

Mal Weber life and times at Briars

Mal Weber's first connection with the Briars was in 1976, when his family moved into the area, as his dad, Doug, took over as manager of the pub on the next corner. Now Briars members were always interested in anyone who had a connection with a pub and so Mal and his brother Greg were welcomed with open arms. As his dad happened to be a good bloke then the relationship was cemented. So Mal nominated for club membership. He had his first season playing for the club in the centres under the coaching of an iconic character, Barry Larkin, whose comments on Mal's season were visionary.

He noted that *"Mal was a strong and talented footballer who lost his Kentwell spot right at the end of the season due to a continuing run of indifferent form. But how consistent a footballer would you be if your old man owned a pub? Keen to move back to his accustomed back row position regardless of his boyish good looks!!"*

Mal actually took over the Kentwell centre position held by Chris Murray the previous season. Chris later moved on to play breakaway. Regardless they remained good friends.

It is fair to say that Mal instantly fitted into the Briars mould, he was a solid and popular player, both on and off the field, over many years and made many lifelong friendships. Of course he was instantly spotted as Snr Bar steward material for the club. Initially in an unofficial capacity he officially took over the role for a number of years from 1978, the year in which his full membership was granted. He also served on the club's Management committee for a number of years

Mal was a regular Kentwell cup player from 1976 until 1985. He was awarded the Gordon Bevan Shield in 1978. The shield is presented each year to the footballer, who in the opinion of the club, has done most towards football and the club in general.

Mal played in a couple of Kentwell cup sides that almost 'did the business'....finalists in a Keith Wearne coached side in 1980 and grand finalists in a fine side in 1985 coached by Bruce Robinson. This was probably Mal's best season and as the coach remarked *"Mal Weber – Centre..What a comeback – The Michael Hawker of the Briars, Mal always made the advantage line. Great defensive effort throughout the season."*

Mal also dallied in cricket and played 3rd grade between 1976 and 1980

The annual report in 1976 noted that Mal *"was an opening bowler, beautiful run-up. Nice action, fast pace. ...lacks the killer ball which his brother Greg can produce. Has some very fine bowling performances to his credit, the best being 12 overs, 2 maidens, 5 wickets, 25 runs against Lane Cove."*

In 1979, Mal enjoyed a Rugby tour of the United States, a tour whose stories and tails have become Briars folk lore and by which all subsequent tours have been compared. Perhaps one day he will be encouraged to tell his version of the many escapades the tourists enjoyed that have been whispered in late night bar discussions.

As Mal's playing career closed he kept a keen interest in the operation of the Briars Club. He was especially interested in Rugby. On returning to the Briars scene after a stint in Western Australia, Mal combined his love for Briars and his business interests. He and his company became major sponsors of Rugby in the late 1990's. He played a pivotal role in obtaining good qualified coaches and ensuring the rugby teams were provided with adequate kit and a stream of new players.

He initiated BOOM for rugby in late 90's which rejuvenated rugby for a successful period and ensured that old rugby players didn't forget their old club. Rumour has it that older members bought "the most expensive supporters shirts and caps in history" off Mal to allow rugby to flourish for another generation of Briar's members. But can anyone remember what BOOM stood for?, the writer of this missive certainly cannot remember.

Mal was asked to become a Board member of Briars representing rugby from 2000-2002. This was a period in which it was becoming clear that the old ways in which our great club operated required review and some hard decisions needed to be taken. Club presidents and the board members had for some time been presented with a new set of operational circumstances. These were years of declining trading figures and licensing law pressures. For example the introduction of RSA for bar staff was problematic for a club operating with a 24 hr license and only honorary bar service. The introduction of women membership meant that the club facility itself needed review. The location of the club at Burwood whilst all our playing facilities were in another municipality needed discussion. Attendance at the club had been declining for years and our investments and rent from the Burwood premises were now of particular significance.

Mal Weber became Briars President in 2001/02. In his first annual report he noted:

"As I write this 84th Annual Report of the club being my first as President, I reflect on previous reports and note a common repetitive theme. That is the world is changing dramatically and that we at the Briars are running flat out to either keep up or maintain the edge in our well performing sports"

and

"During the year we initiated discussions with Greenlees Bowling Club at Concord with the view to merging. The Briars and Greenlees, for some members this has all gone too slowly, to yet others, need convincing that we have to move to Concord at all. Our four man team of Ian Blair, Peter Richardson, John Threlfo and I are hopeful of being able to present to our members the cases for and against such a decision in the very near future. This very time consuming issue has been brought about by thinking of the future and discussing what it is that our members, both male and female require, and what resources are required to maintain and be successful in the future as a sporting club."

This was not an easy time for any involved from both clubs and all suffered from a backlash from members who didn't see any real need for change and their belief in the imminent destruction of the culture and traditions for both Greenlees and Briars. The discussions were

fruitful and in 2005/06 the two clubs merged to become Briars at Greenlees. The story of this merger, the issues, the partnership and its current successful entity is for another story.

However, without the leadership of Mal Weber and his team, the story of the Briars club could well have ended in the early years of the 21st century. It is fair to say the Mal Weber took many personal hits over this and the successful merger did come at a personal cost.

Nevertheless, the clubs' history will favourably record Mal Weber's actions and note him as the **last President of The Briars Sporting Club Ltd and the first Chairman of Briars at Greenlees.**

Mal played well on the field, however his off field service was probably his greatest gift to our club.

