

TOM CARROLL

“I first joined the club as an 18 year old in 1962. At that time the course was nine holes with sand scrapes. The 1st tee was back behind where the 10th tee is now. You hit across the race course to the green where the big tree is on the corner of the 10th fairway. The fairways were just natural grass, extremely rough in texture. The entire course (nine holes) was within the race track. I distinctly recall in winter it was often like a bog. One Saturday all four of us drove off and all four lost our ball, buried somewhere in the fairway. When it dried out, crabs would burrow so there were mounds of clay about 8 inches high and the same in diameter everywhere. They were particularly a nuisance on the 16th. One day I counted 70 of them. We punished them by smashing them with a club as we walked along.

At the time the club used the current race club building as our headquarters. If you enjoyed a drink after the game it was BYO. You would write your name on your bottle of beer and place it in the fridge to enjoy after the game. This was an honour system that did not always work well. It was common to go to the fridge only to discover someone had got there before you and drunk one of your beers.

Later on, I think in the sixties, land was acquired on what we now refer to as the back nine. Grass greens were constructed and teams of 4 or 5 were allocated to look after a green. I was part of publican Pat Gleeson’s team and we looked after the 22nd. We would come out when required to weed and water while it was becoming established. Today I note that it has sunk to what it was originally.

I came on to the Committee in 2000 and was part of the development of the new nine holes opened in 2002. This created a lot of excitement and has gradually become more enjoyable, particularly as it allows for playing 3 different courses. This is a luxury that goes unnoticed by many members. The introduction of the extra nine holes however has become a challenge for the Committee. In the early eighties when the Committee of the day purchased the neighbouring land they anticipated that within ten years by building the extra holes it would lift our membership to 1000.

This was a fair assumption at the time, but as we now know this has not come to fruition. The challenge now is to maintain a 27 hole golf course. Regardless of what happens in the future the decision taken back then has proven to be a tremendous asset.

I took over as President in 2003. Looking back I now realise what a difficult four year term I had. There was the unexpected burden of having to pay \$189,000 on a new watering system and then the agro from a small band of members who were hell bent on dividing the Committee. Fortunately for the Club, many have chosen to go elsewhere but it did take its toll on my health.

Over the years the working relationship with the Race Club has been, to say the least, very testing. Personally, I believe that at times the Golf Club has been less than cooperative. Both entities have equal rights to Matthew Bennett Park. Just because we are large and more commercial does not give us extraordinary rights. For instance, we are not supposed to have trees above 2 metres in height within the confines of the track. Clearly we have thumbed our noses at this.

As President I pride myself on settling the waters between the clubs. We had meetings between the two clubs with the mayor as the chairman. These meetings helped to settle a few old scores and produced an agreement to move onto more amicable times ... well mainly. One Saturday meeting sticks in my mind. As our small contingent moved towards their representatives near the Steward’s tower, a Race Club lady opened fire on me raising every bit of dirty linen she could recall. It was only when I threatened to walk away that their President, Edwin Batt, gathered his thoughts and we were able to progress. Since then I think the relationship has been OK.

Our history is an interesting one dating back to the early 1900's and of course having the Honourable Michael Scott as an early member and the first winner of the Australian Open. This is something we should make much more of.

I remember going out to Drouin West with the late Gerry Butler and him showing me where Scott and Gerry's father plus a small contingent played on the Butler farm (six holes played three times.) This meant hitting over barbed wire fences. He was able to show me two spots where you could still see where they had formed a mound of soil to form a green. They were certainly primitive conditions.

I particularly recall how after reforming the Club in 1955, the immense amount of work done by members in working bees. Mick DeVries and Jack Cuthbertson are two who come to mind who gave their time and equipment to form fairways, greens and dams. Their generosity saved the Club thousands of dollars. I recall an occasion coming out and looking forward to a game of golf one Sunday only to be told, "There's no golf today. Here, grab a shovel."

The original club house which was extended several times was also built largely by volunteers with Peter DeVries very much to the fore."

Of course what Tom has forgotten to mention is that even though he is a left hander and a Collingwood supporter he is a pretty fair golfer. Off a handicap of four, at one stage he could have laid claims to be the best left hander in the Club although no doubt Anthony would have disputed that. He was good enough at one time to have held the course record of 66.

His talents went well beyond the golf course. His cricketing ability was more than just forming a dangerous opening batting partnership with one of the Club's favourite sons, Lindsay Rippon. He played District Cricket with Richmond. With two centuries at that level he must have been under consideration for State selection. He also played in three winning football premierships with Halora-Strzlecki in the early seventies and won the Ellinbank goal kicking award on three occasions. In these endeavours he was usually involved in the administration as well and has four life memberships of different associations and most proudly, a Federal Government honour for services to cricket.

He was coaxed by a group of members to nominate for Committee in 2000 because of his experience in other sporting committees including a stint as treasurer of the Warragul Cricket Association when only 18. He served as President for four years from 2003 at a time when the Club gave a good impression of being at war with itself. In his story he talks of the toll this period took on his health.

He must be a sucker for punishment because of course he is our current Captain. This is an often thankless task which requires humour and patience. After all, you are responsible for everything that goes wrong. Or is that the President's role? Anyway Tom discovered the pitfalls in 2012 when he cancelled a round of the Club Championship before the round was even played. Why? He believed the weather forecast which promised torrential rain. Rain we got but not torrential. An ordinary round was played in the mud and slush but there was more mud on Tom's face. His apology was abject and appropriate.

Tom is a "lifer" having been associated with the Club for 50 years and a member for about 30 years. In that time he has been a great worker and clubman.

Written by George Shand