

MR. WILLIAMS JAMES 'RAY' VAWDON



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A FATHER OF OUR SPORT

It is with profound sadness that we advise that Ray Vawdon, the man who started it all has passed away peacefully on June 8, 2020, aged 86. Our thoughts, prayers, and love are conveyed to Shirley, Sharon, Russell, Nadia, and Tom. While Ray was a loving family man- he was also the father to our sport. This man had the foresight to take a pastime and develop it into a fully-fledged sport.

Ray was the founder and first President of the NSW Touch Football Association (as it was at the time). He served from 1972 through to 1979. He was also the inaugural Australian Touch Association (now Touch Football Australia) during its formation in 1978 and 1979. He was one of the first Life Members of the NSWTA and also received TFA Life Membership in 2010.

Our sport is saddened by the news of Rays passing, but are eternally grateful for the footprint and legacy he has left on our game.

Following is a personal message from the General Manager, Dean Russell.

As an upstart youngster starting out playing the sport of Touch football, I heard the name Ray Vawdon, but like all youths it meant little to me, he was just a bloke who had something to do with the sport. How much of a fool was I. Little did I know at the time I would owe my career to the man that a few years later I would come to know.

I met Ray officially in 1989. At that time, I had just been employed by the NSW Touch Football association as a Development Officer. I was attending the NSWTA Clubhouse Opening and City verse Country Presentation that followed. It was on this night that I gained one of my most valuable lessons by having a lengthy conversation with Ray.

That lesson is that you have to know where you come from to know who you are. As at this dinner, I was blessed to spend time with Ray listen to him explain where we as a sport had come from, how we developed and how we grew. First-hand knowledge from a man was at the forefront of these heady days. From someone who was very much integral to our success. From a man that laid the foundations for where we find ourselves as a sport today.

Ray Vawdon was a pioneer. His involvement started in the 1960s when he was one of the forefathers of the game that helped create the sport of Touch Football. A man with a vision and drive to take a pastime to a fully-fledged sport that today is played in 47 countries across the world.

During the 1960s anyone who played league or union would have participated at training a form of the game. This was anything up to 30 players a side on a full league or union field. However, it was the vision of Ray that would see a structured sport to evolve from this training past time. In 1968, under the South Sydney RLFC, he along with Bob Dyke gained sanction from the district club to organise the first Touch Football competition. A formal competition of six teams at Snape Park, Kingsford.

Although initially it was thought the sport would appeal only to retired league players, they soon realised that society at the time was changing and Australians of all walks of life were looking for leisure activities. Ray was smart enough to capitalise on this, especially the family-based sporting link that Touch Football could offer.

On hearing of other Touch games being played around the Sydney area Ray visited, discussed, met with and assisted in forming new Touch Football Associations to join with the then South's Sydney Touch Football Association. In four short years, his efforts had seen the growth of the sport, and it was realised that a more significant need existed- a State Association.

So, in 1972 after again discussion with his partner in this adventure Bob Dyke, an NSW Touch Football Association was formed, with South Sydney as the founding member. Ray then worked quickly to bring on Cronulla, Manly, and Wagga Wagga as the sport grew. Indeed, he spread his knowledge extensively, not only through NSW but indeed interstate to enhance the growth of the game. It was such communication, follow up, and guidance that saw regional centres such as Tamworth, Wollongong and the Riverina take root in the sport. Ray played a big part in ensuring that early interstate matches were held between

NSW and Qld. A forerunner of the fierce contests of today and organised an international Tour of New Zealand in 1976 for first every Australian team.

Vision was certainly something Ray did not lack. With the growth of the game now not only taking foot in NSW but in other states as well, he again with Bob recognised the need for a national body. Thus through vision, guidance, and foresight, the Australian Touch Football Association was commenced to be formed in 1976. In that same year, it was estimated in the annual report that in NSW alone some 40000 people were playing the sport either in affiliated competitions or non-affiliated clubs across the state.

Ray was a pioneer of the organised sport that Touch Football has become. He was heavily involved in the transformation from a social game into a sport right across Australia from 1968 through to 1982.

Ray served as President with the NSW Touch Association from 1972 to 1979. At a national level, he was also the inaugural President in 1978 and 79.

By the time he left the sport he along with Bob Dyke, Peter Rooney and Phil Smith been an integral part of;

- Structuring the sport from a past time to a properly constituted organised sport
- Assisted many Associations across Australia to form with constitutions.
- Oversaw both the originals rules in 1968 and the adoption of a standard set of rules for the sport.
- Organised the first interstate games between NSW and Queensland in 1973.
- Organised the first international tour of New Zealand in 1976
- Held an exhibition match to promote this new game in 1976 against the British Rugby League team at Port Hacking Rugby Club.
- Organised the sport to be played in front of its biggest live audience ever when they staged two representative games in front of 40000 spectators on the SCG as a precursor to the 1976 Grand Final Replay.
- Commenced the Vawdon Cup in 1976 for representative teams
- Commenced and consolidated the Westmont State Cup in 1977.
- The formulation of country divisions to control and administer the sport within their areas
- Initiated city vs country clashes.
- Aided the Queensland, Victorian, South Australian and ACT associations form and moved them to become affiliated with the national body

With incredible foresight, organisational skills, and dedication this gentle man is truly one of the fathers of our sport. Had there not been men like Ray Vawdon, there is little doubt the game would be where we stand today. Indeed, we may

not even be a properly structured and constituted sport; we still may have been a past time for training purposes?

I feel humbled and privileged to have had the opportunity to not only know Ray but also to discuss our origins with him. Very few people in history have had the chance to converse about the start of their sport with its founder. How many basketball fans and players had that opportunity with Dr Nay Smith, how many Rugby Union tragic's discussed how Rugby formed with William Webb Ellis.

While touch football may not share the same stage as Basketball and Rugby (at the moment), Ray Vawdon certainly through his actions and foresight can be placed alongside such luminaries.

He will forever be enshrined in our sport. Those, like I who were lucky enough to have come into contact with Ray, speak with him, listen to him and get to know him, no matter how briefly, have all had our lives enriched by the man.

Vale William James Ray Vawdon.

Dean Russell
General Manager