

- **He’s played cricket against Victoria . . . and, wait for it, England!**
- **He’s operated a garage, a pub, a laundrette, all types of farming and golf course equipment and he’s still driving a school bus!**
- **He’s presided over both local cricket and football clubs, and served on several other committees.**
- **He had ambitions to play VFL footy until he “wrecked” his knee.**
- **He nearly died one night . . . 15 years ago!**

Last Saturday, he reached a significant milestone - his 70th birthday - with a typically raucous party although, maybe, a tad quieter (and shorter) than parties of previous years.

Throughout a life of achievement and the odd bit of drama, Colin Gaut has remained an unflappable gentleman, respected and loved by his family and many friends. Certainly cool in a crisis, he’s a cool dude who likes the odd cool drink!

Sport has always been Col’s great interest. He said he had trouble retaining what he learnt at school but he never forgot how to kick a footy or hit a cricket ball. “I learnt my tables and was good at maths but nothing else stayed in my head,” he said.

With parents, Lillian (nee Anson) and Thomas ‘Digger’ Gaut, Col moved to Cobden from Camperdown when he was three. School was only two doors up from the family’s first Silvester St home but, when he followed his mother home on his first day, he was “slapped on the bum all the way back.”

You could argue Silvester St should be re-named Gaut St. During his 67 years in Cobden, Col has lived in four houses along the street. After school, every night, it was footy and cricket on the fire brigade track in front of his second Silvester St home (on the Home Hardware timber-yard site), then it was 8 Silvester St and, finally, 49 Silvester St where he and wife Jan have lived for 44 years.

Mechanic ‘Digger’ Gaut moved to Cobden to build a garage so Col left school at 15½ to begin an auto apprenticeship - the beginning of a 43 year stint looking after customers and cars so competently and cordially on the corner of Curdie and Walker streets.

Wife Jan and three of Col’s siblings - Francis, Joan and Chris - all worked at Gaut Motors at some stage with Chris staying for the final thirty years. Other long-time employees included Bernie Harrington and Scott Guthrie. Three apprentices - Scott, Ross Clementson and Kelvin Clarke - were trained as mechanics.

“Dad and I spent many hours starting the business – we got so busy we would work half the night,” Col said. “We worked on all makes and models of cars.”

He recalls one incident that makes him smile. “I replaced front drive shafts on a white Camira but I didn’t know there were two white Camiras outside. I took the customer to his car to explain the completed work when he told me it wasn’t his car. I’d put them in the wrong vehicle! As it turned out, the customer actually needed his shafts done too – but not just then – so we let him pay the job off. I hope Greg Chessum doesn’t read this.”

The garage was sold to Ian and Cherine Benallack in 2002. “It had been a hard but rewarding life, helping people out and getting to know new people when they came to town,” he said.

Col and Jan showed true entrepreneurial skills in 2001 when they started Cobden’s first laundrette in the building now occupied by Stirlo, the quality butcher. They sold it four years later – to Milton Parlour – who took it to Victoria St.

Something Col always wanted to do was to run a pub so the opportunity arose in October 2002 to take up a lease on Thommo’s Hotel. “We had a great clientele and very little trouble,” he said. “Helped by Peter Sharp, we gave local talent a go by starting Friday night live music which was a big success.

“We had wonderful staff like Steve Murphy, Ella Howard, Lisa Dickinson, Paula Duynhoven, Adam Bellman, Robert Frusher, Andrea Ross and Cloe Cole but we decided to sell the lease after three years.”

Col took twelve months off after leaving the pub before mowing fairways and greens at the golf club for three years.

With Alex McDonald, he is now in his fifth year of driving a small bus for Hampden Specialist School, a job he enjoys. Plus, he “does all sorts

— COLIN GAUT — 70 not out!



Colin holds the ball used by the English bowlers in 1974 when he made a wonderful 50 at Warrnambool. Suitably encased, the ball was sent to Col in 2010 by Graeme Amoore whose father Morrie received it from English ‘keeper Alan Knott after the game.

ON THE FIELD

Sport has always been a major part of Col’s life. As a schoolboy, he was a talented athlete, winning high jump and sprint titles at inter-school sports and, before he was 18, he had won a junior tennis premiership with Cobden Public, a B grade cricket premiership and two under 18 football flags– in 1959 and 1960.

In 1960, Col also played about five senior games on the half-forward flank and, in 1961, he played the season on the flank and in the back pocket, scoring five Maskell Cup votes as a 17 year-old. What looked like being a glorious career holding down the centre half-forward position ended in tatters in 1962 when he injured his knee at Camperdown, never to play football again.

He ruptured the cruciate ligaments in his right knee, spending ten days in a Melbourne hospital and ten weeks on crutches. “I was totally devastated,” he said. “When I see the amazing operations carried out today and the short recovery time of players, I realise what might have been possible if the injury had happened a few years later.

“My surgeon told me I would never play sport again and that I would need a new knee by age 30 but I had a steel brace made that enabled me to play cricket until I was 44. I learned to play with pain but, in the end, I could run no further.”

Among Col’s many cricket achievements: 253 matches, 9227 runs for Cobden as an opening bat, 18 centuries and fifty half-centuries with a top-score of 179 and a total of 12 ducks; he represented Hampden Cricket Association in Hudson Shield and at Melbourne country week with distinction throughout his career. Of course, matches for the Corangamite Zone against Victoria at Warrion – where he made 48 – and his 50 against England at Warrnambool in 1974 are days he will never forget.

Individual honours came Colin’s way at all levels – countless batting average and aggregate awards and he captained A grade teams many times. Amazingly, it wasn’t until 1979-80 that he

enjoyed A grade premiership success – the start of a successful era for Cobden.

Few will remember Col as a bowler . . . but he does! He once took 3/3 with his right arm medium-pace seamers in B grade. He was also a classy fieldsman, pocketing 143 catches at first slip, a position created for him and him alone.

He remembers running out partner Alan Pell before poor ‘Pelly’ had even faced a ball. Humourist, Jim Dalziel, greeted Alan with, “How’s the wicket playing?” and waited for ‘Pelly’s’ bat to hit the shed wall. Col also recalls a day at country week when his spectating brother-in-law Noel Smith was stirring a fast and furious Kyabram bowler Shane Loveless who was giving Col an impossible time on a sticky, unplayable wicket. Loveless promptly dropped his pants in the direction of Noel . . . who, of course, copped an eyeful!

Best cricketers he’s seen include Cobrico, Cobden, Hampden and Corangamite opener Graham Hunter – “as good as anyone I’ve played with or against” – and Rob Connoley who was “the best spin bowler in my time – we were lucky he played for Cobden.”

In football, Col mentioned 1959-62 Cobden coach Bill James as an outstanding player who “protected the kids.” Locals John Rantall, David Rhodes and Hugh Worrall who played VFL footy, also Bill Askew and Warren Couch, won his praise. “Shane Garner was certainly one who was missed by talent scouts,” he said.

A footy highlight was being picked to play with Camperdown High against University High in Melbourne. “As a form 3 student, I should not have been allowed to go but a teacher got Mum’s permission, and I kicked four goals.”

Col remains a supporter of local talent. “I love watching the local boys – Ben Cunnington, Gary Rohan and the Merretts – doing well at AFL level,” he said. “And I love watching my grandkids developing in their sports.”



OFF THE FIELD

Col has served his community well . . .

- **Cobden under 18 footy coach for three years.**
- **Twice a senior selector and on the club committee for years.**
- **President of the football club for three years and cricket club for eight years.**
- **Recreation reserve management committee member for many years.**
- **Original sports club committee member and treasurer for six years.**

Col helped build the sports club in the early 1980s. He was one of the volunteers who were told by their spouses, “You may as well take your bed up there.” He laughs when he recalls Kevin Johnston reprimanding him and Gary Jewell for putting the tiles in the bathrooms ‘upside down’ “We discussed it before we started tiling and we were very happy with our job,” he said.

All will agree that Jan Gaut has been a patient partner for Col. They “went together” for a few years – Colin was always fairly relaxed – before their wedding on January 17th, 1970. Their first night was spent in Melbourne where they went to church early so Col could make 50 for Hampden against South Melbourne in the afternoon.

That night, the whole team went to the Carousel restaurant for tea. Jan was the only lady and Col says she was “treated like royalty”. Off to Adelaide for their honeymoon but they had to be back in Cobden for cricket the following Saturday. Two weeks later, Col went to Melbourne country week. Soon after, a New Zealand team was touring but Col decided to declare himself unavailable for a game against them. Probably very wise!

Jan and Col holidayed at Peterborough, even before they married – independently, of course – and have followed suit every year since, always celebrating their anniversary at the local pub with family and friends. One of Col’s pleasures is enjoying a beer around the campfire at their Peterborough van-site.

Col loves watching live sport on television. He enjoys a punt and recalls watching their greyhound win a race, only to have it taken off them “because a real rabbit ran across the track”. I could not believe it,” he said. In AFL, he followed Collingwood from the moment childhood hero Thorold Merrett was recruited by them.

From a medical perspective, Col’s last 15 years have not been easy. He became mysteriously ill in 1999 and was rushed to Warrnambool where he nearly died. A week later, he was again rushed, this time by plane, to St Vincent’s in Melbourne where he was kept in an induced coma for ten days. A lung disease called bronchiolitis obliterans organising pneumonia (BOOP) was diagnosed and Col faced a long recovery period. He lost three stone! At the beginning of 2012, he was operated on for prostate cancer and, twelve months ago, he had seven weeks of radiation treatment. Today, he describes himself as “fighting fit”.

A very family-orientated person, Colin was keen to get as many family members as possible to last Saturday night’s celebrations. Brother Francis and sister Margaret (Smith) live in Melbourne, sister Joan (Bell) resides at Tesbury and brother Chris lives in Cobden. Many of their families also attended the function.

Colin is proud of his own children and grandchildren who, he says, keep him young. Daughter Tania (Reed) lives in Cobden with sons Jake, Trent and Mitch, son Bradley is working with a mining company in Queensland and Laura (Holland) is in Colac with Ian and children Indy, Tilli and Jarvis.

It’s hard to see anything stopping Col Gaut in his quest to top-score in the innings of life. Even if he doesn’t make another ton, he continues to build and maintain strong partnerships, displaying marvellous stroke-play in his infectious laconic style. His opponents have become his close friends, and his team-mates, just like Pelly, would sacrifice their own wickets for him every time. His wife, Jan, has been a terrific partner for Col. She, too, has had her own health battles in recent years but, together, they continue to put runs on the board. The spectators watch on, in awe!

Yes, we do need to balance this story by acknowledging some of Col’s shortcomings - he batted left-handed (imagine how good he would have been if he batted right-handed); he fielded at first slip all day so he could be fresh for social drinks after stumps (the rest of us were ‘cactus’ after two drinks because we had fielded ourselves ragged all day); he kept us out of bed all night because he was still feeling fresh at 5am on Sunday morning (despite all of us having to play inter-association cricket that day); and, yes, he barracks for Collingwood! Enough said!

of jobs” on the Noy farm with Bill, Michael and David.

After losing his mum, Lillian, at the ‘too young’ age of 58, he appreciated his relationship with his father ‘Digger’ who, “taught me so much about mechanics and life.” ‘Digger’ died at 89 in 2006.

Right: Jan and Colin Gaut

COBDEN CALENDAR
Wednesday 16th July: Connecting Cobden #35.
Monday 21st July: 7.30pm CopRice Cobden Spring Festival meeting, Heytesbury Room.
Tuesday 22nd July: Cobden Business Network breakfast meeting.
Monday 4th August: Progressing Cobden AGM including Twenty20 Vision “Report Back”.