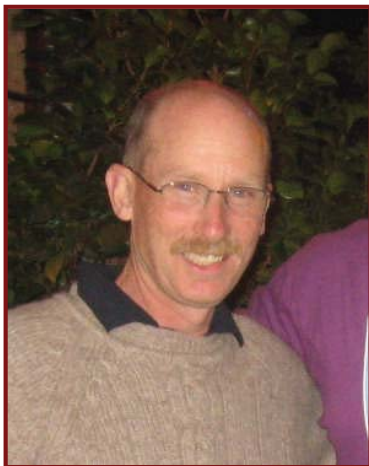


## VALE KEVIN WILLIAMS



Willy came to the club over 30 years ago from the Caulfield Baseball Club as baseball moved its main playing season from Winter to Summer.

He went on to play over 600 games with our club and was elected to life membership in 1994 for his services as a player, coach, committeeman and Chairman of Selectors. Just prior to his passing, Willy had been making a major contribution as the third base coach in our Firsts.

As a player Willy always impressed as someone who approached the game with serious intent. When he arrived at Cheltenham in 1976 he was already a pretty good hitter and solid gloveman but he had the arm of a 50 year old, the legacy of being from being over

used as a young pitcher.

It was with the bat in his hands where Willy excelled. with hard work and willingness to learn he continued to improve though his mid 20's to lead the batting in the firsts for several seasons with averages over .400 including .429 in 1982/83. Willy was always very proud of his stats - justifiably so as they were the result of hundreds of hours of practice in the batting tunnel and his relentless discipline and application at the plate on a game day.

As good as he was over a normal season - he got even better in finals. The best effort probably, being his performances in the 1982/83 final series where he was B.O.G. in the grand final, with clutch hits for extra bases when the game was in the balance. Over that finals series Willy batted .500 and slugged an extraordinary .830 in 26 plate appearances. An outstanding effort and representative of his contributions as a player.

Willy also holds a unique record that is unlikely to ever be challenged. He has the distinction of being the oldest player ever to play in our firsts. A couple of years ago playing against Essendon one of our players - Travis Blackley, got himself ejected early in the game and Kevin was brought in off the bench from his coaching role to complete the at bat. He worked a base on balls and as the innings progressed he eventually found himself on 3B. An infield ground ball ended with Kevin being thrown out in clutch at home plate. Later the Essendon catcher made the comment to the effect "gee the "old bloke" plays it hard.

Willy later confessed - he was so pumped with white line fever that he found himself trying to put the catcher half way up the back-net in the hope that ball would dropped and he could score. I wasn't at all surprised - Willy could only play one way - all out.

As a coach however Willy was an even more valued member of our club making a positive impact on many lives and baseball careers.

Willy usually took on our 15 -17 year olds, with all the challenges as they moved from being boys to young men. He coached for many seasons. The early starts on a Sunday morning and 6 months of mid weeks practices requires a very special commitment as well as the full support of his family. His last premiership team was only a few years ago when he steered our Under 18's to the State Championship - which is no mean achievement.

Willy had a great belief in his players and he had a terrific ability to impart technical knowledge and skills but more importantly he was able to get across how the game should be played.

Willy stressed the privilege it is to cross the white lines to play in the game, what it takes to become part of a team and finally the importance that respect, loyalty, integrity and a good work ethic plays in building a successful team. Willy himself had all these values and demonstrated them every time he walked on to the field.

Willy was always very generous with his time and in 30 years I never saw Willy knock back a request from a teammate or young player for extra help outside the regular practice sessions.

Willy won his share of premierships and although there are quite a few flags on the walls here today due to his efforts - Willy clearly understood it wasn't the just result that counted, it was the journey and the bonding with your mates that was most important. (Didn't Willy love the word 'bonding'?) Over and above all the great things Willy did as a player and a coach - it is as a teammate that Willy will be best remembered.

Basically you knew Willy would never let you down – ever. He was a rock.

Even after Willy eased back on fulltime involvement, if we were short of someone to fill in a lower side or a junior umpire – it only took a phone call to get Willy to cover the gap. A quick “ok, where is it? What time?” then there would be a pause as his rational thought process caught up and he would say “I hope you are not now going to tell me it's at Geelong.”

Willy was regularly consulted by club personnel for his advice and highly valued opinions of different players and game tactics. If you sought an opinion you got an informed and honest response, sometimes brutally direct but at least you knew he was probably right and you knew immediately where you stood. You also knew you could rely on Willy to help you work through to a positive outcome. Whatever it takes was his common response.

Our change rooms and dugouts lifted when Willy arrived. He just loved the smell of the liniment. A couple of sniffs and he was away. His unique sense of humour and his positive, “can do” attitude rubbed off on everyone and he was a huge asset to all the teams he was associated with. Simply put - Willy was fun to play ball with and he had a big impact on many lives and always for the better.

When we talk of Willy in the years to come he will be remembered as a ballplayer who always gave it all he had.

John Ferguson