

Interview with Ian Brown:

Life member, Past President and Secretary:

How did you originally become involved with Fitzroy Baseball Club ?

Originally I was asked to come down to the club by my late ex brother in law Jack (John) Plant in 1963 who was President of the club and catcher in the firsts. I gave up racing my bike due to having a young family and commitments. I started as the scorer for the thirds and as it turned out the team was often short of players so I decided to start playing at the age of 33. I returned to cycling in 1977 and for a number of years I cycled on Sunday morning and played baseball in the afternoon until I stopped playing baseball in 1984.

What year did you start as an office bearer in the club ?

When the late Jim Beitzel became President after Jack Plant, I was Secretary for 5 years in the 1970s and then followed Jim as President of the club in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I recall that when I was President we moved from William Barr Oval around 1982/83 to the ground opposite where Northcote played baseball and had a turf wicket in summer.

During that time, baseball was run by the VBA, (Victorian Baseball Association) did you have much to do with the administration of the game then ?

In those days Jim and I would attend Presidents and Secretaries meetings run by the VBA (Victorian Baseball Association). Ron Smith was VBA President and eventually I became a member of the VBA Council, so on some issues we had differences of opinion one notably involving an umpire not being allocated future Fitzroy games. I had to wear 2 hats one as a club representative making the complaint and the other as a VBA councillor ruling on it.

Did members of your family also make significant contributions to the club ?

Well my wife at the time Marcia was a great supporter of the club with our 3 young daughters and a very good scorer for a number of years at club level and with State junior teams. Our eldest daughter Janine who was a very good softball player played a game of baseball to fill in as the team was short one game. Upon finding out the VBA were going to penalise us match points and even fine us. She was the first female to play in a men's baseball game at the time possibly in Victoria. The club responded to the VBA by threatening to go to the Victorian anti discrimination board. Not surprisingly the VBA backed off and allowed her to continue to play baseball where she more than held her own against the men. My other 2 daughters, Robyn and Kerryn also contributed as scorers for a number of club teams

Do you have some fond memories of playing for the club ?

Yes, I played all my games with the thirds. Not having started until I was 33, Graham Moss suggested I should have the strongest arm in the club having rested it for 33 years. (so far from the truth!) In 1970 the thirds made the finals and played the Preliminary final against

Newport. We were trailing 9-3 with 2 out and bases loaded in the last innings. Some one hit a routine pop fly to shortstop to end the game, however an experienced player at 3rd base called out to the young SS to watch the runner taking his eye off the ball and dropped the easy catch ! With all runners on base going with 2 outs we scored 2 runs on the play and then went on to score 4 more runs with 2 out and win 10 -9. In the grand final we went on to easily defeat the top team Sandringham 10-2 for the premiership.

One other memory is turning up to watch the firsts playing Sunshine as we had a walkover nearby that day. Our American pitcher had to leave during the game and being one short, Frank Hanlon came up to me and said Brownie you're batting! So at the age of 42, I made my A grade debut for Fitzroy and flied out to deep centerfield, my one and only turn at bat in A grade and then played right field where thankfully no balls were hit for the rest of the game. Frank had a go at the rest of the team for not hitting the ball that day against Sunshine and that a 42 year old rookie showed us how to do it.

Who were some of the players that had a big influence on the club during your time ?

In the early days, when baseball was a Winter sport we had a number of very good cricketers from Fitzroy CC, of course the **Harvey brothers**, then **Merv Harvey's** sons **Jeff** (father of St Kilda footballer Robert Harvey) **and Graham Harvey** playing during my time. I recall one game against Preston at Merri Park, Frank Hanlon hit a very long flyball to LF (open park baseball) Jeff "Feathers" Harvey was the runner at 2nd, touched up at 2nd base and he scored on the flyball !

Frank Hanlon was a great acquisition having played in a winning A grade premiership with South Melbourne, determined with a win at all costs attitude and a great power hitter. **Eddie Illingworth** a former all Australian pitcher and fine district cricketer was great mate of **Jim Beitzel** (ex Claxton shield catcher while playing with Prahran) played 1st base superbly for many years. **John (Jack) Plant** was a great catcher and contact hitter, astute and knew the game. I admired his character staying calm and in control during games. **Ross Stephens** not the most gifted player, but an honest, reliable RH pitcher and handy LH batter. Of course **Graham Moss** had an enormous influence, a great guy who put in the time to develop the juniors, those kids he coached looked up to him and on the playing field as a long ball hitter and fine defensive 1st baseman.

There was the influx of Americans over the years that helped lift the club. **Billy Bush** a fine LH pitcher, **Duane Baker** RH sidearm pitcher who pitched a winning Grand Final against Sunshine to gain promotion to A grade and later on **Howie Norsetter** who returned from the US to play for Fitzroy for a number of years and even coach the club.

When I first came to the club in 1963, we had the Claxton Shield battery, Doug Provis pitching to Norm "Tex" Robinson, however they left to play with Melbourne, a big loss for the club at the time and then getting relegated to B grade shortly afterwards.

Do you have any other funny stories to tell ?

Well one involves watching a club game with Ted Sedgman, we were having a few beers both during and after the game. Ted was driving back from the game when we were pulled up by the police, Ted's beer can was still on the dashboard. I grabbed the can to point out it was my can, however they still breath tested Ted who was well over the limit. Instead of

booking Ted, the copper told Ted to drive straight home. We figured the police were finishing the shift and just wanted to clock off for the day !

The other one was during one of our End of Season Trips. As Club President I gave the boys a "peptalk "about behaving themselves on the trip except that I finished up flat on my back after a big night, much to the amusement of Lloyd Ingram at the time.

A kids television program that was screened on Saturday mornings was called TV T- Ball on Channel Nine with a mascot and a well known female presenter Miss ? who enjoyed sipping on her gin and tonic during the TV coverage. We entered a combined team of Fitzroy and Waverley kids, Laurie was the coach and I was the team manager. We won the competition and were presented with our medals on TV at the end of the series.

When the Linton brothers played at Fitzroy, younger brother Matty used to pitch and he would tell the umpire to hold his spare baseball glove. He would start pitching with one hand and at some point swap his glove to pitch with the other hand!

In those days all the kids in a junior team would pile into my VW Beetle when we played away games, that's right up to 9 players with me the driver in my VW Bug.

What do you think about the club today and recent success back in Division 1?

Well the club administration should be commended on the club's success and the number of teams that the club is fielding each week is unbelievable compared to my day when we struggled to field 3 Senior teams (often short of players) and 2 to 3 Junior teams.

Have you enjoyed returning to the club to attend Life Members events and catching up with fellow Life Members ?

It has been great to see them back at club functions, a big plus and well worth coming to events. I would love to get to more games during the season but the size of my family and associated commitments has kept me pretty busy.

Finally as a Past President and Life Member, I encourage the club to keep heading the way we're going and the teams will continue to achieve success.

Thanks Ian for sharing the story and memories of your time at Fitzroy Baseball Club, we hope to see you down at the club in future, particularly at Life Member events.