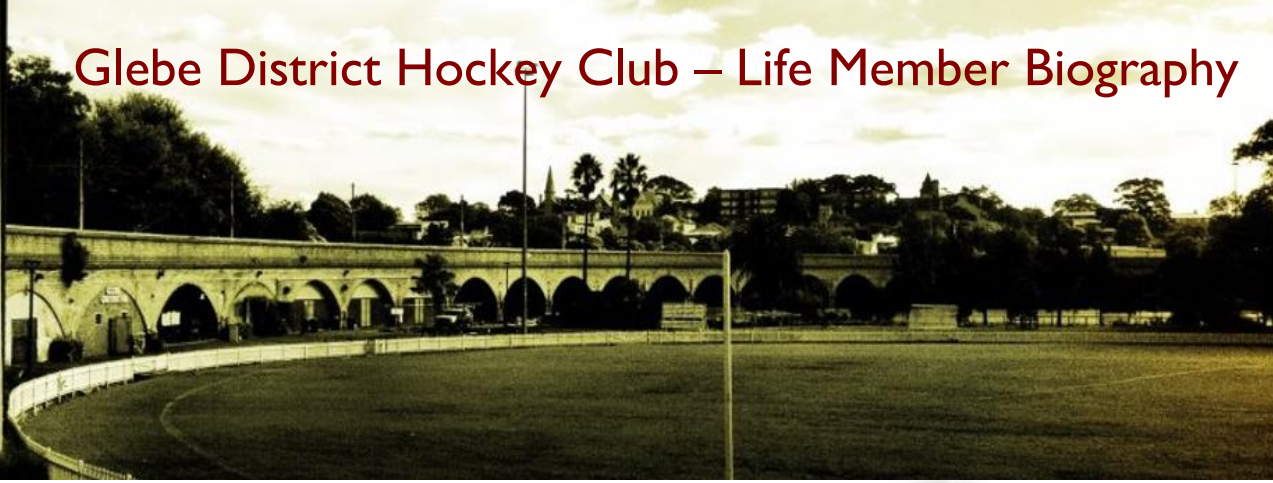


# Glebe District Hockey Club – Life Member Biography



## John Nilan

**DOB 9 January 1940**



### **Elected to Life Membership at the 2010 AGM**

John Nilan was the seventh of the ten children of John and Annie Nilan. John and Annie had arrived in Sydney in 1937 from County Cork in Ireland. The family lived at 233 Rose Street Darlington, behind Sydney University. John had his primary education at St Kieran's Primary School, 25 Golden Grove Street, Darlington and moved to Saint Benedict's Marist Brother's School, Broadway for his secondary education. The Nilan family home was later demolished to make way for University of Sydney's Noel Martin Sports and Aquatic Centre.

As a lad growing up, John's Irish father took him and his brother Pat out to Moore Park twice a month to play hurling in the summer and Gaelic football in the winter. John and Pat were introduced to team sports at an early age and they both had their own hurling sticks.

On leaving school John served an apprenticeship at a machine shop in Sheppard Street Darlington close to his family home, and became a qualified fitter- machinist.

John played cricket and rugby league at school and handball after school using the wall of a box factory opposite his house as the court. He had good hand-eye coordination. Starting at 15 he played rugby league for the Saint Benedict's Broadway CYO for a couple of years before the team folded. In 1960 he played for the Waterloo Waratahs, in the South Sydney Junior Competition, which won the competition. In 1961 he trialled for the Newtown Rugby League Club and was graded with the Club's first grade team.

From 1961-1964 he played rugby league with the Newtown Bluebags whose home ground was Henson Park, Marrickville. John was athletic, light on his feet, agile and had a good turn of pace. During his 4-year career with Newtown he played mainly on the wing and at full-back in the Club's first and second grade teams.

John was also a keen cricketer, a fast-medium pace opening bowler who was handy with the bat. After leaving school he played cricket for several years with a Saint Benedict's Old Boys' team in a competition at Moore Park. In 1961 he trialled with the Paddington Cricket Club and was graded in first grade.

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Glebe District Hockey Club Life Member – John Nilan



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In his first game for Paddington, he opened the bowling against Australian player Bob Simpson. Simpson went on to make 150 runs. Residential restrictions were in force in the district cricket competition in those days and after the season had finished it became known that some members of the Paddington Cricket Club, including John, were not residentially qualified to play for the Club, and were forced to move clubs.

In 1962 John began his cricketering career with the Glebe District Cricket Club (GDCC), for whom he was residentially qualified, playing in the Club's first and second grade teams. In 1965 Glebe amalgamated with the Paddington Cricket Club to form the Sydney Cricket Club to allow for the Sutherland Cricket Club to enter the district competition. John played for the Sydney Cricket Club until he was 45, but retired after the Club was forced out of the district competition to accommodate a new team from the Nepean area.

John took up golf, a game that he still enjoys and plays often.

Of John's 9 siblings, he had a younger brother Pat, 18 months younger than himself and the rest were girls. Pat joined the Glebe Juniors in 1956 as a 15-year-old lad and has been a club member ever since, for over 65 years. Pat represented Australia at hockey, went to three Olympic Games and was elected a Life-Member of the Club in 1971. At the family home in their teenage years Pat would practice his hockey and John often joined Pat in his practice sessions, and developed considerable skill with the hockey stick. John's earlier exposure to hurling helped him with his skill's acquisition.

John often attended Glebe games to watch his brother Pat play and became friendly with many of the Glebe players and supporters. He often joined Pat, Robert Brown, Len Needham and a few other Glebe players at training sessions at Saint Paul's Oval, Wentworth Park and Jubilee Oval. Some of the Glebe players of this era went to school with John at Marist Brother's Catholic High School Broadway, and he always had familiar faces on the sideline to keep him company. He became part of the hockey scene.

After his football days were over John played a season with the Glebe third grade team of 1968 at the age of 28, and acquitted himself with distinction. This team, nick named the "Easybeats" won the Premiership. The nickname came from a popular Australian Rock band of the mid-sixty's era called the Easybeats who played great music together. Players in this team were Darryl Fishenden, Harry Wark snr, Tom Harvey, Brian "Bear" Howe captain, Graeme Kirkland, Fred Letts, Bennett Dunn, Bob Fox, Colin Brown, Albert Hush and John Nelmes.



The Glebe Third Grade Premiership winning team of 1968 nicknamed the "Easybeats". The photo was taken at the sporting grounds of Saint Paul's College Sydney University.

**Back row L-R:** Darryl Fishenden, John Nilan, Harry Wark, Tim Harvey, Brian Howe, Graeme Kirkland, Fred Letts.

**Front row L-R:** Bennett Dunn, Bob "Rocker" Fox, Colin Brown (goalkeeper), Albert Hush, John Nelmes.

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Glebe District Hockey Club Life Member – John Nilan



John was a chatty fellow who got on very well with his teammates. It was a harmonious group of players who enjoyed each other's company and with his dry sense of humour John contributed a lot to the upbeat team banter before, during and after the game. His speed and agility were of great benefit to the team's on field success.

In 1966 the Nilan family moved from Darlington to Eastwood, after the University of Sydney resumed their house. He lived in Eastwood for over 55 years until 2021. John was married to his wife Patricia at Saint Kevin's Catholic Church Eastwood in 1972 and together they had two daughters, Leonie and Katrina.

Family life, raising his two daughters, and working kept John busy, and after his 1968 third grade premiership he retired from playing hockey. At that time John was in business with a few other people, running an industrial plant repair and maintenance operation that covered the east coast of Australia and the Pacific. He was often away from Sydney on weekends and this curtailed his ability to commit to play organized sport on a regular basis.

With the reduction of manufacturing capability in eastern Australia as more manufactured goods were imported, after 20 years John's industrial repair company was no longer profitable. He then began working as a maintenance fitter for McWilliams wines, where he worked until 2011, retiring when he was 72.

John missed his involvement with organised team sport and by early 1990s his domestic, parenting and work activities became less demanding.

John's elder sister Trudi had married Irishman John Diviney in 1956 and they had six children. All the Diviney children played hockey and John Diviney was elected to Life-Membership of the Club in 1980 for his unstinting efforts in fostering the Club's juniors. Two of Pat Nilan's four children, Shane and Aaron were keen Glebe hockey players and hockey was a constant theme of conversation at all Nilan-Diviney family functions and John was always fully briefed on Club activities.

In late 1993 at a Diviney/Nilan family BBQ, Colin Rochester, John and Trudy Diviney's son-in-law, married to their daughter Anne, was discussing hockey matters with John and suggested he take on the second-grade manager's job in 1994. Colin was captain-coach of the team, and he thought John was ideally suited to the manager's role. After a little thought, in 1994, John began his involvement in managing Glebe teams.



Photo taken at the Moorebank Hockey complex in September 1996 after the Glebe third grade team beat Ryde 5-3 in the grand-final to win the premiership. John Nilan often helped manage this team.

**L-R:** Colin Sargent, Les Wark (7), John Nilan (civvies), Jeff Busch, Geoff Hammett, Danny O'Brien, Adrian Searle, Tony Wark (bending down), Colin Rochester (5), Sam Everest who did not play on the day as he was injured, Harry Wark Jnr (Maroon Hat), Patrick Nilan at the sideline fence

Glebe District Hockey Club Life Member – John Nilan





In the 1994 Annual report Colin wrote about John: "In closing I take this opportunity to thank John Nilan, our manager, for an outstanding contribution throughout the year. John's preparation, professionalism, attention to detail, enthusiasm, and overall positive approach was a contributing he made week-in-week-out which every player, including myself as Captain/Coach greatly appreciated."

From 1995-1998 John was co-manager of the first-grade team with Mervyn Goodridge, with Leo Sherwood its trainer. The 1995 team coached by Colin Rochester won the SHA competition. The 1995 first grade squad included: Warren Buster Birmingham, Ken Wark, David Rochester, Pat McCann, Brad Goodridge, Aaron Nilan, Shane Nilan, Dean Benfield, Craig Stubbs, Brett Stubbs, Kevin Chivers, Alan Alderson, Terry Reece, Steve Cain, Craig Greaves, Simeon Booth, Christian Campano (reserve goalkeeper), Peter Busch, Craig Martin. In 1995-1998 John also managed the Club's second grade team.

Players in the 1997 first grade premiership winning squad were: Dean Benfield (goalkeeper), Christian Campano (reserve goalkeeper), Pat McCann, Ken Wark (captain), Kevin Chivers, Shane Nilan, Simeon Booth, James Wright, Chris Neville, Jeremy Boyce, Steven Cain, Aaron Nilan, Craig Greaves, Trent Benfield. Other players to help out during the season were Alan Alderson, Matthew Parker, Daniel Little, Wayne Benfield, Peter Busch, Brad Goodridge, Aaron Oman, David Krepp, Steven Sherwood and Craig Martin.

In 1999-2014, John was sole manager of the first-grade team. The 2005, 2006 and 2008 first grade teams that John managed won the premiership. The 2008 team comprised: Geoff Paterson (coach), Dean Benfield, Sam Noller, Past Casey, Josh La Spina, Zac Farlow, Peter Wark, Aaron Nilan, Matthew Wark, Shane Nilan, Adam Howard, James Benson, Alister Cullen, Pat Wark, Michael Wark, Mark Paterson, Ian Paterson, Aaron Oman, and Daniel Cleary, Andrew Cheong, Stephan Madycki.

2005 saw John win the Pat Nilan Trophy which is awarded annually to the most outstanding Club Member for the year as adjudged by the Management Committee.

In 2009 Geoff Paterson had this to say about John in his end of year report: "Thank you John for the way you conduct yourself and the guidance you give us all and the example of great sportsmanship in a tough year. Turning up on Tuesday night with drinks and Wednesday as well."



This photo of the 2008 Glebe premiership team was taken at the Homebush Olympic Pitch after its 4-2 grand-final victory against Norwest Stickers.

**Back row L-R:** Daniel Cleary, Sam Noller, Alister Cullen, Ian Paterson, Pat Wark, Michael Wark, Matthew Wark, Pat Casey, John Nilan (**manager**)

**Front row L-R:** Dean Benfield (goal keeper), Geoff Paterson (**coach**), Andrew Cheong (kneeling), Mark Paterson, Josh La Spina, Adam Howard, Zac Farlow, Peter Wark, Aaron Oman, Stephan Madycki.



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At the 2010 Annual General Meeting held in December at Number Four Railway Arch Jubilee Oval, Robert “Charlie” Brown, a Life Member of the Club proposed John for Life-Membership, for this unstinting dedication to the Club over many years. The vote was unanimous and John became the twenty-eighth Life-Member of the Glebe District Hockey Club.

John’s final year as manager of the first-grade team was 2014, a 21-year stint, and he was succeeded in 2015 by George Manou. A “fantastic time with the blokes” is the way John describes his life and times as a Glebe team manager. He still closely follows the fortunes of the Club and comes to Annual General Meetings and major social events.

In 2021 after living with his wife and family at Eastwood for over 55 years, John and Patricia moved to a retirement village at Erina on the Central Coast to be closer to his married daughters and their families.

John is an unassuming chap, a great philosopher, counsellor, support person, and has a soothing influence on a team. Personal differences, conflicts and team disharmony were often sorted out by John in his typical low key, reassuring, non-judgemental way. He was a great believer in just doing it, play what is in front of you, be flexible and adaptable, expect the unexpected, instinctive reactions are often the best course of action and that the game situation usually determines the tactics to be employed.

Every team requirement was attended to by John, such as organising the hit-up balls, ball-boys, providing ice for application to bruises, completing the match card, compiling the game statistics, having tape for running repairs, and having first-aid equipment ready. He ran on to the field to attend to injured players and provide expert first-aid.

John attended games with his large esky containing the ice in one hand, with the other equipment he carried in his other hand and a shoulder bag to boot. He carried these items from the carpark and lugged them to the dugout. All-up I estimate that the total weight would have been around 30 Kg. He always declined any offers of assistance to carry this load, which he carried with ease. Even into his later years John is a fit, strong, wiry, athletic person with the physical capabilities of a man 25 years his junior.

John heartily welcomed any players having their first, first-grade game and made sure they were settled and as calm as possible. He made a fuss of them and made an occasion of presenting them with their playing shirt for the first time.



This photo was taken at the Homebush Olympic Pitch after Glebe 1<sup>st</sup> grades 4-2 grand-final victory against Norwest Strikers.

L-R: John Nilan (manager) and Geoff Paterson (coach)

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Glebe District Hockey Club Life Member – John Nilan



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The players John managed appreciated all the care and attention he lavished on them and these bonds of friendship are on-going. John had a relaxed style, a low-key operator who made the players feel at ease. Win, lose or draw John was positive and optimistic, and very aware not to denigrate players, or to blame people for a team's imperfect performance.

He provided good cheer to the despondent, hope to the hopeless and reined-in any disruptive, angry, undisciplined rants that occasionally occur from frustrated, tired, disappointed players. He handled the highs and lows of winning and losing with equanimity and good grace, and constantly set a good example to the players in his own humble, gentle style.

He was a model of consistency, calmness, predictability and reliability. After the game John liked nothing better than to share a beer with the players, and supporters, dissect the ebbs and flows of the game, the heart-breaking moments, the exhilarating moments, and run through the statistics he had collected about the game. He inspired confidence in others, mixed well with all members of the Club both young and old and was a friend to all.

John was one of the first coaches or managers in the Club to regularly record game statistical information, such as corners for and against, circle penetrations and territorial advantages. He attended training sessions and match days, providing a rock of stability for the team. Even for Glebe supporters John provided a beacon of confidence. When us Glebe supporters saw John in the Glebe dug-out, we knew there will be courtesy, patience and appropriate behaviour.

Thanks, John, for all you have done for us, and all you continue to do for us. It is much appreciated by us all.



Photo taken on 30 November 2017 outside the Glebe DHC Club House Jubilee Oval after the Annual AGM with new Life Members Peter Busch and Andrew Goodrick.

**L-R:** John Nilan, Les Wark, Patrick Nilan, Harry Wark, Andrew Goodrick, Charlie Brown, George Manou, Peter Busch

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Glebe District Hockey Club Life Member – John Nilan

