

# **A LETTER TO THE CLUB FROM OWEN GIFFITHS**

**Ref: 2020/13**



## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past few years, there have been numerous requests for former players to forward comments and memories of their playing careers with Dromana to be recorded on the club's website for posterity.

Slowly but surely we are building the archives of the DFNC; and the contributions of past players ( and local families) are helping the club to 'fill the gaps' and 'complete the picture.' Thank you to all those players and members who have assisted with contributions of press cuttings, memorabilia, photographs and old team sheets.

The club recently received a most enlightening letter from former member Owen Griffiths. Owen commenced his football at Dromana in 1964 and went onto play 65 senior games with the club. He was an adept defender and gained selection on the half back flank of the DFNC 'Team of the Decade 1996-75.'

Owen's letter is illuminating in several ways regarding: (i) DFC club coaches, (ii) Information about the Third XVIII competition and (iii) Memorable matches in the 1960's.

Owen's letter is indeed a valuable 'slice of history' and we appreciate the time that he has given in recording his years at Pier Street.



# **OWEN GRIFFITHS' LETTER TO DROMANA FNC 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

*Dear members of DFNC,*

*We lived at Tootgarook and I played Under 17 football with Rye FC in 1962 & 1963. Ron Choate was the playing coach of the Senior team and Mick Cain was coach of the Under 17s. 1962 was Ron Choate's first year as playing coach of Rye. I believe he was recruited from either Preston or Prahan in the VFA where he made a name as a back pocket player.*

*At Rye Ron mostly played in the ruck. One of Ron's oft used lines in his pre-match, half time and ¾ time rev-ups was "Each and every one of us".*

*At the end of 1963 our family re-located to Dromana and I played 5 years with Dromana FC as follows:*

## **1964 – UNDER 17S:**

*Dromana were the 1964 Under 17 premiers and went through the season without losing a game. Bill Martin was the coach, Neil (Chooka) Chambers was captain and Rod Dark was vice-captain.*

*In 1963 Dromana U17s did well in the finals and the team was mostly intact in 1964. Players lost to the U17s due to their birthdates falling outside the Under 17 cut-off period were Andrew Emerson, John Lechte, Ken Myers and Theo van Roy. However, other eligible players had moved to Dromana and there was a buzz about the place with the players eager to get into training.*

*Chooka Chambers played with the U17s in the first game of the year, but was poached by the senior team where he out played the remainder of the home and away season.*

*Although playing only one game with the U17s, the players voted that Chooka should be brought back into the team for the grand Final against Rosebud.*

*On grand final day, Bill Martin was concerned that there was an element of over-confidence and cleared the change rooms of all officials, runners, trainers and supporters, leaving only himself and the 20 players.*

*We blitzed Rosebud at the start of the game establishing a first quarter lead of over seven goals. Although Rosebud outscored us for the following three quarters, we still ran out comfortable winners.*

## **1965 – SENIORS AND RESERVES:**

*In 1965 the Nepean Football League introduced three teams per club, (Seniors, Reserves and Under 17s). In the first game of the year I was on the back flank with the Seniors against Rosebud at Rosebud. John Nix was the playing coach*

and his instructions were: "If you get the ball, kick it to centre half forward". The following week John left Dromana and Bob Castles took over as playing coach.

I played on the wing for the second game of the year at Dromana (Bob C's first game as coach). I don't recall the opposition team.

I was also on the wing for the third game of the year against Navy at Navy. I put in a shocker and was dropped to the Reserves where Bill Martin was the playing coach. It was an interesting experience to have Bill as a coach one year and then as a team mate the following year.

I played the rest of the year with the Reserves, but was recalled to the Seniors (for I think 2 games, one being a losing first semi-final). The Reserves were also in the finals and I recall that on two occasions I played a game on a Saturday with the Seniors and another game with the Reserves on a Sunday. The Reserves lost the grand-final to Rye in a low scoring affair on a wet cold Sunday at Rosebud.

### **1967 - SENIORS:**

This was John Kelton's first year as playing coach. I first met John at the start of the year when Dromana played a practise match against Balwyn at Balwyn. I played most of the year in the back pocket. I remember John developing an early form of the "Huddle". When Brian Taylor was kicking out from full back, the two ruck men would lead to the wings, and Brian would go up the middle to Norm Robinson, Norm being a strong overhead mark.

We beat Somerville in the first semi-final (I only got two possessions for the game), beat Rye in the preliminary-final (in a nail biter) and lost the grand-final to Crib Point.

### **1969 – SENIORS:**

I played mostly in the back pocket or on the back flank. I was living in Melbourne and did not have my own transport. I used to catch a train to Seaford Station, walk to John Kelton's house and travel to the game with John and his family. I recall wearing No 19.

### **1970 – SENIORS:**

John Kelton took on the role of club secretary and Greg James became the captain coach. I first met Greg when we played a practise match against Mt Eliza at Mt Eliza. I played mostly at full back, back pocket, back flank and centre half back (wearing No 19). I recall Greg suffered cracked ribs in a game against Crib Point at Crib Point

### **SOME MEMORIES REGARDING COLIN MATTHEWS**

*I first met Colin in 1959 when we were in the same class at Rosebud High School. He is responsible for me still remembering the ditty:*

*“No matter how much you shake, jiggle and dance. The last drop goes down your pants”. Col did have two older brothers.*



**Owen's friend at school and Dromana FNC – Colin Matthews.**

*In 1961 Colin and I were in the Rosebud High School junior football team. Col was in the back pocket and I was full back. Our captain was Alan Mannix, who was a very good overhead mark. I was very short sighted and anything over 40 yards away was a blur. When kicking out I would call out to Col: “Where's Mannix”. Col would point and I would kick in that direction. Mannix got the ball more often than not.*



**Rosebud High School Debutante Ball -1965  
Owen Griffiths is at the extreme right in the front row.  
Colin Matthews is second from the left in the back row.**

*In 1965 Colin and I were among a group who partnered some girls at a Dromana deb ball and we played Navy the next day. Col must have played OK, but I was dropped the following week.*

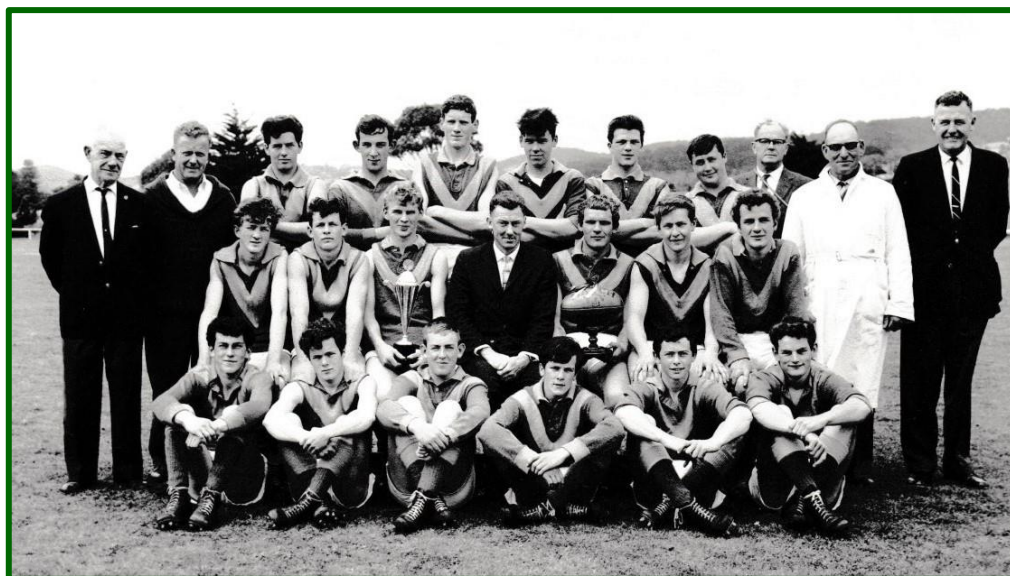
*One of Colin's many tales was when he was recruited as he got off the plane at Woomera airport. Evidently a team was short and desperately needed to make up the numbers. Col always packed his footy boots when travelling, played in the game and kicked a goal. Because he was new, the Woomera paper acknowledged Col in the list of goal kickers as “unknown - 1”.*

*In 1994 Colin organised a re-union of the Under 17 football team at the Dromana pub. At the end of the night, Col felt I needed sobering up and took me back to his house for coffee. The coffee was effective, but was negated by the bottle of port we shared.*



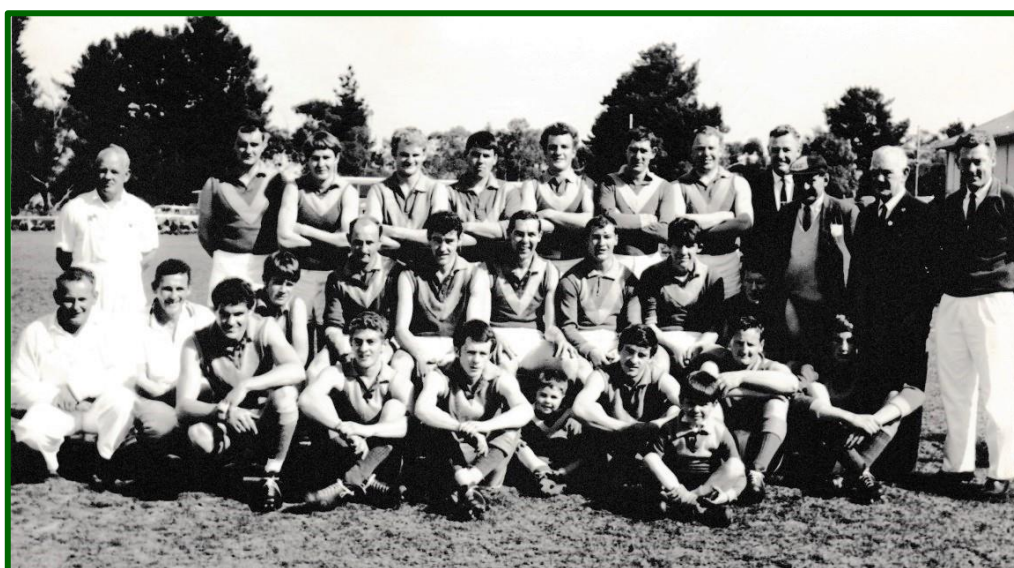
### **SOME FURTHER BRIEF COMMENTS:**

- *My younger brother Lloyd played with the Reserves in 1966. I believe I played most of the games of the 1970 season.*
- *I have previously commented on the article about the 1968 win against Somerville. The article names Garry Tagliabue, but the name is Gerry Tagliabue. Gerry was a team mate of John Kelton's from his South Melbourne days.*
- *I caught up with John in Darwin in 2001. He said he could still name all the players from the 1967 runners-up team. He mentioned that he was surprised that Dromana did so well on his first year as coach. Colin Matthews told me on more than one occasion, that he thought the 1967 runners-up team was a better side than the 1971 premiership team*



**1964 Thirds (Under-17 ) Premiership team .**

**Owen and Colin are next to each other in the middle row at the right hand side. George Osborne and Eric Oakes can be seen. Bill Martin was the coach in that historic season.**



**1967 Runners Up – Owen is second from the left in the back row.**



***The 1969 Dromana team and Owen can be seen on the left of the back row. John Kelton was the Senior XVIII coach that season.***



***1994 DFNC Reunion***

***Back: O. Griffiths G. Harris A. Pittock C. Matthews N. Chambers  
Front: N. Hazeldine L. Fraser F. Fraser R. Dark R. Millsom M. DiGregorio B. Martin.***



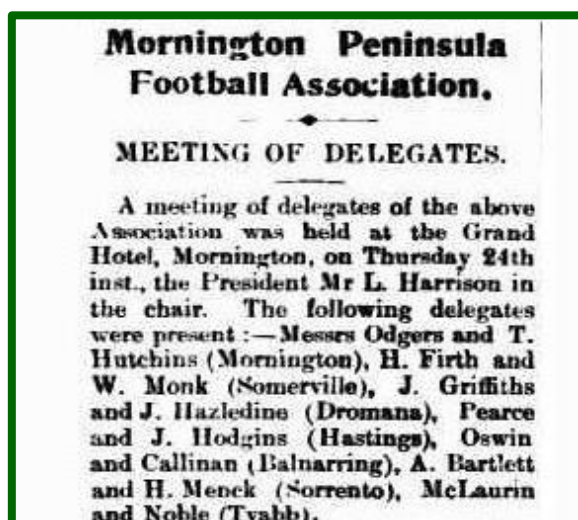
***Team of the Decade 1966-75  
Owen is third from the left in the back row.***

## FOOTNOTES TO OWEN'S LETTER

- Owen also clarified the inaccuracies that have often been made in relation to the spelling of his family name. Since 1970, there have been at least six Senior Grade footballers with the name 'Griffiths' or 'Griffith' and it no surprise that such confusion reigns...As Owen stressed...

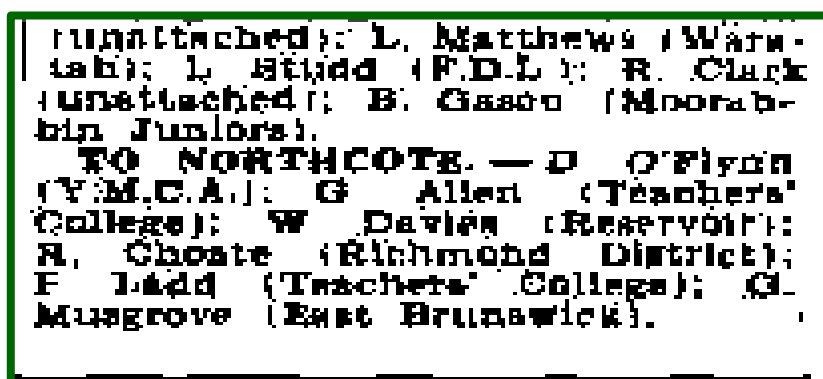
*"Brian is Griffith (without an "S"), and I am Griffiths (with an "S")"*

- As a matter of interest, a certain Mr J. Griffiths was the President of Dromana FC in 1909 but there were also variations of the spelling of his name in the newspaper articles of that era ...



Source: Mornington and Dromana Standard July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1909, page 3

- Although not mentioned in the above letter, it is known that Owen played with Richmond Districts FC in the Metropolitan FL in 1968.
- Following an exhaustive search of early newspaper's, it was discovered that Ron Choate was cleared from an inner suburban club to Northcote (VFA) in April 1952. The family name 'Choate' was often seen in newspaper reports regarding the Northcote Football Club



Source: The Age April 10<sup>th</sup> 1952 Page; 16



- Bob Castles played 84 senior games with Dromana from 1964-68. As mentioned by Owen, he coached the club following John Nix's return to Richmond FC in 1965. Bob was recruited to Dromana from VFA club Camberwell. He played mainly as a ruckman and utility but could hold down any key position as required. From all reports, Bob Castles gave his 'heart and soul' to lift the team each Saturday. When Bob left for Narrandera in NSW in early 1969, the DFC, President Eric Oakes, presented him with a memento for his outstanding service. Bob had won the respect of all members at Pier Street and he was big loss to the club's playing list.



- John Kelton, formerly from Hampton Rovers, played 21 games with South Melbourne (1957- 60) before being cleared to Dromana . John played 52 games with DFNC; and gained a handsome reputation as strong leader and fine ruckman in his time with the club. As mentioned by Owen, John was influential in attracting Gerry Tagliabue to Dromana. John Kelton was an unlucky coach who played a vital role in fostering the club in the township.

A story about John Kelton can be found on this website.

- The 'Tagliabue' mentioned by Owen was Gerald ( Gerry ) and he played 32 games for South Melbourne ( 1956-59). Gerry was recruited to the SMFC from Swan Hill and he made his debut for South against St Kilda in Round : 9 in 1956 at the Lake Oval . Kevin Hogan ( Liam's Father ) was playing his 29<sup>th</sup> game for South that day.



**Gerald Tagliabue, a raw young full-forward from Swan Hill, who is over 6ft., showed courage in going in for the ball. He took some clean marks, and could develop into a League man, given the proper encouragement.**

Source: Emerald Hill Record March 20<sup>th</sup> 1954.

- John Kelton and Gerry Tagliabue played in one of South Melbourne's most famous victories in that era. In Round: 17 in 1957, at the Lake Oval, South Melbourne shocked the football world when it defeated the 'all-conquering Melbourne powerhouse' by four points.



On that day, John Kelton kicked two goals and Gerry kicked one for South. Melbourne went on to win the premiership that season while the Swans languished at 10<sup>th</sup> position...football can be a funny game!

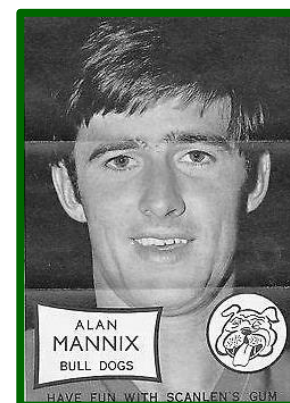
**Demons Overpowered  
by Determined South**  
A fiercely determined South Melbourne shattered Melbourne's poise and confidence to grasp victory in the final second of a great battle at South on Saturday.

Source' The Age'

- Younger readers may be interested to know that Gerry Tagliabue was a reserve in the South Melbourne team that claimed the 1957 Night Premiership. John Kelton was named as an emergency that night. Night football was very popular in the late 1950's and early 60's; and more than 18,000 people crammed into the Lakeside Oval to witness South Melbourne 17.14(116) defeat Essendon 15.14 (104).

SOUTH MELBOURNE			COACH
Herbie Matthews			
Hamilton	Hudson	Gillett	BACKS
McLaughlin	Ledwidge	Harris	HALF-BACKS
Dorgan	Pratt	Crough	CENTRES
Gunn	Oaten	Skilton	HALF-FORWARDS
Keyter	Goldsmith	McGowan	FORWARDS
	Taylor	Clegg (C)	FOLLOWERS
		Hogan	ROVER
	Lane	Tagliabue	RESERVES
Trethowan	Kelton	Matthews	EMERGENCIES

- Colin Matthews ( see above) played 257 senior games ( 1962-83) 56 with the reserves and more than 60 games with the club Thirds. Colin played in the 1971 premiership team and also coached the Reserves in 1978 and 1979. Various articles about Colin's steadfast contribution to the club can be found on this website.
- Alan Mannix- Following his time at Dromana FC , Alan was cleared to Crib Point and developed into a polished midfielder; and in 1965 he was recruited to Footscray. Alan played his first game against Essendon at the Western Oval in Round:3 of the 1965 season; and went onto play 112 games and kick 44 goals for the Bulldogs. One of the highlights of Alan's VFL career was being a member of Footscray's Night Premiership team in 1967. Alan stepped down from VFL ranks in 1972 and then forged a



handsome reputation in VFA football with Coburg and Werribee. Alan was a named on the wing in Coburg's team of the Century.

## **A SPECIAL 'THANK YOU' TO OWEN GRIFFITHS**

'Thank you' again to Owen for forwarding the above letter to the club; and it is hoped that other former players may also consider committing their memories in writing. While the club makes every effort to accurately research the past seasons of club life , history is best told by the various stakeholders of any era. As Theodore Roosevelt once said...

***"The more you know about the past, the better you are prepared for the future ...:"***

## **REFERENCE & RESEARCH INFORMATION:**

Sources: Letter and emails from Owen-DFNC records-personal files

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