



UMPIRE PROFILE

Neill Murray



Neill Murray was recently awarded Life Membership of the Victorian Sub District Cricket Umpires Association.

Congratulations Neill, this is a well-deserved accolade for a guy that has given so much to the sport. Neill also has life memberships with Cairns Norths CC (team of the century member), Mordialloc Tennis Club! He is also a Life Member of Moorabbin CC and in the club's 90-year celebrations, was honoured as a Club Immortal! I invite you to enjoy Neill Murray's story.

Born in Toowoomba, Neill grew up at Redcliffe, on Brisbane's northern outskirts. Cricket was in his blood early, and typically of the times, every day played local and "Test" matches with friends on the dusty stony streets of their tiny neighbourhood. This is the basis of his enduring love for the game – not quite a fanatic perhaps, but he'd certainly qualify as a card-carrying cricket tragic.

His education took him from the quaintly-named Humpybong (in the Yuggera/Turubul languages, this means "dead huts", named for the deserted shanties of the first (failed) British settlement on Moreton Bay) Primary School to Redcliffe High and then to Queensland University from where he emerged with (he says, Lord knows how?) a BA with majors in English Literature and Language, Modern History and Psychology.

He was on a path to teaching but found instead that he preferred the smell of kerosene rather than chalk and built a career in civil aviation. Later in life, he became the head of Inflight Service for Australian Airlines, responsible for all cabin staff and seven catering centres serving hundreds of thousands of meals each week for Australian Airlines and many international carriers operating into Australia.

His club career moved through Sandgate Redcliffe in the QCA, Redcliffe City in Brisbane's highly competitive Warehouse competition, and University of Queensland Cricket Club. His first job at TAA (remember The Friendly Way?) saw him transfer to Rockhampton, then Cairns, then Melbourne. Over the Rocky/Cairns years, ironically playing for Norths clubs in each city, he played in seven consecutive premierships.

He considers himself a just passable bowling all-rounder with more spirit than ability or style, but still managed some adequate performances including his one century (124 no) and one or two good bowling returns with a 9-for and a few seven-for.

One of those (7 for 13) was on a day when the match pitch was unplayable as water had seeped under the corners of the covers. The opposition needed to play and win to secure a finals berth, and so they proposed a "left field" solution to get a match played. They noted that although the ends of the pitch were wet, the centre of the five-pitch block was fine, and a pitch could be created at an angle of about 45 degrees across the block. "We agreed," Neill says "because we had nothing to lose, already being in the finals, and we were always keen to play anyway. The curator obliged, cut a new strip, rolled it for an hour, and then in the next hour we rolled the opposition! The best part was, I didn't have to do anything clever, just run in and let it go...the 'pitch' did the rest!" Yes, it wouldn't happen at Lord's or the MCG, but Cairns was a different situation!

(Btw – those seven premierships?...well after them, Neill and another of his Cairns Norths colleagues went to a start-up club as the Cairns competition was being expanded and found out what it was like to lose every week!)

One of the highlights of his cricketing life was in 1977 when the visiting West Indies Cricket Team came to Cairns to play a one-day game against the Queensland Country team. Unfortunately, on the morning of the match, the heavens opened, and the ground was flooded. (What is it with Cairns and wet pitches? Oh, that's right – when it rains there, it pours!) The local community came out in droves, and they all worked together to soak up the water, and to everyone's joy, the match got underway. "Country people in remote communities are so honoured to have top-level sport played in their communities"

Neill's job exposed him to cricket in some different ways. One was when the West Indies visited Cairns to play Queensland Country in 1977. The story of the match follows, but there was another side to their visit. Arriving on TAA, the players disembarked and Neill, as the local TAA representative, was taken aside

by Keith Walcott, the Team Asst Manager, and given a "secret and sacred" mission, to "safeguard the rum cask and not let the players know where it was!"

Also, during his time in Cairns, Neill had a bowl at Geoff Boycott in a centre wicket practice session (lots more stories there – too many for here) and just missed out on bowling to Viv Richards (lucky man!) in a double-wicket final – washed out, Cairns weather again!

In 1979 Neill moved to Melbourne with TAA, and he lived in Cheltenham. "Moving to Melbourne was like going to a different country". Soon after he joined Moorabbin Cricket Club at a time when the Club was a mighty force, in the VSDCA. "It was an exciting time under the leadership of Club President Dennis King, and over the next few years through links into the Caribbean Community, we had Malcolm Marshall, Carl Hooper, and Ken Benjamin playing at Linton Street. Malcolm probably moved the ball an inch or two too much on some occasions, so his haul of wickets was modest for a player of his calibre; however, he is remembered especially for flat-batting a six deep into the St Kilda's FC stands – a mighty blow."

Neill was President of Moorabbin Cricket Club and had two separate stints, in the 1980s and again in the late 90s/ 2000s. His proudest achievement as President was to help Moorabbin become the much more inclusive and welcoming club, it is today.

He soon became an umpire after he finished playing. "I was reminded by Helen of my mantra that players should continue as umpires." He joined the VSDCA panel in 2010. "I love the game, I enjoy umpiring, it has extended my life in cricket, and I have been honoured to meet so many great people. I've been in many clubs, but truthfully, the Ump's club is my favourite."

He has umpired over 150 games, including, before taking on the Umpire Appointments role, multiple finals matches, a Hatch Grand Final in 2012 with John Doig at Werribee on a hot day between Brighton & Plenty Valley.

Neill served for five years on the VSDCUA Board, including three as President. After leaving the Board, he assisted the VSDCUA in re-writing the Association's Rules, to bring them up to date with Victorian legislation.

Neill has also been actively involved in Mid-Year Cricket for 10 years, and in that time has done multiple finals matches, representative matches including Victoria Vs NSW.

Today Neill's role in the VSDCA as the Umpire Appointment Manager is one, he enjoys, largely because of the continual contact it gives him with fellow umpires across all XI's. He says he is still learning and draws deeply from the practical approach and manner of his predecessor Jim Earle – in his words, "an inspiration !"

Two of Neill's sons played 1st XI cricket for Moorabbin, and Helen his wife was raised in a cricketing family. It's only the family cat who isn't roped into his summer passion.

Neill is a true gentleman in every sense of the word. His love of life, good humour, humility, dedication, and willingness to put others first are traits of this great man. When he goes out to umpire, you know you will have a good game because you have Neill at your side.