

JACK KERR

Only a few are able to win a club championship which makes Jack Kerr's efforts in winning three in succession -1961, 1962 and 1963 - special. It makes him one of the very best to have played for our club.

The format of the contest made it a test of both skill and endurance. There were up to 4 rounds of qualifying stroke play before the best 8 met head to head in match play. After quarter and semi-finals the two best met in a 36 hole play-off. The winner was genuinely a champion. This was recognised with a spectators following out on the course and always a good number in the club house afterwards for the presentations.

Despite contesting the finals another club championship eluded him. He battled but could not beat John Blake, a remarkable character in his own right, who went on to win 5 successive championships, Jack Dwyer who managed 7 and of course his son, Shane Dwyer who some say is a pretty fair golfer, who won 10. He continued to have plenty of success in other club events including the Captain's trophy.

He was a regular member of our pennant teams that often went close but never quite managed to pull off the big one. In fact, the Junior victories of 1971 and 1983 aside, the drought in the Men's wasn't broken until 1991 nearly forty years after the club reformed. He was also a regular at Country Week. To gain selection you had to be well recognised outside of your club because it was a West Gippsland representative team.

Jack learnt to play the game before the war. His parents owned a farm in Warragul, yes "in" Warragul, near where Western Park is now. Two of the club's holes were on his side of Sutton St so it was natural for him to earn a few extra bob by caddying and after that learning the game itself. It also helped that his father was curator of the course for two years Jack actually was a member at Warragul for twenty five years. Good Drouin people would say, "What a waste" but he has fond memories of the time and in any case he balanced the books by playing at Drouin for twenty five years too. Jack has the skills of a diplomat. He had a business in Drouin so it made good business sense as well as being more convenient. He was also able to persuade his mother to hold the fort while he nicked off to the club to play his rounds.

He is modest to a fault. Entirely self taught he became a single figure handicapper. He wouldn't admit to being a long hitter even though a newspaper report at the time described him as a "powerful hitter." He had in mind comparisons with modern day golfers who hit the ball a mile. Most of us would put that down to improvements in technology, especially ball technology.

Jack was prepared to admit that he was pretty good around the greens and this was no surprise. Plenty can hit it long but the ones who win usually do so because of their short game. He used a seven iron to chip on to the sand scrape "greens." Given they were often held together with sump oil or kerosene there must have been a real technique in coping. I would guess there would be lots of bump and run shots. If you want to find out there are still clubs in the Mallee where these "greens" can be found and Benalla has an annual tournament.

Once on the "green" then the trick was to hit the ball firmly and straight. To assist you were allowed two scrapes towards the hole and two after. It would have been tough work though and required skill. You might like to remember this next time you complain after our greens have been cored and sanded. Grass greens came into play in 1963 so Jack had to make that adjustment which obviously he managed because he won the championship that year.

It wasn't only the greens which were different in those times. The fairways were never much more than paddocks. They certainly improved over time but still were littered with logs and yabby hole mounds. In winter they could be a quagmire. For a while there was a local rule on the current 21st that if your ball plugged on the fairway and couldn't be found you had a free drop. Straying off the fairway was a problem too because apart from the holes enclosed by the race track the timber was very heavy indeed. Jack sensibly solved that problem by hitting the ball straight. Without wanting to presume maybe that is a technique others of us could try.

Another problem to overcome was the crows' delight in pinching the ball. It wasn't unusual to lose 3-4 per round. Some, Don Mathieson for example, solved this problem by carrying a shotgun in the bag. At the end of play the dead crows would be strung up on the fence. We live in different times but I have heard plenty of you say what you would like to do to the Magpies and Butcher birds in the nesting season. No doubt with a shotgun in the bag you would "scare" away the ducks too.

Jack may have had an advantage in that he had a caddy. Lifelong friend, Mavis, was there for most of Jack's success. I'm not sure that she kept him on the straight and narrow because her other job was to be the designated driver when the Drouin boys travelled the State to play in plates and tournaments. Apparently they liked to enjoy themselves afterwards and during the matches felt it was more interesting if there were side bets and liquid refreshments. Jack wouldn't admit to this but I imagine they played for a can a hole so that there was a real skill in winning often enough but not too often.

Jack played with plenty of characters. Once he paired with Pat Gleeson of Gleeson hotel fame at a Liquor trade day at Victoria Golf Club. Nine holes were played in the morning followed by lunch when the sponsor's product was sampled and then if sober the second nine was played in the afternoon. This day Pat had other plans for the lunchtime. "Come on, Jack, we're off to buy a boat." Which they did. Now where in Drouin would you use a boat?

Stan "Bloody" Anderson managed the new Olympic sized swimming pool. He didn't start the game until he was 47 but managed to reduce his handicap to 5. He drove a Rambler which if I knew anything about cars no doubt I would be impressed. It was capable of 100mph - remember this is pre metric - and apart from Stan the only other person with permission to drive it was Mavis. Did she reach 100 mph? Somehow I think she did.

Alan Rogers, a long time Treasurer and then President drove a Rolls Royce. Now of course the entrance to the club was just a dirt road, muddy in summer and dusty in winter. His arrival at the course must have been a grand affair perhaps like a visit from royalty.

And then there was John Blake. He was a superb golfer but he liked to play it hard away from the course so much so that he often had a minder. Apparently Jack Stroud was multi skilled and had the ability to have a good time and still make sure he got John to the first tee on time. Often with a minute to go John's opponent would be ready to claim the game on forfeit only to have a bedraggled John arrive and hit his tee shot. He would complete his dressing as he walked the fairway.

Jack remembers a tournament where the course record was broken by Warragul golfer John Bannan in the morning but then bettered by Alan Graham from The Valley. John wasn't having any of this and promptly regained the record in the afternoon. This was the same John Bannan who on another occasion took a sickie from work and won. Of course his feat was in the papers. He got a very frosty reception from his boss the next day.

The club didn't get a liquor licence until 1968. Did that mean there was no drinking on site? Actually no. Jack was finishing his round one day with Les Purser, a local policeman, who also enjoyed a drink. They were told things would be rather quiet. The Club had been "visited" by the

Flying Squad from Melbourne and had been booked. I wonder if they ever had a little chat to Les? This was also the days when there was no Sunday hotel trading. The exception was if you were a bona fide traveller i.e. you lived more than 50 miles away. This meant that Von Stroud had to be well organised. Many a working bee was organised on Sundays and it was her job to make sure that there was a dozen bottles of beer waiting. It sounds a bit like football's "pleasant Sunday morning" to me.

For both Jack and Mavis the club was an important social centre. The advent of television in 1956 begun the slow process of change but in the sixties and well into the seventies people made their own fun. The club had an annual ball that was the envy of the district. The driving force behind this was Von Stroud, a life member. They were formal occasions with the men wearing tuxedos and the women dressed in their finery. The music of course was provided by The Chordettes. An annual dinner was a similarly impressive occasion while during the year there were plenty of dinner dances and card nights.

Another side to Jack's character was his involvement with the Juniors. A report at the time said he had a great ability to teach at their level. He also went to great lengths to get them to the course. He and Mavis provided a shuttle service from all around the district and organised equipment for them. He won't take the credit but he must have been one of the reasons for our first pennant success in 1971 when a Junior team of Marcus Dwyer (Captain), Russell Dent, Tony Dent, Gordon McDowell Jr, John Fielden and Terry Dent captured the flag.

Jack's time at Drouin was one of consolidation. The mighty effort to get the club reformed in 1955 could easily have fallen over without the hard work so many of the next generation. People like Jack Caddy, Alan Rogers, Geoff Wadham, Lindsay Smith, Gordon McDowell, Keith Anderson, Horrie Leishman, Jack Stroud, Herbie Lindorff, Alf Belton and plenty of others worked so hard. They were all playing partners and friends of our first genuine champion, Jack Kerr.

Written by George Shand