

Excerpts from the unpublished Biography of Vernon Turner (DRAFT) by Club Historian, Harry Wark.

Vernon Turner was born in at Coraki, near Lismore on the north coast of New South Wales in 1924, the youngest of nine children. The depression ruined his father's business, and as a consequence the family home and its contents had to be sold. The Turner family moved to Glebe when Vernon was twelve and a half years old. He lived at 60 Saint John's Road, Glebe with his cousins, the McGraths.

Vernon was a member of the 1952 Premiership First Grade winning team along with Frank Murray (captain), Noel Walker, Harry Wark, Ray Thorpe, Bob Needham, Les Waight, Bill Ryan, Vince Halls, Ken Wark, Jack Taylor, Bill Lord, Glen Elliott and Fred Needham.

The Glebe teams in which he played were a tight-knit, resilient group where the team performance was much better than the sum of the talents and skills of the individuals in it. Vernon played in Glebe First Grade teams that were very hard to beat.

These teams were talented, strong all over the field and able to produce a goal from 'nowhere'. Harry Wark remembers:

"The Glebe teams of the '40s and '50s went away to play in country carnivals at Bathurst and Goulburn, playing at the Bathurst Showground and at the Kenmore psychiatric facility in Goulburn. The final of the carnival on a cold winter Sunday afternoon would be watched by over a thousand people, standing at least two deep all around the field behind ropes, with over 99% of the people in the crowd cheering for Glebe's opposition.

It was uncanny how often the Glebe team would come from behind, produce a tremendous finishing burst and win the game with only seconds remaining, much to the disappointment of the home crowd. The Glebe teams lost a couple of country carnival finals, but won the vast majority of them."

The team had tremendous self-belief and great resilience, the players were well disciplined, the team had a never-say-die attitude, and the game was never over until the final whistle blew. Players accepted victory with good grace and humility, and defeat with equanimity. Negative talk and comments were rare at the post game team talk.

Vernon played in the Glebe First Grade team from 1942 to 1957, a sixteen year period, and in that time he played in twelve Sydney Hockey Association Premiership winning teams. The Glebe team won the First Grade Premiership for seven consecutive years from 1947 to 1953 years, which remains a record for the longest period of consecutive first grade premiership wins in Sydney Hockey Association history.

On the administrative side Vernon held the following elected administrative positions for Glebe:

Assistant Treasurer 1942, 1943

Management Committee 1944

Club Vice-Captain 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954

Vernon represented Sydney in the Sydney Senior Representative Men's Team continuously for the fourteen year period 1944-1957. He played in the NSW Senior Representative Team for the nine year period 1947-1955 and captained the team for six of these nine years.

There was a strongly held view in the Glebe Club that Vernon was robbed of Australian selection because of politics. Vernon was most unlucky not to have played for Australia. In the mid-1950s his Glebe team-mates considered Vernon to be far and away the best left-winger in the country.

In those days hockey players had to be residentially qualified to play for a District Club and in this regard Vernon was a saviour as far as the Glebe District Hockey Club was concerned. For many years in the 1950's twelve to fifteen Glebe players were registered as living at Vernon's two bedroom flat in Leichhardt Street Glebe. When Vernon moved to Blaxland in 1959 the players' address 'moved' to the flats above and behind Harry Wark's butcher shop in Mansfield Street Rozelle.

The Club fielded its first junior team, an Under 16 team in 1948 with Mr. Vince Halls, Senior as its manager. Then Vernon took over. Not only was Vernon a champion hockey player, he was a phenomenally dedicated and committed coach. In 1949-1958 the Club's junior teams were supervised, inspired, organized, enthused and trained by Vernon Turner. For ten years Vernon was the driving force within the Club's junior movement. He was an optimist, an enthusiast, a great motivator, and a good organizer, ideally suited to his role working with younger players.

By 1955 Vernon had built up the junior base to the extent that the Club fielded seven junior teams, a record for the Club at that time.

Vernon had the following to say in his end of season 1955 Junior Report: "There is a quality in hockey that is far more desirable than winning and that is the learning and acquisition of sportsmanship; the basic philosophy of our Club." Pursuing this point a little further, he went on: "it is true to say that the essence of our whole teaching has been to conduct yourself like a sportsman on and off the field."

Vernon was a stickler for teamwork, as exemplified by his comments in the 1956 Annual Report in describing the season had by a Glebe Under 16 team: "Obviously, a team can win only by superior ability either in individuals or in the team as a whole. Our teams as individuals were equal to any in the competition but the same could not be said of their teamwork. It is one thing to be a member of a team, but another to play as a team." And further "To the other players joining the senior ranks, remember at all times that the greatest asset you can take with you is your desire to play in the team selected as a member of the team, not as an individual. By doing this you will not only be helping the Club but you will join in the thrill of being a member of a winning combination."

It was during this 1949-1958 period that Vern became known as the "Father of Junior Hockey at Glebe". He went to many schools in Glebe and surrounding districts, spoke to teachers and students and invited the children to attend St. Paul's Oval at the University of Sydney on a Saturday morning during the hockey season, where they would be given instruction in how to play hockey. Vernon had enthusiasm, energy and passion for the task. His commitment, his energy, community mindedness, and selfless dedication to the welfare of others is inspiring to recognize today. Harry Wark who was coached by Vernon in 1957 and 1958 opines: "He was a legend with the boys he coached."

Vernon only coached boys. It was not until 1976 that Glebe had a girl play in its junior ranks, when Lisa Williams, the daughter of an ex-Glebe grade player Barry Williams and his wife Kathy commenced playing. Vernon coached Barry in the Under Sixteen team of 1955. Lisa is still playing in the Glebe Women's Third Grade team of 2018.

Eventually as these children matured and became young men, a large number of them played for NSW and one, Pat Nilan, went on to play for Australia at three Olympic Games in 1960, 1964 and

1968. Vernon reminisced that Pat deserved his success because “he would practice anything and everything I asked him to do”.

During this time many families were too poor to buy hockey sticks and playing shirts so Vernon purchased different coloured material and his sister made shirts for the children gratis. At the start of each season Vernon’s sister often enlisted the help of other family members to help with the shirt making, and this help was always freely and willingly given. Vernon came from a generous family.

As well, Vernon collected broken hockey sticks from his senior hockey playing team-mates and had them renewed, restored and made as good as new, on the cheap, by two friendly cabinet makers, the Atkinson Brothers, who had a joinery business at 62 Glebe Point Road. It was in this way that every child had a stick and a team shirt. The children and their families were charged nothing to play.

Vernon contributed thousands of pounds (decimal currency came in, in February 1966) of his own money to buy materials for shirt making, hockey sticks, hockey stick repair materials, goal keeping equipment and other miscellaneous pieces of equipment. He was a generous man, and contributed greatly to the common good. This was all done in an unobtrusive, low key way, without any pomp, ostentation or ceremony.

In his last year playing for the Glebe first grade team in 1957 Vernon played in a team with five players he had coached in the Glebe Under 16 teams: Bennett Dunn, Victor Westacott, Bill Stubbs, Greg Harris and Bob “Rocker” Fox.

Vernon left Glebe after the 1958 season having played 259 games for the Club. He did not take the field as a player in 1958, but was still very active in the Club during that year as the junior organizer, administrator and head/only coach.

Ten years of unstinting devotion to the Club’s juniors from 1949-1958 with little practical help, or encouragement from other senior players had taken a toll on Vernon. In 1959 Vernon started work as a school teacher at Croydon Park Central School, and moved to Blaxland, at the foot of the Blue Mountains. With regret, Vernon decided that after being a player and junior coach for sixteen years at Glebe it was time for him to move on to new challenges and to bid farewell to his many friends, young and old, at the Club.

Players that Vernon had coached as juniors in the 50s, Bob “Charlie” Brown, Graeme Gilmour, Barry Goodrick, Colin Brown, and Victor Westacott came to the fore and revived the Club’s junior movement following his departure.

Rather than stop playing and coaching cold turkey, Vernon decide to play hockey with the Sydney University Hockey Club in 1959, where he was studying at the Arts Faculty of the University. Vernon had previously played for Sydney University at the Australian University Games in 1953, and was selected at these 1953 games into the Australian Universities Team. Vernon only played the one season with the University of Sydney, as by the following year Vernon’s life and its living had moved westward.

Vernon was awarded a Blue from the University of Sydney Sport’s Union in 2003, when he was 78 years of age, for his services to the Sydney University Hockey Club, and to the sport of hockey in general over a period of 60 years. The following citation was presented when the award was conferred:

“Vernon was enrolled at the University of Sydney in 1953-1955, 1957, and 1959. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1964 and a Master of Education in 1973. Vernon played hockey for both the Sydney University Hockey Club and Glebe Hockey Club during that time. He is a Life Member of SU Sport. Vernon has an impressive representative career lasting from 1947 to the present. He achieved senior State representative honours at both national and international tournaments from 1947 until 1956. He played in excess of 100 games for NSW over this period, gaining a number of national titles and trophies along the way. For five years in a row Vernon was captain of the NSW team. In 1948 Vernon achieved the honour of being selected to play hockey for Australia.”

In 2018 the GDHC’s Board decided to name the trophy for the inaugural Derby Day competition to be played annually between Glebe and Sydney University after Vernon. We look forward to many years of excellent hockey played in the team spirit that Vernon enjoyed and promoted with so much enthusiasm.