

Recollections of Melville Glades Golf Club – Colin Harburn

The content of this document was prepared by MGGC member Frank Davies by transcribing relevant content from an interview-cum-discussion with Colin on September 12, 2018.

Colin is a foundation member at MGGC and at the time of this interview the club was celebrating its 50th anniversary. Due to health reasons in recent years Colin no longer plays golf.

For convenience, the content is presented “in the first person”. That is, as though Colin was saying the words himself.

MGGC Foundation

I joined MGGC along with my brothers, Darryl and Lynton. At the time we were all members of the Kwinana Golf Club. As such, I had minimal involvement with the formalities and practical activities involved with the foundation of MGGC.

Joining MGGC came about due to the family knowing Tony Kelly (one of the MGGC founding committee members) who wanted a house built in Booragoon, and we were builders. During discussions about this project Tony said “I’ll put your name down for Melville Glades then. We’re starting a golf course here”. As a result we were the first of the exodus of several people who later left Kwinana Golf Club to join Melville Glades. For a while then we were members of both clubs at the one time.

Personal Background

I attended Spearwood State School and Fremantle Boys High School. Subsequently I gained an accounting qualification and CPA status through night school in the technical education system.

I was employed at West Australian Meat Export Works, Robb Jetty from 1954 until 1966 when I was accepted for a short service commission as an Equipment Officer with the RAAF. I resigned from the RAAF in 1968 to join my father and two brothers as a partner in the family building business.

In 1981 I returned to Robb Jetty as the WA Meat Commission Marketing Division accountant and stayed with public service employment until my retirement in 1998.

Cricket Background

As a junior, cricket was my favourite sport and I was selected in the 1952 State Schoolboys cricket team which went to Sydney. Later I joined the WACA district club of Fremantle and

progressed through the ranks to eventually become the captain of the club in 1963. In that year I was selected for the state team to play against South Africa.

I had only limited success playing at Sheffield Shield level and because of inconsistent performances was not a regular member of the team. My best effort was scoring 139 against the Australian test team before they sailed to England in 1964 for an Ashes series.

MGGC Early Years

The course itself was very raw. The bush was cut out for the fairways and if we tried to take out too much bush early in the piece people would say "Oh, you are making it too easy". With hindsight, there was so much time spent looking for balls under buttercups and things like that, it was impractical. One little anecdote I recall was the last playing groups finishing in virtual darkness and members who had finished their round coming out with torches so that the latter players could putt out on the par three 18th hole. I presume that their rounds were taking so long looking for balls and so on that the darkness set in before they could get around. Eventually common sense prevailed.

Of course, one of the biggest problems in the early days was the quality of the grass. We didn't have the proper couch grass and although it looked good in parts there were areas where crows and other birds would peck away such that it was like a perpetual bunker. And of course there were problems with the irrigation as well. The club lost a lot of members as a result of the course being very tough.

It is interesting to note that the two nines on the original course design were in reverse. That is, the current 10th hole was intended to be the 1st. However the club started with the 1st as it is today, although I recall that we did attempt to play the course as it was designed at one stage.

We hosted the Melville Glades Open during those days and Terry Gale was quite critical of a couple of holes, describing them as long and thin. The par four 12th was one of those with its two opposing bunkers. Hooker Rex sponsored the Open in 1973 and we attracted some quite big names like Kel Nagle, Peter Thompson and Len Thomas. Peter Thompson's suggestion was one of the drivers to change the original 18th from a par three to a par five. Another observation from the Open was Kel Nagle hitting a seven iron in both of his rounds into the old 17th, the short par three with the lake, which surprised me for such a big hitter. It would have only been approximately 120 to 130 metres to the pin.

In the opening years there was a strong feeling that "We have got to be as good as the next club". An example of this was the strict dress code in the lounge, ably enforced by Mal Gliddon who upon noticing anyone inappropriately dressed "would be onto them like a seagull and a bit of hot fat". But there was a fear that we would be classed as second rate if we allowed certain things that other clubs, particularly the "Royals" (Fremantle and Perth), wouldn't do.

A common scene after golf in the lounge in those early days was members sitting at tables in their formal attire playing liar's dice whilst they enjoyed a few drinks. The game required

each player to have a set of five dice which were shaken before they looked at their concealed "hand" that the dice had produced before bidding commenced around the table. Bidding was controlled by an additional dice that was passed on around the players. It was said that it would take a person \$15 to "learn how to play the game". One of those playing liar's dice was Dr Fitzpatrick, who smoked and did everything regarding his health in the wrong way but would simply say "Do as I say and not as I do". Another I recall was John Cook, a physiotherapist from England. I personally didn't play much myself as after showering and changing I would initially pass via the sprig bar before entering the lounge so there wasn't much time available before golf presentations commenced. In addition there was a pool table in the lounge, as well as the sprig bar, so some would be occupied with that.

In those earlier days just about everyone used to have a shower after the game, regardless of whether they intended to go into the lounge or the sprig bar.

Having mentioned the sprig bar there was the story about Mario Mofferdin, who frequently played golf with Jimmy Vaughan. Mario used to bet quite a bit, particularly on the putting green before playing his golf round. This particular day he must have won quite a bit and was later playing pool in the sprig bar. Typically, when he lost a game of pool he would immediately double the bet, and keep doubling until he did win. Arguments prevailed this day and the story ended with Mario throwing the betting money in the air declaring "I'm going mad with money" only to realise that all the notes had been sucked up by the exhaust fan that was operating at full speed to extract the cigarette smoke from the packed sprig bar.

Men's Dinners and Balls

The men's dinners were an all-male affair, except for Pat (Urquhart, the bar manager) and Helen behind the bar. My two brothers and I went to all the dinners. On these nights there was a lot of entertainment. You would have some members get up and sing, when they "couldn't sing a bank note". One night I got up and sang something and one of the members said "Gawd, that was flat Col. You sing like you talk. Flat!" But a feature of these nights was that we would entertain ourselves. Ken Marsh (father of Graham the golfer and Rod the cricketer) used to be on the piano and Des Shave would do a bit of singing. At one dinner the secretary manager, Peter Evans, organised a comedian. Unfortunately he came from Melbourne and all his jokes were Melbourne oriented so they didn't go down very well, to the extent that it was embarrassing. In the toilets that night I overheard a conversation where the comedian asked for some help from one of the members who replied "You've either got it or you haven't mate!".

There was once a trench located just beside the lefthand side of the entrance drive. I can't recall why the trench was there but one member had a new, top of the range Holden car and somehow this ended up in the trench after one of the dinners. One can only assume that it had something to do with the consumption of alcohol. Of course, in those days the club was essentially located out in the bush so it would have been difficult getting it out.

I recall at one of the fancy dress balls Robbie Taylor wore an overcoat and underneath that was a cricket ball suspended from his stomach in a ladies stocking. As a lady passed by he

would “flash” them by opening the overcoat. Some of the women would ask for a second look! My wife and I went as Arabs, covered in sheets, pantaloons and towels around our heads.

Golf

When I took up golf at Kwinana after shifting across from cricket I was learning the game so I started with the typical basic set which consisted of just four irons; 3, 5, 7, and 9. Somehow in that first year I managed to qualify in the top eight for the match play championships and was pitted against a guy who was crippled in one arm but still played off an amazing two handicap. This guy looked at my clubs and said “Where’s the rest?”

It is significant to note that the early days of the MGGC men’s club championships were decided by match play, rather than stroke as it is today. Players would initially play 72 holes of stroke and from there match play rounds occurred. (The club still has the men’s match play event but the winner is not the club champion.) This is not obvious when looking at the honour boards.

Colin’s Golfing and Club Achievements

One of my most satisfying golfing achievements at MGGC was to be runner up to Colin Hallam in the club stroke play championships, which I recall was in 1985. My scores were 74, 79, 80, and 81. I was playing on a handicap as low as four around that time.

I’ve had four holes in one at MGGC, and I proudly keep all the trophies they give out for that achievement. And I also won the eclectic gross in 1977.

I was also fortunate to score an albatross, the first recorded at MGGC. This was on the original 17th during the period when it was a par five. The feat was achieved with a driver and three iron to hole out. Harold Taylor was Captain at the time, 1973. When they went through the scorecards of the day Barry McClean had scored a hole in one. So at presentations Barry was invited to ring the bell to signal a free drink for all, which is always a popular event. Then Harold Taylor said “Oh you can ring the bell as well Colin because you’ve had an albatross”, which I did to the accompaniment of more joy and laughter from the assembled members. Later on the Managing Secretary came out and said “Sorry Colin, but we’ve got no insurance for an albatross so you’ll have to pay the bill” and it ended up costing me \$28.50 to pay for the drinks. That may not sound like much these days, but at about, say fifty cents a beer, that equates to over 50 drinks. Perhaps they didn’t charge me for the whole lot, but that is what it cost me. After that event I pushed hard for the club to get an albatross honour board and with the help of Laurie Johnston that was accomplished. Kane Benson was the second person to get an albatross. Kane later said to me “Colin, I’ll tell you what. The year that you got your albatross was the year I was born”. Kane was a junior at the time of his albatross. I also believe that he subsequently went away to caddy for professional golfers. The next person to get an albatross was Colin Hallam, followed later by Hayden Bancroft on the redeveloped 15th par four hole. The amazing story with Hayden was that the following week he “rattled the flag” on the same hole to just miss out on another

albatross. (At the time of this discussion with Colin, Scott Jager was the only other person on the albatross honour board; five members in fifty years of history.)

From a management aspect I served as Vice President under President Laurie Palmer, the Match Committee under Captain Paul Sarich, and was also the pennant organiser for a while. As Vice President I was responsible for vetting new members, which, amongst other things, involved interviewing them. Laurie Palmer was one for being very cautious about who we let join the club.

Side Betting

Side betting was a tremendous way of maintaining and establishing camaraderie in the club. Between individuals, the better golf score on the day was initially a twenty-cent bet and some members built up a number of side betters. Some bets were a new golf ball but you would have the same ball being handed around as betting collateral to the extent that by the time you wanted to play with it, it was no longer “new”. Around the time that the regulated golf ball size changed from 1.62 to 1.68 inches Ken Marsh came back from southeast Asia with balls that were 1.65 inches in diameter which confused matters somewhat.

Anecdotes and Characters

Bill Barnes was a friend of mine who also came from Kwinana Golf Club. Bill served as Captain and President at MGGC but was a character in his own right. He always meant well. On one Saturday afternoon he saw a lady on the course so he approached her to inform her that this was not allowed. Being Scottish, for everything that Bill gave her she gave two back and Bill eventually backed off. It was legendary how she gave Bill a mouthful.

Laurie Johnston is another with many stories associated with him. After he lost his leg due to illness he would have great difficulty walking into and out of bunkers with his prosthetic leg. To get by he was always tempted to use his sand iron as a form of crutch, but of course that broke the rules of golf for “testing the condition”. So, he had to take great care to avoid grounding the club. Laurie lived near to us, had a pool and was a good swimmer. I recall him saying that he’d always remove his prosthesis leg when he was swimming but all he would do is “end up swimming in circles”. He was such a funny man. One time his wife Dawn (a MGGC life member) was away, so as a joke he bought one of those blow-up dolls and put in their bed for when she came home. I can’t recall how that event ended up but later they moved to Leeming where they had a break in. The Police found the young kid who broke in and during the interview with the perpetrator Laurie said “and what did you do with the blow up doll?” That weakened the crown case a bit!

Alan Bond, who was infamous in WA’s business history, was one of MGGC founding members. As far as I know he never actually made an appearance at the club. However, coincidentally, he was in my class at school, Fremantle Boys, but he was regularly absent.

Course Layout

As I indicated earlier, the rough has been extensively cleared over the years, into what is now almost parkland clearing. This has helped the overall enjoyment and pace of play.

In the early days there was a great big blackboy (grass tree) in the middle of the par five, 18th. It was about eight to ten feet tall, right in the middle of the fairway. Blackboys grow about one foot every hundred years, so it was a very old plant. I said to Laurie Johnston "Don't get rid of that. It's a characteristic of the hole and you have just got to be aware of it." But one night it disappeared and even today I don't know what happened.

There are many more bunkers on the course since the original course was created, partly to address the change in equipment and greater length that people hit the ball.

Of the more recent course alterations, I was one of those who opposed the shortening of the par four 15th, to the extent that I wrote a letter to the Board. Now, in the overall scene, it does give the big hitters a challenge so I've changed my mind over time about that. The 15th has gone from a "run of the mill" par four like all of the others to something completely different, so it is a good innovation. If you can't drive it you've still got to be good with your short irons.

Concluding Comments

I never contemplated leaving MGGC. The club was close to home and where would I go if I left? I know a lot of members at Fremantle through cricket and other connections but I've never been tempted. I only joined Kwinana because a couple of friends were members there.

Golf is a challenging game and I miss it but I realise that I just can't play it now and I accept that.