

Interview with Peter Hooper:

Life member and long serving Past President of Fitzroy Baseball CLUB (interview February 2018):

What were your sporting interests when you were growing up Peter ?

I started playing cricket at Fitzroy Cricket Club as a 15 year old and played till I was 29 years old then retired from playing to take up District cricket umpiring. Within 3 years I was umpiring District 1sts cricket which I did over the next 14 seasons.

During my time at the cricket club in 1948 I can recall meeting brothers Ross and Lyn Straw, Graeme Deany, Bernie Considine, Jack Potter, Eddie Illingworth and all the Harvey brothers who were great baseballers as well as cricketers.

How did your family get started at Fitzroy Baseball Club ?

When I left the cricket club my 2 young sons Ian and Greg started playing local football with Glenroy Football Club. Jimmy Beitzel, who was a good friend invited both my boys to give baseball a try at Fitzroy Baseball Club. So with the support of my late wife Joan (who is also a Life Member of the club) Ian and Greg started playing at the same time in different age groups.

Joan would help with the team that Graham Moss coached, she picked up half the team for away games and Graham the rest in their cars. Graham was the person who introduced the Collingwood flats boys John King, Steven Brooke, Billy Linton, Paul Farris, Wayne Pollock and Norm McHenry to baseball at Fitzroy.

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

A year later after my two boys started playing in the juniors at Fitzroy I came down to the club to watch my sons play as a parent. At the end of the season I was asked to take over as President of the club next season. I was President for a number of years, we moved from William Barr oval behind Northcote High School to the Northcote ground where Northcote District 3rds and 4ths played. We fixed up the inside of the shed behind the back net, fitted out the room with furniture and seating from my auction rooms including large commercial fridges. We were offered the current ground and new pavilion, then decided to move on my recommendations to go ahead with the move.

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

My late wife Joan helped Graham Moss with the junior teams and ran the canteen for many years as manageress. She attended Ian and Greg's junior games, organised the uniform tops of the teams. Ian played juniors through to the U/18s and as a senior mainly in the 2nd nine and a few games in the 1sts, he was a solid second base, in the end gave up playing for family reasons. Greg played virtually all his summer seasons at Fitzroy except for one season at Malvern and came back to catch in the firsts. One of his big fans was Frank Trucchio. Greg was a very good catcher who blocked the ball well and had a strong arm. Greg coached a number of junior teams and also coached the second nine.

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

Some players that I remember were Frank Hanlon, John King the best defensive centrefielder I have seen play, Norm McHenry as a catcher, George Bolin a great hitter and his brother Jim Bolin as a good pitcher, Jimmy Bolkas and our American imports Duane Baker, Horton Roach a hard throwing pitcher who loved to bat and Howie Norsetter a great contact hitter who coached the club for a few seasons. I believe that our American players contributed to our club's development. I also recall one of the Harvey brothers Brian Harvey who was a bit of a larrikin, died at a young age when electrocuted at work potentially he could have been one of the best of the Harvey brothers.

You mentioned that you were a Victorian district cricket umpire for many years, do you have any stories as an umpire during that time ?

There were a number of cricket greats that I umpired in district cricket. Alan "Froggy" Thomson who I "no balled" in a game, Bill Lawry a very hard competitive man who liked fast balling, Keith Stackpole who I was threatening to report for disputing my decision, Paul Sheahan a right hand version of Neil Harvey, Bob Cowper, Barney Jones father of Dean Jones, Jackie Rose captain of Collingwood said I needed a seeing eye dog for a decision at the bowlers end. Later off the field he apologised and said he was only trying to test me out in my first game at District firsts level.

How did you find dealing with the VBA (Baseball Victoria) in those days as President of the club ?

When I was president Ron Smith was VBA president and Paul Collins was running the VBA. I recall only too well in 1987/88 season we were demoted to 2nd division from 1st Division during the season over not fulfilling our junior team requirements. It went to court and the court ruled in favour of the VBA despite other clubs in Division 1 also not meeting the junior requirements. It was a stressful time and very emotional issue and affected my work in the auction rooms. As a result the club nearly folded and we ended up in Division 4 scraping together 2 teams with no support from the VBA. I feel they wanted to support the clubs from the other side of the Yarra and expand baseball into the outer suburbs of Melbourne. When the VBA were looking for a new home for baseball, I spoke to the Northcote City engineer about using the old Northcote tip site in Separation Street and even Boeing Reserve in Essendon airport but Ron Smith decided to opt for Altona where it is today. After all these events I was thinking about giving the Presidency away, it was affecting my health and auction business. I told the committee that I would not be standing for the Presidency and recommended John King to take over next season.

On the playing side even though I was an ex cricketer I decided to stay away from playing baseball and watch the game my sons started playing. I must admit I was known to be a little vocal towards the baseball umpires (as an ex cricket umpire !) but no worse than old Ed Evans always yelling out to steal, steal, steal !!!

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

I believe the club resurgence started with the Teeball Centre at the Brunswick Street Oval when many kids started playing the game with the help people like the Arnotts, Wyatts , Wilsons and other baseball families.

Today the club is in a very good position, there are plenty of juniors, the lower teams are very competitive and the firsts have done well in Division 1. We are fortunate at Fitzroy Baseball Club as we are willing to encourage and support our players of all ages to play and stay at our family club. We have senior players that are good role models to look up to for our young players which will help with our success in the future.

I am happy the way the club is heading and being run by the committee and confident it will continue into the future.

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

Of all the events for Life Members, this year's event at the end of the 2017/18 season has been the best so far and the event is going from strength to strength each year.

I do have one suggestion for a future event.

Let's have a Women's event each year so that they feel part of the club and valued whether a player, parent, wife, girlfriend of a player or past member of the club

A wine and nibbles or an afternoon tea. Send invitations to all the women in the club via mail, email or other media.

Peter, it has been a pleasure to catch up with you and share the story of your time at Fitzroy Baseball Club. As a valued Life Member, former long serving President, your late wife Joan a Life member and father of Ian and Greg a life member, it has been an incredible effort and service to our club to have three Life Members in the Hooper family.