

## Youth framing the future for Briars Hockey

Some of the History of Briars Hockey since the 70's

In 1975 Briars decided to sponsor and provide coaching to the junior cricket teams at Croydon Cricket Club to establish links within the wider community. With new team kit in the back of his wagon, Kevin Holley took on the U/16 team and Aldo Cantori the U/14s.

As the season progressed many of these U/16 boys began playing lower grades in the Shires teams and in doing so met the likes of Bob Streeter, David Walker, Mike, Derek and Nigel Sterry, Dave Jamieson and others who also played hockey for Briars. As the cricket season concluded, the Croydon Cricket boys were invited to try their skills at hockey which was played each Saturday morning in winter and some were silly enough to take up the offer.

Each Saturday morning Bobby Streeter would pull up outside homes in his Torana SLR5000 or Sandman Wagon, while Dave Jamieson would collect the Homebush High boys in the back of his TNT courier's wagon. The team gathered to go play hockey with 8am starts in the cow paddocks of Kellyville and Rydalmere. Once the game was completed it was off to the pub for lunch (at about age 15) en-route to the men's games in the afternoon. The consumption of beer before the afternoon games seemed like a sensible idea - and for us 15 year olds it was very exciting (even though it tasted awful at first). This vintage of Briars juniors included the likes of Peter Jones, Sandor and Lazlo Kovacs, Col and Paul Huggett, Mal Shorter, John Price and Russel Roberts to name a few.

Most of the juniors would then double up and play in the seniors at various levels. Those afternoon Men's games were played all over Sydney but our home ground was Burwood Park. Location wise this was perfect, 1-minute drive from the Club where beer was almost cheaper than water, and soft drinks were only 10c each - what a time to be alive!

There were so many great characters that played for Briars Seniors that took these juniors under their wings, Bobby Streeter - every boy's hero, the fearsome Keith Harvey and the 4 Jokers - Ian Wade, Alan 'Fish' Fisher, 'Limpy' Bob Bauman and Warren 'Pardo' Partington who always kept them entertained. The Sterry brothers and the flying Huggetts all passed on lots of skills to the juniors, Warren Widger also ferried them to many games and taught Laz lots about goalkeeping, as did Graeme 'GT' Trevenar. There were also so many great hitters of the ball like Kevin Holley, Geoff Gorton and Ronnie Hodge & Dave Jamo who gave us good tips too and all around nice guys like Ian Sullivan, Andre Declase, Paul Mackay, Greg McIntyre, Steve Schomberg and Peter Mansford who encouraged us all to keep playing.

Let's not forget those controversial 'Rosebuds' - wives, girlfriends and their friends formed a team under the Briars banner for a few years - if you can't beat 'em, join 'em they said - this was Briars first ever female team.

The \$1 sausage sangers after the game were always a treat and helped fill in the time till the big boys played. Watching Streeter, Shorter, the Sterry's, Keith Harvey, Ross Hugget, Andre Declase, Warren Widger, Dave Jamo, Kevin Holley trying to work out the bounce of a very uneven Burwood Park was always a great way to spend a winter Saturday afternoon.

Playing on Burwood Park was a nightmare, mostly for the opposition, who didn't know its intricacies. The soil covered cricket pitch when it rained was an awesome advantage to Briars players, excellent for hitting mud into the eyes of the opposition and running away with the ball. Bobby wasn't happy though when a rising ball smashed him in the mouth and sent him to hospital for plenty of stitches.

Briars were in about 2<sup>nd</sup> division in the 70's, but that was enough to keep those cricketers fit in the offseason.

It was 1984 and Rob Wood arrived at Holy Cross College to recruit junior hockey players for Briars. Nine young men decided to give it a go and we became the Briars U15 junior team that was at the forefront of the hockey renaissance of the 80's. Briar's junior hockey ranks swelled in the 80's and many players started their Briars journey during this period.

In the late 80's Sandor Kovacs coached the U17s that mostly came from Holy Cross College, Ryde. The core of that team being Greg Dunn and Ian Reynolds who still play for Briars today more than 30 years later. In 1988 the team controversially decided they wanted to stay together as a senior's team rather than splitting up even though many of them could have played for Premier Division.

Junior Team Mates: Ian Reynolds, Martin Wood, James Ryan and Daniel Thiele would form the backbone for the club to build on over the coming decade. In the late 80's, they played alongside much loved Briars hockey legends including - Bob Streeter, Sandor and Lazlo Kovacs, Gerard and Paul Price, Russell Roberts, Paul Huggett, Peter Jones, Wayne Allsop and the Sterry brothers.

Everyone who played hockey for Briars has one or two June Long Weekend Canberra Trip memories. The bi-annual trip south pitted us against the boys from Barton/Valleys and introduced us to another family name synonymous with hockey, the Pikes - Bob, Tim and Darren. The matches were tough, but nothing compared to the next day hangovers most endured on these trips.

In the early 90's then chairman, Lazlo Kovacs, recruited a man who brought a new level of excellence to Briars Hockey, Tom Persson. Tom took us to a Premiership in 1993 and loved the Briars club, especially the old George Street bar. This period set the platform from which the modern hockey club was launched. Tommy added a new professionalism to the club that had never been seen before. The hardened, successful approach he brought from his days at Moorebank took the club to another level and the strategy and intense training led to a memorable 5-3 grand final win over Northern Districts in the 1993 Grand Final.

The club lost a host of that 1<sup>st</sup> grade side after that win with Dunny, Reynolds, Woody and others leaving the club, anxious to test their skills at the top level of Hockey in Sydney. So for the 1994 season Paul Price, being one of the few remaining from the 1993 Premierships winning side, took over as skipper. We welcomed four of the Head family - Chris(Father), Jonathan, Alex and Nathan, and combined with some past players this volatile team somehow managed to make it two 1<sup>st</sup> grade premierships in a row with an impressive Grand Final win in 1994. The Club also won back to back Club Championships across 93/94. The remainder of the 90's, following this success, were fairly lean and the club somehow hung on to survive a tough few years.