

A HISTORY OF LACROSSE AT MELBOURNE HIGH SCHOOL and MELBOURNE HIGH SCHOOL OLD BOYS (MHSOB)

Lacrosse has been played at Melbourne High School for over one hundred years in various forms:

- as a “house” sport within the school where four houses played each other (Forrest, Como, Waterloo and Yarra houses)
- as an inter-school sport against other secondary schools as part of the Victorian Lacrosse Association (VLA), and
- as an “Old Boys” team as part of the VLA. It should be noted that boys from the high school often filled in as players for the Old Boys at Saturday afternoon games.

Lacrosse started as a school sport in 1912 when it entered the schools section of the VLA winning one game in their first season. An informal Old Boys team started two years later in 1914, when the Old Boys played the school team in June, with the school team winning 17 to 4. The school and the Old Boys team continued to regularly play each other for years. In their third season playing in 1914, MHS had a successful year scoring 184 goals to 16 against their rivals throughout the season and ended up being the premiers of F Section.

In 1916, MHS played in “A” grade and “C” grade. The season commenced in June 1916 with MHS “A” grade playing an away game at Brighton Presbyterians and “C” grade playing Malvern at home. MHS lost both games.

MHS had some success in their early years becoming second section premiers in 1917 and in 1919 the school scored 176 goals to 23 against it. MHS played Box Hill in the final game of 1919 arranged by the VLA, finishing the season at the head of “C” section. MHS continued in “C” section in 1920 and 1921 and on 31 August 1921 MHS played the Old Boys with the Old Boys winning 13 to 6.

By 1922, MHS had moved to “D” section in the VLA and started the season without a coach. The elected committee consisted of Keith Ellis (Captain), Henry Volk (Vice Captain) and John Lilburn (Third Committeeman). Henry Volk represented the team at association meetings held every month and would go on to form the official Old Boys club in 1923, staying involved with the club for decades. While the school students had been regularly playing the “exies” since 1914, as noted above, an official Melbourne High School Old Boys lacrosse club was founded in 1923. MHSOB was close to the school as expected, and it was common for students to play in the Old Boys team throughout future years. In 1923 MHS played the Old Boys on 21 April, the High School winning 9 goals to 7. In 1923, the school team entered “D” section, where a shield presented by Captain Fearon (Williamstown) was to be presented to the winners. MHS were runners up for D Section and also received a cup presented by Captain Fearon and were determined to work hard to be awarded the shield the next year.

MHS entered a team in “D” section of the VLA and became premiers in 1924, beating Brighton 4 goals to 3 in the final, after a very successful season. Captain Fearon presented the Fearon Shield to the captain of the MHS lacrosse team, W. Stewart on 28 November 1924 at a presentation at the school, also attended by the school principal, Mr Searby and Mr Balmer from the VLA.

In 1925 the MHSOB lacrosse club was represented by teams in “B” and “C” section of the VLA. “B” section were premiers in 1925, beating Williamstown in the grand final. The school team entered in “D” section and were runners up to Williamstown in the final Williamstown winning 6 goals to 2. The school lacrosse team were premiers of “D” section for the second time in 1926 and again Captain Fearon presented the Fearon shield to MHS principal Mr Searby and the lacrosse team Captain, W. J. Stewart, on the west steps of the school on 30 November 1926.

MHS again entered in “D” section in 1927. As a result of winning the “D” section premiership of the VLA in 1927 for the third time (in addition to winning it in 1924 and 1926), MHS took permanent possession of the Captain Fearon Shield. By 1927, the Old Boys were organising regular social events, including dances, away from the ground that were reported by the press in the social pages of the day. The Australasian reported on 25 June 1927 *“The Melbourne High School Old Boys' Lacrosse Club gave a most enjoyable dance at the Maison de Luxe, St. Kilda, on Saturday evening June 18”*. On 8 September 1927 Table Talk reported *“Members of the Melbourne High School Old Boys' Lacrosse Club held their annual dinner at the Victoria Palace, Little Collins Street on Saturday 27 August. During the evening the members presented*

their Vice President, Mr Lemmon, with a handsome smokers' stand, the presentation being made on behalf of Mr C A H Searby, the school principal. After dinner the club attended the school play "Make Believe" at the Playhouse."

In 1928, MHS played in "C" section of the VLA. Two teams "A" and "Z" also entered in the Metropolitan High Schools Association.

Lacrosse was thriving at MHS in 1929. After a successful year in 1928, MHSOB now had a team in the senior section. The Old Boys also had teams in "B" and "C" sections. Inter house lacrosse was being played and a House Cup was offered as a prize. Monthly dances were still being well attended in the school hall as Table Talk noted *"The Melbourne High School Old Boys' Lacrosse Club is holding its second monthly social evening and dance at the High School, South Yarra, on Saturday next, 16th inst. Music will be supplied by the Gay Serenaders"*. MHS also entered the "D" section of the VLA, winning the Metropolitan High School Association premiership without a single defeat. In 1929 MHS benefited from the VLA providing them with twelve lacrosse sticks for house lacrosse. The winning house was presented with a cup by the MHSOB lacrosse team. At the end of the season the MHSOB lacrosse club visited Ballarat for the weekend where they were beaten by a team from Ballarat. And finally, old boy Archie McIndoe, won the cup at the Interstate Carnival games in Perth for the best and fairest player.

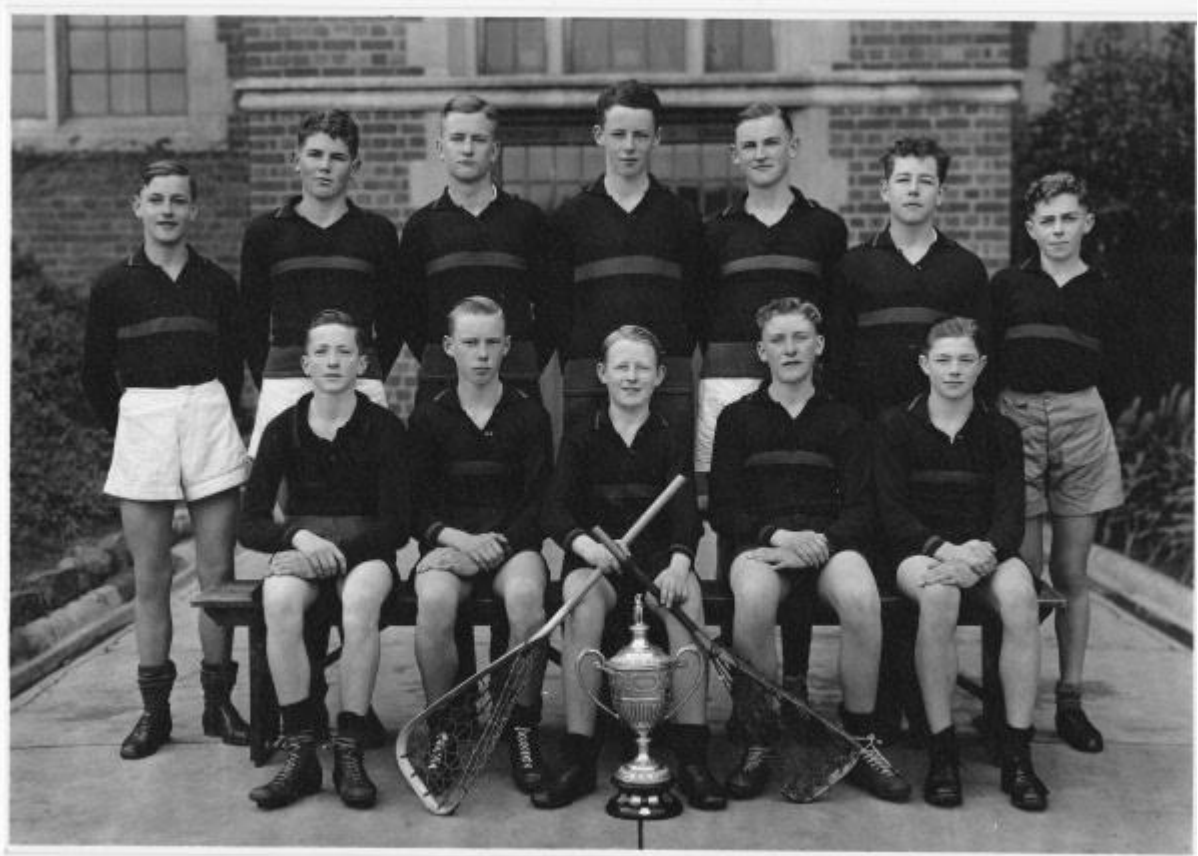
MHSOB had three teams playing in 1930, one in senior, and one in each "B" and "D" sections. The senior team found it a hard competition, while "D" section had a few school boys in the ranks. House lacrosse was also being played.

In 1931, MHSOB had teams in the senior section, "B", "C" and "D" sections. MHSOB played in the "B" and "C" section finals, defeating Teachers College in "B" Section and scoring an equal score of 4 with Williamstown in "D" section. By 1931, the school and the Old Boys lacrosse teams had amalgamated and the school did not compete in its own right in the VLA "D" section, but a team composed completely of school students played for MHSOB in "D" section.

In 1932 the amalgamation of the school and the old boys club continued and two school teams were entered in D & E sections under the name of the old boys club. This continued amalgamation gave the school boys good opportunities to advance their lacrosse skills and play a high level of competition and two school boys, Dudley and Mattingley were regularly selected as regular players of the Old Boys senior team.

In 1934, the school was still closely aligned to the old boys' club and a new agreement regarding the utilisation of school students and facilities was put in place between the school principal, Mr Searby and Henry Volk of the old boys club. In this agreement it was confirmed, 1) MHS would pay the registration fee for each student playing with MHSOB, 2) at least one MHSOB team playing on a Saturday would be made up wholly of students and, 3) MHSOB could use the school sports ground. The 1934 season opened on Saturday 28 April and MHSOB had teams in "A" section, "C" section and "E" section.

In 1935 Fearon Cup matches were being played. Forrest were House champions and teams in "E" & "F" sections failed in the semi-finals, despite winning against every team they played, and finished third on their lists. In 1937, MHS entered three teams, an under 17 and two under 15 teams.



For those with a good eye, Noel McDonald is on the far left and the late Bill Taylor is second from the left in the front row. Both went on to be VALA referees and awarded life memberships of the VALA. Bill Taylor was also awarded an ALC Fellowship for his services to VALA as secretary for many years, along with his administration and management of Australian box lacrosse teams and representation, as well as an experienced referee for international matches. Former President of the VALA Henry Volk, who became patron, was also one of the founders of the MHSOB club.

In 1938, MHS had an Under 15 and an Under 17 team playing in the Saturday competition. The Under 17 team won the grand final. MHS school teams were not permitted to compete in the Inter high school competitions on Wednesday afternoons in 1938 and instead played in the Saturday afternoon competition. House lacrosse was strong in the school and Como won the 1938 competition.

MHS fielded two Under 16 teams in 1939. The first team was captained by J Kerferd with W. Taylor as vice-captain. The second team was captained by J Hipper and H Reid vice-captain. Six MHS students played with the junior north zone team. MHSOB played in B section this year.

In 1940, MHS raised two under 16 teams which were selected more evenly in strength than the previous year. MHS had eight players in the "North zone" team. MHS students made up 11 of the 18 Victorian players (including the Captain and Vice-Captain) visiting Port Pirie in South Australia during the first term break. Noel McDonald was one of the Port Pirie players.

House lacrosse was again being played in 1940 and Noel McDonald remembers their maths teacher, Bill Woodfull (who had been the Australian cricket test captain) allowing lacrosse players to leave his maths class early to play house lacrosse. Noel McDonald also remembers their teacher in charge of sport, Mr McKenzie, getting Noel to go down to Chapel Street to a sporting goods store to buy lacrosse equipment. "I used to buy sticks that were better quality and more expensive than other ones. The first time I did this Mr McKenzie turned to me and said 'why did you get these McDonald?' and I said 'I got them sir because they're the cheapest ones and they'll last the longest'. After that he gave me dockets to go and get all their lacrosse equipment".

In 1941, MHS again had two Under 16 teams. There was still a close relationship with MHSOB lacrosse club with four students playing for the old boys D section team. MHSOB also played in "B" section. House lacrosse was also being played.



Above is a photo of a MHSOB team year unknown, probably the 1940s.

The players from back row left to right:— Ernie Page, Ian Lowe, Ian McGregor, Jack Perry, Noel McDonald, Ian Hore. Front row, left to right:— Ken Wright, Don Lee, Geoff McDonald (Noel's older brother), the final player is unknown.

Only two MHS matches were played in 1945, between Essendon High School and University High School. House lacrosse was still being played. MHSOB Under 16 team defeated Coburg in the grand final, 9 goals to 8 as reported in the Argus newspaper. The best player was Ridout who threw 6 goals. MHSOB had teams in both "B" and "C" sections in 1947.

In 1949 lacrosse was still being played and both the school and MHSOB teams were thriving. The MHSOB team was in the senior reserve section of the VLA and was undefeated as at July of that year. The high school team was undefeated in 1948, 1949 and 1950.

1950 was successful for the lacrosse team in the high school competition and they were undefeated for the third consecutive year. The team was made up wholly of Saturday afternoon players, most of whom played in open sections, so play was of a high standard. In 1950, MHSOB played in the senior section, as well as "C" section, the Under 16's and Under 14's.

On 23 July 1951 The Age noted that "MHSOB suffered its second successive defeat in lacrosse on Saturday. The Old Boys *"fopped"* at Williamstown on Saturday. Without McDonald and McFadyen, they lacked steadiness and could not cope with Williamstown's solid defenders. McNeilage starred in attack and threw six goals for the winners." Things had improved by the end of the season when the Sporting Globe reported on the semi-final played by MHSOB and Trinity United "as one of the most exciting and dramatic ever witnessed in Victorian Lacrosse" and noted the "Old Boys bulldog tenacity in the last hectic minutes". MHSOB got a goal during the time on period winning 10 goals to 9.

The school team was undefeated in 1954 and in the schools' competition played Box Hill High, Caulfield Tech and Swinburne Tech. Fred Graf, an ex-Victorian player and member of MHSOB team coached the school team and the two Saturday afternoon teams.

In 1955, the school team finished fourth in the schools' competition. Two students played in the MHSOB "B" grade team. Fred Graf again coached the school team.

MHS lacrosse grew and thrived as a sport during the 1920's, 1930's, 1940's and 1950's, however while it was still being played in the second half of the twentieth century, it had lost support and declined as a sport within the school. By 1962 only four schools had lacrosse teams. MHS played Box Hill High, Williamstown

High and University High. The schools' competition was expanded in 1963 and MHS played University High, Eltham High, Box Hill High, Williamstown High and Chadstone High. University High defeated MHS in the final on 7 July. In 1968, the MHS lacrosse team was undefeated in the schools' competition.

In 1970 the school team consisted of 6 former state players and the team was undefeated. After several years break, lacrosse was again being played at MHS with 3 school games against Chadstone High, Jordanville Tech and Williamstown High. This revived interest in lacrosse at MHS was driven by students who played the game at a club and interstate level.

MHSOB ceased playing in the VALA competition circa 1973. Many of their remaining senior players moved to Chadstone or Malvern, several of whom went on to represent Victoria and Australia. MHSOB played their matches at the picturesque Como Park in South Yarra, not far from the Yarra River and famous Como House.

MHS played two games in 1981 against Oakleigh Tech and Caulfield Tech. Lacrosse had ceased being played as a MHS sport sometime in the 1980s.

Today, lacrosse is offered as part of the summer and winter sports program at MHS.