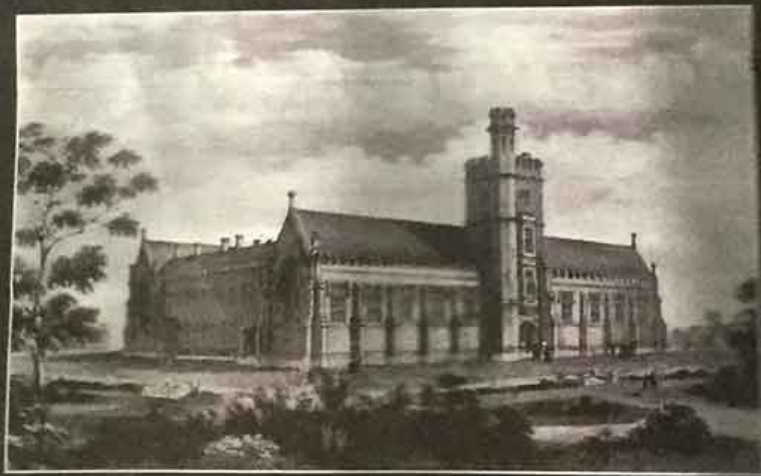


# THE TIES THAT BIND

## A History of Sport at the University of Melbourne



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# Moving Indoors: Stadium Sports, Racquet Sports, Martial Arts

Apart from changes taking place in the culture of existing sporting clubs, there was a greater challenge to the structure of organised sport at the university through the formation of new clubs. The demand for a wider interpretation of appropriate forms of recreation moved the culture of sport at the university away from those sports that had been at the core of an English sporting culture. From 1938, Fritz Duras and, from 1955, Franz Stampfl were influential in offering different models for sport. But within the population, generally, after the Second World War there was an interest in investigating the novel. The post-war expansion of softball and volleyball owed much to the American contacts during the Second World War, though American gridiron never gained the support to compete against the well-entrenched football codes. Martial arts, originating in Asia, appeared on the scene. Another reason for the increased profile of sports such as basketball or table tennis was the role immigrants from Europe took in expanding participation.

Most of these sports had been played in Melbourne but had not been represented at the university. Now, with the expansion of student numbers, there was sufficient interest to initiate and support new clubs in different sports. This was not a simple matter of addition, for these new clubs required a change in thinking about sport. No longer was the understanding that England was at its best and bravest and no longer was open air an essential requirement for the pursuit of exercise.

Until this time the understanding of a sports stadium in Melbourne had been linked to professional boxing, sites like the stadium in West Melbourne or the old Fitzroy stadium in Brunswick Street. Both these locales were the antithesis of what was considered to be appropriate for a university sporting culture. In the post-war decades, there was a demand for indoor sporting space to play a range of sports. In the past some of these sports had been played in the indoor recreational spaces of the Young Men's and Women's Christian Associations and church halls. The gymnasium at the Melbourne Teacher's College was heavily used. Now, the sports that had operated in these sites were given a broader definition and more purpose-built spaces began to appear around Melbourne. Here the Beaurepaire Centre provided a new sporting site that allowed the formation of new clubs and a significant shift in the sporting culture. In April 1963 *Farrago* announced a course in creative dancing to be held in the Trophy Hall in the Beaurepaire Centre on Monday evenings.<sup>2</sup> All things were now possible.

## *Stadium Sports*

### **Basketball**

In 1891, when those at the University of Melbourne were settling into the demands of regular competition in cricket, Australian football, tennis and lacrosse, Dr James Naismith was



brainstorming yet another new sport. This was basketball, tailored to meet the needs of the Young Men's Christian Association in Springfield, Massachusetts, for a winter sport. Because the game was played indoors and therefore could be played at night and in all weather, it was soon taken up by those already interested in promoting the benefits of organised sport for their constituents—educational institutions, the army, churches and workplaces. In 1932 an international body was formed and in 1936 basketball was played at the Olympic Games.

Basketball had developed in Melbourne largely under the aegis of the Young Men's Christian Association and the churches. Although one of its strengths was that it was played on an indoor court, this was actually a disadvantage in Melbourne. Local government authorities or churches were reluctant to invest in buildings to house the sport. As a consequence, there was no common standard of playing conditions and this remained a major limitation to the expansion of interest in the sport. In 1931 the Victorian Basketball Association was formed and by the end of the decade there was a sufficient level of competition around Australia for a national body to be formed. However, it was not until 1946 that the first Australian men's championships were organised. The first women's championship was not held until 1955. In 1948 Australia affiliated to the International Basketball Federation (FIBA). By then, the standard of play in Victoria was much enhanced by post-war migration which brought Lithuanians, Latvians and Hungarians, well versed in basketball, to Australia, as well as by Mormon missionaries from the United States of America. Then the Olympic Games gave new impetus to basketball and an annexe to the Exhibition Buildings housed the competition.

In 1946 University of Tasmania wrote to the sports union asking if there was any prospect of a men's basketball team being formed.<sup>3</sup> At this time, the sports union was not interested in taking the initiative in expanding sport at the university and it was left to students to organise a new sport themselves. Subsequently, in July 1947, a men's basketball club was enrolled and competed in intervarsity.<sup>4</sup> The issue of a space to play was a problem. In 1954, when intervarsity was held in Melbourne, they used the Melbourne University Regiment Drill Hall as a practice site for the teams.<sup>5</sup> At this time, there was no basketball site in



*Basketball team,  
Second Division  
premiers 1963: Back  
row: Graeme  
Faichney, Ian  
Nicholls, John  
Mercer, Lou Anceschi;  
Front row: Jon  
Liddelow, Len Arnott,  
David Arnott, Garry  
Butler; Absent: Rod  
Claessen, Ross Ponds.  
(Farrago, 18 October  
1963)*



Melbourne. Although there was the impetus of the Olympic Games, this did not have a lasting impact. Lindsay Gaze, a prominent basketball player at time, by 1961 was teaching in the physical education department:

At the time of the Olympic Games, they decided to hold basketball at the Exhibition Buildings. We were disappointed that there would be no legacy of the Olympic Games in the way of a stadium but many thought that there was no point in building a white elephant because they thought of basketball as virtually a non-event. At that time there were only 1,500 registered players and many of those were European migrants. There was even confusion with netball, so there was not much credibility given to basketball.<sup>6</sup>

For basketball at the university, the building of the Beaurepaire Centre with a basketball court was a major advance and because of the 'proper facilities' there was both an improvement in the standard of basketball and in the numbers of students interested in the sport.

The university men emerged as a strong team by the end of the 1950s. At this time basketball was a novelty. In 1958 *Farrago* observed that basketball, 'being a relatively new sport in Australia, is still a much under-rated game' but continued, 'It is a far more popular sport in Europe than in Australia and New Australian students are adding to the standard and popularity of the game'.<sup>7</sup> Saturday afternoon practice was introduced and consisted of 'dribbling drills and extensive practice against a man-to-man defence, with new plays now being used by American ball teams coming into force'. As these new plays were considered 'well suited to the Shop's style of play', the outlook was good. Andy Kalkavs was elected captain and Ronny Holt, vice-captain.<sup>8</sup> In 1959 they won the A reserve in the Victorian Amateur Basketball Association and there was sufficient interest in the sport for it to be included in the list of inter-faculty contests in 1960.<sup>9</sup>

In 1961 the basketball club lifted its profile by employing Allan Landells as coach, recruiting actively and providing special coaching for beginners.<sup>10</sup> The club wanted 'to win its way into the Victorian championship's "first division", and in 1963, this was achieved when University won the A Reserve premiership and so returned to A grade in 1964.<sup>11</sup> In 1965 there was correspondence from the basketball club regarding the possibility of appointing an American coach and this was acted upon.<sup>12</sup> By 1967 there were six men's teams.<sup>13</sup> As well as breadth of interest, there was also depth: in 1968, R. Watson was selected in the Australian team for the Olympic Games in Mexico.

Soon, though, the club had outgrown the space it had so enthusiastically secured in the Beaurepaire Centre and, by 1970, its lack of facilities was holding back recruits.<sup>14</sup> John Campbell played with the club when it moved to the larger space in the Air Hall:

When I finished it had just moved to the new stadium. It was obviously a quantum leap forward in terms of space and the club could play its league games there and there was space for spectators and a scoreboard.

In the 1970s, the sport grew fairly significantly. It was really a statewide phenomena: basketball went from a very minor sport to a fairly major sport and there was a real growth at the uni. in the number of teams and players from the late seventies onwards.



*Part IV: Widening the Horizons*

The club had teams competing close to the top level in the state and there were plenty of championships and highs and lows. The club always considered the intervarsity competition a major part of its endeavours and the men won in '78 and '81.

Good players? There were guys like Dr Ray Watson and in the early 1970s when the Education Department were bringing out teachers from the States, there were a couple of players who were studying at uni. and played for a while, like Bruce Solibakke who became promotions and development officer at Bulleen-Templestowe Basketball Club. Then there were basketballers, such as Damien Keogh, who studied at Melbourne Uni. but were involved elsewhere.<sup>15</sup>

In 1964 a women's international basketball club was accepted as an enrolled club in the sports union, although it was by then in its second year.<sup>16</sup> In 1962 the first intervarsity contest in women's international basketball had been held and in 1963 Melbourne had won the contest.<sup>17</sup> Within a few years of the organisation of the women's club, there were three teams.<sup>18</sup> In 1966, the two basketball clubs cut new ground by amalgamating.<sup>19</sup> Now, those in the club looked more at what they had in common:

I think it was just what happened as you start to get interested in each other's activities and tournaments. And when you were looking for coaches, you'd often look to the blokes to see if they had anyone because they'd been playing basketball for longer. And then the two combined at an intervarsity—men's and women's were run at the same time.

To Cheryl McKinna, basketball offered 'good fun—both the training and the playing':

There was one classic team of women. We had in the team Debbie Laurie (later Wardley) who became the first woman pilot of a commercial airliner, we had Di Patterson who became the first woman officer in charge of an Australian Antarctic base, a woman who became the company secretary of TAA when it was still an airline, a woman who ran her own small business, another woman, Trish Clifford (later Faulkner) who is now secretary of the Victorian government Department of Human Services and me, who became the first woman director of sport at Melbourne University. So, it was really, although we didn't realise it at the time, just brilliant timing. We were winning competitions, that was great, and we were having a great time together.

We still keep in touch and reminisce about what this person is doing now and how they were a real superstar. They'd be in the paper and all that sort of stuff. They were a really high-achieving group of women, which is probably the same for any sport at a reasonably high level—that the people who commit to sport, to train and go through all the pain, angst, sacrifice and everything—have a lot of self-discipline.<sup>20</sup>