



## REMEMBER WHEN – BILL JAMES - was the teacher and coach?

### COBDEN ON AIR IN THE ARCADE

Saturday - three hours of non-stop entertainment in the Arcade.

Next time - live to air on ACE Radio? Live to air along the length of Curdie Street?

Anything is possible when you consider the talent and organisations that are 'up and about' in Cobden these days.

Interviewees provided comprehensive and clear answers to the curliest questions put to them by the hosts. They were a credit to themselves and their organisations.

As for the music, the crowd was blown away by Paige Gibson, Lillie van Donk and Tim van der Shans, and Jess Sadler who presented self-penned songs and covers with real style.

Despite the hot conditions, arcade customers took time to appreciate the event with families arriving to hear their sons, daughters and parents strut their stuff behind the microphone.



Jess Sadler

Drew 'Bruce McAvaney' Semmens was sensational testing the sporting people with teasing questions and Garry 'Derryn Hinch' Ross, as always, was the consummate professional - although the fact he had not heard of tennis legend Jack Black surprised everyone within cooee-distance. A meeting is being hastily arranged!

Sponsors - well, the producer did not need to visit all businesses to get backing for the project. The revenue target was reached very quickly which meant we could actually have an expenditure stream. Thanks sponsors for your assistance!

No, television will never kill the radio star . . . not in Cobden.



Drew Semmens (left) and Garry Ross

#### BROADCAST CREDITS

**ALL STAR CAST:** David Staggard, Kerryn Cain (Lake Cobden); Jacinta Henriksen, Mitch Kelly (Moving to secondary school); Paige Gibson (Singer/musician); Garry Finlayson (Cobden District Tennis Association); Thommo's Hotel (Bree Fitton); Leigh Walsh (Cobden Cricket Club); Lillie van Donk, Tim van der Shans (singer/musicians); Trevor Clarke (Cobden Business Network); David Buckle, Wayne Robertson (Cobden Football Netball Club); Cr Jo Beard (Corangamite Shire); Sam Cunnington, Caitlyn Mitchell (Where to from here?); Jess Sadler (Singer/musician); Bill Nelson (Cobden Fire Brigade)

**HOSTS:** Garry Ross, Drew Semmens, Kelvin White

**SOUND TECHNICIAN:** Matt Leversha.

**CONSTRUCTION:** Chris Bodey

**SPONSORS:** Cobden Country Gifts & Sweets; Oasis Cafe; Ritchies IGA Supermarkets; Cobden Golf Club; National Australia Bank; Cobden Post Office; Curdie Car Care; Curdie St Clinic; Cobden Community Bank; Hampden Veterinary Clinic; Cobden Pharmacy; Cobden Motors; Cobden Sewing Machines; Stitch-it Quilts; Damian Riches Lawn Mowing; Cobden Newsagency; Cobden Bakery; Cobden Home Timber & Hardware; Mallani; Cobden Technical School; Cobden Civic Hall

It's hard not to warm to a bloke who describes Cobden as "the town that is fondest in my heart", a bloke who remembers its people as "sensational, the best of any town we have ever been part of".

Bill James, 75, was a teacher at Elingamite North State School between 1959 and 1962. As a 21 year-old ruckman, he coached Cobden to the 1959 grand final against Warrnambool, a match they lost by 88 points.

Now living at Bacchus Marsh, he has high regard for the footballers he coached during his four year stint with the Bombers and, similarly, great memories of his Elingamite North school pupils.

"Just a helluva nice bunch of kids" was how he described the likes of Bruce White, Pam and Norm Pegg, Dianne and Murray Smith, Neil Podger, the Walsh families – Michael, Dennis and Eileen, and Carmel and Elizabeth Walsh who married Terang reinsman Bruce Clarke, and the Scanlons – Gerard, Rhonda, Jeanette and Pauline.

After playing six games with Geelong in the then-VFL, Bill went to Geelong West in 1958 when he won the Ballarat Football League best and fairest. Cobden offered him £30 a week to coach and play, an offer he described as too good to refuse after earning only £7 a game to play VFL.

"The situation is quite the reverse these days," he mused.

Following his Cobden coaching appointment, Bill had to apply for a district school. For the first few months, he worked at Lismore before the Elingamite North opportunity arose. "When I was transferred, I found board with Dora and Gordon Kerr in Cobrico," he said.

"When my wife Judy and I married the following year we rented the house at 7 Parrot Street. The townsfolk made us feel most welcome and we thoroughly enjoyed our remaining three years in Cobden."

#### PAST PLAYERS

Cobden players during Bill's time included John "Mopsy" Rantall of South Melbourne and North Melbourne fame, Bernie Moran who played 30 to 40 games with Carlton, Gavin Moran who played two or three games with Geelong on permit, Max "Bluey" Reed who appeared briefly with St Kilda and, of course, the Lord twins – Stuart and Alistair – who became champion Cats and, later, coached Hampden clubs. Brownlow Medallist Alistair coached Cobden from 1975 to 1979.

Other notables included, "Mike Giblett who was vice-captain in my first year and who had previously played with St Kilda, Norm Dickinson, Keith Simmonds, Bazil Hammond, Billy Hose, Peter Watts, Norm Gleeson, Graham Horan, Max and Trevor Nelson

Bill also remembered wingman Robbie Howarth as "one of the best in our club who could have gone much further." He said one VFL umpire who officiated in a Cobden game described him as capable of playing at the highest level – quick and brave with excellent ball delivery.

"Colin Gaut was another, a lovely bloke who suffered a bad knee injury. Back in those days, knee operations were a major career-defining thing – none of the technology being used today was available," he said.

Bill recalled Danny and Jimmy Rohan as formidable footballing forces. "Dan broke his leg early in 1959 and I remember Jimmy being thumped in the preliminary final the same year. His jaw was broken so I used that to motivate our players at three-quarter time. It made them dig a little deeper," he said.

Bill marvelled over the fact that Cobden drew three matches in the lead-up to the grand final in 1959 – "never been done before or since, I reckon. We drew the last home-and-away match against Camperdown, the first semi-final against



Bill James

Mortlake and the preliminary final against Camperdown again. Luckily, we were able to win the replays!"

One of Bill's favourite memories relates to the clandestine meeting of the 'Goose Club' comprising players and followers in the old clubrooms on Sunday mornings. "Initiation rites involved the skoaling of a pot of beer whilst blindfolded and standing on one leg. It seemed that those who repeatedly failed still managed to front up each successive week for another try," he laughed.

Frank Pekin was president of Cobden Football Club when Bill was coach. "As we toured the Heytesbury looking for players, he told me the area had lots of gum-trees but not many footballers".

#### LIFE AFTER COBDEN

After Cobden, Bill shifted to Hamilton where he coached Coleraine for a year. He backed into a pack, suffered spinal injuries and missed football for two years. Returning to the field of play, he turned out for Welshpool in Gippsland ("where I played for crayfish"), Tooborac and, finally Yallourn North in 1966.

Bill and his wife Judy have four girls, three boys, 17 grandchildren and a few "steppies". His adult children are nurses (two), a commercial pilot in the United States, a banker, a 'sparky', a teacher and another who works with a Dutch company in China.

Bill finished his teaching career when he resigned as principal of the Keilor Road School in North Essendon in 1992 to pursue other interests. Since then he has published a small book, "The Bush Chalkie, School Dummies and other stories". One of his greatest interests was/is trout fishing and, for many years, he was a regular contributor to fishing magazines and had eight fishing books published.

Keeping reasonably good health, Bill also enjoys gardening, a glass of wine and a round of golf. "The Bacchus Marsh golf course measures about seven kilometres in total – well, I manage to walk 20 kilometres around it. I don't hit the ball very straight," he said.

He also enjoys following the fortunes of the mighty Cobden Bombers. "Although I don't know the players, I am familiar with many of the family names. Barb Semmens sends me the Bull'n Banter newsletter and I try to stay in touch with her mother Marie who I might see once every two years."

- Kelvin White

## From the history books

- 1924: Electricity was first switched on in Cobden.
- 1940's: A fish hatchery was operating in the Cobden Creek on the eastern side of the weir; local fishermen were the instigators of the breeding programme.
- 1954: Cobden swimming Pool Committee placed a drinking tap in appreciation of Mr E. W. Hill's work in swimming. This tap is still used by patrons today.
- 1955: Cobden Play Group opened at the Presbyterian Church Hall. Miss Jessie Thompson (later Mrs Harold Nelson) was the first teacher.
- 1958: The War Memorial was re-sited from the Curdie-Victoria Streets intersection to the lawn area beside the Civic Hall.
- 1962: A fence was erected along the Victoria Street entrance to the Cobden Bush Nursing hospital, with a plaque in appreciation of the work done by Mr Percy James.
- 1963: The OBE was awarded to Dr Alfred Barrett for his outstanding medical service to the Heytesbury Community.
- 1965: Cobden Pre-school centre was officially opened. Committee members raised their share of the costs by the sale of a recipe book, and by catering.

Keep Cobden in business = shop locally

#### COBDEN CALENDAR

**Friday 21st December:** Community Bank/Progressing Cobden Christmas in Curdie Street. Co-ordinated by Cobden Business Network from 5pm. Santa, barbecue, dunking tank, handball comp, live music, spinning wheel, free face painting, jumping castle and pony rides. Best decorated costumes and bikes, pre-school, primary and adult sections. Raffle draws and presentations at 7.30pm including best decorated house and shop window.

**Monday 31st December:** Cobden Rotary New Year's Eve Celebrations – Racecourse Reserve.

**Friday 25th January:** Dancing with Frankie Lawrence at Cobrico Hall. 8pm to midnight. Contact Nola 5595 1231 or Glenice 5595 4360. Great floor, music, supper and friendship.