

Greg Hall

(1979-1983)



I'd played junior and senior football for Shepparton City and just finished a pretty tough pre-season program with them when I arrived in Bendigo to attend teacher's college.

I knew a guy who'd played for City who'd moved to Bendigo to study and he asked me to come down and train with the club he was with, Eaglehawk. Not knowing anything else about the Bendigo League I went to one training session but it didn't feel right. Lots of running and a bit disorganised.

I then found out the College had a team and they trained just a short walk from the student residences so off I went to see what they were like. Well, that turned out to be a very wise move. Right from the start I felt I'd found a new home!

Siggy was the first person I spoke to and straight away he made me feel welcome. Mick Roche then started to chat to me and we found a connection in that he knew my older brother from Melb Uni.

And then the training! It was focused on using the ball and I was with a skilful group of players. I could tell this was the team for me.

1979 turned out to be a great year for me football wise. I ended up being the top goal-scorer in the league and winning the best U-21 player award as well. Team-wise we were runners up in the league and won the Indoor 5-a-side competition. Still remember watching Mick Roche playing one-twos off the wall and scoring!

As far as goal scoring went I was blessed to be surrounded by some great players, the skilful and positive Siggy, the super talented but modest Michael Roach (one of, if not the best player I have played with), the super competitive Marty Hurst and a host of other players who all provided me with chances to score. Dave Damon was awesome on the wing and had a huge throw from which we scored a few goals and the skilful David Cutler chimed in with a few goals too.

Coincidentally, the first game of the season was against Eaglehawk and I knew they weren't happy I'd signed with the College. I was young and confident and wasn't worried about playing them. We won 6-1 and I scored five. I still remember getting fouled and winning a penalty. I

jumped up and said "I'll take it." Ah, the cockiness of youth!!

1980 was not such a good year as I struggled for form. Siggy was, as always, very supportive. I still scored a few goals but we were not as consistent as a team but still competitive. I think we still won the indoor comp again. I think that was the tournament I broke my foot kicking an uncovered door jam during one of the games!

1981 was THE year. Stuart Gibson joined us and I still remember him trying to rev us up before the first game of the season. I hardly understood a word he said in his Scottish accent and fired up as he was. Walking out to the field I looked around and I realised no-one really knew what he had said and what he wanted us to do. We all just decided to play where we would normally!! We lost the first game of the season so maybe we should have asked for a translation!

Stuart was a very good player. Tough, direct and skilful. He helped turn our defence into a difficult line to penetrate. Guy Congdon, Vardy, Albert Schepers. We also had a terrific goalkeeper in Tony Long. All good teams have a great goalkeeper and he won us many games with his saves.

We had a great season winning everything on offer and playing some really good football. Probably the most enjoyable season I ever played in. Our midfield was immense with Siggy and Marty and Mick Roche who won another, well deserved, league best and fairest.

Up forward I was ably supported by Paul Ayre and Sandi Geddis. Together we scored a lot of goals too.

The end of the season was not great for me as in the last game of the season, with the title in the bag, I beat a defender on half-way who tripped me and as I fell another opponent hit me from the side. I landed on the point of my shoulder snapping my collar bone in two places. I do remember quite clearly how bad the Bendigo roads were as I was driven to hospital and uttered a few swear words on the way with every bump! Who were our opponents that day? Eaglehawk! So maybe it was my comeuppance for not joining them!!

1982 was another good year and then in 1983 we were runners-up in pretty much everything. Apart from 1980 we were always challenging for honours and always tried to play an attacking brand of football.

I do remember playing up at the new ground on the hill and getting changed in our cars which was fine. Only once I wished we had changing rooms. We played on a freezing cold day in driving rain and afterwards I drove home in my full kit and boots and stood in the shower fully dressed to try and warm up!

Training and playing with the BCAE spirit and camaraderie was always enjoyable. Not having our own clubrooms meant our after match get-togethers meant going to people's houses which was always fun. Stewart Gibson introduced me to the joys of Indian curry. He said it was mild!!!

I also enjoyed playing for the League side in the Country Championships over those years and getting to know and play alongside some of my opponents from the league. Always a great experience.

I played for BCAE from 1979 – 1983. I moved to Melbourne in early 1983 but continued to travel up each weekend with Clive and Mick Bracey to play that year. It was not the same as other years when you can't train with your teammates. We were still a very competitive side as our results show.

In 1984 I played for Melton in the Provisional League 1, then TAA and Middle Park, winning a league title, in the Industrial League. I'm proud that I always scored on debut for every club I played for, even when I was playing more as a midfielder or winger by then, rather than centre forward. Nothing ever as epic as my first game for College though!

My last season of outdoor football was under a rather despotic coach at Middle Park so I gave the game away for a while and took up triathlon which led to an interest in distance cycling.

But my interest in football remained, regularly attending South Melbourne's NSL matches and playing indoor football. By chance I got into coaching in a big way.

As a primary school teacher, I'd always coached my school's team and I saw an invite to a futsal tournament for schools so I entered a boys and a girls team and the kids did very well. The Brazilian who was running the tournament asked if I'd be interested in coaching the State U-13 Girl's team and travel up to the Gold Coast for the Nationals. I had

coached the Women's team at College for a year and that was fun. So why not?

A couple of my school's girls made the team and I also invited another student, Amy Jackson, who had been playing Aussie footy with a boy's team. I knew she was sporty and would be up for the challenge. At the end of the tournament she was invited to play for the Australian u-14 Futsal team on a tour to Spain and Italy.

Amy, last season, scored the first goal for Melbourne Victory in the Liberty A-League Grand Final which they won. She has played for the Young Matildas at a World Cup in Russia, a Florida University, played in the Netherlands and also won titles at both Melbourne Victory and City. I have one of her first Matilda's tops which she gave to me for talking her into playing football and we still keep in touch regularly.

With Amy and some of my other students I started one of the first girl's teams in the western suburbs at Brimbank. Won a couple of age division titles there, took over the Women's team and won a first Division title and promotion to the Women's Premier League. We made the finals that year and won one but were knocked out in the prelim. Didn't get a second year after a falling out with the club's President and Secretary as I wouldn't play the secretary's daughter in the first team! Club politics!!

My daughter Jess wanted to play so I coached her team at Hoppers Crossing for 3 years which was fun.

As well as club football I also coached Western Metro Region teams at State Championships, the VSF Centre of Excellence and had 3 years as a coach with the State Primary School Boys teams going to National Championships working with a couple of future Socceroos in Jason Davidson and Matthew Spiranovic.

I don't coach any more but my interest in football continues following the Socceroos and Matildas. My wife Carole and I were there in Sydney to see Australia win the Asian Cup in 2015 under Ange which was a great night. We have also been members of Melbourne Victory since the A-League started.

Just after my 55th birthday I was lucky enough to be selected to play in the annual Victory

members match under lights at AAMI Park. What a pitch and what fun, even if I did tear my quad in the warm-up. I kept on playing as I knew I wasn't going to get that chance again!!

I am really looking forward to catching up with my former BCAE team-mates and finding out what they have done over the years. Football is our common connection and it's great that, through Siggy, we will have that chance to re-live our past glories with BCAE.