

NSW Bar v Victorian Bench and Bar hockey match

By Edward Muston



Front row, L to R: Esther Lawson, Andrew Scotting, David Jordan, Verity McWilliam. Back row, L to R: James Gibson, Bruce McManamy, Ganasan Narianasamy, Geoff Warburton, Edward Muston, James Ward, Peter Maddigan, Rob Montgomery, Rob Shilkin, James Hardiman.

The 2008 clash for the Bert Balfe-Leycester Meares Cup between the NSW Bar hockey team and their Victorian counterparts was, in most respects, much like all previous encounters. The game was played on a particularly hot Saturday afternoon in late October. As has become something of a tradition on the Sydney leg, the game was played at the Kyeemagh RSL hockey pitch which, conveniently, provides ready access to chilled beverages and assorted fried foods for the post match celebrations. Both sides were a little light on for numbers and required the assistance of ring-ins. But, as always, the game was hard fought and played in excellent spirit.

However, in one fundamental respect the 2008 game did depart significantly from tradition – after eight long years the NSW Bar finally won.

Upon arrival at the ground, one could be excused for having thought that word had passed around about this exciting annual fixture. Around 200 people had gathered at the Kyeemagh RSL. Speculation was rife that the assembled masses were eager to witness the lightning fast speed of Neild; the striking power of McManamey, Warburton and Muston; the evasive wing play of McWilliam and Jordan; and the defensive wall that is Scotting, Lawson and Gibson. Our excitement was short lived.

Shortly before hit off, 22 of those spectators retired to the dressing sheds to don their costumes for the American football game, which was to commence immediately after the hockey. Thereafter, around 150 further spectators retired to the clubhouse for the Brighton Seagulls junior rugby league club presentation day. A further 18 potential spectators disappeared when the members' lucky badge draw commenced and three retired to the gaming lounge. Nevertheless, six genuine and very vocal spectators remained and were present to watch the NSW Bar's fittest and finest take the field.

From the outset, the Victorians played an attacking style of hockey, dominating the possession and forcing Scotting, Gibson and Lawson to work hard in defence. Nevertheless, defend they did and, approaching half-time, the score was locked at 0:0. Moments before the half-time whistle was blown, NSW managed to snatch the ball away from the Victorians and secure a short corner, which (thanks to a powerful shot from perpetual ring-in Ganasan Narianasamy) was converted into a 1:0 lead at the halfway mark.

Being down a goal for the first time in eight years seemed to incite the Victorians, who commenced the second half with a searing attack on the NSW defensive line. However, with the wind behind them and victory in

sight, NSW began to dominate possession. Jordan and McWilliam were out flanking the Victorians to the left and right while Warburton and McManamey produced a number of piercing runs through the centre. Nevertheless, Victoria continued to look dangerous and came very close on several occasions to claiming an equaliser.

Finally, a breakaway run by Neild caught the Victorian defenders off guard. Dragging the ball into the Victorian quarter, Neild fired off a well timed pass to Muston who smashed it past the Victorian goalie to secure a (more comfortable) 2-0 lead, which NSW successfully held for the remaining 10 minutes of the game.

Once again, thanks must be extended to Scotting for organising the game, the ground and the umpires. Thanks also to the Victorians for travelling to Sydney for the 'away game'; always a daunting prospect. It was a pleasure to host this year's event and an even greater pleasure to win it. We look forward to next year's clash in Melbourne and would encourage anyone who might be interested in heading down to defend the honour of the NSW Bar to pass on your details to Scotting, who will ensure that you receive the annual press-ganging email as soon as a date is fixed for the game.