Notes on Stan Judkins

(by his son – Noel Judkins)

As a youngster Dad would arrive home from school, in Greensborough, and there would be his older stepbrothers waiting just inside the gate in the front yard holding a cricket ball.

Each night the task would be set: the older boys would throw the ball at Stan who just had to catch it. If there was a fumble, and he dropped the catch, the stepbrothers would walk down and *whack* him. Drop it - you get wacked - that was the rule.

This exercise had a marked effect on young Stan through his football career, as he was renowned to have very safe hands, and to be a great ball handler.

In fact, when he went to play in the VFA at Northcote after leaving Greensborough, Stan would get to training early and do some fielding while the Northcote Cricketers had batting practice. During one of these sessions, the great Jack Ryder witnessed Stan fielding, and told him that if he could take a specialist fieldsman to England on the next tour - he would take Stan.

As you all know, Stan won the Brownlow Medal in 1930. At that stage the umpires only cast one vote to the Fairest & Best player on the ground for the day. Stan won with four votes, originally tying with the great Harry Collier of Collingwood and Alan Hopkins - a legend at Footscray.

Stan won on a “count back” because he only played 12 games whereas the other two had played 15 & 17 games respectively.

In 1989, the AFL, in it’s wisdom, awarded retrospective Brownlow Medals to all the players who had lost on count backs through the years.

Stan, who passed away in 1986, would have been delighted with the AFL’s decision, as he was a very vocal advocate of these great players getting their just reward. He was always saying it was a tragedy that they had missed out getting the medal they so richly deserved.

In the 1970’s Stan and my mum (Dolly) would drive to Shute Harbour in the Whitsundays each year, and spent 5 months there. Every year he would call in and visit Alan Hopkins in Northern Victoria on the way.

Collecting the Medal

Stan arrived home after work one evening after the end of the season and his father told him that a telegram had arrived that afternoon with the news that Stan had won the Brownlow Medal - and congratulated him on doing so.

The telegram asked that he contact the VFL Headquarters and arrange a time to come in and have it presented.

Stan made arrangements for the following Tuesday evening and was asked to be at Headquarters at 7.30pm. On that evening, Stan caught the train from Greensborough to Princes Bridge Station, which is now the sight of Federation Square. He got off the train, and noticing it was only 6.45pm, decided to fill in time by going for a walk. He went up Swanston Street to Latrobe Street, then up Latrobe Street to Spring Street, then down Spring Street to VFL Headquarters (Harrison House) - which was a few yards from Flinders Street - arriving about 7.25pm.

He was met at the door and shown into a nice lounge where dignitaries were waiting to present the medal and celebrate with him. After celebrating with a cup of tea and cake, Stan was on the 8.30pm train back to Greensborough.

The next day another telegram arrived asking Stan to make contact to arrange to go to the Herald Sun building in Flinders Street, as they had forgotten to take a photo. Stan was always annoyed by the photo that they took, because it showed him in borrowed shorts nearly down to his knees, and he was quite proud of the fact that he had introduced the shorter, more modern shorts, that would become the norm, due to his job as a tailor.

One of the things that I learned, as his son over the years, that he didn’t ever mention was that he was actually Richmond’s top vote getter in the Brownlow for 5 x years. Things were certainly different in 1930, as now there would be a frantic media blitz on the winner and photographers galore.

To emphasise how different most sports were in those days, Phar Lap, who won the 1930 Melbourne Cup, started 4 times in Cup Week, for 4 wins over varying distances, ie. Saturday Derby Day 2000m, Cup Day 3200m, Thursday Oaks Day 1600m and the last Saturday 2400m.

Could you imagine Bart doing that with a good horse?

Jack Dyer told me at Dad’s funeral that Dad was a real showman, and only ever played on the Grandstand wing. Also, that the supporters used to sing a song as he sped past “ *number 6 is Judkins - isn’t he a flyer - he even runs so fast at times - he sets the grass on fire*”.

Jack also told me that Dad often “acknowledged” the fans as he sped by with a little wave. Jack wrote an article on Dad in a football magazine sometime in the 1960’s, and called him the ‘Johnny Rae’ of football.

Johnny Rae was an American singer, who was regarded as the greatest showman of his time, and played up to his fans by kneeling and crying, and pleading to them during his performances.

Dad’s great mate at that time, Alan Geddes, played on the other wing. Dad said he was the best winger in the game. Geddes was captain at some stage, and after the toss, would go to his wing on the far side of the ground, walk up to his opponent and say “Fair or Foul“?

If his opponent said “Fair” Geddes would play him “fair” - but if he said “foul” he would belt him all day.

Hence, Dad said he always had to mind the best ball players, because they wouldn’t play on Geddes.

Dad played at 5 foot 5 ½ inches and 9 stone 9lb. A good mate at Greensborough was a boy named Reg Heather. Reg wanted to play football and Dad wanted to ride horses. Reg, who was the team’s mascot, became one of Australia’s greatest jockeys, and was one of the first to go to England on contract. During this time he regularly rode for the Queen.

Dad’s nickname was the ‘Tin Hare’ - named after the rabbit at the Greyhounds. At that time it was made of tin, and went around the outside fence so fast in was never caught.

Dad’s introduction to Richmond wasn’t as smooth as it could have been, as Richmond wanted him to go there in 1927, but Northcote refused to clear him. So it wasn’t until 1928 that he got his clearance.

On arriving, the Coach, Checker Hughes, allocated a big fellow named George Rudolph to be Dad’s mentor. Dad was really chuffed as he thought Rudolph was the best big man he had seen, and he carried that thought all his life. He always regarded George as one of the “greats”.

During the pre-season, George followed Dad around and was like a shadow - but he never spoke to him. Dad was somewhat puzzled at that, but just went along with it.

Then, along came the big night at the Richmond Town Hall for the “Presentation of Jumpers”. Dad was awarded number 6 and got called to stand for acknowledgment. He jumped up, all pumped, very proud & excited, but when he sat down, big George had broken the ice by planting a bunch of grapes on the seat, which swashed nicely into the pants of his new suit!

The players all thought that was a great joke, and it seemed like it was expected. George and Dad then had a long lasting friendship until George left unexpectedly to join Oakleigh in the VFA. Together with an ex-Carlton rover, he became part of what became known as “The 20 Pound Ruck”.

Dad later had his share of being a mentor. His first pupil was a 17 year old Jack Dyer - who arrived in 1931. Dad was in the drinking team, and on one occasion, during a train trip across the Nullarbor to play an exhibition game in Perth, he introduced Jack to the demon drink.

After one or two, Dad, and the legendary property steward, and Dad’s best mate at Richmond, Charlie Callander, had to assist young Dyer back to his sleeper and tuck him in for the night.

There were many cartoons in the daily papers in those days depicting various VFL players, and the things that happened to them. One was a drawing of a game at the Junction Oval, between St Kilda & Richmond, on a terrible day, where the ground was a like a mud bath. The pictures show Dad getting knocked out just before the final siren. As the St Kilda players are walking off, they notice a pile of mud move in the centre of the muddy cricket wicket area. Assuming it is one of theirs, the St Kilda boys lift up the pile of mud and carry the poor blighter into the rooms where the trainers take over and place him into a bath fully clothed. As they eventually wash him clean, they yell “Hey - it’s the Tin Hare!” Consequently, Dad got kicked out and had to find his own way back to the Richmond rooms.

The early 1930’s Richmond centreline of Stan Judkins, Eric Zschech & Alan Geddes was regarded as the best in the business. They played together in four successive Grand Finals, winning in 1932 & 1934. The Richmond team was always up in the top four from 1927 until 1935. Collingwood were always the team to beat, but Richmond was not far behind. Dad played 133 games in 10 seasons during that era, and always said that the emphasis on a stable team, with players of great character and mateship, was the reason they were so strong.

After leaving Richmond, at the end of an injury riddled 1936 season, Dad took the coaching job at Albury, where he had a great team, including some ex VFL players. He won a Premiership, but unfortunately the business, where he had a job in the town, closed down. As jobs were difficult to get in those depression years, he accepted a coaching position at Drouin, because it came with a job.

Drouin had been a basket case in their competition, but in one season he took them from last place to runners up. Unfortunately though, the Drouin job also disappeared, and this time he had to head to Hamilton, where he got work in a grocery store. At Hamilton he took them to an immediate premiership.

After the season at Hamilton, he then joined the AIF and became a drill sergeant, stationed on the Atherton Tablelands, where they were training soldiers for jungle warfare against the Japanese. During this time he persuaded the hierarchy to conduct an Aussie rules “Challenge Competition” between the various units. They cut a ground out of the rainforest and had a game, the first of many. Dad coached and played in the centre, and could not believe the quality standard of the games, which featured players from all over the country, ie. SA, WA, Victoria, Tassie, etc.

He said during most of these games he just stood there and watched what were great exhibitions of Australian football. He came out after 5 years in the Army, some of it spent in Borneo as a pretty sick man - probably from malnutrition of a sort. He was coaching Sandringham 2nds when the Senior Coach was enticed to Melbourne FC mid-season.

Consequently, Dad took over the Senior 18 in 1946, but he just wasn’t fit enough to continue in 1947. He eventually recovered somewhat, and in 1949, he and a mate started up what was to become the VFA Under 19’s or “Thirds”.

After this, he went on to coach younger kids and had good success with East Sandringham Under18’s - a Club that has since produced dozens of VFL/AFL players, eg. Chris Judd. At that time, one of his Stan’s young players was Jeff Crouch, later to become the top VFL umpire of his day.

Stan then took a couple of years off, but was asked to take on an Amateur team desperate for success. Despite never playing in the finals before, under Stan they made it to fourth place and were ecstatic. However, on the Tuesday night before the First Semi Final, as Dad was jogging in the centre of the ground directing training, his knee cap “snapped”. They say it was so loud it was like the sound of a “303” being fired. When they opened the knee up for surgery, the bone had become like “powder” which meant he spent the rest of his life with no kneecap. His final game as a coach was from his hospital bed at the Alfred, and his team was beaten by one solitary point to be eliminated.

He then took up lawn bowls, and with his great mate Jack Anderson, won the Victorian B Grade Pairs Title. He had many other tournament wins over the next 30 years.

Stan lived a great life. He enjoyed everyone he met, and had a great sense of humour. He used to take my wife (Gail) to the Brownlow Medal Night each year, as Mum would not go. The first year he took her, he just introduced her as “Mrs Judkins” and left it at that. His old mates, and the other winners at the table, just looked at each other as if to say “silly old bugger - he sure is batting out of his league there!” But after an hour or so they had worked out the truth, and all had a good laugh.

A peculiar thing about Dad’s make up was that he was totally ambidextrous. He kicked right foot and bowled left arm “china man” spinners - but right arm off breaks. He batted right hand but played golf left hand. He wrote right handed but played lawn bowls left handed - and when playing tennis he never hit a back hand, because he was a switch hitter able to always hit forehands by simply changing hands!

All I can say about Stan is that he was “a great Dad - and a great Friend to all.

**Stan Judkins Summary**

Full name: Stanley Lucas Judkins

Date of birth: 4 October 1907

Place of birth: Fitzroy, Australia

Date of death: 17 October 1986 (aged 79)

Original team(s): Greensborough (DVFL) & Northcote (VFA)

VFL Debut: 1928, Richmond vs. Geelong

VFL Playing career: 1928–1936 Richmond 133 x games

Brownlow Medal 1930

Richmond Premiership Player 1932 & 1934

Interstate Games x 1

  