

# Glebe District Hockey Club

## Life Membership Biography

### Bill Francis "Jazza" Ryan

Born 6th December 1918

Died Sunday 15th July 2007

Elected Life Member of the Glebe District Hockey Club 1956

Much of the information in this Biography was provided by Bill's children Michael, Trish and Stephen. Their help in providing this information is greatly appreciated by the GDHC. Billy's record with the GDHC is shown towards the end of this Biography.

Billy was a GDHC stalwart of the 1930's, 40's and 50's, who died on Sunday the 15th July 2007 in Ashfield, where he spent the last three years of life in a dementia specific nursing home. He was born in Ultimo and moved to 50 Toxteth Road Glebe with his parents William and Mary Ryan when he was four. Toxteth Road is about 150 metres from the Club's home ground, Jubilee Oval, Glebe. Bill had two siblings Leo (1920-2005) and Kevin (1922-2008) Billy's father, William Ryan senior was an Irishman who played hurling for County Cork. Billy's mother hailed from Polar Creek a small town just outside Kempsey on the mid-north coast of NSW. Billy remembered fondly his time as a small child



**Bill and Leo Ryan, Leo is the taller of the two, photographed in their Glebe Hockey Club Blazers outside the Beard Watson Department Store at 361-363 George St Sydney, in the 1940's.**

in Ultimo as the family lived next door to mews. These stables housed horses that 'richer folk' owned and used to ride in the park, which now forms part of the grounds of Sydney University.

Billy would "help" with the horses whenever he was allowed and always had a fondness for horses, although in later years when he could afford a 'punt' he would usually go for the jockey riding them. In those years Scotty Seamer was his favourite.

The Ryan boys were all educated at St James School, Woolley Street Forest Lodge at the time Brother Macartan Keegan, founder of the Glebe District Hockey Club, taught at the school.

After leaving school at age 15 Billy began working at the Australian Gaslight Company (AGL), where he worked for the next 19 years. On leaving AGL he began working for Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in administration, where he worked for the next 30 years, and retired in 1981.

Billy's future brother-in-law, L Cruise (first name unknown) was recorded as having played 10 games for Glebe up till 1937. The Cruise family had an early association with the GDHC and in 1942 Joan Cruise is thanked in the 1942 GDHC Annual Report, for typing up the Annual Report. In the early to mid-40s Billy and Joan formed a friendship and in 1947 they became engaged. Joan lived in Mansfield Street Glebe, which is less than 200 metres from the Ryan family home at 50 Toxteth Road Glebe. They were married on 30 May 1948 at Saint James Church Woolley Street, Forest Lodge.



**Glebe was good to Billy. He met and married the love of his life Joan (nee Cruise), made lifelong friends, followed the Balmain Tigers & of course played hockey for GDHC.**

Billy's first born, a boy, Michael was born in Glebe and was diagnosed with asthma at a young age. It was suggested to Billy and Joan that they move to a more conducive climate. When given options by Technical Education, Billy chose Orange in the central west of NSW.

It must have been a very emotional time for Billy and Joan to leave their beloved Glebe and all it encompassed.

Orange proved to be a great place for the Ryans. Two more children were born, hockey & cricket were played and Kelly's pub became a favourite watering hole!

The story goes that Billy joined the Orange District Hockey Club (the Boomerangs) soon after arriving in Orange in 1955. He sat on the sideline for at least three games. His chance came when a team mate was injured and Billy went on. The coach & players were heard to remark... 'why didn't you tell us you could play hockey!' This is an example of Billy's humility, which he showed throughout his life.

Billy played hockey in Orange for some years and represented Orange at NSW Senior State Hockey Championships, which at that time played in the lower divisions of the Competition.



**A photo of Billy, his brother Kevin,, and Kevin's wife Colleen which was taken in the 1980s. It shows them relaxing and sharing a drink around a kitchen table.**

Billy, Joan and children Michael, Patricia and Stephen returned to Sydney in 1963 and resided in Milperra and then Panania, until they moved to South West Rocks after Billy's retirement in 1983.

After they returned to Sydney in 1963 Billy and Joan had regular catch ups with the Wark brothers, the Dickeys, the Butlers, Vernon Turner, Jack Taylor, Jim and Dot Kenny, Bill Stubbs and many others Club Members past and present.

At that time, Joan's parents, Arthur and Gladys Cruise, still lived at 26 Mansfield Street Glebe. Prior to the Ryan's moving to Orange several house parties and many Management Committee Meetings were held at the Cruise residence. Gladys Cruise was a strong and loyal supporter of the GDHC. Billy's brother Kevin was still in Toxteth Road and Leo had moved to Campsie.

Billy's time in Milperra and Panania saw him still taking an active role in sport, coaching his younger son's cricket side, managing his younger son's league side and discovering Bowls.

When he retired to South West Rocks, bowls, as had hockey, became a very important part of his and Joan's life. Billy was treasurer of the SWR Bowling Club for 4 years.

In 1992 Billy's world unravelled somewhat with the death of his much treasured 'Joanie'. However, in true Billy fashion he focused on the future and not on the past and really amazed us all with his resilience.

Billy loved his family, especially his three grandchildren. At the time of Joan's death two of his adored grandchildren Shannon and Matthew lived at South West Rocks and this proved a great source of comfort and joy to him.

One of Billy's proudest and most emotional moments was the birth of his first great grandchild, Finn.

Since Finn, six more great grandchildren have been born into the extended Ryan family. They have all shown great potential in their sporting pursuits, among them swimming, athletics, surfing, soccer and cricket all at local, regional & state levels.

I am sure Billy is now looking down from Heaven most proud of their achievements!

Aside from Billy the husband, dad, grandad, great grandad, team-mate, lover of sport and a beer, Billy is best and most fondly remembered for his quick wit and sense of humour.

Billy was not a person to pass on 'History', but certainly kept his family entertained with his witticisms & stories and his family has shared a few anecdotes with us, the readers of his Biography.

Billy loved his faith and was a Church going man most of his life that was until age 80 when he decided that he didn't have to go to Church anymore. When he was asked by the Parish Priest why he hadn't been to mass lately, Billy replied...'taking a sabbatical'.

Billy, on meeting his grandson Matt's future wife, asked her what she did. Coby replied that she was a horticulturist. Matthew, very foolishly we might add, asked Billy if he knew what that meant, to which Billy replied...'Yes they search out weeds, probably how she found you!'

Billy was always one for 'good deeds' NOT!!

One of his favourite stories involved him walking along Glebe Point Road to meet Joan. He was all dressed up. He came across an elderly lady who was struggling to get the lid from a jar of 'blacko' (used to paint the steps into the house). Billy offered to help. Unbeknown to him the jar had been soaking in hot water. When he turned the lid, with some force, it flew off, as did the contents all over his good clobber!



**A photo Billy and Joan taken at a social function in the late 80s, during their time at South West Rocks**



Another time whilst walking down Glebe Point Road he saw a rock on the footpath & felt obliged to kick it out of the way so no-one would trip over it. He kicked it and in doing so broke a toe!

His family recall that his Glebe years were his very fondest.

At one time, late in his life, he was living with his daughter and her family on the South Coast when he was admitted to Respite Care for a short period. He decided he would vacate from that arrangement and when he was intercepted by a 'good Samaritan' and questioned on where he was going, the answer was ...Glebe!

A record of Billy's involvement with the GDHC

The Ryan family was prominent in the GDHC during the early years of the Hockey Club. The three Ryan boys were intimately involved with the playing and social side of the Club for over 20 years.

Bill played 320 games for Glebe in the 21 years from 1935 to 1955. He captained the NSW Under 21 Team in 1939 and played for the NSW Senior Team in 1946 and 1947. He was an outstanding right-and centre-half, who played in 10 First Grade Premiership winning teams for Glebe. The Glebe First Grade team of Bill's era was an outstanding outfit, and Bill was its captain for many seasons.

Bill Ryan's place at first grade centre-half for Glebe during the 1955 season was taken by Victor Westacott, an ex-junior of the club. Victor (seasons 1950-1992) went on to play 629 games for Glebe. The phasing out of Bill and the phasing in of Victor must have gone well, as Glebe won the 1955 first grade premiership.



**A photo of the Glebe first grade premiership winning team of 1947 taken on the grass hockey field above the water reservoir at Centennial Park. Bill Ryan was the captain of this team.**

**Back row L-R Bill Taylor, Harry Butler, Vernon Turner, Harry Wark, Noel Walker, Jack Taylor.**

**Front row L-R Frank Murray, Les Waight, Dave McNiven goalkeeper, Ken Wark, Bill Ryan**

During Bill's era, on a fine Saturday afternoon at Glebe's Jubilee Oval, sometimes 200 people or more would turn up to support the local lads. The team spirit of the Glebe teams was inspiring and attracted many local residents as well as parents, friends, relatives, neighbors and retired players. Glebe was noted from the earliest days for their team spirit, determination, "Esprit de Corps" and fierce will to win.

The first grade team of that era would often fight back from seemingly impossible positions to win games in the last few minutes of the match. The team was very hard to beat at Jubilee, playing in front of the loud and parochial home crowd. As Captain, Billy was instrumental in bringing the best out in his players and the team, and it is widely believed he was the best first grade captain Glebe has ever had.

He was first referred to as "Jazza" in the 1952 GDHC Annual Report. The author of the first grade report was not named (perhaps the Club Secretary of the day Fred Needham). He wrote a brief synopsis of the players in the team and it reads thus:

**Frank Murray (team captain):** The great dictator

**Noel Walker:** Looks faster than ever in his "New Holden"

**Harry Wark:** The man in the boxer hat, sometimes in the "dog house" in more ways than one (Harry owned greyhounds at the time)

**Ray Thorpe (a teacher by trade):** Imported bloodstock-should improve the Club's general education

**Bob Needham:** The flyer from Forsyth Street (Glebe), too much glitter, and not enough "gold"

**Vernon Turner:** (a teacher at the time, later an academic at the University of New England) - scholar and gentleman, renowned after dinner speaker, especially with single female audience. Obvious State Captain.

**Les Waight:** The dasher thrives on Country Carnivals, the last of the Straightbacks.

**Bill Ryan:** The Jasser-remarkable similarity to 9 gallon keg. May not train on in 1953.

My interpretation is that the author used the term Jasser to convey the meaning of maestro, star, outstanding talent. The original author spelt the word Jasser, but most people used the Jazza spelling when subsequently referring to Billy.

**Vince Halls:** Smooth, lounge-lizard type, stick-work, par excellence.

**Jack Taylor:** the tea cosy, the man of a thousand repartees, the Court Jester.

My interpretation - Jack wore a Glebe Cricket Club Cap during games. The maroon cap had three horizontal and white rings/hoops and looked like a tea cosy. Jack worked in a retail music shop, played in a band and had the banter of a stage performer, hence the reference to the Court Jester.

**Ken Wark:** First class Butcher (on and off the field)-green and gold blazer type.

My interpretation-Ken worked with his brother Harry as a butcher in Rozelle, hence the reference to butcher. He was a fierce competitor on the hockey field and he went on in 1952 to be selected for Australia.

**Bill Lord:** Painter and decorator, contender for Archibald prize.

**Glen Elliott:** The big critic likes a wager and a pot.

My interpretation - Glen always saw the half-full glass as pretty empty, a critic by nature.

**Fred Needham:** left elbow forward, secretarial type, efficient on and off the field.

My interpretation - Fred was the Club Secretary in 1952, at the time this report was written and he was employed in an administrative/clerically position, hence he was referred to as a secretarial type.

Individual enthusiasm, recklessness, over exuberance and imprudence were ever present in some of the individuals in the first grade teams of the 1940s and 50s and Billy was an expert at harnessing the talents and skill sets of the individuals and fashioning a dynamic united team. The team was much better than eleven players on the field playing as individuals. As the Glebe motto goes “A Champion team with all else being equal beat a team of champions”.

On the administrative side Billy, supported by his wife Joan was Club Secretary from 1943 to 1945 and again in 1954 and Club Captain in 1948 and 1949. He was made a Life Member of the Club in 1956.



**Bill 'Jazza' Ryan enjoying a beer.**

Billy's father, also a William was involved in Club affairs, as was his mother Mary. William Ryan senior donated a trophy in 1942 for the most improved B Grade Player. The trophy was won by Kelvin Dickey, who went on to become a GDHC stalwart. Kelvin was made a Club Life-Member in 1967. Mary helped with catering at GDHC social

functions and is named in the 1942 Annual Report as organizing the catering after the 1942 Annual Meeting.

Billy's brother Kevin was a handyman/kitchen cabinet installer who played 162 games for the Club from 1938 to 1953. His hockey career, like that of their other brother Leo, was interrupted by war service. Leo worked for Ampol for almost all his working life and played 165 games for the Club between 1938 and 1952.

Billy, Kevin and Leo all played together in the 1946 Glebe First Grade team, which finished runner-up in the competition. Having three brothers play in the same first grade team is an unusual occurrence; but the Mockler brothers Ted, George and Frank performed a similar feat in the early 1930's.

In several matches in the late 40's, the Glebe first grade team ran on with four sets of brothers - Bill and Jack Taylor, Harry and Ken Wark, Fred and Bob Needham and Bill and Kevin Ryan.

It was not until 2005 that four sets of brothers again played together in a Glebe First Grade team. Glebe's 2005 First Grade premiership winning team included four sets of brothers - Shane and Aaron Nilan, Darren and Brendan Booth, Peter and Matthew Wark and Patrick and Michael Wark.

Billy Ryan was a great contributor to Club affairs in its early years and passed on to following generations a flourishing organization, with a rich and proud tradition.



Billy's wife Joan was a actively involved in Club affairs and ran/organized many of the Club's social functions in the 1940s and 50s. In those years there was an active ladies social committee with members including Joan Ryan, Joyce and Molly Wark, Phil Dickey, Dot Kenny, Gloria Waight, Gloria Halls, Fran Harris, June Taylor, Pat Rogers, Beryl Thorpe, Ester Taylor and Win Worley, Thelma Worley, Mrs. Quinlan, Isobel Butler, Audrey Jeffree. The ladies committee organized the first Club ball at the old Glebe Police Boys Club on the shores of Rozelle Bay in 1952, which was an outstanding success.

From all of us past and present members of the Glebe District Hockey Club, we say thank-you Bill.



Enjoy your Eternal Reward.

## **End Note from Billy's children**

We thank you the GDHC for the opportunity to reminisce about our DAD, Billy 'Jazza' Ryan.

We could only hope that present and future players, and members of GDHC on reading the Biographies of the GDHC Life Members, will reflect on the qualities of the men and women mentioned.

Commitment, Respect, Humility and Regard for others come shining through.

We would imagine that these qualities, as well as getting the GDHC to where it is now, will place it in good stead moving into the future.

Congratulations GDHC. Well done!

Mick, Trish & Stephen Ryan.

PS. Billy could snore for Australia!!

