

Tony Cowan's Biography



A photo of the 1982 Glebe first grade team taken at Primrose Park, North Sydney after it won the premiership in 1982. Tony Cowan is second from the left in the back row.

Back Row L-R Keith Pritchard, Tony Cowan, Ken Wark jnr, Les Wark, Ian Mutton, Craig Stubbs, Garry Manou (goal-keeper), Fred Letts (manager).

Front Row L-R Bill Stubbs (coach), Colin Rochester, Danny O'Brien, Geoff Paterson, Warren "Buster" Birmingham.

For primary school Tony went to the Saint James Catholic School in Woolley Street Forest Lodge. After he finished at Saint James he went to high school at Holy Cross College Ryde.

During Tony's childhood the Cowan family lived in a terrace house in Victoria Road Glebe, adjacent to Jubilee Oval, the Hockey Club's home ground. This house was a few houses down from the home of the Gilmore family. Graeme Gilmore at that time was the Club's Under-10 coach and first grade full-back. In addition many of the pupils at Tony's primary school played for Glebe and playing hockey was common amongst the pupils at Saint James.

The Parish Priest at Saint James for much of the time that Tony attended the School was the late Father Frank Roberts. Father Roberts was Parish Priest at Saint James from 1967 until he died in 1988 and was a strong and long-time supporter of the Hockey Club.

It was not surprising that Tony developed a keen interest in hockey. He started his hockey career with the GDHC in 1966 in the Club's Under-10 team as an eight year old, when Pat Nilan was the Junior Convenor and Graeme Gilmore was his coach. He won the best forward award in his first season. Interestingly Vernon Howe won the team's best back award.

Tony worked his way up through the Club's junior teams playing two years in the Under 12s, two years in the Under 14s and two years in the Under 16 team giving him nine seasons in the Club's

junior teams. During this time he was consistently in the Sydney Junior's Number One Team for his age division, being picked to represent Sydney at the NSW Junior Hockey Championships. His coaches included Garry Manou, Colin Brown, Robert Charlie Brown and Pat Nilan.

In his junior career Tony played approximately 150 games for the Club. Tony represented NSW at the Australian Championships in 1973, 1974 and 1975.

In 1974, aged 15 years Tony had a few games in the senior grades, filling-in when the teams were short.

In 1975 Tony won the V J Turner Cup. That was his first full year in the senior ranks and Tony played in the Club's Third Grade team which won its competition. Players in this team included Len Needham (c), George Manou, Graeme Gilmore, Daryl Seed, Pat Diviney, Ian Fawcett, Steve Casey, Brian Howe, Roger McDonald, Michael Atterton and Colin Smith.

In 1976 Tony progressed to Second Grade, who were undefeated premiers. Team captain Charlie Brown wrote of Tony in the Annual Report: "Improving rapidly—looks the goods for a top grade spot." In 1977 Tony had some games in first grade, covering players who were injured or unavailable for other reasons.

By 1978 Tony had cemented a spot in the Club's First Grade team. Players in this team were Graham "Dinga" Bell, Harry Wark, Kevin Sweeney, Garry Wark, John McDonald, Ian Mutton, Graham Lisk, Robert Wark, Les Wark, Robert Diviney, Geoff Paterson and Captain Pat Nilan. Also in 1978/1979 Tony represented NSW at the Under-21 Australian Championships. Other Glebe players in this NSW team were Warren Buster Birmingham and Robert Diviney.

At the end of the 1979 season Tony had played 112 senior games for Glebe. By now in his early 20s, Tony was finding his feet in the world of work and independent living and played only a few games for Glebe in 1980. He was interested in art and was trying to establish himself in that field, which impacted on his ability to play hockey for the Club.

Tony returned to hockey in 1981 and won a Second Grade premiership. This team comprised George Manou, Colin Rochester, Craig Stubbs, Garry Wark, Danny O'Brien, Harry Wark, Henry Lysaght, Craig McPhee, Pat Diviney, Mark Gersback, Jason Hughes, Captain Royce Jenkins and was coached by Bill Stubbs. Bill Stubbs commented in the Annual Report about Tony: "A player with exceptional ability and the will to win."

In 1982 Tony played in the Club's First Grade team that won the competition. Tony played some games in first grade for the next few years but his work and personal life did not allow him to devote the amount of time to hockey that he would have liked and he did not train as often as was required for a regular first grade position.

Barry Howe the third grade captain of 1985 wrote in the Annual Report about Tony: "In my opinion the best forward in the Club. He caused havoc in the finals and was a pleasure to play with." In the late 1980s and early 1990s Tony, who was devoting little time to training, played mostly in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades. He loved playing with his mates and enjoyed himself immensely when he did so.

He was live wire on the field and a source of good humour and camaraderie off it. He was a well-liked member of all teams he played in. His upbeat attitude and lively disposition was infectious. After playing hockey for 24 years Tony stopped playing after the 1990 season having played 270 senior and 150 junior games for Glebe.

His decision to stop playing was not so much a conscious decision to retire but more an inability to organise all the other things going on in his life so that he could fit hockey into his week. After he stopped playing Tony attended Glebe games where and when he could, and supported the Glebe teams with enthusiasm and good cheer. Tony's sideline barracking and enthusiastic support was legendary with the Glebe faithful. He had a unique ability to enliven, lighten-up and brighten-up the atmosphere and ambience, at even the most tense of matches.

As a young man Tony was a prodigious hockey talent. He was a left hander and often gripped the hockey stick in his left hand and dribbled the ball one handed down the left hand sideline at express pace. He was capable of the miraculous and was an exciting hockey player, who frequently brought the Glebe crowd to their feet. His effort and commitment to the team he was playing in and to the GDHC was absolute. Tony was well liked by all who knew him. It was hard not to like Tony.

He is one of the few Glebe players over the years has won premierships in first, second, third and fourth grades. Fitting training and physical fitness into his schedule were things Tony found difficult. If he had of been able to fully realise his undoubted potential Tony had the talent and ability to play for his country, however Tony was not ambitious when it came to progressing as far as he could in hockey.

Tony played the game for the fun it brought him and he delighted in the interactions he had with his fellow Glebe team mates. Fun and exercise were the reasons Tony played hockey and he was just as happy and content playing fourth grade as he was playing first grade. He had no sense of loss, nor did he have any sense of regret that he had not gone as far as he could have gone in the sport of hockey. Tony was a no regrets sort of guy.

Tony's father John Cowan was a talented middle distance runner who trained at Jubilee Oval with his brother-in-law John Atterton. He was the Club's Conditioner from 1969-1985. John is now living in retirement at Coffs Harbour and still gets the Red Rag newsletter posted to him and is keenly interested in Club affairs. Maureen Cowan, Tony's mother was a tireless worker for the Glebe juniors from 1966- 1975. She acted as team manager and was a dedicated canteen worker behind the counter at the Hockey Club, Club House Number Four Arch at Jubilee Oval.

At times during the 70s and 80s Tony used the Arch the Hockey Club rented from Leichhardt Council at Federal Park Annandale as an artist's retreat/studio. During the week he would paint beside the hockey goals used for the Federal Park hockey field, which were stored in the Arch

Tony contributed to Club life where and when he could. Because of other aspects of his life Tony never held any Club administrative positions. He was one of the real characters of the GDHC over its 83 year history, and he brought much joy, happiness, entertainment and camaraderie to all he came into contact with, thank-you Tony for your contribution.