

# 1968-79

## Towards a Codified National Sport

*The development of Touch Football from a sport played in parks and other public places during the late 1960s, through to a regulated and codified interstate sport during the 1970s, then to an international sport during the 1980s, now known throughout Australia and New Zealand, Touch was nothing short of a remarkable sporting success. In retrospect, the establishment of the national body, the Australian Touch Football Association in 1976, was a miracle waiting to happen.*



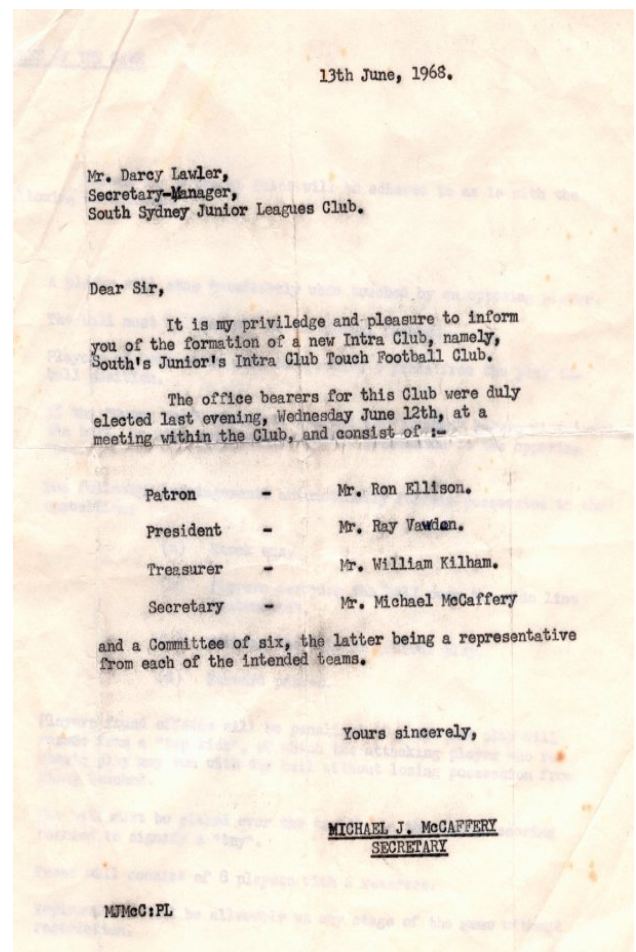
*Ray Vawdon, one of the men that started it all! He is photographed here in 1981, on the left, presenting the winner's cheque (Vawdon Cup) to Ross Scott, President of South Sydney Touch Association.*

## The Formative Years

Anybody who played Rugby League or Rugby Union in Australia during the 1960s will remember playing a form of Touch Football as a form of practice and fitness at training nights. Often this would involve as many as thirty players, with the playing field usually being the normal Rugby League field. Usually the

constituted rules embodied a touch, rather than a tackle.

No doubt, hybrids of this form of game are still being played today all over the world. It was from these beginnings that the game of Touch evolved. Today the numbers of women's teams, mixed teams, age teams, junior teams, Aboriginal teams, service teams, surf club teams, teams involving prisoners from institutions in the State Department of Corrective Services, are a feature of the game.



*The letter that started it all! Ray Vawdon remembers the legendary Darcy Lawler, on handing the letter to him, quipping, 'This bloody game will never get off the ground!'*

In 1968 the first official game of Touch, or Touch Football as it was then known, was played in the traditionally strong Rugby League area of South Sydney. The South Sydney Touch Football Association was founded in 1968. Here, through the organisational structure of the intra-club sporting bodies at South Sydney Junior Rugby League Club, Bob Dyke and Ray

Vawdon started a formal competition between a small number of teams at Snape Park, Kingsford, in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs, a venue that is only less than a kilometre from the venue of the 1999 Touch World Cup. Initially, the sport was intended simply to appeal to retired Rugby League players who wanted to stay fit through a football-type sport.

Australian society was changing rapidly during the early 1970s. In respect to sport and leisure, increasingly people were looking away from highly competitive, single-gender sports and recreational activities to sports that were less demanding on individual budgets and time, and that were more family based and gender inclusive. During the late 1960s and early 1970s Touch Football clubs and associations grew rapidly in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Queensland.

Affiliated with the Manly-Warringah Touch Football Association in 1975, the formation of the Avalon Touch Football Club was typical during this early period. The 1979 Manly-Warringah Year Book records that "the Avalon club originated from a group of guys playing Touch opposite the Surf Club at Avalon Beach on Saturday mornings about six or seven years ago. They were made up of locals mostly, and included surf club members, leaguies and rah rabs and some who just wanted a run after a hard Friday night."

Later, evening summer competitions were introduced and proved to be a boost to the number of players joining the sport, particularly from those playing winter sports, playing to stay fit in the off-season.

### **The New South Wales Touch Association is Constituted**

During 1973 the New South Wales Touch Football Association was constituted, with six affiliated associations, and with 1500 registered players. Not surprisingly, the first association to be affiliated was the South Sydney Touch Football Association. By 1978, in his annual report for the NSW TFA Ray Vawdon, President of the association, estimated that there were 40,000 Touch footballers in either affiliated or non-affiliated clubs in country and metropolitan New South Wales.

### **Australia's First Interstate Touch Football Carnival**

The first interstate clashes in Touch Football occurred during the late 1970s between representatives of the Brisbane Touch Football Association and the New South Wales Touch Football Association, comprised mostly of players from the South Sydney Touch Football Association. This was played on a standard Rugby League field, with teams comprising ten players and four reserves per side. These clashes became occasional events during the late 1970s, and did much to sustain the vitality and enhance the profile of the sport. If there were still any doubters, other highlights for the sport during the 1970s were sure to quell any doubts about the future of the sport.

### **The Rugby League Grand Final Spectacular**

An index to the future growth of the sport came with the British Rugby League tour to Australia in 1978. A one-off match was played at the Port Hacking ground between a representative Metropolitan team and the touring Great Britain Rugby League team. The Metropolitan team won by a disputed try. This was an excellent spectacle, played on a full-size Rugby League field. The Pommies received a thousand dollar donation to their players' fund from a sponsor.

It was, however, the opportunities provided by the drawn Rugby League grand final at the Sydney Cricket Ground that year between St George and Parramatta that provided the most spectacular publicity for Touch Football. With the rematch required for the first grade Rugby League premiership, and with the consequent need for a curtain-raiser match, with the reserve grade premiership having been already decided, Rugby League officials looked to Touch Football to provide the curtain raiser for the grand final replay.

Of course, with ex-Rugby League greats such as Ken Irvine taking the Touch Football field the 40,000 spectators were not disappointed in the two representative matches provided for them. For Touch Football, the resulting media publicity was nothing short of spectacular.

### **New South Wales Regional Affiliations**

During 1973 the Wagga Wagga Touch Football Association affiliated with the NSW TFA,

marking it as the first country association to affiliate with the state body. With that city's proud history of sporting accomplishment it is not surprising that it should have been the regional association to affiliate with the NSWTFa.

Thus, by 1974 the future of Touch Football in New South Wales was looking very bright. Outside Sydney the sport was growing rapidly, first in the Riverina area, then on the South Coast, centered at Wollongong, and it was also taking root in the Tamworth area.

### **The Seeding Role of Qantas**

During the early years of the development of Touch, Ray Vawdon was Director of Properties for Qantas, a position that took him to all Australian major regional centres and cities, along with trips to any international city where Qantas had property. And during these years wherever Ray went so did the banner of Touch Football.

In those days Touch Football was unashamedly tied to the Country Rugby League and Australian Rugby League organisational structures. It was not surprising that Ray Vawdon tied the infant

sport to these structures. He was a grade Rugby League player with South Sydney, who, in the shadow of the vast array of internationals at South Sydney during the 1950s had departed his beloved Rabbitohs to Young in south western New South Wales to play in the prestigious Maher Cup. Consequently, through his sporting career and his position in Qantas, he had many contacts in regional New South Wales, and not surprisingly the great regional sporting centres of Wagga Wagga and Tamworth were early growth centres for the sport.

### **The Inaugural Touch Football International Tour**

With successful interstate matches behind them, it was time for Ray Vawdon, Bob Dyke, and their hard-working team of volunteers, officials and organisers to begin thinking about an international tour for Touch Football under the auspices of the ATFA. Ray Vawdon's connections with Qantas and his access to assisted tickets were vital in financing the tour. So, with a representative New South Wales team selected, they set their sights on Auckland.

Again, Rugby League was at the centre of the organisational structure.



**Australian Touch Football Association New Zealand Tour: 1976**

Back: T. McMahon, J. Adams, R. Vawdon, T. Garlick, R. Dyke, W. Glanville

Middle: D. Carson, B. Reynolds, C. Judge, A. Brannighan, C. Coward, P. Paterson, M. Mackay

Seated: R. May, M. Pinfold (Vice Capt.), C. Matthews, R. Hanson (Capt.), C. Azzopardi, R. Robinson



First came some matches against the Eastern Suburbs, St George and Cronulla-Sutherland first grade Rugby League teams. The Touchies defeated St George, 2-1, Cronulla-Sutherland, 2-1, and Eastern Suburbs 7-1.

In 1976 just prior to the New Zealand tour the Australian Touch Football Association was formed. Thus, the team was now able to tour as a national team, even though the players were all New South Wales players. This move provided an official justification for the logo on the players' blazers.

On the eve of the departure of the New South Wales (Australian) team Rod Humphries wrote a telling article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The 30 March 1976 article underpins the Rugby League origins of the sport, and the state of the sport at the time:

### ***Inside Sport Extract***

*A lot of good football is talked by men breasting the bar at leagues clubs around Sydney.*

*But a small group stopped talking and did something about it at South Sydney Junior Rugby Leagues Club back in late 1967.*

*They saw the years ticking by ... the waist inching outwards ... and their only exercise lifting beer glasses from counter to mouth. So they decided to organise a touch football competition within the club.*

*Now, eight years later and thousands of touch footballers later Australia's first touch football team leaves for Auckland on Saturday for international matches against New Zealand. And two of those original bar-breasters, Bob Dyke and Ray Vawdon, will manage the team to New Zealand.*

*It is quite a success story. Vawdon was president and Dyke secretary of the South Sydney Junior Rugby Leagues Club touch football committee when they started a six-team competition in 1968.*

*Today they hold the same positions in the NSW Touch Football Association which controls close to 10,000 footballers in NSW.*

*Touch football, played with eight-a-side across half a football field, is proving a great attraction*

*for ex-footballers who no longer want the bodily contact and those who just want to keep fit.*

*But the game which started as a fitness outlet now has a wider horizon. Bob Dyke is talking of sponsorship and the rules being varied to give it more spectator appeal.*

*Representative games such as those to be played in New Zealand are lifting touch football to more than a pastime. The NSW Touch Football Association formed in 1973 is probably the fastest growing sporting organisation in the country. The South Sydney District now has 26 teams, Cronulla-Sutherland and Manly-Warringah 24 each, Parramatta 16, and western Suburbs 12.*

*St George, Eastern Suburbs and Glebe-Balmain will almost certainly join the NSW association this winter. Secretary, Bob Dyke estimates there are more than 5,000 players affiliated in country areas. The game also is entrenched in Queensland.*

*In Auckland the Australian Touch Football team's confidence was soaring as the New Zealand Herald on 6 April weighed in with spectacular support.*

*Its report on the international Touch Football matches reveals the view that in many people's minds the games was still a variant of Rugby League:*

### **No Hold-ups In This League Game**

*Competitive touch football and the first appearance of the former All Black Joe Karam, at Carlaw Park will be a double attraction at rugby league headquarters tonight.*

*Karam will take his place in the Glenora premier side after only one game for the reserve grade side, when he was given a watching brief rather than a being expected to be fully involved. ...*

*As a curtain-raiser, touch football played on a more serious level than that played during training sessions will be introduced to league followers. However, about 700 spectators were given a preview of the game when the visiting Australian side beat Glenora 30 tries to 6, at Glen Eden on Sunday.*



Bob Dyke: on the eve of the historic 1976 New Zealand tour.  
Pairing with Ray Vawdon, he did much to shape Touch Football into what it is today.

### Entertaining

*The impression gained was that football which does not allow for scrums or kicking or even tackling can be an extremely entertaining spectacle. ...Tonight, the Australians, who mainly come from New South Wales, will meet an Auckland side at 6.45 pm. Each team consists of ten players and scoring is through one point for each try.*

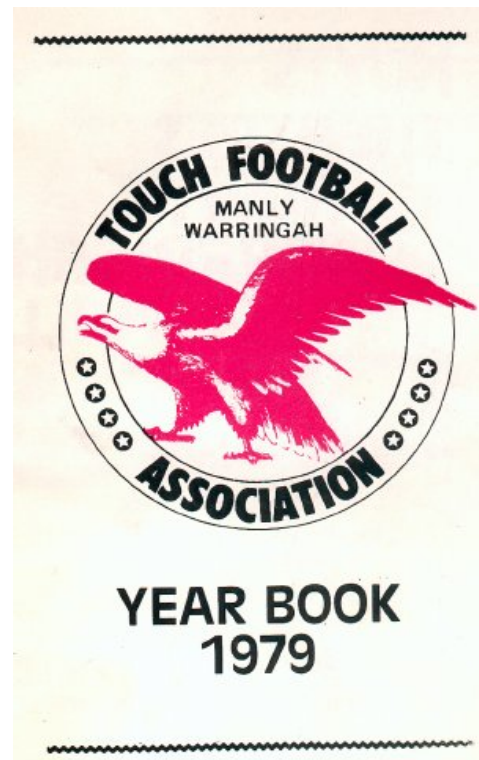
*There is no goal-kicking so that the emphasis is on speed and ball-handling. Australia won, 12 tries to 1.*

### The Expansion of the Australian Touch Football Association: the Sport of Touch Football is here to Stay!

In his 1978 Annual Report for the NSWTF A Ray Vawdon could confidently hold that Touch Football was now truly consolidated into the Australian sporting scene. Major developments for the year were:

1. The consolidation of the Westmont State Cup a total of 56 entries representing just on 1,000 Touch Footballers.
2. The introduction of the Coca-Cola 'Knockout' for district club sides played in five divisions throughout the metropolitan area.
3. The success once again of the Vawdon Cup, contested by district representative sides.

4. The formulation of the country divisions to control and administer Touch Football within their individual areas throughout the state.
  5. The initial Touch Football 'City and Country' clashes introduced to run annually.
  6. The formation of the NSWTF Referees' Association encompassing both city and country areas.
  7. The formation of an Australian National Touch Football Association, with Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory now affiliated.
  8. The additional affiliation of Newtown, Hawkesbury, Nepean, St George and Cabramatta districts.
  9. Newly acquired sponsorships.
- With their amazing foresight, organisational



The first ever Touch Football Year Book  
By the end of the 1970s in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Queensland in particular there was a proliferation of regional Touch Football associations. The formation of a national body was imminent.

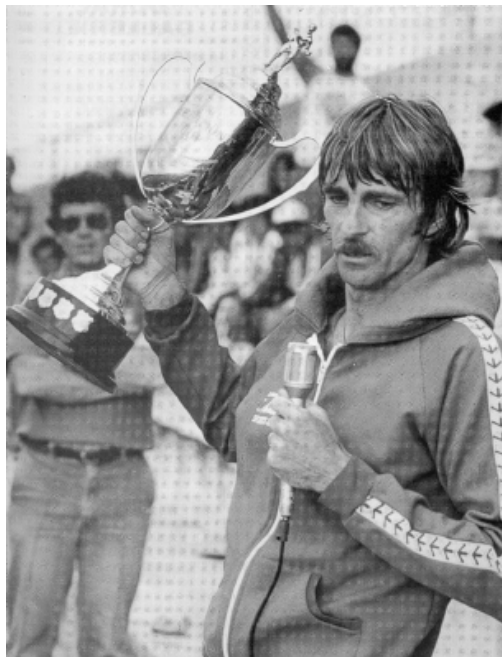
skills and dedication to the emerging sport it was not surprising that Ray Vawdon and Bob Dyke would be elected foundation President and Honorary Secretary respectively to the national body, along with Paul Eggers from QTFA as Director of Promotions.

## *Legends of the Early Years*

### **Owen Lane**

Known to all as Mr. Touch, the mercurial Owen was a key player in all New South Wales Open teams from the beginning through until the mid-1980s in his mid-30s.

With all his fantastic speed and energy, through until his retirement from the sport was a benchmark by which other players set their standards.



*Owen Lane, South's mercurial captain, pictured here following the 1981 Westmont Cup Final, holds the cup after South's great win in the Men's Open Final.*

Owen was one of the first 'true Touchies, dedicated to his sport, and who saw it as distinctly different from Rugby League, in no way connected. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he never aspired to League, and never perceived of Touch as an add-on to League. He always said that he was too light and easily injured.

After the Sydney Metropolitan Touch Football team defeated the Eastern Suburbs Rugby League first grade side seven tries to one in a trial game at the Sydney Sports Ground, East's coach, Jack Gibson, requested the Touch Football officials that they do not tell the media

of their defeat, as it was only seven days to the grand final, which they were to go on to win 38-0 over St George.

Gibson always commented that he wished he had a player with Owens's ability in his team. Coming from a man of few words, and with such a renowned eye for talent, that was a terrific compliment.

### **Ron Hanson**

Ron Hanson is the complete athlete who made the emerging sport of Touch his own. As an administrator in the sport he did much to assist in the growth of Touch as a national sport.

During his school days Ron won the Sydney All-Schools Athletics in 100 yards, 200 yards 400yards, relay, long jump, broad jump. He was also Open Hand Ball champion and Open Tennis champion. He was Captain of the School Rugby League team and the School Cricket team. Whilst at school he also captained the local CYO Rugby League team

He played first grade cricket for Waverly at 17 years of age. At that time he was also playing Rugby Union for the Bronte RSL Club.

Ron trialed for Eastern Suburbs Rugby League when he was eighteen and was graded in Reserve Grade. He played in both Reserve and First grade teams for many years.

After finishing a close third in the prestigious Keith Holman Testimonial Sprint, behind Ken Irvine (North Sydney) and John Mowbray (Western Suburbs) Ron was invited to run in the Stawell Gift.

His achievements on the Rugby League paddock were impressive. He was recorded as being the first fullback in first grade Rugby League to score three tries in a game.

He retired from Rugby League in 1964 due to injuries to his knees. His achievements in surfing were equally impressive. He joined Bronte Surf Club in 1958, where he excelled in beach sprints and was a member of the Bronte B boat crew for many years.

Not surprisingly, when Ray Vawdon and Bob Dyke kicked off Touch Football at South Sydney Juniors, Ron was one of the first to take up the

sport. In 1968 he played in the first Touch Competition at Snape Park. His team, Bronte



*Ron Hanson in his prime: a key member of the Bronte Touch Football team during the late 1960s. Photographed here in 1968. Bronte was undefeated in four premierships during this early period.*

Surf Club, won the first four competitions, marching through undefeated. Not surprisingly, he was chosen to captain the first Australian Touch Football side to tour New Zealand in 1976. Ron captained the first Queensland-New South Wales Touch Football match in 1971, through until 1975, winning every series. In fact, his side was undefeated in all inter-state and international matches. Quite an achievement!

He continued to play with Bronte for many years and then played for the Cauliflower Hotel, before moving to Forster on the New South Wales Mid-North Coast in 1975.

He quickly established Touch in his new district. In 1975 he founded the Men's Forster-Tuncurry Touch Competition. He played continuously over the following years, and was President, Secretary and Treasurer of the club.

However, he continued with his much-loved Rugby League. He coached the Hawks Reserve grade Rugby League side, and went on to found the Combined Lakes Rugby League Club, where he was President for eight years.

He continued to both play and coach Forster Touch teams until becoming involved in Region 4 (Mid North Coast Touch), first as a coach, then as Regional Director for a number of years during the 1990s. He played his last game of Touch in Forster, playing with his daughter in the Mixed Competition in 1999.

Ron stepped into the role of Northern NSW Eagles Regional Director, as caretaker in 2000, and then continued his role through to March 2003.

As a coach, Ron's achievements were many. He was coach of the Under 20 Boy's Region 4 team that was undefeated in the Regional's in Wagga Wagga in 2000. Moreover, he has been Manager of the New South Wales U/20 Boy's side. He was also the state coach of the 50s Men's side in 2002. He has coached the Under 18 Boy's Eagles, and also the Eagles Women's Open.

He is the New South Wales State Team leader for the Women's 35s. In 2004, he became an accredited Level 2 Selector, and his career as a selector continues. Ron is also an accredited Level 1 Referee and a Level 1 Coach.

Fittingly, Ron was awarded the Spirit of the Eagles Trophy in 2001, and the NSWTA Blues Award in 1993. But his great surprise came in 2004 when he was awarded Life Membership to the NSWTA, only one of an elite band of 15 people. Ron Hanson and his wife, Fran, remain tireless workers for Touch in all levels in the district.

## ***The Beginning of Women's Touch Football: Jenny Park, a pioneer in the sport.***

An important starting point for women's Touch Football was in the Port Hacking District TFA. That association played on the grounds of the Port Hacking District Rugby Club at Sylvania Waters. The licensed club needs patronage to survive, and consequently the club was responsive to the suggestion that Touch Football become a part of its activities. Dress rules were relaxed and games were played, mainly on summer's evenings.



The then President of the licensed club, Bob Davey, who previously had never played or even seen Touch Football, came up with the idea that if a women's competition were to be introduced this would attract more guys to the club.

That it certainly did. The Friday evening Women's Touch Football competition soon became a huge success, and for many years the licensed club enjoyed badly needed increased trading.



*'Buddha' Jenny Park shows her style at the 1983 Nationals in Hobart.*

Jenny Park, better known as 'Buddha', was a star in women's Touch Football during these early years. Her nickname was apt. She was stocky in build and a great personality.

Jenny played with Ramsgate United in the Port Hacking Competition, a team that won many competitions. She was a natural, with a passing game that matched many top Rugby League players.

The St George Rugby League international, Billy Smith, whose daughter, Karen Smith, also a star in the same team, heaped an enormous amount of praise on her ball-handling skills.

She could also read a game, with a wonderful vision, like few others. Billy often said that this was also another area that many aspiring Rugby League players could do well to study her game.

Jenny went on to play representative Touch Football at a District and State level. Today she is retired from Touch, and married.

Jenny Woodley (nee Park) lives in Salamander Bay. Touch left an indelible mark on her life. Her friendship continues with her old teammates and opponents, Karen Smith, Lisa Neal and others.

## ***The establishment of a standard set of playing rules***

In 1979 a coordination meeting was held at Melbourne Hotel in Brisbane by Queensland Executives, and was attended by New South Wales and South East Queensland Touch executives. Here it was resolved to draw up a standard set of playing rules for Australia and to recommend them to the National Organisation.

## ***Standard set of Rules for Australia***

On 23 September 1979 a standard set of rules for Australia was approved at a meeting of ATA in Sydney attended by Paul Eggers, Hugh Grant (Central Queensland), John McAllister and Bill Pierce (North Queensland).

## ***The establishment of the National Interstate Touch Championships***

At the same in a Brisbane Hotel meeting it was further agreed that steps be taken to coordinate an annual event between State Associations and the inaugural National Touch Championships were born.

The first official match in Brisbane by a New South Wales representative team since the QTFA formation was staged at Mitchelton, Brisbane, when the visitors were defeated by South East Queensland, 4-2.



# 1980

## Inaugural 'Johnson Wax' National Championships

*Staged at the Owen Park Sporting Complex, Southport, Gold Coast, the inaugural National Championships truly set the scene for one of Australia's great sporting competitions. Seven years later, Peter Rooney, Executive Director of the ATFA, reported on the event and its evolution.*

On the eve of the 1987 Perth Nationals, Peter Rooney, reflected on the development of the sport in its national guise. It is a wonderfully erudite account and one which deserves reprinting verbatim. We will take relevant extracts from it through until the 1987 Perth Nationals.

*It has been said that the success of Touch has been as much due to the ambition of its early players as their energy and enthusiasm.*

*Never was this more evident than during the National Championship inaugural annual meeting at Newtown Leagues Club when it was decided that planning start on a National Championship competition to be played no later than 1980.*

*The meeting itself was attended by delegates from New South Wales, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Victoria. A second meeting, on 21 September, which included representatives from Tasmania fixed the date and venue as the weekend of 6 and 7 December at the Gold Coast. The competition was to be at State level,*

*therefore, only State teams could play in select divisions. These were:*

- *Men's Open: ACT, NSW, QLD, SA, TAS, VIC.*
- *Women's Open: ACT, NSW, QLD, SA.*
- *Over-35s: ACT, NSW, QLD, VIC.*

*Queensland and New South Wales also fielded junior players for an Under-16 National title, which proved the forerunner of what is now a highly successful division in mixed competition.*

*Its purpose was not to demonstrate the reaction of youth to the sport but illustrate how mixed competition would look in future competitions.*

*Adding luster to the scene was the inclusion of children of Rugby League greats, Billy Smith and Johnny Raper. Raper's son, Aaron Raper and Smith's daughter, Karen Smith followed the tradition of their parents by playing in the same team.*



**NSW Men's Open side:** Back: Tony Coward (Manager), Owen Lane, Barry Reynolds (Coach), Mick McCall, Boris Stecherbina. Middle: Ron May, Frank Curry (Captain), Paul Duckett, Jon Turner, Paul Blaylock. Front: Steve Saunders, Warren Speechley, Greg Hunt, Russell Fairfax.

*The Championships were an interesting and exciting time from start to finish although getting started presented a problem or two. The first was bringing the selected site of the Championships — the Gold Coast Trotting Club— up to match condition. This required almost completely rebuilding the centre of the arena then constructing bridges over both the trotting and dog tracks. As it was also a drought year a fair amount of watering was needed to bring the grounds to a presentable color and condition.*

*The total cost of more than \$10,000 was only met thanks to a generous donation from Johnson's Wax.*

The teams duly arrived on 5 December to accommodation booked at the Golden Gate Hotel and promptly taught organisers a lesson they would never forget — it is perhaps not such a good idea to have competing teams from different states all under the one roof.

Nevertheless, things somehow worked out well there was a great feeling among the players and only a few 'instances'. The Championships themselves were something else again for despite the sunny claims of the tourist brochures, it absolutely poured with rain.



**NSW Women's Open side:** Left to right, back: Michael Hayes (Coach), Karyne May, Debbie Dibley, Maria Arthur, Karen Smith, Jan Potter, Debbie Dowd (Manager). Middle: Chris Forsythe, Fern Elliott, Lisa Neal, Denise Nash, Jenny Parker. Front: Debbie Ginman, Cheryl McCormack, Liz Paul.

I had been on the Gold Coast for two weeks before the Championships holidaying and getting things ready for the big event. Watching the downpour was shattering.

A group of us stayed up until 2am on the Sunday morning debating the options. Fortunately, someone had friends in the right places because when we had had a short sleep the sun was shining and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. And by about lunchtime when it was time to get into the main games and final series the ground was almost dry. It was unbelievable that it could have happened so fast.

It was a competition of highlights including the moment when Touch President, Phil Smith, Paul Eggers Vice-President and myself as Director of

Referees and others were watching the march past.



NSW Men's 35s captain/coach, Ken Irvine, gets a ball away, whilst his team mates, Eddie Whiley and John Newton move into support.

Also watching but relatively unknown to many of the players was Gold Coast MP, Doug Jennings. Just how little known came to light during a brief shower when he was politely but firmly given an umbrella to hold over the official dignitaries to stop them getting wet.

### 1980 'Johnson Wax' National Championships Final Results

#### Men's Open

NSW 3      ACT 1

#### Women's Open

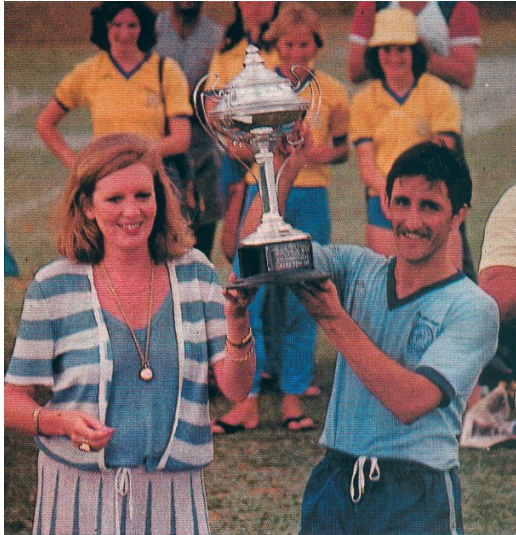
NSW 8      Qld 0

#### Men's 35s

NSW 4      ACT 1

But thanks to sponsors, Johnsons, Dunlop, and Ansett and the skill and enthusiasm of the players, coaches and referees the Championships was a huge success, not the least

for New South Wales, which took the laurels in every event. The Championship also marked the selection of the first National team, a tradition that has been maintained to this day.



1980 National Men's Open Presentation: NSW Captain, Frank Curry, accepts the trophy from ATFA Sponsor representative, Helen Flannigan from Johnsons Wax.

What cannot be overlooked was the magnificent contribution of the small army of volunteers at a time when Touch had no full-time paid administrators.

### 1980 All-Stars of Touch

Ken Irvine (NSW), Ray Beatie (NSW), Chris O'Sullivan (ACT), Steve Saunders (NSW), Terry Jack (QLD), Owen Lane (NSW), Cheryl McCormack (NSW), Karen Smith (NSW), Bob Brett (QLD), Arthur Tsakissiris (QLD), Gordon Abercrombie (VIC)

**Coach of the Year:** Barry Reynolds (ACT)

**Manager of the Year:** Debbie Dowd (NSW)

**Referee of the Year:** Michael Horne (NSW)

**Official of the Year:** Phil Smith (ATA President)

### Mens Competition Tables 1980

Including Finals						
	P	W	L	D	F	A
ACT	6	3	2	1	15	7
NSW	6	5		1	27	2
Queensland	6	3		3	17	3
South Australia	6	2	4		8	24
Tasmania	6	1	5		7	28
Victoria	6	1	4	1	7	17
	36	15	15	6	81	81

### Womens Competition Tables 1980

Including Finals						
	P	W	L	D	F	A
ACT	3	1	2		4	20
NSW	4	4			43	1
Queensland	4	2	2		9	20
South Australia	3		3		2	17
	14	7	7	0	58	58

### Mens 35's Competition Tables 1980

Including Finals						
	P	W	L	D	F	A
ACT	4	2	2		6	8
NSW	4	4			13	4
Queensland	3	1	2		11	5
Victoria	3		3		3	16
	14	7	7	0	33	33

## 1981

*A Big Start to the Season: tough battle for Nationals predicted for next year.*

*Although there was no inter-state matches during 1981, the ever-increasing attention being paid to Touch Football in the national press highlighted the development of the sport. Typical of the media attention was Jim Tucker's*



**regular column in Sydney's Daily Mirror. On 26 June of the year he wrote:**

*The touch football representative scene kicks off on Monday night bigger and more ambitious than ever to confirm the game as a national sport. The Vawdon Cup is one of the codes most sought after trophies and begins a hectic program for the top players.*

*The Westmont State Cup and Inter-district Summer Championships follow later in the year before the annual City v. Country clash.*

*For the first time, leading club sides from around Australia will have a chance to match skills in the national teams championship at the Gold Coast in early December.*



*Ray Beatie (NSW Vice President) sitting in the rain with fellow Manly and NSW team mate, Adrian Astorquin*

*NSW teams will be backing up to defend their three titles, men's open, women's and men's 35 and over, when the National Championships are held for the second time early next year. President of the NSW Touch Football Association, Mr. Peter Rooney, said the constant build-up over the next seven months would culminate in the selection of the state sides for the nationals in Canberra.*

*"The Vawdon Cup has been expanded to include women's and senior's teams for the first time because of the great interest," Mr. Rooney said.*

## **Australian National Teams Championships:**

**Barry's boys prove too classy.**

***With their work all done, jubilant Canterbury-Bankstown Touch footballers heaped champagne and beer over their captain, Barry Reynolds, after their grand final win in the Australian club titles at Southport on Sunday 7 October.***

The Gold Coast Bulletin reported on the tournament:

*The Sydneysiders had too much celebrating to do to worry about cold showers, and they launched straight into the alcohol showers to escape the suffocating heat.*

*Canterbury showed all the tenacity of their Rugby-League namesakes, the Canterbury Bulldogs, to win the title with a 7-2 blitzing of crack Canberra side, Belconnen Eagles, in the grand final.*

*Barry Reynolds and his brother, Terry, who both wore the blue and white jersey of the Canterbury Rugby League team with distinction, led the way in the demolition. The pair's experience and quick thinking were too much for the high-flying Eagles.*

*Canterbury-Bankstown atoned for a loss a week before in the New South Wales titles by winning at Southport's Owen Park.*

*However, the slick Sydneysider's sweetest victory came earlier in the tournament when they knocked arch rivals, South Sydney, out of the championship race in the quarter finals earlier in the morning.*

*The week before the titles, South Sydney piped Canterbury-Bankstown 2-1, after scoring in the last few seconds of play and again in extra time to win the New South Wales club championships.*

*This time around, the scores were again deadlocked at one-all at full time, however, Canterbury Bankstown were awarded the game on try averages over the entire competition.*



*The southerners, spearheaded by the former Canterbury Rugby League stars, Terry and Barry Reynolds, paced themselves well against the Belconnen Eagles, and the game was virtually over at halftime when they led 5-0.*



*Barry Reynolds and his team mates celebrate with champagne galore after their close win in the Men's Open.*

Cary Thompson recalls that also starring for the Canterbury-Bankstown side was another set of brothers, Mark and Dennis Carter, who unlike the Reynolds boys from the Bulldogs League team did not attract the same high-profile attention which was to the opposition's peril.

### **Women's Finals**

*Boasting no less than six Australian representatives, Port Hacking won the Women's title with a 3-1 win over Canterbury-Bankstown, who had fought their way into the grand final with a lucky 2-1 defeat of Gold Coast.*

*The Coast girls really hit their straps in the tournament with State representatives, Kathy O'Brien, Kerrie Norman and Debbie Ballantyne in fine form, along with Patty Lee and Kay Sercombe.*

### **Men's Over 35s**

*Brisbane side, McGregor Roos, had to overcome a tenacious Gold Coast lineup to earn a crack at Port Hacking in the Men's Over 35s grand final. The local combination included such old hands as former Rugby League stars, Australian halfback Bob Bugden and Queensland five-eight Bobby Cook.*

## **1982**

### **Second Australian National Championships**

*The venue for the 1982 National Championships was in Canberra. We continue with Peter Rooney's account of the event, written from the perspective of the 1987 Perth Nationals.*

The second National Championships were planned and staged for Canberra in the summer of 1981-82. The dates were Friday January 29 to Monday February 1.

There were timed to coincide with the Australia Day Sports Festival being held in and around the Bruce Stadium.

*As with the first Nationals, planning was a long and tedious process. At the time of initial planning Dennis Coffey, then president of ACT Touch, had done some good groundwork in getting things together. But it still came as a shock to find on arriving back from a business trip to Japan that the hotel where accommodation had been booked for players, officials and so on, had yet to be built. It remains that way in 1987.*

*However, the Bruce Stadium itself was a magnificent venue and justified the huge amounts of money poured into it to do justice to the National Capital.*

*King Gee clothing manufacturers did similar justice with a sponsorship package that enabled organisers to do the job without the need to cut too many corners. Also to stage a competition that caught the eye of other potential sponsors.*

*One drawback to the choice of weekends was the number of other competing activities taking place as well as the habit of locals to vacate the capital for the coast when they got the chance during the warmer months.*

*The Championships, however, were a magnificent spectacle and they again provided some excellent games including the shock to the*

*New South Wales Men's side when the Australian Capital Territory tied for the Men's Open title.*

*The Women's Open and Men's Over-35 were both taken by New South Wales. In the Junior final, New South Wales once again proved too strong, this time beating the Australian Capital Territory.*

*The march-past was an impressive ceremony, while the electronic scoreboard had all states wishing they had one.*

*Politicians, as befitting the location of the venue and the growing popularity of Touch were out in force. Michael Hodgman, known in some quarters as 'The Mouth of the South' was one of many who showed a keen interest in the sport.*

*The competition also boasted some top-name Rugby League players thereby providing some excellent promotional spin-off for the lower-profile Touch.*

*Another player who added his own unique status to Touch was John Bonetti, a well-credentialed player and referee who had played in two Nationals, and refereed three. After arriving in Canberra on the Friday for a session with his team he had to turn around and fly back to Griffith to receive a Sportsman of the Year trophy. Such an award was a rare honor at any time, and made more so through its association on this occasion with Touch.*

*The Championships provided a knockout tournament, probably the last to be run in conjunction with such an event. But like the administration of the early years there have been considerable changes with each year helping better the next.*

*One of the highlights of Canberra was the presentation night which featured audio visuals of the most exciting moments of the Championships. The \$7,000 package stemmed from a concept picked up in Hawaii by Phil Smith and Dennis Coffey. Its cost made it prohibitive before, and since, but it was a unique experience and one few would forget.*

*The highlight of that tournament was the joint first placing in the Men's Open when New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory tied*

*for the winner's trophy, with the scores being deadlocked at 3-3.*

*New South Wales defeated Queensland in the Women's final, 9-1. The Mixed and Men's over 35s was an all New South Wales versus Queensland affair, with New South Wales winning 3-0 in both games.*



*Victorian, John McCrae, makes a desperate lunge in an effort to touch the ACT's Doug Crampton during a match in the King Gee National Touch Championships. The ACT won the game 6-3. Image courtesy of Canberra Times.*

### **Excellent Press Coverage**

With the sub-heading in the *Canberra Times* announcing 'stars gather for titles' in its article announcing the forthcoming Touch nationals, the *Times* continued to give good support to the event at Bruce Stadium, albeit it strongly endorsed the perceived nexus between the semi-finals on Monday morning followed by the final at 5 pm. The women's and the men's senior teams from each state will play five preliminary rounds for the top two final spots.

*The three Mortimer brothers, Steve, Chris and Peter, from Sydney join Graham Murray (South Sydney) and former Australian sprint champion, Dave Irvine, in 'Buck Rogers' 25th Centurions side for Monday's celebrity match at 2 pm.*

*Their opposition will be 'Furner's Raiders', a team made up from some of the imports for the 1982 Canberra Raiders rugby league side. Jay Hoffman from Brisbane, Lloyd Martin from Balmain, and Alan Smith from North Sydney will run alongside their future coach, Don Furner in Rugby League.*

In fact, it was the gathering of the league stars that the local press devoted most space to during the championships. We have seen how Peter Rooney had already mentioned that the invitation matches played by the rugby league stars provided publicity for the championships, but it

may have been an index to the developing maturity of Touch that the reports of this match dominated the coverage of the championships.



*The 1982 National Men's Open joint winners. NSW captain, Barry Reynolds, and the ACT captain, Ray Kiley*

Peter Rooney refereed the match, and he summarises the value of the invitation all stars match: *With so many big-name players, the match provided outstanding publicity, but it's a pity that as far as the public is concerned we still need to link the sport with Rugby League. However, we certainly achieved what we set out to do. We can only hope that one day the sport can achieve this same publicity in its own right, without having to appeal to Rugby League as a hook for the media. We still have to do a great deal of work with the media.*

### 1982 All-Stars of Touch

Ray Kiley (ACT), Paul Blacklock (TAS), Ron Wall (NSW), Lisa Neal (NSW), Karen Smith (NSW), Barry Doyle (QLD), John Newton (NSW), Maria Arthur (NSW), Graham Hill (NSW), Mark Carter (NSW), Sue La Fontaine (ACT).

**Coach of the Year:** Graham Rogers (ACT)

**Manager of the Year:** Cary Thompson (NSW)

**Referee of the Year:** Brian Burns (NSW)

**Official of the Year:** Ron Carroll (NSW)  
(President and Executive Director)



*All Stars players Karen Smith*

### 1982 National Championships Final Results

#### Men's Open

NSW 3      ACT 3

#### Women's Open

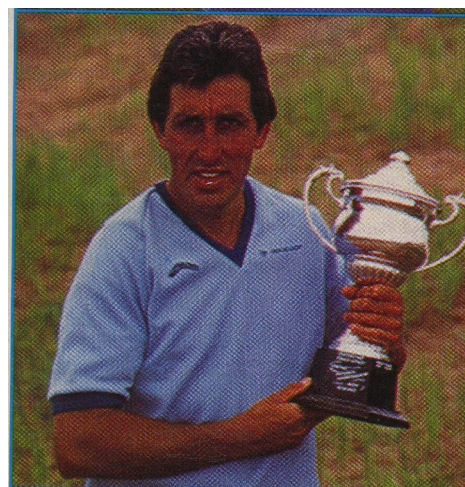
NSW 9      Queensland 1

#### Men's 35s

NSW 3      Queensland 0

#### Invitation Mixed U/16

NSW 5      ACT 0



*1982 All Stars player Graham Hill*



### Mens Competition Tables 1982

Including Finals						
	P	W	L	D	F	A
ACT	9	7	1	1	56	8
NSW	9	8		1	91	4
NT	7	2	5		8	43
Queensland	8	5	3		35	20
South Australia	7	3	4		19	23
Tasmania	7	1	6		6	39
Victoria	7		7		8	47
West Australia	8	4	4		17	56
	62	30	30	2	240	240

### Womens Competition Tables 1982

Including Finals						
	P	W	L	D	F	A
ACT	5	3	2		24	15
NSW	6	5		1	67	3
Queensland	6	4	1	1	37	13
South Australia	5	2	3		10	32
Tasmania	5	1	4		5	35
Victoria	5		5		3	48
	32	15	15	2	146	146

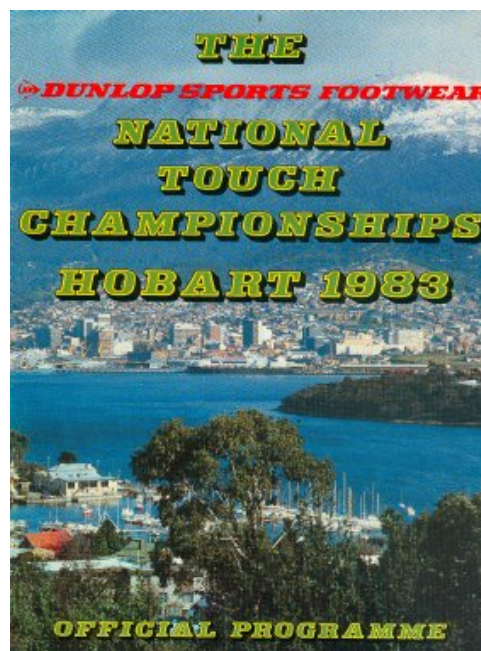
### Mens 35's Competition Tables 1982

Including Finals						
	P	W	L	D	F	A
ACT	5	3	2		25	15
NSW	6	6			49	4
NT	5	1	4		14	25
Queensland	5	4	1		29	7
Tasmania	5	2	3		16	17
Victoria	5		5		2	67
	31	16	15	0	135	135

# 1983 National Championships

*The Third National Championships were held at Hobart Showground's. Here the highlight was the joint first*

*placing between New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory in the newly formed Mixed Juniors divisions. We take up the story with Peter Rooney's history of the first seven Nationals.*



*The showground at Hobart in the Apple Isle was chosen as the venue for the fourth National Championships in 1983 from Friday 10 March to Monday 13 March.*

*It followed by two months the death of Tony Sheahan, president of the SA Touch Association, who had been involved in the National body since its inception. Fittingly, Tony's wife, Leslie, was flown across to Tasmania to allow us to personally recognise her husband's achievements, not the least of which was putting South Australian Touch firmly on the map.*

*Again the games were extremely successful, although behind the scenes had its moments. If anything it was an exercise in overcoming problems a long way from headquarters while providing a good classroom for local organisers.*

*On the field New South Wales showed its customary dominance in beating Queensland in the Men's and Women's Open. However, it went*



down to the Sunshine State in the Men's Over 35s and jointly shared the Junior trophy with the Australian Capital Territory.

Despite other shortcomings, the march past was the most spectacular of any to that point, with the large number of people who had come to see the trotting events that night considerably padding the crowd.

One of the few hiccups came when a representative of sponsor Dunlop accidentally selected the only player not wearing Dunlop brand shoes from the more than 250 competitors present.



Paul Eggers, the President of the QTA, hands out the championship prizes to Maria Arthur, captain of the NSW Women's Open.

It was a condition of the sponsorship that those taking part stick with the company's label, a condition with which we were naturally happy to comply.

The unfortunate player, however, had managed to become separated from his Dunlop shoes somewhere en-route and a pair of Pumas crept in to fill the gap. That they also crept into the limelight at that particular moment was pure bad luck. As far as Hobart was concerned the championships provided excellent exposure for the Touch Association as well as experience in what is required behind the scenes for an event of its size. Organisers, in turn, added to the

growing pool of knowledge gleaned from other championships.

By this time the Northern Territory had joined the ranks thus making Hobart the first venue in which all states and territories were represented.

Some of the other highlights of the tournament were the fourth placing in the Men's Open by the hosts Tasmania, with South Australia being fourth in the Women's, and Northern Territory third in the over 35s. Whilst the history of the Third Nationals has recorded the placing for all the teams who participated, it is sad that the actual scores for all the games played, including the semi-finals and finals are not recorded.

### 1983 National Championships Final Results

#### Men's Open

NSW d Queensland

#### Women's Open

NSW d Queensland

#### Men's 35s

Queensland d NSW

Scores not available

### 1983 All-stars of Touch

Donna Baker (QLD), Kerry Norman (QLD), Owen Lane (NSW), Dennis Dwyer (NSW), Graham Oates (NT), Karen Smith (NSW), Terry Jack (QLD), Ray Kiley (ACT), Tim O'Brien (NSW), Debbie Ginman (NSW), Mike Campbell (QLD).

**Coach of the Year:** Arthur Brannigan (NSW)

**Manager of the Year:** Gwynne Ker (QLD)

**Referee of the Year:** Barrie Keenahan (NSW)

**Official of the Year:** Peter Rooney (ATA President)



Referee of the year Barry Keenahan flanked on the left by Michael Horne and on the right by George Shuttleworth

### 1983 Final Placing (Scores, For and Against Not Available)

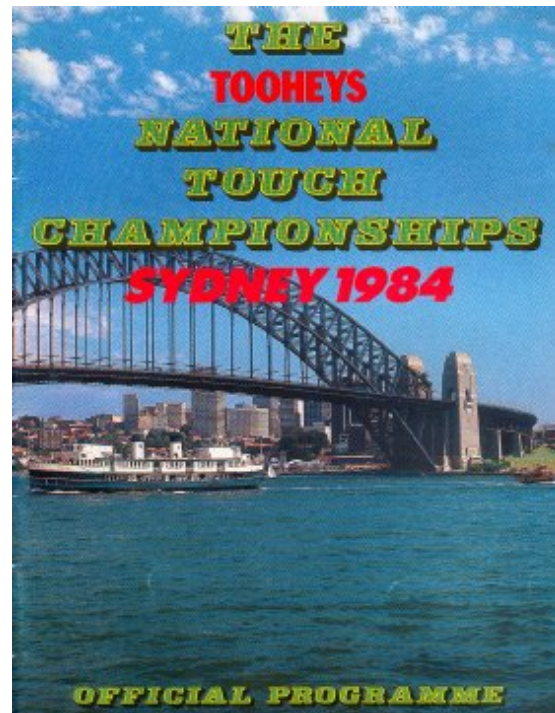
Teams	M	W	35	Jnr	#
ACT	7	7	7	15	36
NSW	15	15	10	15	55
NT	4	4	7	-	15
Queensland	10	10	15	-	35
South Australia	5	7	5	7	24
Tasmania	7	5	3	7	22
Victoria	2	3	-	-	5
West Australia	3	2	4	-	9

## 1984 Australian National Championships



The Queensland Women's Open team warms up on a chilly Hobart autumn morning.

*The venue for the Fourth National Championships was Sydney. One of the highlights of these championships was the playing of some of the events at the Sydney Domain in the heart of the city so lunchtime crowds could watch. We can return to Peter Rooney's insightful history of the early Nationals.*



*These Championships, at the Tempe Velodrome, Sydney, were a milestone in the history of the competition by being held over a full seven days.*

*By comparison with the Hobart and Canberra grounds Tempe came in a poor third, particularly after some poor weather and the fact that it was the metropolitan-based headquarters of Australian Touch. Its image in many ways was hard to live up to.*

*In hindsight the decision to take the games into the city on the Thursday and play some games in the Domain was bad decision overall.*

*Had we stuck with our original plan to run three games: New South Wales-Queensland Men's and Womens Open, Over 35s on the Domain at lunchtime, they would have been an enormous success. But trying to take the whole tournament in there for a day and playing on sloppy fields with manholes for the underneath car park met with disdain from players from the other states .*

*The Rugby League grand final coincided with the beginning of the week-long Touch Nationals, and notwithstanding that the Touch championships were an enormous success. New South Wales came again to the fore winning the four divisions, with wins against Queensland in the Men's and Women's Open and the Over-35s.*

*One of the problems with holding the Championships in a metropolitan venue was the difficulty contestants faced firstly in travelling time within the state as well as interstate then in fighting the city traffic to get to matches.*



*Some of the action between the Northern Territory and Western Australia in the Men's Open in the 1984 Toohey's National Touch Championships.*

*One of the most significant steps taken during the week was the decision during the annual general meeting to employ a full-time executive director. The presentation night at Bankstown Town Hall was once again even better than the last and players, with the help of a live band, made the most of it.*

Hundreds of spectators were on hand to see the prize games of New South Wales and the Queensland Men's and Women's teams play on the New South Wales Parliament House side of Sydney's Domain. A downside of the New South Wales victory in the Men's was the broken shoulder sustained by Steve Saunders after he

dived over for a touchdown that kept his team in front. Other highlights of that tournament were the fourth placing in both the Men's and Women's Open by the Northern Territory teams. Even more exciting for the Territory was their second placing in the Junior Mixed division, their third placing in the Mens 35s and surprisingly beating Queensland by one point for second place in the Championship Trophy.

Like the history of the Third National Championships many scores of the later round games have been lost. Running the event the same weekend as the Winfield Cup grand final was a lesson well learnt. The Nationals did not score a mention in the Sydney press. It was obliterated by the publicity surrounding Parramatta's win over Canterbury.

### 1984 National Championships Final Results

#### Men's Open

NSW d Queensland

#### Women's Open

NSW d Queensland

#### Men's 35s

NSW d Queensland

#### Mixed Juniors

NSW d Northern Territory  
Scores unavailable

### 1984 All-stars of Touch

Paul Barton (NSW), Warren Speechley (NSW), Owen Lane (NSW), Terry Jack (QLD), Ray Kiley (ACT), Maria Arthur (QLD), Karen Smith (NSW), Donna Baker (QLD), Lisa Neal (NSW), Simon Annesley (NT), Katrina Maher (NSW)

**Coach of the Year:** the late and great, Ken Irvine (NSW)

**Manager of the Year:** Fred Henderson (WA)

**Referee of the Year:** Neville Hockey (NSW)

**Official of the Year:** Ken Wells (ATA President)

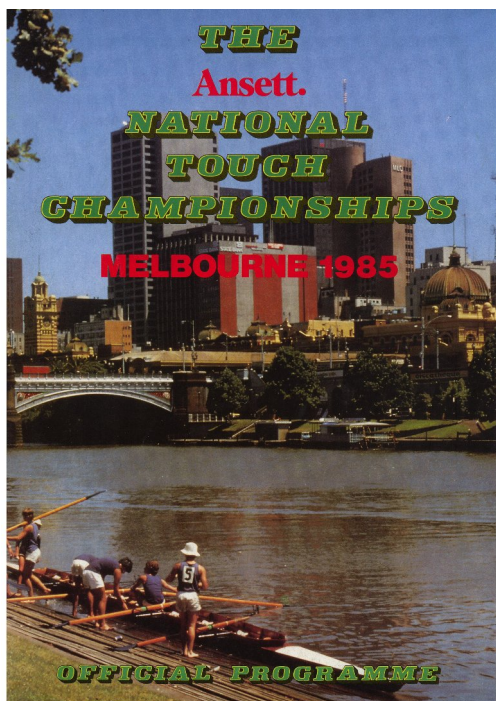


**1984 Final Placing**  
(Scores, For and Against Not Available)

Teams	M	W	35	Jnr	#
ACT	7	7	7	10	31
<b>NSW</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>60</b>
NT	7	7	10	7	31
Queensland	10	10	-	10	30
South Australia	5	5	6	3	19
Tasmania	4	3	5	4	16
Victoria	2	4	-	-	6
West Australia	3	2	-	5	10

# 1985 The Fifth National Championships

*The venue for the Fifth National Championship was the South Melbourne Cricket Club in St*



***Kilda. Ansett Airlines sponsored this event. We continue with Peter Rooney's history of the nationals.***

*From Sydney in 1984 the Championships moved to Melbourne for 1985. Divisions were extended to include the Over 30s and an interstate challenge introduced between New South Wales and Queensland in the Over-40s. The Championships ran from March 18 to 24, 1985, at the Melbourne South Cricket Club complex, a venue generating a superb atmosphere for the players.*

*A large arena with other games being played on the lakeside drive grounds, it saw the first International visit from another country when New Zealand came over to play at the end of the week in the Men's Open and Men's Over-30s international game.*



*Karen Coombs from the Queensland Open team, playing Tasmania, demonstrates erudite evasive skills.*

*The difficulties of running a championship in conjunction with hosting an international team proved tough and at times created a few problems.*

*The Championships themselves saw New South Wales once again come under pressure from Queensland and go down in the Men's Open. The state bounced back, however, to take the Women's Open, the Mixed, the Over 30s, Over 35s, the Juniors and defeat Queensland in the Over 40s interstate challenge.*

*Sprints were introduced to the championships and provided a few unnerving moments for runners not conditioned to lining up 16 abreast in centre field for the start of a 70 metre sprint. But the event proved a big hit and clearly showed the speedsters in each division.*



*The Friday presentation night marked the first occasion a Federal Minister of sport had been in attendance. Of the almost two hours MP John Brown was with us, almost an hour was given to awarding trophies. Regardless of political persuasion, players appreciated the significance.*

The major surprise at the event was the Queensland Men's Open team snatching the championship from New South Wales for the first time in history. The Queensland Men's Open team was coached by Alan Satchell, one time member of the Board of the QTA. The Queenslanders defeated New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory came third, with Victoria fourth.

In the Women's Open New South Wales defeated Queensland in the final. The Australian Capital Territory came third, with Western Australia fourth.

### **The introduction of Mixed Touch**

History was to show that the ATA was on a winner when it decided to introduce Mixed Touch at a national level.

New South Wales won the first Mixed National Champions 3-1 in the final, and at the time of the writing of this book that team had never lost the title. Queensland came second, the Australian Capital Territory was third, and Northern Territory fourth.

### **1985 All-Stars of Touch**

John Christopher (NSW), Mark Hornery (NSW), Terry Jack (Qld), Karen Smith (NSW), Paul Wilson (Qld), Kerry Norman (Qld), Terry Starr (NSW), Donna Jacks (Qld), Ron Wall (NSW), John Bonetti (NSW), Dennis Dwyer (NSW), Geoff Vigors (NSW), Steven Stokes (NT).

**Coch of the Year:** Alan Satchell (Qld)

**Manager of the Year:** Peter McNeven (Qld)

**Referee of the Year:** Innes McDougal (ACT)

**Official of the Year:** Bobette Wilkinson (Vic) Manageress

In the Junior Mixed division New South Wales retained its title; however, the Australian Capital Territory edged the Northern Territory into second place and relegated the Territory to third. Queensland was fourth.

In the inaugural Men's 30s division the first place was shared by New South Wales, and the Australian Capital Territory who drew the final. In the 35s New South Wales defeated Queensland in the final, and the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia came third and fourth, respectively.



*Don Jago from the Queensland Men's Over 35s puts on a step against his Northern Territory opponent.*

### **1985 National Championship Final Results**

#### **Men's Open**

Queensland 2 NSW 1

#### **Women's Open**

NSW 2 Queensland 2

*Extra time was played and still a drawn game. NSW won, being higher on the ladder.*

#### **Mixed Open**

NSW 3 Queensland 1

#### **Men's 30s**

NSW drew with ACT

#### **Men's 35s**

NSW defeated QLD

*Scores not available*

#### **Mixed Juniors**

NSW 4 ACT 2