

## ROB STARK – AUSTRALIAN LACROSSE CHAMPION

Rob Stark commenced playing lacrosse in 1984 as a 7 year old in the Under 12's with the Caulfield Lacrosse Club, which was the natural place to start playing lacrosse given his uncle, Denis Trainor, was a former Caulfield, Victorian and Australian player and coach, so it was in the genes. His grandfather, Frank Trainor, also played for Caulfield and represented Victoria in the 1930s.



Above is a photo of Rob in 1993 in the Under 17 team at Caulfield (Number 2 in the middle).

Rob started playing state league in 1993, the same year he started playing Under17, was captain of the state league team by 1995, his first year out of Under17s. Thus he was playing Under 17's in the morning and then backing up with the state league team.

I moved Clubs from Caulfield to MCC from 2006-2009 just to have a different experience, and fortunately was able to captain the club and make it to its first final series in 20 years.

He returned to Caulfield in 2010 as captain/coach until his retirement at the end of 2015, "To give back to the club that had given me so much".

Rob's first state selection was in the Victorian Under15 team in 1992 and was appointed captain. In the following year he was selected in the Victorian Under 17 team, was awarded Victorian Under 17 best & fairest player, a feat which he replicated in 1994.

He played in the senior Victorian team from 1997- 2010 (Missing 2011-12 due to back injury and subsequent operations and rehabilitation) and 2013 (15 times), and was captain for his last 6 years.

Also played in the Australian Under 19 team in 1995 &1996, which participated in the senior nationals in both years. Rob was selected as captain of the 1996 Australian Under19 team, where he was also selected in the World All-star team as best midfielder. While members of the Under 19 team were not eligible for the Don Hobbs Trophy (Best and fairest player at the national carnival) he was voted MVP in every match and accumulated the most votes for the Don Hobbs Trophy, but sadly ineligible to win it!



Rob was selected in the senior men's Australian team to play in the World Series in 1998, 2002 (Pulled out just before tournament due to a herniated disc), 2006 & 2010 (Captain). Thus selected in 4 World Championships but only played in 3 due to major injury and the need for back surgery.

Due to a herniated disc & subsequent back operation Rob missed 2001 & 2002, followed by an ankle reconstruction late 2005, just prior to the 2006 World Championships and to quote Rob " I worked my butt off to be fit & ready for the 2006 World Champs. Actually my proudest achievement was that I played through the whole of 2005 with torn ankle ligaments, which needed surgery, but waited until after the Aussie team try-outs that year. Made the team, then booked surgery, rehabbed to be fit for World Championships, all without telling any coaches or management, as I felt it would have put my selection at risk".

One of my other highlights would be making the grand final with Caulfield in 2003. When you're not one of the bigger clubs it's a very hard task to do. To play with your best mates on the league's biggest day was special occasion for me, we went down to Williamstown. Again that was the year after my back operation, so was a proud achievement just to be back playing again.

## **Awards**

Senior All-star teams 1995 - 1996, 1998 -1999 and 2005 – 2006 at national carnivals (6 times). Interesting that he was selected in the 1995 &1996 All-star teams when he was playing with the Australian Under 19 team, not the Victorian team.

He won the Don Hobbs Trophy in 2006 as the best and fairest player at the national carnival, and while he was ineligible in 1995 as he was a member of the Australian Under 19 team (Rather than a state team), he won the MVP award for every match and accumulated the most votes for the award.

Rob has won the Isaachsen Trophy (Best and fairest player nationally for home and away matches) a record equalling 4 times – 1996, 1998, 2005 & 2012 (Ross Turnbull from W.A. is the other).

He also won the Vince Healy Trophy (Victorian best and fairest player) a record 8 times (1996-1999, 2005, 2011, 2012 & 2014). No other player has won it more than twice!

Club best & fairest

- Caulfield 1995 - 2000, 2003 - 2005, 2011-2015 (14 times)
- MCC- 2007 - 2008 (Twice)

Caulfield Team of the Century 1909- 2009

What many may not realize was that from 1995-1998 there was a professional box lacrosse league of 4 teams from 1995-1998, players were paid and sponsored, and Rob Stark won the league's MVP awards in 1995 & 1998, as well as being a member of the All-star team & leading point scorer.

## **Biggest influences?**

My biggest influence in my lacrosse game was Darren Gibson - I modelled my game, especially head over the ball, as well as his competitive attitude, on Darren.

Best player I played with was John Tokarua, as we played at the same club (And state and national teams), he was a very difficult defender to play against so any other defender I came across seemed easy compared to him.

In terms of face-off players, the two greatest in my era I played with and against were Peter Inge , always a great battle in the middle & around the ground, and Darren Nicholas, just an all-round complete player & hard to stop, and Geoff Snider from Canada.

## **TESTIMONIALS**

### **DARREN GIBSON**

One of the nicest guys in the game! Being nice doesn't mean not competitive, though as he was that and more. Got to really know 'Phar Lap' in his first senior state team where we played in Adelaide. Taught him some tricks off the field which I still smile about today. Great character and you always knew that he would get the job done. Great leader who would carry teams with him, hence the nickname with the big heart. His record is really second to none at club and state level. Not just a face off player but a threat all over the ground. I certainly enjoyed watching his career over the years mostly from the opposition and therefore trying to cut down his influence. This was a task too great for me as all we could do was work on the other guys knowing he would get his job done each and every game. Where he was extra good was that he could play on the field and score.

He has stayed true to the game and always giving back to the sport. His leadership at Caulfield is envied around the league. Honest, upfront and one of the real gentlemen of Aussie Lax.

## **CLIVE SHEPARD** (Club & Australian Under 19 coach)

The first time I saw Rob Stark was at the 1992 under 15 nationals. I was coaching the Western Metros and we played the Southern Crosse. Rob dominated.

I had just returned from the 1992 World U 19 Championships in New York. We were silver medallists and I was determined to start building the 1996 world team quickly. Rob put himself on the list right then and there.

By some quirk of fate, I was approached to coach Caulfield state league team that next season. It was sold to me that I would get the chance to develop some young talent at the club. The first practice I met with the squad. Amongst them were fifteen year olds Rob Stark and John Tokarua.

I worked with the Caulfield team for the next four years, Tuesdays and Thursdays, game day Saturday and most of Sundays with the National U 19 squad, which started that year - Rob never missed practice or games. I can remember Rob's mother Josie mentioning "that Rob saw more of me than her".

Those years at Caulfield were "rebuilding years, we did not win many game. Rob played his heart out in every game he ever played Some players will talk the talk "yeah we can win this", Rob always walked it.

His record of awards speaks for itself. I don't think there is much he hasn't won. I feel so fortunate to have had an opportunity to work with him.

## **MURRAY KEEN** (Club, state & Australian coach)

The first time I saw Rob was in 1995 when he was playing in the Under 19 Australian team in the senior championships in Perth. In the first game of the carnival I was playing in goals for WA and Rob was playing for the Under 19's. The reason I can remember Rob so well was we were a man down and he let a shot go from distance, through screens and it hit me in the chest, breaking 2 ribs. He could throw the ball as hard as anyone.

As a centreman he was dangerous as he would win the ball to himself out the front, creating a fast break opportunity. With the power he had in his shot you had to slide early to him, which would open up the bottom corners for easy shots or if you didn't slide he would put a shot in himself. He was a complete round the ground lacrosse player not a FOGO (Face off, get off) like many face-off guys. He played solid defence and was great at clearing the ball. He was fast and good at spreading the defence in attack. The most complete face-off player of my time.

In the prime of his lacrosse career Rob was debilitated with a back injury, not that he would let anyone know. I still can't believe he played on after back surgery and was still so dominant.

Rob was a player I much preferred to play with than against. I was also lucky enough to coach Rob at a club, state and international level and he always gave you everything he could, never letting you down. He was so dominant at a club and state level as was seen with him winning the Isaachsen Trophy as the best player in

Australian competition (4 times). It was great seeing Rob passing on his knowledge as coach of Caulfield.

Rob Stark retired from playing lacrosse at the age of 38, which is quite remarkable given his back issues and surgery, a playing career spanning 31 years!

Rob left school at 18 and was looking for a job to so he could represent Australia on an U19 Australian tour in 1995 of the USA as you had to pay your way & his family didn't have enough money to go.

As Bill Stahmer (Former Caulfield, Victorian and Australian player and coach) recants "Starkie has worked for me since he was 18, so that is just on 26 years. We had a vacancy at Stahmer's Carpets and I heard Robbie was unemployed, so with Denis Trainor being such a great friend, and Robbie being his nephew, I got his number and rang him, he arrived with wet hair on his push bike within an hour, he started the next morning at 8am. He climbed the ladder quickly, he was very diligent and punctual, doesn't take any "Crap".

This was illustrated when he worked weekends on the door in a Chapel Street venue with John Tokarua's security company. He did come in some Monday mornings with a shiner or cuts, etc, but always with a smile. His lacrosse career would mirror his working career – Quiet yet mentally and physically very strong, gave his best always, and always prepared.

He is a very modest champion, has had a fabulous career, and despite serious injury and surgery he played in 3 World Championships representing the green and gold.

Well played Rob Stark, an outstanding lacrosse career, a humble champion.