



Western Suburbs District Hockey Club lost one of its greatest servants and statesman with the sad passing of life member and past president JOHN RUSSELL PUNCH on Wednesday, January 12, 2022.

I first met John in 1975, and from that time on, he was always Mr Western Suburbs. In those days, Wests fielded five senior, two junior and two women's teams. He commenced his ten years as club president the following year, a role he fulfilled with outstanding commitment and passion to his club. No one on those committees would have been in any doubt where his loyalties lay. If a task needed doing and no one else had volunteered quickly enough, John would say simply, without fanfare, "I'll do that", and you knew it would be done and done right. I would like a dollar for every time John said "I'll do that".

In 1976 John ran the highly successful testimonial dinner for another club great Ken Gardner, at Concord Memorial Hall, Majors Bay Road Concord. Ken was president for the preceding ten years. Ken and John had a father and son like rapport, often seen having a quiet chat together or conferring on the phone.

John was a driving force behind the club's major fundraiser, the Western Suburb's junior carnival. For the round-robin tournament, thirty-two junior teams from as far away as Kelso and Goulburn would descend on St Ives Showground and later Meadowbank. A vast logistical exercise and John was meticulous in all aspects of the event's planning with many hours spent at his house doing the draw.

John was also deeply committed to the club's juniors. Coaching the same squad for many years. Wests were in the central metropolitan zone in those years, stretching from Concord to Moorebank to Sutherland and Glebe. Much travel was required very early on a Saturday morning. John would be there every morning, load as many juniors as physically possible into his orange Toyota and off they'd travel. Those juniors didn't realise that John had a second job as a barman at North Ryde RSL, often working well into the early hours of Saturday morning before going to junior hockey. Additionally, John secured one of Wests first sponsorships, Singapore Airlines, to sponsor the juniors. Many of those juniors went on to play seniors and indeed first grade with Western Suburbs, of which I'm sure he was very proud.



John was a rock both on and off the field, and sometimes the overlap was blurred. He was one of my fullbacks in my first year as first grade goalie. Skilful, solid and fearless. When playing at home, one of the first things John would ask after the final whistle and before leaving the field was "how did the canteen go today", which typified his "club first" attitude.

And then there was “Punchy” (by name, not by nature). Punchy, shall we say, was not afraid of a cold beer on a warm day. He was always good company socially and loved telling jokes. His specialty was “Mate” jokes. The Mate was a social misfit somewhere between “Strop” and “Mr Bean”. Punchy had a library of these jokes, which he told very animatedly. A Wests tradition in those days was attending the Manly carnival complete with a West’s keg. Unfortunately, one year Punchy suffered a severe leg injury in the first half of our first game - ending his carnival that year. Coincidentally that year’s keg had a shorter life than usual!

They say behind every good man is a good woman, which was undoubtedly the case with John’s wife, Joy. Joy also had a good sense of humour with an underlying strength, and her suggestions were always “spot-on”. Joy was excellent support during his presidency, and John very much appreciated her assistance.

As Chris Head, who has known John from primary school days, said recently, he never heard a bad word about John.

John Punch, leader, inspiration and good mate to all.

John is survived by his wife Joy, their four children and eight grandchildren.

Vale John Punch



*A reminiscence from Carl Albrecht, former player and committee member*