964 and returned to coaching the Blacks from 1967-69. Former champion Geoff Treloar recounted "We liked him as a coach, he was never critical or negative and on Sunday mornings would sometimes go behind goals and demonstrate how he wanted the ball to be passed." Alf Evans was awarded Life membership of Malvern in 1954.



Alf Evans as captain-coach of Victoria

While there is a gap of several years of historical information, team photos or programs covering the Victorian senior team, we do know that Alf Evans was a member of the Victorian senior team in 1935, 1937 & 1939 (We cannot find any information on 1936 or 1938), national championships were not played between 1940 – 1947, and again there is a lack of information or photos, but Alf was selected in the Victorian team from 1949-1953, and coached Victoria from 1953-58.

CONCLUSION

With the passage of time and passing of most players and officials of the lacrosse era up to the late 1950's, it is becoming more difficult to draw out the facts to demonstrate the champions of yesteryear, an era where things were written down on paper, not readily available as they are today. In the modern era we can go to the internet and recover an incredible amount of information but there are limitations on accessing information on lacrosse or even photos when you step back from the late 1950's. It will get harder as the few remaining from this era pass but we must endeavour to seek out the performances and deeds of former champions or legends of the game like Alf Evans. This era produced champions as has the modern era but the players from the hickory era had to endure 2 world wars and a depression, and lived in times where it was hard to make a living let alone afford to go on an overseas or interstate flight with a state or national team. This in some ways makes their performances and achievements all the more important and remarkable.

Alf Evans was clearly a remarkable attack player for Malvern and Victoria over a long period of time that was interrupted by WW2, and remained a champion of the game at age 41 where he was still playing coach of Victoria. He was truly a champion, one of the greats.