

Spencer Hipwell

Briars Cricketer, Rugby Player, Coach, Administrator and Lifelong stalwart of the club.

For many years, until recently, at about 3pm, a man arrived at Rothwell Park, and sat near the goal posts at the Briars Sports end of the ground. His name is Spencer Hipwell, and he came to support his beloved Briars. He also made it to as many of the away matches, if it was near his Beecroft home. Spencer was usually accompanied by his wife Elizabeth or son Scott, who also played for Briars.

A school mate Dick Atwill convinced Spencer to come down and play some cricket at Briars, and so Spencer joined the club in 1945. Thus, begun an active cricket and rugby playing and coaching career that spanned more than 20 years. Initially he played 3rd grade Cricket and 2nd grade Burke Cup Rugby. Subbies rugby had just been resumed following WWII. Spencer also served on the Hockey Sub Committee. This committee was established with a view to entering a team into competition. He played a season of Hockey, but Rugby was his love.

It didn't take long for Spencer to make his mark at Briars as he was awarded **The Gordon Bevan Shield in 1945**. The annual report noted that Spencer....." was one of the young members, who not only showed great improvement as a footballer, but also displayed a keen sense of clubman ship"

Spencer was also a member of the **1st grade Cricket Premiership team in 1946-7**, after being promoted from the 2nd X1.

In these years the two Briars cricket teams would not only play in a competition on Saturdays, but also play each other on a Sunday at a ground at Birchgrove.

Over many years Spencer was an active administrator for the club members, and at various times holding positions on the club's:- Cricket Sub Committee, Rugby Sub Committee, Outdoors Activities Committee, Social Committee and Planning and Development Sub Committee. The Briars club was the hub of members' lives, and well respected in the Strathfield and Burwood areas. The club's social events were envied by locals and the Social Ball's tickets much sought after.

As a Centre, Spencer enjoyed success in winning **two (2) 1st grade Kentwell Cup Premierships in 1949 and in 1952** under coach Bill McLaughlin. Reports spoke of his..." ability to pierce defence" ...and "deadly kicking that stopped many opposition backline moves".

Bill advised Spencer and Brian Williams to go along to Wests, which they did for a couple of seasons...but they always headed straight back to Briars after their games for social activities.

Oddly enough it was in a game against Easts that Spencer had his nose broken by another famous Subbie named...John Barraclough. Spencer's nose was straightened at half time by the doctor and he was sent back on the field.

Spencer was also a regular member of C+S Cricket teams in the 1950's and 1960's ...one typical Chris Mitchell report quipped that "he excels when substituting for the opposition".

On the Rugby front Spencer continued his enjoyment of the game. In 1956 he was an inspirational player / coach of the Whiddon Cup team who were placed 3rd. He also coached Kentwell Cup in 1958 into a creditable 3rd position.

In the 1959-60 cricket season Spencer topped the C +S batting average at 61.0 with a highest score of 101 Not Out.

The 1962 -63 seasons saw Spencer rejoin shires Cricket as Captain in the 2nd XI team, and in the following two seasons averaged in the 30's. He topped the averages in 1962-3 season.

Spencer suggested that the club undertake a trip to New Zealand in 1960. However, Bob Clark's remark that this would never happen, spurred Spencer on to undertake all the planning and arrangements for Briars first overseas tour. Unfortunately work commitments didn't permit Spencer to tour. The tour was a great success and the team was well received in New Zealand. This was also the first time the "Briar Rose" was used as our emblem. Even Bob Clark finally agreed to Spencer's idea of replacing the old 'B' with a thorny Briars Rose. Of course, the enthusiasm of others such as Doug Vanderfield helped convince the hierarchy of the idea. Spencer followed through in obtaining the artwork and manufacture of the emblems.... this is still our emblem today.

By the way Spencer would like to see more of our sporting teams' tour...he believes it melds players together and enhances a club spirit.

It seems that Spencer's last game of Cricket for the Club was in the Secretary's XI which defeated the President's XI, an event to celebrate the Briars 50th Anniversary.

The strong personalities that Spencer remembers from his active membership years were Bob Clark, Ron Thompson, Maurie Hill and Aud Land. Our hockey players will note that Spencer believes Briars Hockey only ever came about because of one man... Bruce Travener.

But what does he think of the club today....

In relation to the Club, he would like to see more players come back to the club after their game and each player personally invite their opposing number back for a drink..... Not a bad idea.

He remembers that Bob Clark visited the dressing shed before and after each game to direct the players to invite their opposites back to the club.

In relation to Rugby,...if the forwards play as forwards and the backs as backs and not do each others' job, we'll win his old mates cup....The Barraclough Cup.

Spencer is still a keen supporter of the club, but alas can only follow the games from published results. However next time you see him, why not walk up to him and have a chat, he just might have some insight about today's Rugby and what a contribution to our club really means.



Spencer (right) with old rugby team mate Sir Gordon Samuels (left)