

Fourth Inning—The Swinging Seventies

This is a somewhat hazy recollection of the UBC during the seventies. The haze is induced by age, and not substance abuse.

I intend to concentrate primarily on my memories and impressions of the UBC players of that era (and particularly A Grade), together with some of the more important on and off field events of the time.

I apologise for any mistakes, or omissions.

1969–70

The diamond was situated in the middle of the bottom oval, facing north. There were no social facilities, so, after home games, drinks were in front of the change rooms at the west end of McGillivray. The current east changerooms did not exist.

Our first game in A Grade was a home game against West Perth (now Stirling). We were outclassed (according to the report in *The West Australian*) 19—1. John Phillips was our pitcher, with Ian Ross or Barry Bastow catching, Mark Edwards on first, Don Cousens at second, Bill Clare at shortstop, and Kerry Smart at third. The outfield was Tom Greenwell, Rhys Jones and Rodney Anderson.

Rhys was a controversial player. In the early days, we had the ability to ‘claim’ (i.e. conscript) UWA students from their club. Rhys was claimed from Nedlands, but came fairly quietly, without any of the civil disobedience which was popular with other conscriptees at that time (i.e. the Vietnam war).

Bill Clare got our only hit for the game, a double, and we made a heap of errors. Our error rate was to set the trend for the next 2–3 seasons.

Coach Rodney Anderson was an accomplished player, and a dictatorial coach. He had an ability to get up the noses of the opposition in a way which has been rarely exceeded by any other club member since.

The Clubs ethos, of playing hard and to your ability on the day, but not training too hard, and enjoying your self socially, was established at this early stage. Our other trademark, of giving the opposition teams and supporters the shits, was also evident very early on. There was great resentment at having what was seen as an arty-farty team of smart-arses playing in what was essentially a blue collar sport.

Following games saw losses of 16–1 to Nedlands, 8–3 to East Fremantle, 16–1 to Wembley, and 10–8 to Swan Districts.

Sunday the 27th November 1969 was one of the great days in the Club’s history, and in my memories of my baseball career—OUR FIRST A-GRADE WIN.

The game was against Victoria Park, at (I think) Lathlain Park. Rodney Anderson was the starting pitcher, and must have lasted 5.2 innings, because he was credited with the win in

the paper. However my memory, as the catcher, was of Mark Edwards relief work. Mark was (and still is in many ways) a tall, whippy left handed pitcher, with the type of massive ego that only medical students seem to have. Still, he could also play a bit.

The game was very tight in the late innings, with Uni leading 10–9 in the bottom of the 9th. We had been hit around a bit by a very talented VP youngster of that era, David Melloncelli, who was a member of a very famous baseball family at that club. Melloncelli batted right handed, and with two out, and runners on base, struck out reaching for a wide curve ball.

Victory was ours, but the taste didn't last long. In following weeks we were beaten 19–0 by East Perth (now Eagles), 19–3 by Perth (I still have memories of a very large Terry Lean thundering down the third base line to home, causing me to drop the ball which I had in my glove for some time, awaiting his arrival), and South Perth 6–5. In all those games we made a minimum of 3 errors, with the count blowing out to 7–10 in some instances.

But we enjoyed ourselves!

The second half of the season went pretty much as the first, but I wasn't around, having gone to live in Sydney in early 1970. I believe we won another game, and made plenty more errors in losing the rest.

There were many players in the Club who had never picked up a glove prior to joining us, but who were good athletes, and put in creditable performances. These included Alan Chiew, Ken Trainor, Frank Murray (later to be Australian hockey coach). An outstanding player for the Club in this category was Tom Greenwell, a young, strong, confident and very talented outfielder and hitter.

1970–71

The diamond moved around a bit, and for some time was in on the south west corner of the top oval, just east of the athletics track. Rodney Anderson was again coach.

Our season was pretty much a repeat of the previous. New players included Robin Nussey, an all-time great of the Club, and recently returned from Melbourne, Ian Brunton, a large first baseman in the “Spanky” mould, from West Perth, Rod Moore, and Vic Delosa from Melbourne Uni, who was to feature prominently in the Club in the late 1970s.

Even at this stage, there was a very strong Uni Hockey Club presence at the Club, making up many of the numbers in the lower grades, and contributing strongly to the social fabric of the Club. They were also very talented opposition team and spectator baiters. This continued right through the seventies.

1971–72

Rob Campbell was club coach, and the diamond was still at the western end of McGillivray.

This was a big year at the Club. Kevin Parry was a generous contributor to baseball in those days (when he had money), and decided to bring two players from the United States, and place them with the two weakest teams in the League—Uni and East Perth. The players were Don Knapp, and the legendary Dennis Fitzgerald—more about him later.

The year was also memorable for the reintroduction of night baseball, played under candles at the Showgrounds.

The first half of the season was an improvement, with the odd win or two. Rob Nussey was doing most of the pitching, and contributing more than his fair share of hits, together with Tom Greenwell.

5 January 1972 saw both Dennis Fitzgerald in his first start for the Club, and brand new uniforms imported from Japan. Both Dennis and the uniforms were the best in the WABL. Fitzgerald was of medium height, but built like a bear, and could pitch faster than I, or anyone else in WA baseball, had seen before. He had reached single or double A level in the States, but had failed to reach his full potential in the Major Leagues due to a discipline problem (i.e. lack of).

With Dennis pitching, we won several games during the second half of the season. We were rapidly running out of catchers however, with people being press-ganged into this very dangerous position. I remember well Tom Greenwell catching with a wet handkerchief in the glove, but still coming out bruised and bleeding.

Another memorable incident at the Showgrounds saw a wild pitch from Dennis go straight past Tom, over the 20 metre speedway track, and through to the wooden backfence. The unfortunate runner on third took off straight away, only to see the ball bounce back to Tom, who was waiting for him before he was halfway down the line. You're out!

Dennis's presence certainly introduced a new level of talent, professionalism, and self belief into the players in the Club. We also picked up some other talented players in that year, including Ian Scarman, a left handed batter who had played infield at Claxton Shield level; a mate of Ian's from Sydney Uni, Hartley Anderson, who was a 12ft tall first baseman; the legendary Ian Edwards, brother of Mark, and ironman pitcher; and the young, frizzy haired and bespectacled Tony Baker, who needs no further introduction.

Chris Brown, to become a Club stalwart, but who had not played before, also started during this season, and went through his whole career not understanding that a decent glove and shoes might have made him a superstar. Chris also rapidly gained the reputation of being the worst teller of the worst jokes ever thought up, and his team mates used to desert him quicker than if he had dropped an atomic fart once he started on his comedy routine.

1972-73

Nightball was again played at the Showgrounds. Owen Perryman, an experienced player from NSW joined the Club, and was made coach,. His mate Peter Simpson also joined, and became A-Reserve Grade coach. Dennis Fitzgerald had gone to Melbourne during their 1972 winter season, and then returned to the USA.

Other new players included Gary Evershed, a talented ex-Nedlands junior; Jon Dadd, a big hitting infielder/outfielder who had played for WA against a visiting Japanese team, and who was making a late start at medicine; Nigel Sontaag, a left handed Kiwi with plenty of softball experience, but struggled with the small ball for some time; and Al Lopez and Ric Dunn, both hockey players who were good athletes.

Nussey and Perryman carried the pitching load with distinction during the season, which saw the A Grade win 6 games. Hitting improved, but errors cost us a lot of games.

The season was significant and memorable for the hugely successful gambling night held in a marquee in the backyard of Ric Dunn's parent's Cottesloe house, while they were away overseas on holidays.

May 1973 also saw a team travel to Monash for Intervarsity. Rob Nussey was picked as an All Australian.

1973-74

This was again a big year for the Club. Warren Kuhn, a tall American basketballer, with plenty of baseball talent, was appointed coach, and for the first time in the Club's history, got us thinking seriously about our training and our games. He was also a very good motivator, and was able to get people (especially me) to believe in their ability. Warren and Rob Nussey (again) contributed most of the pitching, and I contributed most of the errors.

The Club also took a huge step forward in constructing the cut outs on the diamond where it currently stands. The University put up the backfence and batting cage. This was the first permanent diamond, and first with cutouts, in the WABL.

Rob Nussey contributed his tractor, Ian Edwards his surveyor's skills, and the rest of us our shovels and sweat. The job basically took a full weekend.

We attracted much jealousy from other clubs for our efforts to upgrade baseball in the State!

Ian Hoad, probably the most talented West Australian to have played for the Club, joined us to play 3rd base, and effortlessly hit the shit out of the baseball.

Other recruits included Alex Hamilton, a league footballer, and the fastest player in the history of the Club. Alex consistently beat out cleanly fielded infield hits, and was dynamite when stealing bases; Jim Kidd, before he owned his sports stores, a big hitter and good pitcher; Mike Young, a youngster with tons of talent; and Neil Keene, a big hitting left hander who played the outfield very well.

The Club was developing the nucleus of a competitive and talented A Grade team.

Memorable playing events during the season included 10th and 11th innings wins over East Fremantle, the eventual Premiers, with Ian Hoad hitting a game winning home run against his old club in the first game, and Jim Kidd getting involved in a fight with Brian Carne in the second game. This game was won thanks to 11th innings hits by Mick Young and Robin Nussey.

The season finished with 6 wins, and 8th position on the premiership ladder.

May 1974 also saw a team travel to Adelaide for Intervarsity. We finished 3rd, with Ian Hoad, Ian Scarman and Ian Edwards being picked as All Australians.

1974-75

The most significant year for the (reformed) Club since 1968. Ray DelCarlo was the nominal coach, but the job was actually done by Warren Kuhn.

Pre-season, a photo had appeared in the paper of an American school teacher who was to play for West Stirling. On a hunch, Rob Nussey and I (I think) took DelCarlo to lunch, and asked if he would like to play for the Club. He told us that West Stirling had not yet had him sign a registration form, and that he had not been all that impressed at the training sessions he had been to. He said he would play for Uni, and we got him signed and cleared immediately. West Stirling didn't have any idea what they had let slip through

their fingers, mainly for the reason that they didn't particularly like 'yanks'.

What a player! In my opinion, the best, and most exciting baseballer to have ever played for the Club. Ray was a left handed pitcher and batter. He through the biggest curve ball you have ever seen, and was pretty quick as well. He was also a typical left hand batter with the sweetest swing you could imagine.

Other significant recruits for the season were Ron Collins, who I can't remember, but hit quite a few home runs during the season; Neil Ritchie, a young outfielder; and Don Jones, a phys ed student who hadn't played before, but was very quick, and talented.

The season also saw 7 innings twilight games played, to take advantage of daylight saving.

We had a good year, with the first game of the season being a 7-1 win over West Stirling (what irony), and Hoad, Kuhn and Collins hitting home runs.

The following week saw us play probably our best ever game to date, with a 3-0 victory over arch rivals Perth. DelCarlo threw to 28 batters, with Perth's only safe hitter (and baserunner for the day), Darryl Moyle, being doubled out at second on a ground ball from brother Lindsay. For good measure, DelCarlo also hit a home run.

Next week saw a 10-0 victory over South Perth (DelCarlo 13 strikeouts), and to that stage of the season we had a combined error total of only 6. Oh!, what a difference.

Controversy the following week. The rain started bucketing down with us comfortably ahead of East Fremantle in about the 4th innings. Umpire Eric Knight preceded to put on his bright yellow raincoat, and told us to get on with the game. DelCarlo put the resin bag directly on the ball, and was ejected from the game without any warning. Ian Edwards came in cold, we fumbled a lot, and ended up losing. The game was protested on the basis of the ejection, and later upheld.

DelCarlo continued to pitch brilliantly in following weeks, with 12 Ks (8-5 win over Vic Park), and 15 Ks (7-0 over Wembley, with Ray Michell pitching). A twilight game in mid-December saw Ian Hoad hit the first grand slam in the modern Club's history, and in early January we beat Perth in the 10th innings on a balk by pitcher Geoff Moyle.

Ian Hoad became our first ever (and only) Claxton Shield representative, when he covered himself in glory in Sydney.

On 2 February 1975, the Club had its largest ever win, plundering 18 runs off East Fremantle, while shutting them out behind DelCarlo's 11 strike out and 2 hit effort. The team amassed 18 safe hits, including a historical 3 home runs in 4 pitches, by Tom Greenwell, Warren Kuhn and Ian Hoad. Hoad hit another home run, and DelCarlo also put one over.

The strikeout blitz continued, with 12 against South Perth (4-0), and another 12 against Wembley (6-1).

At the end of the regular season we were in third place, setting up our first ever final appearance, against Vic Park who we had beaten easily every time during the season.

We went no further that year. Vic Park came back with a vengeance, winning 11-4.

It was a season that bought credibility to the Club, with opposition teams knowing that we were a force in the competition.

C Grade were minor premiers.

Ray DelCarlo won the WABL Fairest and Best by a mile, and Ian Edwards won the WABL A-Reserve Grade Fairest and Best.

1975 also saw us send an I.V. team to Sydney. With DelCarlo in the team, we blitzed the opposition, and achieved our first ever I.V. win. Ray DelCarlo, Rob Nussey and Ian Edwards made it to the All Australian Team.

1975-76

This season saw us slip back a bit, finishing 7th out of nine.

Ray DelCarlo played up to 19 December, when he returned to the USA with his beautiful wife, Linda.

Recruits for the year included Steve Andrews, and excellent infielder from South Perth (and ex Nedlands); Ken Palmer, a sweet moving centre fielder, and good left hand hitter from the USA (also a teacher); and Murray Lindau, a young infielder with lots of ability with the glove and the bat.

A significant 'recruit' in the lower grades was David "Harpo" Hammes, so nicknamed for his shocking head of hair. Harpo was one of the real characters in the history of the Club, and at one game will always be remembered for almost reducing Scoring icon Rose Corker to tears at a home game against Vic Park.

The season opener against Perth saw us go down 3-1, with 7 errors, just like the bad old days. We were then beaten 5-2 by Vic Park, but beat South Perth 7-2 the next week. DelCarlo's 10 strikeouts helped us beat West Stirling 2-1 in 10 innings but his 14 k's the following week against East Fremantle couldn't prevent a 4-0 loss.

In late November we beat Eagles 21-3, behind our 17 hits, and their 11 errors. Swans beat us 7-2, and the following week, we went down again to Perth 4-1. With DelCarlo's departure, we won few games for the rest of the year.

A-Reserve also had a poor year, finishing 8th, and C Grade finished 3rd.

I.V. in 1976 was at La Trobe in Melbourne, where we missed out on winning only on percentage. All Australians were Ian Edwards (also I.V. MVP), Rob Nussey, Ian Ross and Murray Lindau.

1976-77

This was another successful and significant year. American schoolteacher Steve Olsen was attracted to the Club as coach. Steve was a polished shortstop, and lethal bat.

Equally significantly, Rob Nussey managed to attract to the Club one of the greatest pitchers in Australian baseball history, Neil Page. Over a couple of seasons, Neil had been one of our greatest adversaries and critics while playing at Swans. He was a most unlikely person to fit into the Club, but once with us, made a huge contribution both on and off the field.

Other recruits included a skinny little outfielder from WAIT, Jim Gerrard, who complemented Alex Hamilton's outfield skill and speed.

The first game for the season saw us go down 8–2 to Perth. The following week, Steve Olsen pitched us to a 7–2 win over Vic Park—their only loss for the season, and for about 15 games into the following season. South Perth then beat us 3–2, and Wembley did the same, 4–3.

Our next outing against Eagles saw Page record 18 strikeouts, and Uni win 6–2 against Eagles. Page followed with a 14 K, 8–1 victory over Swans, and a 12 K, 2–1 win over East Fremantle.

In December of 1976, a USA schoolboys' team visited WA, and were coached by Ed Howell. This was to be a very significant event for the following season.

Our next game saw a 6–0 win over South Perth, and a 3–2 loss to West Stirling. This result was overturned when it transpired WS had played an unregistered player.

In February 1977, we beat Wembley 5–1 in a 16 innings marathon. Page threw the whole game, with stats of 17 Ks, 0 walks, 8 hits and 1 earned run. We made only one error for the game, and scored 4 runs in the top of the 16th.

Back to earth the following week, with a 8–6 loss to Eagles.

A 6–5 win over Swans the next week was memorable for Ian Ross's only ever home run in A Grade baseball (Hey—I'm writing the story). Ian Hoad hit a game-winning home run against East Freo the following week in a 2–0 result, seeing us in third place at the end of the regular season.

The 1st semi-final against Wembley presented us with our first A Grade finals win. The only run for the game was scored when Alex Hamilton scurried home from second base on a dropped catch at centre field. The ball had been hit by Steve Olsen.

A week later we fronted South Perth in the Preliminary Final. A very long and arduous season including a winning Claxton Shield Final, and winning games against the Japanese told on Neil Page, and he was belted by the opposition. The most telling blow was a home run by South Perth coach Bob Harris in about the 7th innings. Our great season finished on a 6–4 loss.

A-Reserve finished 3rd, with Steve Andrews winning the League Batting.

C Grade, under coach John Phillips were losing grand finalists, with Brian Hansen taking the WABL Fairest and Best.

1977 saw I.V. baseball in Perth for the first time. It was run in conjunction with the women's hockey I.V., and included a magnificent piss-up and dance at the Subiaco Civic Centre on the Monday night. The police were called about the noise, Rob Campbell was nearly arrested for smoking dope in the toilets, there was an all-in brawl between some of the hockey goalies, and for the week we made an unprecedented profit of more than \$1000.

We also won the I.V., with All Australia selection for Ian Edwards (again MVP), Ian Ross and Kevin Pratt.

We also gained the famous Nussey caravan about this time, replacing a variety of tents and other temporary structures which had served as kitchen and dining room for a number of years.

1977-78

Steve Olsen remained as coach. The most significant recruit for the year was Ed Howell, who had been brought to Perth by Kevin Parry to assist with junior development. Howell had pitched in the bigs (Major League) for a short period a few years before, until he sustained a major elbow injury. The surgery scar looked like a large zip! He was very quick, left handed, and could hit the ball out of sight.

Other significant recruits included Ian "Dolly" Dyer from East Fremantle, a very talented but enigmatic player, who added strength to the team; and Kevin Pratt, a fleet-footed outfielder from Perth.

Unfortunately, we lost Neil Page back to Adelaide.

This was also the first season of double headers. In the first round we beat Eagles 3-1 and 6-0 (without Howell). This was followed up by a split result of 3-1 each against Vic Park, and further split results against Swans, and West Stirling. Steve Olsen hit 2 home runs in the late game against WS.

Howell's first major win was a 13 K, 6-1 win against Wembley. The following week, Ian Hoad belted a game winning last innings grand slam against East Fremantle. A split result against South Perth was the next result.

The next game, against Eagles, saw Uni come up with their biggest ever win, and their highest single innings run feast. In a 22-1 result, the team belted 14 runs in the 8th innings, and totalled 21 hits for the game.

There was talk in *The West Australian* of a Premiership! We beat Vic Park 8-0 (Howell 12 Ks), but were then beaten 3-1 by Perth. The team bounced back the following week to beat Swans 1-0 behind Howell's 12 strikeouts, and followed up with a 7-0 win against West Stirling.

Uni lost the last three games of the season to finish in 5th place, with 13 wins.

Ed Howell won the WABL Earned Run Average award, with an average below 1, creating a record that is likely to stand for a long time.

A-Reserve Grade finished 3rd, and B Grade 8th. Chris Jones won the WABL B Grade Fairest and Best.

1978-79

Jim Kidd was appointed as coach.

Significant recruits included Vic Delosa, a quality player who previously played with the Club in the early 1970s; Bob Linnert, an American who coached and played for WAIT; Steve Keller, a right armed pitcher with AAA experience, and a winning Grand Final in South Australia a couple of years earlier, brought out by the Club; Dean Lyman, another very good pitcher from the USA, who walked in off the street, and had a girlfriend of suspect gender; and smokin' Joe McCarthy, a strong right handed hitter from WAIT.

The first game of the season resulted in a 2-0 win against Swans, with Lyman racking up 11 Ks. This was followed by a 15-0 win against Perth, and both games of a double header against the newly-admitted Wanneroo.

Steve Keller's arrival was greeted with a 1–0 loss and 9–4 win against West Stirling, and then another split result with East Fremantle. Our first double loss for the season came against the very strong Vic Park in early November.

To celebrate his final A Grade game with the Club prior to going overseas, Ian Hoad hit two home runs in an 8–1 result over South Perth, with the other game resulting in a 6–1 loss.

The next few weeks saw splits with Wembley and Eagles, and a single loss to Swans 7–6, with 7 errors.

Recovery was at hand in twin wins against Perth, with Bob Linnert picking up a club record with 5 hits in a 17–9 win. Wanneroo went down 4–0, and then we beat East Fremantle 5–4, with Keller the winning pitcher.

An 11 innings, 7–6 loss to South Perth, and 11–5 loss to Wembley saw us still in the top 4 in early February. A further 5–4 loss to eagles in 11 innings started to make our position look shaky.

With 10 Ks, Keller ensured a 5–4 win against Swans, followed by a last game 3–2 loss to Vic Park.

Despite a poor last half of the season, we managed to cling to 4th spot, only to be demolished 6–0 by a rampant Ray Michell and Wembley. 7 errors didn't help!

A-Reserve Grade finished a very credible 3rd, with Karl Rosenow taking out the WABL F&B. B Grade finished 9th, and the D's 2nd.

I.V. was in Sydney, with a combined Uni/WAIT team representing.

1979–80

The last year of A Grade, and a year in which a Uni/WAIT team officially combined in A Grade.

Don Weir, a Victorian pitcher, was appointed as coach. Significant new recruits included Andy Murray, Graham "Spotty" Pates, Harry Barker from Adelaide Uni, Ian Gow, a strong fast outfielder with a great arm, and a good bat, and Keith King from WAIT.

The first game against Perth resulted in a 17–4 win, despite 6 errors. Winning pitcher was Don Wier. The following game we downed Vic Park 6–5, and then split a double header with East Fremantle.

A 5–4, 10-innings win against Wanneroo was followed by a 3–1 loss to West Stirling, and then a split with South Perth, with both games a 2–1 result. At this stage, we were in 2nd position on the ladder.

A 2–2 draw and 2–0 loss to Eagles was softened by a 6–4 win against West Stirling, in which Vic Delosa hits two home runs. The following week Uni went down 6–5 to Perth, as a result of 6 errors.

This started a horror run, which included a 6–1 loss to South Perth, two losses to Wembley, and a split with Swans. At this stage of the season (mid-February) we had 10 wins.

The final game of the season, and of the era, resulted in a 7–5 loss to West Stirling, with Rob Nussey hitting a home run, and the team making 4 errors. The team had been through the full cycle over 10 seasons in the ‘bigs’.

The team finished 8th (of 10).

The Reserves finished 11th, the B’s 9th, and the C’s 6th.

And so finished the swinging ’70s, with a few finals appearances, no premierships, some very good players and games, some poor baseball, a constant living in fear of a visit by the liquor licensing police when we never once held a licence during the decade, a Club that had enjoyed the growth and friendship during the decade, and that had laid the foundations and traditions for the Club that exists today.

Things were no different then—too few people doing too much of the work, a lot of tolerance and hard work from many of the wives and girlfriends, and an attitude that meant no-one went home and slashed their wrists if they lost a game.