

## **Should NSW Senior Men's Team Selectors attend Sydney First Grade Competition Games?**

### **NSW Hockey put out a 16 page information bulletin entitled: State Team Selection Policy Field and Indoor 2016**

This wordy document sets out in ne detail the responsibilities and requirements of players aspiring to represent NSW. It is silent on the responsibilities of the people who select the teams.

From my observations in 2016 the NSW State Selectors did not attend most Sydney Hockey Association Men's Premiership Division games. Over 90-95% of the players in the NSW Senior Men's Team squad play in the Sydney Premiership Competition. For NSW Selectors not to observe NSW squad members regularly in the best competition in the State seems to me to be hypocritical. Selectors are holding the players to a high standard of behaviour and attendance at training but the selectors themselves short-change the players, by not observing them in competition sutures.

The NSW Senior Men's team has one coach and three assistant coaches, but none of them regularly attend Sydney Hockey Association Men's Premiership Division matches. Why is it so? In the expression made the famous by one time Sydney University Physics Professor Julian Sumner-Millar.

Glebe's goalkeeper BJ Bruton has been a member of the NSW Men's Senior Team for the last few years but this year he missed out. The goalkeepers that were selected in front of him may have been superior to BJ, but from what I saw of the Sydney Hockey Association Men's Premiership Competition matches I would be surprised if this was the case. Perhaps I am biased towards BJ and did not have an objective view of the comparisons between the goalkeepers vying for selection.

I would have been more comfortable accepting BJ's non-selection if the selectors had of kept an eye on the goalkeeper's form throughout the Sydney Hockey Association Men's Premiership Competition. My mine BJ is a great goalkeeper, one of the best in Australia. He puts in great goal-keeping displays week-in, week-out for Glebe. Not only is he a great goalkeeper, he is a top team man and a top Clubman.

I suppose selections are always subjective decisions and subject to the whim of the selectors. This is a fact of life, it happens in all sports and I accept this. If BJ had of been notified of his NSW Senior Men's non-selection in sufficient time, he most probably would have been able to arrange a spot as a goalkeeper for another State. He has done this in the past. If players are not wanted by NSW, and if NSW selectors think that the player is inferior to the players selected for the NSW team, given enough notice the over-looked player can make himself available to play in another State team.

The recommendation of the Australian Hockey Association is that the States announce their teams six weeks before the Australian Championships. If the NSW Senior Men's team had of

been announced as per the usual timeframe BJ would have had the opportunity of approaching other states and informing them that he was available for selection for that state.

In 2016 the announcement of the NSW Senior Men's team was delayed. This meant that by the time BJ found out about his non-selection the window of opportunity had passed him by. It was too late for him to be selected in the State team of another state.

Was this a deliberate act by the NSW selectors to prevent the NSW Squad Members who did not make the final NSW team from seeking selection for another state team? We will probably never know.

Whether the late announcement was deliberate or not, the end result was that the overlooked NSW Squad Members did not have the opportunity to make themselves available for another state. This treatment of non-selected players from the NSW Squad seems to me, not to meet the required standard of respect, honesty and courtesy, which should be extended to young men who have fulfilled all the obligations and requirements made of them by NSW Hockey.

The NSW Selectors did not treat these young men with the respect, dignity and consideration they deserve. Why not?

If there is another logical explanation for the late announcement of the NSW Men's senior team, which significantly disadvantaged non-selected NSW squad member, I am sure readers of the Red Rag would like to hear it.

Any correspondence on this matter will be published in the next Red Rag. Readers are encouraged to make a contribution to this debate.

Dr. Harry Wark

Glebe DHC Life Member and Club Historian

## Reply from David Thompson – HNSW CEO

Good afternoon Mark/Harry,

Further to my email the other day, I am detailing the selection process for AHL teams, generally the majority of coaches, managers and selectors are volunteers and offer significant amounts of their personal time and their annual leave to do these jobs.

1. A squad of up to 35 athletes are selected at state championships – not all athletes make themselves available and in some circumstances there are athletes that others consider should be in the squad that are not named, due to unavailability.

2. Once the Squad is chosen there are 16 x 2 hour training sessions for all athletes to stake their claim for selection. The selections are based on the following criteria-

- Playing ability
- Development potential
- Attitude
- Positional Flexibility and willingness to be a team player
- Hockey intelligence
- Team compatibility to playing style
- Leadership and potential contribution ( or negative contribution ) to the team
- Personal effectiveness
- Training ethic
- Physical Fitness

3. The squad then goes to the Capital Challenge where final selections are made under AHL playing type environment. 18 athletes are selected. All squad athletes are encouraged to continue training with the Team in case of injury but also for the athletes continued development.

4. All athletes in the squad of 35 that do not get named into the team then go into the HA pick up roster. HA allocate squad athletes along with NSWIS athletes to other teams. With the exception of NT all states and territories can have 2 imports. Once the athletes are transferred to other states or territories they are irretrievable from the loaned state by HNSW within 7 days of competition or a specified date implemented by HA.

5. There is no other avenue of an athlete transferring to another state .. it must be through the HA pick up roster.

Thanks for your email, as you say, selections will always remain a very subjective discussion point around the sport of hockey.

Any questions arising please let me know.

Thanks and Regards

Mr David Thompson

HNSW CEO

### **Reply from Mr Warren Birmingham – HNSW AHL Senior Men’s Coach & Coaching Director**

1. A squad of up to 35 athletes are selected at state championships – not all athletes make themselves available and in some circumstances there are athletes that others consider should be in the squad that are not named, due to unavailability. I challenge anyone in the community to name a player that wasn’t selected in the squad that was eligible and available.

2. Club Competition is absolutely no guide to AHL playing potential playing ability - club hockey in Sydney, Illawarra and Newcastle is a long way from AHL . The competitions are soft and athletes get rewarded for making poor decisions.

3. Once the Squad is chosen there are 16 x 2 hour training sessions for all athletes to stake their claim for selection. The selections are based on the following criteria-

- Playing ability
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- Attitude
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4. The squad then goes to the capital challenge where final selections are made under AHL playing type environment. 18 athletes are selected All squad athletes are encouraged to continue training with the Team in case of injury but also for the athletes continued development.

5. All athletes in the squad of 35 that do not get named into the team then go into the HA pick up roster

HA allocate athletes along with NSWIS to other teams. HNSW does not get a say in this process. With the exception of NT all states and territories can have 2 imports. Once the athletes are transferred to other states or territories they are irretrievable from the loaned state by HNSW within 7 days of competition or a specified date implemented by HA.

6 .Recommendations were made to ACT they take 3 of the following athletes-Ryan Proctor, BJ Bruton and Tim Brand Hockey Australia and NSWIS allocated Ryan Proctor and Ash Thomas

7. There is no other avenue of an athlete transferring to another state .. it must be through the HA pick up roster.

8. If you are not an NSWIS athlete and miss Waratah selection you have NO chance of being selected for another state as the personnel who make these decisions are HA – Michael Crookes and the NSWIS Coach (both who have KPIs and need to validate the pathway selection of the athletes they have admitted to their program)

Mr Warren Birmingham

HNSW AHL Senior Men's Coach and Coaching Director

**Reply from Mr Harry Wark – Glebe District Hockey Club Life Member and Historian**

**“Club hockey in Sydney, Illawarra and Newcastle is a long way from AHL. The competitions are soft and athletes get rewarded for making poor decisions.”**

W. Birmingham, NSW Hockey Coaching Director.

Dear Editor

I would like to thank Mr David Thompson, Chief Executive, Hockey NSW, and Mr Warren Birmingham Coaching Director, Hockey NSW for replying to the article I wrote in the September/October 2016 Red Rag entitled: Should NSW Senior Men's Team Selectors attend Sydney First Grade Competition Games? Their efforts are much appreciated.

I am sure Red Rag readers will enjoy reading their comments, the information they present, and their insights.

Mr Birmingham writes in his reply: “Club Competition is absolutely no guide to AHL playing potential playing ability-club hockey in Sydney, Illawarra and Newcastle is a long way from AHL. The competitions are soft and athletes get rewarded for making poor decisions.”

Mr Birmingham and I will have to agree to disagree on this matter. 95% of all players in the NSW Senior Men's Squad play in the Sydney Premier Division Competition. Presumably they do this because they wish to play in the best competition in the State.

It does not seem unreasonable that either the NSW coach, one of the three NSW assistant coaches, or the Director of the NSW Institute of Sport for Hockey attend at least some of the Sydney premier Division Games on a Saturday to watch firsthand the match performances of the players they are assessing for NSW selection. In 2016 none of these five people came to the Sydney Premier Division Games on a regular basis.

I will leave it up to Red Rag readers to make up their minds on this matter.

I agree with Mr Thompson that volunteers are hard to come by and they should be encouraged and not criticised. My article did not criticise the people who volunteer to

perform duties for NSW Hockey, I applaud them. Hockey is an amateur sport for the vast majority of hockey players, coaches, managers, and officials and without them the sport would not exist.

Does the NSW Men's Senior Team need three assistant coaches, a Manager and a physiotherapist? My view is that a coach and a manager should be all that the team needs to be able to perform to the best of its ability. A few NSW supporters who attend the AHL Tournament could field balls at training and during warm-ups as occurs at club level.

There is too much doting on the NSW Senior Men's Team, too much performance analysis, too much micro management and not enough fun, enjoyment and player satisfaction. Just do it, as the Nike advertisement says.

When I wrote the article I was unaware of the information about the Hockey Australia pick-up roster and its ability take NSW Institute of Sport players who are not in the NSW Senior Men's Squad and place them in interstate teams for the Australian Hockey League Championships. I am grateful to Mr Thompson and Mr Birmingham for setting me straight on this point.

I was under the impression when I wrote the article that the NSW Selectors left it later than usual to pick the NSW Senior Team. This seemed to mean that players who missed NSW selection were not placed in the Hockey Australia pick-up pool until most other States had finalised their selections. This would have reduced the chances of the NSW Squad players, who missed NSW Team selection, to be picked up by other States. If I got this wrong, I apologise.

It appears to me that the Hockey Australia pick-up system is open to gaming and the opportunities for nepotism, patronage and manipulation seem to be ever present.

In conclusion I would suggest that before the NSW Squad is selected, information regarding selection and a timeline of the journey from State Championships to selection in the NSW AHL Team be publicly available on the Hockey NSW website. In addition, the options that are available to players who miss NSW Team selection but who would like to represent another state should be clearly explained for all interested hockey supporters to see.

My letter in reply has been sent to Hockey NSW, so they may have the final word on the matter, if they so desire.

Readers' comments are still encouraged and welcome, but I have written my last word on the topic.

Dr Harry Wark

Glebe District Hockey Club Life Member and Club Historian