

EICHLER'S MARAUDERS – MEMORIES OF 50 YEARS AGO

Whiffs of Spring blossoms, with the sun shining through the clouds, enlightened recently reappointed Third eleven skipper Chris Eichler's thought waves about the forthcoming season. He sat out on the back porch in the apple orchard country of his Judy Court (Vermont) mansion, sipping his white tea coffee and munching his cherished home-baked Anzac biscuits, whilst contemplating the strategy needed to make a success of the BSCC (called Burwood Socials at that time) third eleven 1972-73 endeavors to attain finals level for the first occasion. It was a period of bliss for the master tactician and key audio specialist at the foremost Melbourne television station Channel Nine after his marriage to the enchanting Felicity Gilchrist. Not only that but fresh news had been announced about the forthcoming birth of his first child. Life was bliss.

The previous season the Thirds had finished fifth but had delivered a thrashing to East Doncaster in the last round, highlighted by a spanking 119 by Steve Kelleher. This gave cause for optimism. Chris retained the sparkling young guns Len Gardner, Steve Kelleher and Peter Walker in his team although the dazzling Mark Gardner had been promoted to higher grades. Allrounder Colin Howard, Mr Dependable Norm Badrock and the key addition of opening bat and strike bowler, ginger nut Bill Hills, from the seconds, gave him an enormous thirst for success.



Chris Eichler (l) and Bill Hicks (r)

The Primer Movers in the Thirds

Chris Eichler – led from the front with his strategic approach and aggression in all parts of the game. Rapid scorer in top order and prime bowler with his hop and skip with both arms flaying about in a butterfly style technique.

Len Gardner – wicketkeeper who belted the ball as hard and as far as he could.

Nev Gregory – tantalizing left arm slow who benefited from batsmen charging him.

Colin Howard – short right arm swing bowler and handy left-handed tailender.

Steve Kelleher – strongly built opening batsman who peppered the legside boundaries.

Peter Walker – pacy right arm swing bowler and graceful left-handed batsman.

Season Start

Willison East (popularly known as Frog Hollow Reserve) was the new home ground for the Thirds and hosted the opening match of the 1972-73 season. Eichler soon made an impression on the game uprooting the stumps four times and claiming a lbw to produce a shattering 5/10 against Mitcham YCW. The servicemen's tally of 65 proved unthreatening with Peter Walker stroking a magnificent unbeaten 76 and the barnstorming Steve Kelleher a bollocking 57. The neighbouring houses and trainline received signs of future threats from the red cherry. Demoralised YCW only reached 76 (offie Rob McAuley 5/22 and Eichler 3/19) in the second dig to lose outright by a comfortable innings and 66 runs. The following match Forest Hill were demolished for only 60 (Walker 5/17) and the boys were cock-a-hoop. They were brought back to earth when we fell to 8/54 before scrambling to the first innings points. Another brilliant spell by the skipper (4/19) fired the Hill Men out for 77. Seeking only 76 for full points, it proved a challenge but thanks to a bright 40 from Len Gardner we sneaked home by 4 wickets. On top of the ladder with maximum points after two games, what a start!

Chocolates to Boiled Lollies

After such a sensational opening the thirds were soon jolted back to reality, losing the next three games. First Innings scores of 104, 99 and 86 were not likely to challenge many opponents and so it proved. The bowling was still satisfactory, featuring an impressive 5/56 by Colin Howard in round 3. The last round before Christmas was a one dayer, 30 eight ball overs per team (equivalent to today's 40 six ball overs). Vermont lost only 4 wickets although a tally of 163 was reasonable. Plenty of our players got starts but with the highest score being number 7 Peter Walker with 34. We managed to squeeze home with three wickets in hand.

New Year Requires Lift

Commencing the new year with a feint chance of being a finalist, the batting crumbled with consecutive totals of 127, 134, 67 and 79. New year recruit Rod "WG" Maygar was an elegant, stylish willow wielder. Standing tall and upright with a lush beard Rod

resembled the British colossus WG Grace. Rod had previously played at Koonung Heights Presbyterian CC, which is now called Koonung Heights CC. Chris Eichler toiled manfully to produce figures 4/59 & 5/71 but his team weren't in the race. Winning only one of the past six matches had dampened the spirits. Losing by an innings outright in the eighth round to the sixth side Doncaster C of C was an arrow to the heart. Facing the top team East Burwood in Round 9, the situation was decidedly gloomy. The Eichman rallied the troops with an inspirational speech before the game. Opening bowlers Colin Howard and Peter Walker bowled brilliantly and didn't rest until they had both snared 3 wickets with the score teetering at 6/90. The skipper then cleaned up the tail taking 3 wickets in five balls. Len Gardner crashed a rattling 109 including 9 sixes and 10 fours which enabled an early declaration. Peter Walker 5/15 combined with 14 year old left arm loopy Nev Gregory 4/33 to clean up the ladder leaders. The skipper was late to the game after witnessing the birth of his son Mark early afternoon.

Coming into the last round there was a sniff of finals but outright points were essential. Winning the toss Chris sent East Doncaster in. The East Donny boys were under constant pressure and Peter Walker 4/28 shattered the top order and then Neville bamboozled the batting with another 4 wickets. Chris 71 and Len Gardner 36 thrashed the attack and allowed our team to declare overnight 82 runs in the lead. East Doncaster were determined to hold out and, after the tea break came and went, the dam wall suddenly broke. King of Swing Colin Howard 5/31 and Chris Eichler 3/37 did the damage. We had just over an hour to reach the requisite 46 runs for maximum points. This was achieved in only 17 balls after Len Gardner smashed 3 sixes and 4 fours (34 runs) off one over.



Neville Gregory and Steve Kelleher at Hartwell Reserve in 2021.

The Semi

Results went our way and we managed to steal fourth position and face up against top team East Burwood for the second time in three matches. The confident Eichler won another toss and chose to bowl. Peter Walker maintained his outstanding form and soon had 3 wickets. The skipper brought himself on together with the left-armed Mick Barton, leading wicket-taker from the fourths. The wickets just tumbled as the last six wickets fell for only the addition of 5 runs. Chris Eichler marched to the crease and never gave East Burwood a look-in. He steered the ship with a magnificent 75 to outscore his opponents on his own. Len Gardner 78 and Peter Walker 34 never relaxed the flow of runs. In their second dig East Burwood were 211 runs behind. The consistent Walker 4/21 and the magical Barton 4/18 enabled a comfortable innings win.

The Grand Final

Doncaster Footballers had given our team a crushing outright loss by nine wickets in Round 7 and had no hesitation of making us bat first at Morton Park, Blackburn. It was tense and tight and soon both openers Eichler and Kelleher were out with only 23 runs on the board. Maygar 38 and Gardner 37 got us on the upward trend. Len's dismissal making it 3/74 but then a downward slide with Walker, Barton and Howard out for ducks and Hills making only 2. Some real fight by Maygar, Norm Badrock and Nev Gregory saw the score finally reach a mediocre 138. Our attack never released the pressure and runs were at a premium. Howard, Walker, Barton Eichler and Gregory shared the wickets with two runouts to leave the Footballer 9/72 after the first day.

They were in survival mode on day 2 but added a very valuable 22 runs to have a deficit of 40 runs on first innings. Being a three day game there was plenty of time and overs remaining in the match. The early loss of Kelleher meant that Maygar joined the skipper at the crease. Eichler and WG took us to 59 but runs were at a premium. In a rearguard action wickets kept falling and runs were at a trickle. The second innings total of 150 gave The Socials' lead of 190 which was very gettable with 11 overs plus a day to go.

The strike bowlers Howard and Walker were breathing fire and were very keen to break through early to pile on the pressure. In Peter's first over WG took a sensational catch and 3 balls later Colin snared their skipper. It was a disaster for the Footballers when Walker had three consecutive maidens and claimed dismissals in the latter two. Mick Barton gave Howard a break and in the last over of the day rattled the stumps to Doncaster faltering at 5/20. After a week's break Mick Barton came back and blew them away finishing with the astonishing figures of 5/5 whilst Peter Walker added another one to conclude with 4/9. Premiership to Burwood Socials outright by 163 runs with Doncaster Footballers all out for 27.

What a topsy turvy season? Two outright wins to start with, three losses, a first innings win, 2 losses and four outright wins to deliver the flag.

Celebrations

After the Grand Final victory, the team went off to celebrate at the Burwood RSL Hall.

After match drinks were essential throughout the season at the newly opened Burvale Hotel where the boys played pool in the public bar until doors were closed at midnight. It was so popular that some of the younger members also made it a base for a few sherbets before the game.



1972-73 D1 Grade (M3) Premiers team

Leading lights for BSCC D1 Grade (M3) 1972-73.

Runs Len Gardner 446, Chris Eichler 412, Steve Kelleher 265.

Wickets Chris Eichler 45, Peter Walker 37, Colin Howard 32.

Fifty Years later

Passed Away - Chris Eichler, Norm Badrock and Paul "Porky" Covington.

Still in Melbourne – Colin Howard (Burwood), Steve Kelleher (Boronia), Nev Gregory (Kilsyth) and Len Gardner (Mornington Peninsula).

Other Residences - Mick Barton lives in Cairns, Queensland, 12th man Lindsay Cannan in Maitland, NSW and Bill Hills in central country Victorian town, Euroa.

Locations Unknown - Rod Maygar and Peter Walker.

Ian Scholefield
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