



ACK Story: Ray Carroll

1. For how many years were you at Assumption College Kilmore?

I first arrived in Kilmore in 1959. I taught and coached at the school from the beginning of 1959 to the end of 2011.

2. What did you know about Assumption College before you arrived?

I actually knew very little about Assumption College before I arrived. A friend of mine growing up in Mortlake, Brian Forrest (ACK 1955), had spoken about his experiences while attending, but prior to 1959 I had not had any association with the College.

3. Tell us about your first experience with ACK and some of your early roles?

I can clearly remember my first visit to Assumption College and my interview with the then Principal, Brother Sylvester. At the time, he was overseeing 300 boarders eating their dinner and he said to me, "I suppose you can teach? I also hear you like cricket and football?" I responded by saying, "I love them both", to which he informed me, "OK. You can start Monday." Arriving on the Monday morning, for what was my first real experience as a school teacher after teachers college, Brother Sylvester directed me to teach a class of about 65 students (grades 5 and 6). When I informed Brother Sylvester "I don't have any text books", he handed me a small strap, a cane and four pieces of chalk and told me; "the boys will have the books; keep a page ahead of them!"¹

Outside of the classroom, where I was given the responsibility of teaching English, History and Religion classes, I was immediately involved in coaching junior footy and cricket teams, well before I became the 1st XVIII or 1st XI coach.

4. What were the main differences between life at the College from your first year to your last year in Kilmore?

They were very different worlds. From a Spartan existence, where conditions were extremely challenging for the students, teachers and Brothers alike, to a completely different experience where the modern comforts and changes in society were reflected in the students.

5. What did you enjoy the most/least about your 53 years at Kilmore?

I can truly say I enjoyed every aspect of my time at Kilmore. Engaging with so many students and families on and around the sporting fields, I developed many great and enduring friendships.

6. As a young and inexperienced sporting coach, from whom did you learn the most?

I learned an enormous amount from my predecessors. Assumption had some wonderful sporting coaches. Brother Domnus, who achieved great success, was followed by Brother Stanislaus and Brother Xavier, both excellent leaders of sporting teams. I was the first lay person, following a long succession of Marist Brothers, to ever coach the 1st teams, so there were understandably some hesitations in making the decision.

¹ Thankfully, at no stage did I ever use the strap or cane during my teaching career.

7. As a coach of sporting teams for most of your life, what did you find the most rewarding part of the role?

I enjoyed the process of teenagers developing in confidence and the part I played in helping them to realise the importance of teamwork and the critical need to support others around them. These basic life principals were the foundation of our sporting success. Although we had our share of outstanding individual players, it was the galvanizing of groups of good athletes into exceptional teams which form my fondest memories.

8. The teams you were involved with (over an extended period of time) had an extraordinary run of successes. Is it possible to capture in 5 points the attributing reasons for such success?

- 1) Respect for the past and for traditions;
- 2) The ability to tap into the inner spirit;
- 3) Respect for the game; for officials, opponents and teammates;
- 4) Instilling a desire in students to be the very best they can be; and
- 5) Acknowledging faith and honouring parents and loved ones who support you.

9. Was there ever a time between 1960 – 2010 when you felt the challenges of coaching were too much and you wanted to do something else? If so, how did you deal with those pressures?

No, I cannot recall that happening. Despite the many challenges, I always felt privileged and honoured to be given such a responsibility. I always loved the coaching, both footy and cricket, at whatever level I was involved. We didn't have the resources, support structure, student numbers and funding of the Melbourne schools, but this became a source of unity, strength and motivation for our teams. The final couple of years were more difficult for me, but at no time did I ever lose the enthusiasm or appreciation for the opportunity.

10. You are often asked about the best players and teams you have coached in football and cricket, however, are there particular games (in either code), which burn brightest in your memory?

Where can I possibly start? There are so many wonderful examples of Assumption teams overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds to emerge victorious. If I must reference some particular examples, I begin by apologizing in advance to the many teams I have omitted.

- The AGSV footy title at Marcellin in 1978 (where Neale Daniher starred.)
- The Herald Sun Shield title at the MCG in 2008 (where we had to overcome an Essendon Kielor College team loaded with 16 TAC Cup players!)
- The 1968 cricket title win in a thriller against Peninsula Grammar.
- The 1980 cricket title where Simon O'Donnell's team prevailed.

11. Of your many famous team addresses, is there one you look back on as being the most inspirational (and was it pre-prepared or created on the spur of the moment?)

I am often reminded by former students of particular pre-game talks or $\frac{3}{4}$ time 'rev-ups' they recall me giving in the past, but they are not things I tend to remember. They were rarely ever prepared addresses. The one address which remains most vivid in my mind was the speech I gave before the game against Sacred Heart College in Adelaide in 1979. My dear Dad had died the previous day and it was a very emotional time for me.

12. Would you agree it is more challenging to coach a team in the current decade than 50 years ago?

There are challenges in every era. Whatever the period of time, if the students believe you are 'fair-dinkum' they will respond positively to what you are asking of them.

13. What did it mean to you to have the Main Oval of Assumption College renamed in your honour?

I am unable to put in words how great an honour it was. Such an iconic oval with a rich history of wonderful sporting achievements. It was a real honour.

14. What do you say to people who believe success is merely a product of good fortune?

There may be a small degree of luck in the outcome of some sporting events, but in my experience, success comes from faith, hard work and perseverance.

15. Although you are most renowned for your sporting achievements, in what ways did you try and prepare young men and women for their roles later in life?

I have always tried my best to instil real-life values in the students whom I have been associated with. I have placed particular emphasis on 2 areas; being unselfish with their time and talents, and always treating others in the exact same manner as they wish to be treated.

16. You remain in contact with hundreds (perhaps thousands) of former students, teachers, parents and friends from your days in Kilmore. How do you manage the time to do this?

One of the true blessings of my life has been the number of genuine and sincere people I have met along the journey. I have been very fortunate to have retained many of these great friendships. It is one of the things I value most and a source of much joy for me. I try my best to keep in touch with people, even though I remain amongst the "last of the letter writers!"

17. Do you ever reflect on the significant and lasting impact you have had on the lives of so many people (both on and off the sporting field?)

I mainly consider how lucky I have been. I feel I have received so much more than I have given.

18. Finally, if you were asked to share one piece of advice with the current Year 12 ACK students preparing for life after school, what would it be?

Always be true to yourself, respectful towards others and do your utmost to achieve your goals.