

VALE BOB DYKE A FATHER OF OUR SPORT.

EULOGY DELIVERED BY DEAN RUSSELL AT BOB DYKE'S FUNERAL



As a upstart youngster starting out playing the sport of Touch football, I heard the name Bob Dyke, but like all youths it meant little to me, he was some 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 livelihood to the man that many years later I would come to know.

I met Bob officially in 1990, at that time I had been employed by the NSW Touch Football association as a Development Officer and was MC of the Annual Blues Dinner to which Bob had been invited. It was on this night that I gained one of my most valuable lessons by having a lengthy conversation with Bob. That lesson is that **you have to know where you come from to know who you are**. As at this gala dinner I was blessed to spend time listening to Bob explain where we as a sport had come from, how we developed and how we grew. All from the man who was not only at the forefront of these heady days but was very much integral to our success, even in the early years and one of the 2 men that laid the foundations for where we find ourselves as a sport today.

Indeed Bob Dyke was a pioneer, a man with vision and drive to take a pastime to a fully fledged sport that today, in some short 42 years has grown to have over 500 000 players in Australia, nearly a million in schools and played in 42 countries across the world.

Bob's involvement in the game started in the 1960's when he was one of the forefathers of the game that helped create the sport of Touch Football.

During the 1960's anyone who played league or union would have participated at training in 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 Bob and his friend Ray Vawdon that they could see a structured sport to evolve from this training past time. In 1968, under the South Sydney RLFC, they gained sanction from the district club and organised the initial Touch Football competition, a formal competition of six teams at Snape Park, Kingsford.

Although initially it was thought the sport would appeal 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 and Bob 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 Bob visited, discussed, 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 bigger need existed, a State Association.

So in 1972 after again discussion with his partner in crime Ray Vawdon, a NSW Touch Football Association was formed, with South Sydney as the founding member. Bob 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 interstate to enhance the growth of the sport. It was such communication, follow up and guidance that saw regional centres such as Tamworth, Wollongong and the Riverina take root in the sport. Bob played a big part in ensuring that early interstate matches were held between NSW and Qld- a fore runner 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 Bob did not lack, with the growth of the sport now not only taking foot in NSW but in other states as well, he again with Ray recognised the need for a national body, and thus through vision, guidance and foresight the Australian Touch Football Association was born 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.

Bob was a pioneer of the organised sport that Touch has become. He was heavily involved in the important transformation from a social past time into a sport right across Australia from 1968 through to 1982.

Bob served as Senior Vice President with the NSW Touch Association from 1972 to 1978 and Finance Director from 1979 to 1981, following which he became the sports first fulltime paid administrator for the next 2 years. At a national level he was the Finance Director in 1978 and 1979 before taking on the role of Vice President from 1980 to 1982.

By the time he left the sport he had lead the way or been an integral part of;

- Structuring the sport from a past time to a properly constituted organised sport
- Assisted countless Associations across Australia to form with constitution's.
- Oversaw both the original rules in 1968 but also the adoption of a standard set of rules for the sport right across the nation.
- Organised the first interstate games
- Organised the first international tour
- Organised 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 district representative teams
- Commenced and consolidated the Westmont State Cup.
- Introduced a Coca Cola knock out for club teams in 5 divisions
- The formulation of country divisions to control and administer the sport within their individual areas
- Initiated city vs. country clashes to which the NSWTA instigated in 2002 the Bob Dyke Shield to recognise the winning region.
- Formed the first referee Associations
- Aided the Queensland, Victorian, South Australian and ACT associations form and moved them to become affiliated with the national body
- Become one of the first life members of the NSW Touch Association.

With amazing foresight, organisational skills and dedication this gentile man is truly one of the fathers of our sport. Had there not been men like Bob Dyke there is little doubt the sport would be where we stand today, indeed we may not even be a properly structured and constituted sport, we still may have simply been a past time for training purposes?

I feel humbled and privileged to have had the opportunity to not only know Bob, but also to discuss our origins with him. Very few people in history have had the opportunity to converse about the start of their sport with its founder and inventor. 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 may not share the same stage as Basketball and Rugby, Bob Dyke certainly through his actions and foresight can be named alongside such luminaries.

His mark will forever be enshrined in our sport and more importantly those lucky enough to have come into contact with Bob, no matter how brief have had our lives enriched by him.