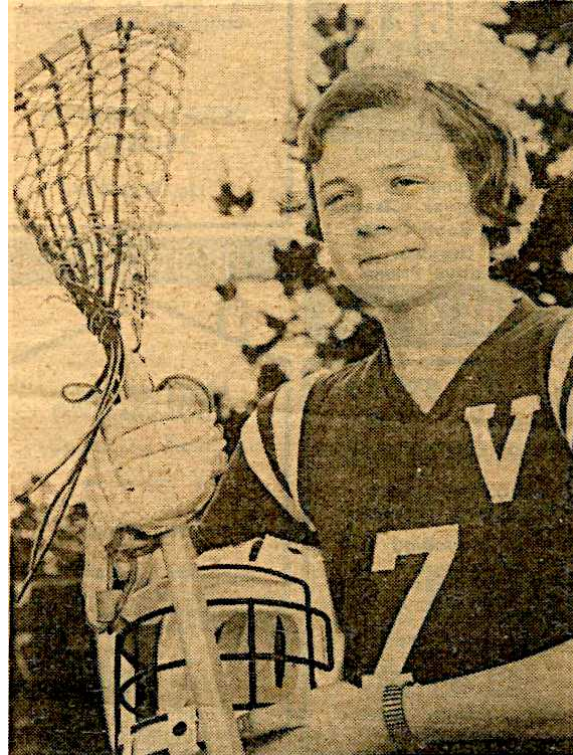


## ROD ANSELL – AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE CHAMPION

Rod Ansell was recruited from Malvern Central School in 1971 at the age of 10 as a product of Franks Lansbury's clinics, as well as the influence of best mate Kevin Wight.

"Frank clearly didn't see any great potential as the first stick he gave me was a left-handed wooden women's stick!"

Rod was fortunate to have Lenny Austin and Ron Alaimo as under 12 coaches, Russell Waite and Graeme Minniece as under 14 coaches and Mick Hilsberg and Jim Daw as under 16 coaches, from 1971-1976.



Rod in 1976 in the Victorian Under 16 team

Rod attended Melbourne High School which played a few games every year in an informal competition against Williamstown High, University High and Mitcham High.

"Jim Daw was very adamant that I played with a wooden stick and not switch to plastic, but the change finally happened in the Under 19 competition which was the first year where a senior player could play in the team. We had Allan Datson as player coach and were runners up to Willy in 1977 and 1978, which was stacked with talent including Robert Flaherty as playing coach and Dennis Newman, Tony Lewer and Steve Pike playing in the team.

In 1978 Bill Daw gave me a handful of A Grade (State League) games whilst the Aussie box team was away and then I played all of 1979 in A Grade under Graeme Reddaway and played state league every year until retiring after the 2002 premiership, which also coincided with the Club's 100 year anniversary.

"In 1979 I was selected in a Victorian Under 23 team to be the fourth team in the national carnival coached by Alec Inglis. I didn't get a lot of game time (Probably wasn't good enough!) and this became my drive and motivation to prove Alec wrong. I spent a lot of time in the gym and pounding the pavement along with Dave Joy, trying to improve my fitness and strength as well as playing box lacrosse in the off season to improve my skills.

In 1992 I was co-captain of the “Kookaburras”, a touring team put together by Ray Trevaskis, where we played approx. 10 games throughout the U.S., which included attending the 1982 world Championship held at John Hopkins University and culminating in playing in the annual Vale tournament in Colorado. Darren Gibson and I were fortunate enough to also play with the Air Force team in the Vale tournament. This trip gave me the confidence that I could play at a high level and the drive to play for Australia at a world championship.

From the late 70's to the mid-80's Malvern had a number of international players and the ability to train with and against the likes of Mike O'Neill, Craig Jaeger, Jim Calder, Ric Blick, Jeff Goldberg, Bob Bonniello, Tom Lion and Bob Cook, assisted in developing and improving my game. Malvern had a strong team during the 80's and 90's and training was often harder and more competitive than playing some games on a Saturday.

With the defence of Brad Skepper, Mark Haddad, Matt Arthur, Sean Slattery and Andy Cook against Peter Brown, Glenn Meredith, Paul Cook, Adrian Skepper, Craig Bell, Chris Baker and the “seasonal Americans”, there were some very intense and hard training sessions!

Rod played state league from 1978-2002, playing in 9 grand finals, winning 6 of them, and was co-captain for 19 seasons, winning the club's best and fairest (Joint winner) in 1994.

Following retirement from state league, Rod played division 2 (2004-08, winning 3 premierships, 1 runners - up) and in his last year as a player (2009) he played division 3, where they won the premiership.

## **STATE REPRESENTATION**

Rod represented Victoria in one Under 16 team and 2 Under 19 teams, and went on to represent Victoria in the senior team for 13 years (Co-captain on 7 occasions and All Australian 5 times). He was also a member of the Victorian box team for 3 years (Co-Captain once).

## **INTERNATIONAL**

Rod represented Australia in 2 world championship teams (1986 & 90 as co-captain) and 1 Australian touring team (USA – 1990 as co-captain).

“It was an unbelievable experience and memory to represent Australia and play in the green and gold, funnily enough I never felt overawed or intimidated playing against the USA or Canada, it was a great challenge and chance to test and prove yourself against the best. I think I got more anxiety playing weekly for Malvern!”



## COACHING

Assistant coach of Australian men's team to 3 world championships (2014, 18 & 23, including 2 tours to Japan in 2014 & 18)

Assistant coach of Australia men's Sixes team to the 2022 World Games

Co-coach of Malvern's state league team in 1998 and after retiring he coached the senior team in 2003, and junior co-coach for 2 years

Rod became involved with women's lacrosse due to his daughter playing, and coached the following teams:-

- Coach - Caulfield/Eastside state league team (2007-10)
- Assistant coach - Victorian senior team (2008, 10 & 2011)
- Head coach - Victorian senior team (2009)
- Head coach of the Australian team (2009)
- Coach Malvern B grade (7 Years)
- Co-coach Malvern A grade (2020-22)
- Co-coach Malvern state league (2023)

Unlike many successful lacrosse players who go on to represent Australia, Rod did not walk away or step back once he retired, instead he immersed himself in administration, coaching and refereeing, which he has been doing for 15 years since he retired as a player. His roles include treasurer of Malvern for 2 years (1980's), serving on the Malvern committee for over 33 years, junior referee for Under 11 thru Under 18 for 16 years, and has been the mainstay and very capable and respected club referee for Malvern since he retired as a player, of which he has been an accredited level 1 referee for over 15 years.

He also researched and proposed an Australian team representative numbering recognition system to LA, which was adopted.

## **AWARDS**

1995 Life Member Malvern

2014 L.A. Certificate of Merit

## **BIGGEST INFLUENCERS**

Graeme Minniece, Ron Alaimo, Kevin Wight, Brian Bell, David Joy, Chris Bird, Bill Stahmer and indirectly Alec Inglis.

## **TOUGHEST OPPONENTS**

Darren Gibson – always a challenge as no matter what the situation he was always going to take you on, Geoff Spicer and Scott Griffin – very crafty and slick lefties, Brian Smith – had a big bag of tricks, Robert Flaherty and Dennis Newman - both very quick with hard shots, Graeme Fox and Chris Brown - both had great vision and smiled as they fed the ball no matter how hard you were checking them, Jeff Kennedy and Peter Cann – had an unbelievable connection, you knew what was going to happen but it was difficult to prevent!, Ross Freeman – used his size to advantage and knew where the goals were.

## **BEST PLAYERS HE HAS SEEN?**

Best players (Australia) – Jeff Kennedy, Peter Cann, Graeme Fox, Keka, Steve Mounsey, Darren Gibson, Chris Brown, Paul Cook, Brad Skepper, John Tokarua and Murray Keen.

Best international players - John Tucker, George McGeeney, Gait Brothers, Kevin Alexander, Roddy Marino, Vin Sombrotto, John Fay (could shoot one handed, very rare in the early 80's), John Grant (Snr) to name a few.

## **TESTIMONIALS**

### **GLENN MEREDITH (Former Australian player and coach)**

It's funny to talk about a defensive player who would be the first to admit he didn't possess a huge array of particular standout talents—especially with the ball. But I've never seen anyone get more out of their own abilities, or themselves, than Rod "Rocket" Ansell.

I often reference Allan Border when I think of Rod. Neither were flashy, technically perfect, or junior standouts in their respective sports. But both simply refused to believe they weren't good enough and they simply outworked everyone around them to not only become leaders in their sport—but leaders of their countries.

Of course Rod was a very talented defender in his own right, but his greatest strengths were his leadership, unwavering commitment to the process, and an unshakable belief in his teammates. He genuinely believed that together, we could always achieve great things. He would simply go to the wall for the team, and that kind of commitment inspired everyone around him to raise their standards to match. No one I know ever questioned Rod becoming the Australian captain—it was not only expected, it was simply who he was as a player.

Rod was incredibly hard to beat one-on-one at any level. It wasn't about fast feet, flashy stick skills, or brute strength. Rod absolutely refused to lose a contest because, in his world, letting

down his teammates just wasn't an option and I and many others were honoured to play alongside him.

To this day, Rod still runs and gets on the rowing machine every morning. That inner drive still burns bright. He's been an assistant coach at the last four world championships, continuing to demand the same level of commitment from incoming defence players that he always demanded from himself, and anyone that wants to improve should absolutely listen to him, and it's clear Rod has already given far more than his share back to the game he still lives and loves.

### **PETER BROWN (Former Australian player)**

I was fortunate enough to play with Rod on the 1986 Aussie team, and I soon learnt via many training sessions that he was a serious competitor.

We renewed acquaintances when I joined Malvern in 1987-89 and Rod along with Mark Haddad and Brad Skepper formed a formidable defence that elevated training sessions to a new level. Rod's leadership demanded individuals and the collective team to train at these intense levels. Without being disrespectful to oppositions, training was invariably tougher than most games. He would never ask you to do anything he wouldn't do and Rod was a smart operator.

I soon learnt that you needed to keep moving when he was guarding you as he'd soon "Set you up" for his favourite "Reverse wrap checks"!

Rod didn't possess the slick stick skills and athleticism of a Brad Skepper but he was the perfect quarterback of the defence. He was a very good reader of the game and his interceptions were frequent, and he was unwavering and intimidating on ground balls.

He was so crucial in helping Malvern coach Gary "Gus" Campbell mould the defence into a very good unit, especially when you add the eccentricity of a Mark Haddad.

I admired Rod as he had a fabulous work ethic, and had an unwavering desire to succeed.

On reflection, he was a most disciplined individual both on and off the field.

He carried these attributes into his involvement in Aussie campaigns and we'd spend many hours talking lax, reminiscing and hanging the proverbial on each other.

When you're mixing it with Glenn "Rubber" Meredith, Murray "Muzza" Keen and "Rocket", you'd better have a sense of humour and a "Thick skin"!

In closing, Rod has always had a great appreciation and respect for the past "greats" of the game, but he is, now well and truly one of them himself. Congratulations Rod "Rocket" Ansell.

### **PETER CANN (Former Australian player)**

Played against Rod a number of times when he was representing Victoria over the years during state carnivals in the 80's and with him in the Australian team in 1986 and 1990.

Rod was a significant player in defence, his knowledge of the game, matched to his high levels of skill, fairness, reliability and teamwork were just some of his playing attributes. Always a team first person with the ability to blend in with team mates, that stood out to me.

His attributes became clear and was one of the captains in the Australian teams in 1990, always dependable in defence and transition with a keenness to improve all aspects of his game and the team. A strong competitor, highly committed, and his solid leadership showed out during training and game days, with a clear desire to be the best he could and to support his team mates and coaches, both on and off the field.

Rod continued giving back to the game after his retirement by taking on roles in Australian teams, refereeing and spending considerable time supporting Malvern in all aspects of the game.

His willingness to assist others by sharing his knowledge and experience, matched by an ongoing desire to learn as much as he can about the game, and continue to help others, makes him stand out as a leader and valuable contributor to club, state and Australian lacrosse.

## **CONCLUSION**

The testimonials above clearly provide an insight into why Rod Ansell succeeded as a player and as a captain, he wasn't pretty but he was effective, was relentless and refused to yield. He got everything ounce out of what he had and can look back on a wonderful career.

More importantly to the man, he didn't finish playing and walk away like so many do, he was a servant of his club from a very young age and is still there as their club referee. Like his playing career, he takes his refereeing career very seriously and would be one of if not the most capable club referee in Victoria, and his playing experiences as a defender would have set him up nicely to referee because he knows what goes on and he knows who is capable of doing what and when!

The third string to his bow is coaching, and again he as shown absolute commitment to getting the best out of young champions, steering them in the right direction, giving them the inner man things that are essential to get to the next level, and he has been unwavering in this task for over a decade.

Rod Ansell is an unusual character in lacrosse, he has excelled as a player, referee, coach and administrator, and he is showing no signs of relenting.

Congratulations on an outstanding career and contribution to lacrosse in Australia "Rocket"!