

# Bar Hockey

By Edward Muston

## The Legal Eagles still going strong at 50

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Legal Eagles, the Gordon Hockey Club 6th grade team which was commandeered by Leycester Meares QC (as he then was), Gordon 'Bunter' Johnson and a colourful assortment of barristers, solicitors and students-at-law, 'shanghaied in various states of inebriation at the University Club on the night before each game' in 1956.

Since that fateful day, the Legal Eagles has maintained its status as a landlocked sovereign state within the confines of the Gordon Hockey club, primarily drawing many of its players from the NSW Bar and the ranks of Sydney's solicitors.

Over the years, the Legal Eagles' line-up has included many of the true giants of the sporting Bar. Justices Fox, Holland, Gyles and Graham and the likes of Masterman QC, Bellanto QC, Collins QC, Ireland QC, Callaghan SC, Pritchard, Ridley and Larkin have all taken the field for the Legal Eagles. Despite this, the team has been cruelly described as 'a sporting team that is not drawn together by the old clichés of athleticism or competitive spirit'. The inaccuracy of this statement is nowhere more apparent than the team's less than impressive record before the Sydney Hockey judiciary (which, thankfully, has in recent years been variously presided over by Callaghan SC, Pritchard and Larkin) and the strict adherence by team members to the Legal Eagles' code of conduct. Since its inception, the Legal Eagles has been governed by two important rules:

1. first, it is compulsory to go for a drink after the game; and
2. secondly, training of any sort is strictly prohibited.

As unconventional as this formula may seem, it obviously works. In the last 50 years, the Legal Eagles have managed to amass an impressive three felt pennants, having won grand finals in 1966, 1976 and 1997.

In what was shaping up to be a fairytale end to the team's 50th season, the 2006 Legal Eagles (which included McManamey, Scotting and Muston) successfully secured a spot Grand Final. Unfortunately, on this occasion the stars did not align (and I refer here to the aforesaid McManamey, Scotting and Muston) and the Legal Eagles were defeated by Monterey 5:1.

In no way perturbed by the disappointing end to the season, Legal Eagles past and present gathered together for a black tie dinner to celebrate the team's anniversary. The night was a great success. Amongst those in attendance were Brent Livermore (the current captain of the Australian hockey team who, fittingly, had two days earlier been defeated 4:3 by Germany in the World Cup final) and a 'wide' range of players from each of the Legal Eagles' five decades.

Everyone in attendance had assumed (if not hoped) that it would be a very long night. However, when Callaghan SC stepped up and invited five former players to each speak for a decade, no one expected that those representing the earlier years would take the invitation literally. At one stage it looked like the dinner may have to be stood-over part heard to enable further argument on the various amendments to the rules of hockey made between 1961 and 1964. Fortunately, at some point during the late 1970's things started to speed up and, by the time the Tattersall's Club threatened to call in the police to eject us from the premises, the legends, lies and various other gems which might loosely be described as the Legal Eagles' oral history had been well and truly shared.

Before the evening was formally brought to a close, a jersey signed by the current Australian Team was auctioned, with the sale proceeds going to the advancement of junior hockey in Sydney. Without wishing to detract in any way from Justice Holland's very generous purchase, one cannot help but agree with the observation of Collins QC that, if any of those in attendance were seriously concerned about the advancement of hockey in Sydney, they would have caused the Legal Eagles to be disbanded decades ago.

## New South Wales Bar v Victorian Bar 28 October 2006

On a windy afternoon in late October, the New South Wales Bar and their Victorian counterparts met at the Kyeemah RSL hockey pitch in their annual battle for the Rupert Balfe-Leycester Meares Cup.

In what has become almost as much a tradition as the game itself, the Victorian Bar comfortably defeated the NSW Bar 4:1, thus walking away with the cup for yet another year.

While some may say that after six years the NSW Bar should be used to suffering defeat at the hands of the Victorians in this annual fixture (and to some extent they would be right), this year's loss was particularly disappointing.

The Victorians are at their most vulnerable when playing the away game. Having been informed that they would be a little short on numbers (and let's face it, the Victorians who turn up every year are not getting any younger) there were a few amongst us who saw this as an excellent opportunity for the NSW Bar to snatch a rare win.

Leading up to the game, the NSW selectors devised a team which, on paper, had all of the elements needed to take full advantage of the Victorians vulnerability.

Ridley had been brought up from the Yarra Valley to inject his aggressive style of play into the game or (at the very least) to start a scrap with one or more of his now fellow Victorians if the need for diversionary tactics arose.

Perpetual ring-in and former Malaysian national team member, Ganasan Narianasamy, was chosen to reinforce the NSW forward line.

Lawson and McWilliam were brought in on debut in the expectation that their inclusion would not only force the Victorians to play the game with some level of decorum but also:

- ◆ substantially add to the collective playing ability; and
- ◆ at least halve the average age; of the team fielded by the NSW Bar.

In something of a coup, the selectors had managed to lure Gibson away from the NSW Solicitors' team in an off contract transfer, thus avoiding the need to pay any transfer fee. While Gibson claimed that he had 'let himself go' in the fitness department, the selectors had no hesitation in pairing him up with Giagios to create what should have been an impenetrable defensive wall.

Otherwise, the selectors were happy to again rely on the striking power of Callaghan SC, McManamey, Warburton, Jordon and Muston; the solid midfield combination of Scotting and Larkin; and a goalie who had to be issued an honorary practicing certificate for the day on the undertaking that he would not otherwise pass himself off as a member of the New South Wales Bar.

What the selectors had not banked on was the fact that Larkin (in a moment of weakness) had organised a number of ring-ins for the visitors. For reasons which shall forever remain a mystery, the individuals chosen to boost the Victorian Bar's numbers had actually played the game before and were pretty good. Prior to hit off, it was even suggested that Larkin had been observed passing a water bottle to the captain of the Victorian team. The allegation was quickly denied by Larkin, who assured his team mates that each of the ring-ins had 'been given appropriate instructions'. Whatever those instructions may have been, it quickly became apparent that they had not been 'appropriate' in any sense of the word.

Despite the unexpected opposition, the NSW Bar put up a good fight. In fact, while it may not have been reflected in the score line, the home side truly dominated the early part of the game. From hit off, the ball was channelled beautifully through the midfield by Scotting, tapping it off to Muston who, in turn, unleashed a full blooded shot on the back stick which, although poorly aimed, did make a nice sound when it hit the fence about three metres to the right of the Victorian's goal.

It was at this point that things took a turn for the worse. About two minutes into the game, the NSW team succumbed to

the obvious effects of physical exhaustion, allowing the Victorians (or at least their ring-ins) to assume control. While it was hoped that 'fresh' legs from the interchange bench may have allowed the NSW Bar to claw back the advantage, sadly, not even Callaghan SC was able to turn the game around.

Just when it appeared that things could not get worse, Jordan was struck down by a mystery injury. With Australia's loss to Italy in the FIFA World Cup finals still fresh in their minds, the visitors cried foul, accusing Jordan of having taken a dive. Were he anywhere near the goal, the ball or any other player at the time of his fall the umpires may have agreed. However, in the end he unceremoniously dragged himself from the field and play was allowed to continue.

The home side tried everything. One of the Victorian ring-ins had turned up in a navy blue shirt. Certain that the confusion caused by the navy blue shirt (as opposed to NSW's sky blue and Victoria's black) had been responsible for at least one of Victoria's goals, Gibson demanded that the offending shirt be removed. In response to this, the umpires ordered that the offending shirt be removed from the field of play, but still things did not improve. In fact, a brief straw poll following the game

would tend to suggest that the said player was far more off putting without his shirt than with it on.

Despite his injury, Jordan managed to again take the field in the second half. One suspects that he may also have suffered from an ear injury in his fall as, despite repeated offers of substitution, followed by requests and thereafter demands from Warburton that Jordan leave the field, Jordan battled on, appearing not to have heard the loud howls emanating from the NSW Bar's dugout.

Finally, towards the end of the game NSW broke through the Victorian defensive line. In fact, it was Scotting who, having received an uncharacteristically graceful pass from Ridley, tapped in a face saving goal for the home side.

After the game, we all enjoyed an excellent array of icy cold beverages and fried food (that was more fried than food). It was pleasing to see that, despite the typically heated battle which had just been played out on the field, the friendship and camaraderie that has come to characterise these games over the past years is still alive and well.

Thanks to the Victorians for travelling this year and particular thanks to Scotting who, as usual, did an excellent job of organising the event.



The Legal Eagles' 1966 Grand Final Winning Team