



1979 UWA First Grade Premiers
Bronwyn Mather rear centre

THE COUNTRY CONNECTION

By Bronwyn Mather (Lang) who joined in 1977 from Northam

I joined the Uni Women's Hockey Club when I came to the city in 1977 to study at UWA. I had been encouraged to join the club by Jo Ryan and Anwen Williams, who were staff members at Northam SHS, where I had attended. It was still scary venturing down for training that first time but soon I felt welcome and at ease, especially when I found out that Suzi Wood was coming as well, we had played most of our high school hockey together.

I learnt much in my time at Uni both on and off the field. I developed as a player throughout this time under the guidance of several coaches including Pam Rothwell, Peter Pederson, Judy Blight, Lindsay Edmonds and Jenny Wealand. It was awesome to come from playing country hockey to being on the field with State and Australian players. I was fortunate to be part of several premierships as the Uni Women's 1A side enjoyed a very successful time during this period.

The 1979 Premiership stands out for me as it was the first Grand Final on the new turf. The State Championships of 1980 were significant plus I had my 21st on the Saturday night right in the middle of the carnival. The whole team attended and fortunately I didn't have to front up for the first game on Sunday morning!

I played in four Interschool Carnivals – Perth 1977, Canberra 1978, Hobart 1979 and Melbourne (Monash Uni) 1980. I loved IV. I loved the hockey, the new friendships formed, the fun, the travel and the singing. As a result of going to IV, I was selected in an Australian Universities Team that toured New Zealand in 1980, along with Erica Herron and Sheralee Edwards. I have to say that the singing antics of the Aussie girls was not appreciated very much in NZ with the final dinner being bought to an early close by the management of the function centre because of our singing.

Some of my fondest and clearest memories from IV's include the final dinner at Monash when the concertina doors between the men and women was opened and 1500 men singing 'If I give you fish and chips.....' then 1500 women squeaking back 'If you give me fish and chips...etc'. The whole of the Hobart carnival being the first combined IV. The 'beep beep' of the horn as a certain Wasy blonde

announced her arrival back at our motel on the first morning in Hobart to signify the success of her goal from the previous night to get a car for the week!

Two Gun Gummer being told to get on the plane and never come back to Tasmania after he returned the hire car and Bubbles drilling a ball head height into the spectators on the hill that were hassling her.

I took on several administrative roles during my time with the club. I recall that the club had recognised that not having juniors was a weakness and one year we entered a PLC team under the UWHC banner. In this team were Julie Waddell and Sandy Johnstone who went on to be outstanding contributors for the club at a senior level.

I am so impressed how the junior side of the club has evolved and this is of particular significance to me now as our eldest daughter is completing her schooling in Perth and has been embraced within a very supportive nest of people at the UWAHC.

The game of hockey has evolved for the better over the years with the advent of synthetic surfaces and rule changes. My first games as a junior were on a hard dirt ground that had such a slope that the ball often rolled away as you were preparing to take a free hit. Fortunately, Northam had grass fields and when I came to Uni the fields at McGillivray were some of the best in the metro area.

When I first started playing hockey the game commenced with an onside bully, there was an offside rule and when a ball went out over the sideline, it was rolled back in by the half back. Other players had to be behind a five-yard tram line that was drawn all the way down the field. The change to a sideline hit was a definite improvement!

Rules to do with balls being played in the air have been subject to many changes over the years from being able to hand stop them to not and from being able to raise into the circle and then not and then yes again. I recall that during the 1979 Men's World Championships in Perth there was a lot of aerial 'ping pong' going on in the circles which was very dangerous and the rule was altered following this event. In my view, the best rule change was with interchange rule. There used to be a substitution rule where you were unable to return to the game if you were taken off. This meant that the 12th and 13th players were often left on the bench as long as possible and it was difficult for these players to feel the same sense of belonging to the team as the first eleven. It is very different now as the 'bench' can be used strategically by coaches to impact on the game and players can rotate on and off allowing the team to be more than the eleven on the field.

It is with great warmth that I reflect on this time with the Uni Hockey Club as it is a very important part of who I am. I have particularly enjoyed re-establishing connections with the club via the juniors and the club now takes on another meaning for me as we move into the next generation, sons and daughters of former players playing together and being coached and developed by players from my era.

I wish the club continued success and encourage all to make the most of the opportunities that this wonderful club presents.