

THE DWYERS

In the US, the Kennedy family has been a powerful dynasty that has dominated the political landscape for nigh on fifty years. In the Dwyers, Drouin has its own dynasty that has dominated the golfing landscape for 46 years and counting. A family that has produced 23 Club Championships from Mum, Dad and Son is a force indeed.

Here is Shane talking about his family's introduction to the grand game.

“My involvement with the game of golf came through my parents, Kath and Jack, but how they came to the game was completely different as no one in their respective families had any golfing background at all.

Jack was growing up in the Central Goldfields town of Maryborough in the mid 1930's when he found a rusty old golf club at the local tip and the rest, as it is said, is history. After leaving school Jack was employed by what is now Australia Post, incidentally for his entire working career, and joined the Maryborough golf club. The war years did limit his golf but following his discharge from the Air Force he was transferred to the Mallee town of Birchip as a postal clerk and it is here he met Kath and this led to Kath's involvement with the game of golf.

The golf course at Birchip was sand scrapes and the golf season ran parallel with the football season, i.e. from around April to October. The rest of year the sand scrapes were fenced off and the course turned over to sheep. It was here I first began to hit balls around under the guidance of my parents.

By the early 1960's Jack had gained promotion to Postmaster at Birchip and along the way had won the club championship eleven times, represented the Kara Kara District at Country Week and won numerous scratch events at various courses. I can recall caddying for Jack at places like St. Arnaud, Donald, Charlton, Wedderburn and Wycheproof. By now there were five of us and as educational facilities were limited in Birchip Jack took up a transfer as Postmaster at Ballarat East in 1963. We became members at the Mt. Xavier golf club and this is where I obtained my first handicap. Jack and Kath both had success here as well and both won their respective club championships in the four years we were members there. Jack also represented Ballarat at country week.

Jack and Kath's first contact with Gippsland was in 1962 when Kath's brother was married at Mirboo North. They found Gippsland to be a complete contrast to Birchip in the Mallee and Drouin made a big impression on them as they drove through on the old highway. Little did they realise in 1966 the Postmaster's position at Drouin became vacant and they decided Drouin was the place for them and the family.

The first impressions of the Drouin Golf Club way back then were not too flattering. There was no clubhouse, the course was a sea of mud and water and the car park was a quagmire. To make matters worse on their first visit to the club Kath slipped over in the mud and ruined a set of clothes. Warragul Golf Club looked to be a much better proposition and it may well have been had a house sale in Warragul not fallen through. However, word must have got around that the new Drouin postmaster was a golfer and club treasurer and ANZ bank manager, Cam Sheffield, and wife, Ena, issued a personal invitation to play in a mixed event at the club.

From there it was immediately obvious what a special place the Drouin Golf Club is and has been right to this day. Kath and Jack were members until Jack retired as Postmaster at Warragul in the mid 1980's and re-located to Yarrawonga.”

Shane would have been quite happy to leave the story there but there is actually quite a bit more to be said. In 2012, the newsletter carried this tribute about his mother.

“When Kath died last month, the Club lost not only a Champion golfer but a Champion person.

When Kath and husband Jack arrived in 1966, the Club had only been going eleven years since reforming in 1955. A full eighteen hole lay out with grass greens had only been achieved in 1963 and our own Club House was not constructed until 1967. On top of that, the course compared poorly with Warragul only 10 kilometres up the highway.

Kath was one of the many hard working members at this time who made sure the Club survived and then prospered to what it has become today.

As a golfer, Kath enjoyed considerable success at both the Club and West Gippsland level. Her most significant achievement was to win our Club Championship six times. Interestingly, on every occasion Jack, or son Shane, won the Men’s Championship those same years. She also won the West Gippsland Championship. There was a victory in the Warragul Championship which gave her particular pleasure. She was penalised two strokes for hitting off in front of the markers but there was a suspicion that Warragul members had not alerted her to the danger. She also formed a fearsome combination with Jack winning many Mixed Foursome events often against Shane and Eileen Smith, another of our Club legends.

One of her strengths as a player was that she was never rattled. Eileen Smith remembers the Warragul incident well and said that all it did was to make her grit her teeth and try harder. Eileen had many a battle with Kath as, along with Alma Pepperell, they took it in turns to win the Championship. Eileen said that her success came from hard work too. A lady of faith, it was often Mass in the morning on Sundays followed by Pennant practice in the afternoon.

For Eileen, she was, “a popular member who played a highly competitive game but always in the best spirit.” Doesn’t that sound just a bit like Shane? Jack apparently was a little more demonstrative.

John White remembers her as, “a generous, quite lovely lady. She was friendly and approachable and always interested in others.”

To her many friends, Kath will be sorely missed.”

Jack hardly suffered in comparison. His achievements and character qualities were as impressive. At his best he played off a handicap of two and at one stage held the Drouin course record of 65 when par was 70. There were many individual successes but perhaps the best was winning 19 Club Championships at three different clubs – Drouin (6), Birchip (11) and Mt Xavier (2). He also represented three districts at Country Week – West Gippsland, Kara Kara and Ballarat. He made the quarterfinals of the Australian Seniors Championship. It is not known but you would like to imagine that one of his proudest achievements would have been to have won foursome trophies with wife, Kath, and sons, Shane, Chris and Marcus.

As a golfer he was a remarkably good tee to green player using to particular effect a two iron to keep the ball low and straight. It is interesting to ponder what he would have done with the modern equipment available today. After all he played in the era when the ball was small and the clubs had wooden heads. Surprisingly, he was only a moderate putter. Usually champions excel at this part of the game.

He made up for this with his determination. He was never beaten. Temperamentally he was little more volatile than Shane or Kath which probably meant that a poor shot produced an, “Oh bother.”

It is hard to imagine a Dwyer getting angry on the course. Liam laughs when he puts the ball in the pond.

His talents extended beyond the golf course. He was a very good tennis player as was Kath. He also played a mean game of billiards – but not snooker. Why? He was colour blind. Shane said it puzzled him for years because his father wouldn't ever admit to the problem. It just shows he was human. He was human in another way too: despite playing low marker golf for more than fifty years he never made an official hole in one. The one time he did was with Kath when they were having a casual hit one day. Now that should encourage the majority of you. You can still be a champion without achieving that feat. Unfortunately, as the others of you can testify, simply scoring that elusive shot doesn't make you a champion. Regardless, there is no disputing Jack's claim to greatness.

The third member of the trio of course is son Shane. His achievements are equally as impressive perhaps made more so because they have all been achieved at our Club while Kath and Jack were members elsewhere. When he became a life member in 2012 this was said about him.

“In 1966 St Kilda won its only premiership and Shane joined the Club. In the time since Shane has enjoyed just a little bit more success than the poor old Saints.

He has won the Club Championship a record ten times - including six in a row - and the Senior Championship six times. No one will bet that he won't increase these numbers before he finishes. Of course when he wasn't winning another member of the Dwyer family probably was. Father, Jack, won seven Championships, Mum, Kath won six and brothers, Marcus and Chris, won Junior and B Grade Championships respectively. Was it a trophy cabinet or room that the Dwyer had to store the silver wear?

This publication only runs to four pages so there is no room to list all of his successes. Here are some highlights. With Jack, he won the A Rogers Shield in 1977. He formed a fearsome partnership with another life member, Eileen Smith, to win the mixed foursomes in 1969, 1981, 1982, 1983 and 1984. He was Captain of the victorious 1991 Division I Pennant team. This victory was the first and only time it has been achieved by the Club. He considers his best achievement was winning the amateur title at the Shepparton Pro Am.

He is a one-time course record holder. In 1973 off 4 and when the course rating was 70, he recorded a 66 off the stick for a nett 62.

He was a regular member of the West Gippsland Country Week team. To gain selection it means you have to be recognised outside of your club so it is an honour indeed. It is believed that he played the time when they won three in a row and perhaps when they won five times out of six. There was certainly one year when he was undefeated. He definitely was a member in 1972 and 1981 which gives him ample opportunity to have been selected on numerous other occasions.

His activities have not been just restricted to the game; he has always made a contribution off the course. He was the Assistant secretary in 1971 1972, 1973, 1979, and 1980 He served on the General committee in 1976, 1977, 1978, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2009, 2010, and 2011. In recent times he has been on the Match Committee and Course development Committee.

The records tell only half of the story. He has been a superb ambassador for the game of golf and for the Club. His demeanour on the course has been exemplary. He has willingly involved himself in all aspects of the Club. If you were looking for model member it would be hard to go past Shane.”

Other Dwyer members of the family have played their part. Brother, Marcus, was a member of the victorious Junior Pennant team in 1971 – the first achieved by the Club. He also won a Junior Club Championship. Another brother, Chris, won a B grade Championship. And then of course there is Liam. He will probably struggle to win a Championship. After all when he tees off on the 12th the out of bounds one fairway removed on the left, the dam on the far right and the drain right in front are all in danger. Does he care about such errant shots? Of course not. He was probably still talking about cars on the downswing. However, there wouldn't be a more natural, or popular person in the Club than Liam. In his own unique way he has contributed to the Dwyer legacy.

Perhaps the last words should belong to Shane.

“I am extremely proud to say my involvement with the Drouin Golf and Country Club has been continuous since 1966, and along with my son Liam, hope that continues for many years to come.”

Written by George Shand