

## BERNACE MILLER

Bernie joined the Club in 1974. A complete novice, she was introduced to the game by Ethel Mapleson, the wife of long time Secretary and Committeeman, Hugh Mapleson. Ethel was the Avon lady at the time. For those of you too young to remember, Avon was a cosmetic company that often sold their products door to door with a catch cry of, "Avon calling." With Ethel at her side she completed in her very first Ladies Day. It would be nice to say that she tore the course apart. Alas that was not the case. Her card that day included a 22 on the current 15<sup>th</sup> (the dam probably featured in that score) and she was so tired that the family ended up with fish and chips for tea that night.

The 22 didn't matter because she was hooked. Whatever there is about an adult activity that involves chasing a small white ball over hill and dale and in all sorts of awful weather until it eventually ends up in hole made complete sense to her – as it does to all of us who love the game. Although largely self-taught, over the years there were some lessons and she managed to reduce her handicap to 14. She was proud of this accomplishment but wanted it made clear that it amused her more that it was only for just one day.

As a golfer she was a long hitter and good around the greens. At the Club level if you can chip and putt well then you are always in great shape. Beyond that though was her determination. Long-time friend, Peg Hocking, said, "She is super competitive, very good company on the course but more than capable of the odd sledge if the occasion warranted it."

In her 38 years of playing she has never had a hole-in-one. She shouldn't be concerned about this though: Jack Dwyer who won 19 Club Championships at three different clubs didn't manage this feat either. She did manage three B Grade Championships which most would rate well above the luck of the one occasion in your life when the ball does as it is told.

Her greatest achievement though was participating in seven Pennant victories. Golf is often a lonely game – you play against the course, the elements and yourself. When you win it is usually a surprise because you have little idea of what others are doing. Pennant, with its match play format, is different. You are part of a team and often finish a game with team mates in tow. Often, too, you are aware of the overall match scores and can feel the pressure of not wanting to let your mates down. Seven victories says a lot about the character of Bernie.

The sweetest one was when she captained the first Division One team to victory in 2003. The team comprised M Purcell, L Hoskins A-M. Lang, M Milne, M Leighton, J Benchley and of course. Bernie. Against Traralgon at Trafalgar the team won 5 and 2. As importantly it gave the ladies equal bragging rights with the men who had their inaugural win when Shane Dwyer led the Division One team to victory in 1991. Since then the women have repeated the feat (2006) while the men are still lamenting. This shouldn't be a competition of course but the women are always keen to point out that with twelve Pennant victories they have twice as many as the men. The men's attempt to swell their numbers by including the three Junior wins is laughed off.

Golf is only partly about what happens on the course. The Club she joined in 1974 was reasonably secure in that since its re-formation in 1955 a full eighteen hole course had been constructed (1963) and a Club House built (1967). However money was always tight and when things needed to be it was by dint of hard work - by the men on the course and the women off the course particularly through their catering and fund raising. In return you got an improving golf course but more importantly a wonderfully vibrant social centre. For many members of that time the Golf Club became central to their lives. Monica and Gerry Butler filled that category. Both were wonderfully warm hearted people for whom Bernace was proud to be considered a friend.

It was hard not to get involved in administration too. Bernie served three years as Captain, two as Vice-Captain and two as President. Time was also spent as Assistant Secretary. More importantly she has always been involved. In the old days, the women had a wind up when a bus was hired to play at another Club. After the game was played out would come the picnic lunch and the year's trophies awarded. When it was suggested that it sounded a bit like a Football end of year trip the comparison was accepted although, "a little more refined."

Bernace was also one of the originals who got the Club involved in the annual pilgrimage to Merimbula. This is still one of the highlights of the year for many of our players. It is a really friendly tournament attracting the same players for many years so that friendships are formed from all walks of life. In the early days it was serious stuff. An early round followed by lunch and then off to Bega for another round in the afternoon. Nowadays the pace is more sedate. This year the afternoon game was skipped and time was spent visiting the local cemetery.

Bernie is still a regular. Usually twice a week she is to be seen on the course. She may have slowed down a tad - a cart is needed- but she still hits a mean ball. More than this after half a life time of the game she still wants to chase that blessed white thing down the hole. And she still wants to remain in touch with the many friends golf has provided. And yes the spelling of her name is correct. Long ago she found it easier to answer to Bernie or Bernice rather than offer a correction.

**Written by George Shand**