

# The Screaming Eagle

**talks to St Mary's  
President  
Steve Hollowood**



## **Screaming Eagle (SE)**

Hi Steve, thanks for taking the time to talk to me. You're the President of St Mary's, one of the bigger clubs in the Diamond Valley Basketball Association but more importantly you have been what seems to be a permanent fixture at Diamond Valley for more than 20 years. But before we get into that, let's take a walk down memory lane. Did you play basketball or any other sport as a kid?

## **Steve Hollowood (SH)**

Yea I did but unfortunately there's not a lot to brag about.

## **SE**

Modesty, that's not something I'm used to in these interviews haha.

## **SH**

Mum raised six of us little cherubs on her own so the situation wasn't conducive for getting around to sporting venues and buying boots/shoes etc. I had a crack at playing basketball in the school yard and pretty much sucked at it. Some of my team mates now might say nothing has changed! I was on the road to adventure at 16, working and traveling around Australia, ending up in Western Queensland as a stockman and horsebreaker at 18. When I was 21 I headed back to study near Brisbane at the Queensland Agricultural College. That was my first real go at consistent sport when I joined the football team, the Lockyer Valley Magpies, who played in the Toowoomba league. It was Aussie rules too which in those days up north was a rare find. I played there for a couple of years and then on completing my course I worked in Brisbane and played for the Queensland Uni side for a season. That's it!! I was back on properties again after that and found my way to Victoria. I umpired footy for a couple of years in my late 20s based in Mansfield in North East Victoria.

## **SE**

That's a fairly interesting background. This is your chance to brag it up a bit, were you any good?

**SH**

The most meritorious comment I ever got about my footy ability was that I was a courageous, straight ahead player – didn't deviate from any contest. Little did they know I didn't have a side step in me or any brakes, so straight ahead was all I could do!

**SE**

That's actually pretty funny, sounds like a few AFL players I could name but go on.

**SH**

I'd always loved sport so this opportunity to get out on the paddock was a great time for me. Remembering some of the grounds we played on, 'paddock' is a good description. Even though I was low skilled, I became aware that I could be a contributor in our successes by bringing my strengths to the game. I never gave up a chase whether it was an opponent or the ball in the air or on the ground. I looked out for my team mates no matter how big the opponent. That hurt sometimes haha! And I cleared a path for the ball carriers.



**SE**

So with that background how did you get involved with Diamond Valley?

**SH**

The usual way most parents get involved. At the time I had two boys, Luke and Andrew. I think it was Andrew and a mate who wanted to have a go at basketball. Their mum and I thought it looked a good all year round sport so we got both boys involved through the school connection with St Mary's. That was at the beginning of 1993. Andrew started in under 8's and Luke in under 10's.

**SE**

Being an interested parent is one thing, getting involved in coaching is another. How did it all start for you?

**SH**

I cut my coaching teeth on football actually, when I coached Andrew's under 12's football with St Mary's. Andrew's first football coach was a chap by the name of Jeff Rutland who was, by his own admission, crazy about footy. "I reckon I've got the worst case of white line fever, Steve" I remember him saying to me. And that included as a coach when he was on the sideline where his urgings to his players literally did deliver a spray. But he also said "I love these boys, Steve. I love to see them find their place in the team and realise that they all have something to offer. There's nothing better than watching them develop confidence in themselves".

**SE**

Sounds like a passionate coach, there should be more of them. So what was your role?

**SH**

I'd help Jeff on training nights and as a runner on game days and I could see how much enjoyment he got out of each boys development. When he had a break after three seasons I stepped in and did three years there finishing in under 14's.

**SE**

St Mary's is a pretty big junior footy club, how did you go?

**SH**

Is this where I claim to have coached a couple of AFL footballers?

**SE**

I did say brag it up a bit.

**SH**

A couple of boys did go on to the AFL but I can assure you it wasn't due to any master coaching by me. But I did have a few successes along the way. The kid who thought he was too slow and fat and the kid who thought he wasn't courageous enough. The slow kid just kept running, got faster, leaner and was a powerful midfielder; the tiny skinny kid who wasn't courageous could find space on the field and get the ball – a modern day 'ball carrier'. Another Jeff quote "We measure our success on how much a kid develops, how much fun they're having and whether they turn up keen to have another crack at it next season".



**SE**

That's a fairly impressive quote, I might use that! So how does a committed junior footy coach go from footy to basketball?

**SH**

My footy coaching stopped when the boys gave it away. They were both still playing basketball and after years of sitting on the benches watching them I was starting to be drawn to junior basketball by the opportunity I saw that it provided for every player to get their hands on the ball and be involved in the play. When I coached football it didn't matter how much you switched the team around you would still end up with more than half the team who would have been lucky to have touched the ball once in the game. I used to think basketball was only for tall players and that football provided opportunities for any size kid, from little rovers to tall ruckman. Then I realized that particularly at junior level, basketball could be played by all kids, tall or short, though you can't get away from the fact that tall players don't get any shorter as the game goes on – a relevant point in both football and basketball!

**SE**

So what actually convinced you to start coaching?

**SH**

The next two kids, Megan and Rory, came along and started playing and needed a coach. Simple as that.

**SE**

That seems to be a general theme, a moment of necessity. If you remember my interview with Al McAughtry he got involved because a niece needed a coach. What levels have you coached and how have you gone?

**SH**

I started with Rory when he played under 8's. Coached him for 2 years then Megan for 2. Then back to Rory's team and then took on another team without one of my kids. That was interesting because you don't have the emotional attachment you have with your own child. You're probably more even handed, I tend to be tougher on my kids, I'm not a parent to play favourites. Last year I assisted coaching the under 14/4 Eagle's team which represented some challenges for me, but from that experience my desire to be true to what I believe has been forged. This year I was going to coach the Diamond Valley under 18/3 girl's team but we didn't end up with enough numbers. That was a short tenure! So I'm back coaching Rory's domestic team at under 14's for St Mary's.

**SE**

That's a shame, from what I am hearing they could have done a lot worse than having you as coach. What makes a person want to coach?

**SH**

I don't want to sound too altruistic but I believe there is so much more to junior coaching than teaching the kids how to play the game. Don't get me wrong, I love the game and love breaking down the basics, or fundamentals, in a way that kids can understand them, and incorporate them into their game. It's a real buzz when you can tweak the way a player is shooting or their defensive footwork and see the look on their face when they have success from making the change. But the real gift is to develop a young person's self belief, to recognise their strengths, to develop their weaknesses and recognise how they can bring all of what they have to make a contribution to their team. How to overcome setbacks,

and work hard at always seeking to improve. Through being involved in team sport they can learn respect for themselves and for those around them. They're qualities they can take with them into any forum in life.

**SE**

That's about the best analogy of what should make up a perfect coach that I've ever heard. Very well said. That's great for the kids, but what about your development as a coach?

**SH**

I'm looking to build on my strengths as a coach, recognise and minimise my weaknesses and to become a better communicator with my players. It has been and is a steep learning curve. Over the last few years I've attended any coaching clinic I can get to, picked the brain of other coaches and have recently been seen tagging along with Al McAughtry while he's been conducting his academy courses in the mornings. I've also used the opportunity to glean what I can from the likes of Ross Clark, Ross Wignell, Cecil Exum or any other coach interested in chatting about the game. There is a remarkable source of information in the coaches we have around Diamond Valley.

**SE**

Absolutely correct, and it is a resource that I sometimes don't think we use enough, getting coaches to talk to coaches. And you've certainly hooked up with some big coaching names there for sure, I have been lucky enough to interview all of them and you are in good company if you are looking for coaching mentors. On the home front, you have quite a tribe, four kids I think you said, tell me about them?

**SH**

Yes, there are four and they all play basketball. Luke has played since he was eight and Andrew, Megan and Rory since they were six. Three have played for the Diamond Valley Eagles, and Rory is still involved, playing in the under 14/2's. Megan and Rory are still at school but the older boys have been out on their own for awhile. Megan and Andrew are currently referees at DV with Andrew being there for the past 13 years or so.

**SE**

Andrew has been appointed as referee to some pretty special games, he certainly is an up and coming referee?

**SH**

Yes, I think he is, but don't tell him I said that. Like most perfectionists he sees what has yet to do rather than what he has achieved. That's probably the attitude that takes you to the top though. That and a desire to be there and preparedness to do the work. He's currently at SEABL level but they get games from VJBL up through to Senior mens at Championship level. He recently went across to the 2014 under 20's National's in Perth finishing the week off with the bronze medal game. He's also been to the under 14 nationals in 2010, the under 16's in 2011 and 2012 and the under 18's in 2013. That doesn't mean we've lost him locally, he still refs at Diamond Valley and mentors young refs and helps to present the ref's course.

**SE**

What about your other kids?

**SH**

Luke's been coaching a domestic boys team for the past couple of years and Megan is in her first season as a coach. She's coaching the St Mary's under 8/1 boy's team. She has pretty good control of the kids, not that she can see that. Anyone who's coached under 8's knows what I'm talking about.

**SE**

In my last interview with Apollo president Natalie Dawson she referred to under 8's as herding cats!

**SH**

Yeah, not much of an attention span at that age haha. But the boys love her and they are having fun and showing improvement. She designs her training program around what she wants them to learn and sets about explaining and demonstrating the skills she is teaching. I tell her not to expect to 'get it' at this age but to persist as she is setting the foundation for the future. Andrew's had a go at coaching a couple of times but he's more of a ref coach these days. Rory has already expressed an interest in coaching and I'm sure he will join the ranks when he is old enough.

**SE**

Do you still play at all?

**SH**

My beautiful wife Sue and I both play, at least as well as we can, having both come into the game relatively late. I try to play a couple of times a week and Sue plays Monday morning ladies. I have to say one of the biggest highlights for me has been the opportunity to get on the same court as Luke and Andrew. We've been playing together since 2008. I'm a bit of a liability but it's an experience I will have as a cherished memory once I have hung up the boots. I've had to cop a bit of the 'Come on old man, you're too slow, can't catch and can't shoot' from them both but I hope it will be an experience they will look back on with a smile. Rory tells me I have to keep playing long enough for him to have at least one season with me. He's 13 so I'd better look after myself because that is definitely a goal for me. Not sure I'll be up to his level but that's a sacrifice he'll have to make. The four boys on court together .... that's something to look forward to.

**SE**

Sounds like a great but wild dream, seriously, any chance of that happening?

**SH**

Absolutely! I've got a lot of years to make up for, having started late so I consider I'm still getting better!!

**SE**

That's the spirit, good ol' fashioned delusion haha. Being a parent is one thing, jumping into coaching is another, and becoming president yet another thing all together. How did that come about?

## SH

In over 21 years I've had just about every role you can at a junior club. From being the parent who pays their dues and gets the kids to training and the games, through being a team manager, a coach and a coordinator and committee member. It's a bit of a progression. I don't know many clubs that have a fight for the executive positions on their committees haha.

I'd like to tell you I was a shining beacon of leadership but, really, it was my turn. I figure if you have ideas on how you think the club might develop or change into the future and you've had an opinion about how we could improve then you need to put up or shut up. At St Mary's we've always had the people who will be there to get the job done. You find them on many committees, at the working bees, fund raisers etc. I have some wonderful people working with me at St Mary's. Never enough, as I don't think the general member realises how much work goes into getting their kids on to a court each week. That goes for the DVBA, the club committees, the coaches and the team managers. And the old adage is so apt, many hands make light work. I can only implore upon every parent – every little contribution you can make will help your club survive and prosper.



## SE

As a president of a domestic club, you would have your own ideas of what you would like to see changed at Diamond Valley. If you had full, complete and total control of Diamond Valley for one week, what three things would you like to change?

## SH

Just one week!! Can I paint the place out in St Mary's colours? Maybe not. Number 1 - I'd have DVBA running the stadium to cut out some of the middle man costs. Does my full, complete and total control include magic? I'd like to stop the drain of players from our girls competition. Number 2- I'd create two divisions in the girls comp. Call them the Competition division and a Fun Sport division. Players could nominate for whichever division would satisfy their enjoyment of the game. The Competition Division isn't just for representative players but it is for players who want to go flat out to win. A little bit of white line fever. That's not to say the Fun Sport isn't about winning but with these girls its more about the social game. This is where they gain their enjoyment. This comes from talking to many girls leaving our comp. They either leave because they can't get enough competition or because they get tired of being beaten by those flat out competitive types. Number 3 – I'd pour more resources into our referees. Better development programs and mentoring with attractive rewards for achievement and pathways for development. Face it, competitions are often spoken of based on the quality, or lack there of, of the refs. We start refs at a young age, give them their initial course, occasional feedback once they have passed and then as a competition we yell and scream and complain about them. Sometimes forgetting some of them are our own kids. Can I add an addendum to that by

way of a zero tolerance of verbal abuse including aggressive posturing and tone towards refs. I know it already exists but in my week of power I would exact a different interpretation of Zero.

**SE**

OK, let's dissect that. Firstly according to my calculations, that's four things but who's counting. Seriously, there are some significant points raised, particularly about zero tolerance. In my experience, tech fouls seem to quieten people down pretty quickly!! You would also have seen some pretty good players over the years, who are the three best you have ever seen?

**SH**

I don't think I'm qualified to rate best players over the years. My point of view on that has changed as my own development and understanding of the game has changed. If we're talking elite players there are some standouts. In Australia I loved watching Ricky Grace, Lenard Copeland and Andrew Gaze. I love the way Gaze was Mr niceguy off the court but was such a terrier on it. A real white line fever man. We've had some good players go overseas. Who can forget Shane Heal taking on Charles Barklay. No-one told him he was only six one. He was my favourite junkyard dog. You want to take his basketball, you'd better be prepared to fight. And what I loved the most – it didn't matter what the score line, he was in it until the final buzzer. Pretty good three point shooter too. Today's crop? Well Bogut has done well for himself but I think injuries have held his status back. Patty Mills is giving himself every chance of getting traded as a starting guard. He's fun to watch – that's what I rate, players with heart. Their giving their all, it doesn't have to be flashy. Ah, sorry was that more than three?

**SE**

That's OK, seems you have a counting problem! From a coaching perspective, who are the three kids you have loved to coach the most, not necessarily the best, just the ones you really enjoyed coaching?

**SH**

Other than my own kids who've all displayed qualities I'm very proud of. I'm not comfortable singling out any players from recent teams but a favourite from back in the football years was Adam Pattison. I was only assisting Jeff at under 11's when I met him but he is definitely a standout as a favourite. He had such a sense of fun, if it was muddy he was the first one who was going to send a mud pie through the air or rub it into the hair of a team mate. If it was wet he'd go flying past you aquaplaining on his belly through the water. But it was his infectious love of the game and leadership that stood out. He was there for his team mates and put everything he had out on the field in a game. I always thought he'd end up a captain once he was drafted to the AFL or at least in the leadership group. I ended up sending him the wrong message by putting him in another team as a leader when I had the chance to coach him....Long story but a regret I have to live with and I hope I've learnt from.

Now, my favourite three players are the last three players to have listened to what I was trying to teach them and have taken it out onto the court. As I said before there is no greater satisfaction than to have a player who is coachable. As you said it doesn't matter how good they are it's how ready they are to listen to you, hear what you're saying and then go out to try to execute it. I'll take that over a star player any day. I've had the opportunity to coach a kid who was ready to quit the game because all he had got was negative feedback about his game. He's one of the most coachable kids I've come across and he too is a leader. Now he can't wait to get to training or the game. That's priceless. You can't get the smile off my face when I've got a team of kids like that.

**SE**

Given your own kid's involvement in referring, yours excluded, who do you think are the three best referees to come out of Diamond Valley?

**SH**

Tough question. Can't say I know many of them well. That's Andrews domain. Some I've respected along the way. - I liked the way Curly (Chris Urli ? Full name) and Stuart Callaghan treated the boys when Andrew started out as a junior. Josh Hughes has matured into my kind of ref in that he knows how to talk to players. He doesn't need to hide behind a superior attitude. Adrian Petrie is a young ref I think is on the way up. He presents himself in a professional way no matter what grade or level of game he is reffing. That's a quality that will take him a long way. No player likes a ref with a bad attitude just because he plays 'D' grade on a Monday night.

**SE**

My final question, if you could magically click your fingers and have something done, changed, fixed and absolutely in place at Diamond Valley right now, what would it be, and don't be afraid to dream big?

**SH**

I do a lot of dreaming about basketball in the north of Melbourne. I've seen some of your previous interviews and there is a common theme that is high on my list too. A renovated extended stadium that incorporates a show court with seating on both sides of the court. A function room, our own Eagles' Nest, with a view of the show court. A café/bistro with inside and outside seating and retail outlets selling paraphernalia for all the sports that use the stadium. Perhaps a sports medicine discipline would find the location attractive I'd have the DVBA running the stadium as I said before but it is our relationship with the other users that will shore up our future. We've got the land and with the current participation rate we've maxed out the use of the existing facility. Once built, I would be utilising the facility in developing programs with as many local schools as possible. Possibly leading to a sports school academy the likes of Marybinong, SEDA, Box Hill or Templestowe – but better of course! What I'm saying is that its not just good enough getting it built, it's the relationships and programs that will deliver a magnificent hub of sporting excellence and entertainment in the north. And I want to be part of that!!!

**SE**

Thanks Steve, it's been great to get into the mind of another club president and see what you think. I'm not sure if I'm getting better at this interview caper or people are starting to get the idea of how the interviews work, but each one I do seems to get better and more interesting than the last.

This interview with Steve is no different, a fantastic story with lots of twists and turns, finishing with yet another who gives so freely of his time to make Diamond Valley a better place for our kids to play.

Steve Hollowood, the Screaming Eagle salutes you.