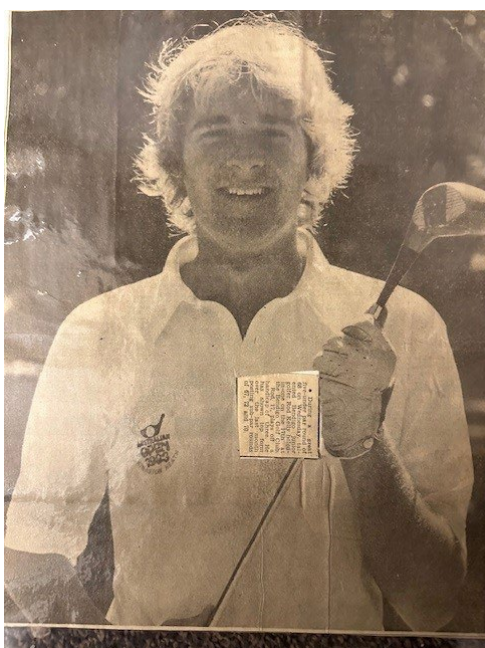


Past Student Spotlight

Rod Kelly Year 11 (1981)



I attended St George Primary School 1971-1977 and St George State High School 1978-1981. 1978 was also the year the new high school opened. School was always entertaining for me, with sport being so popular at our school, as it was in our town. Every sport was played with fierce competition. Softball and basketball were just as popular as football, netball, cricket and tennis. One of our teachers Ken Edwards introduced baseball as well.

The 'Cotton Carnival' was a popular high school fundraiser with a street parade and a boxing ring for any local 'grudge' fights. There was also golf putt putt on the high school lawn to raise money as well.

Many of my classmates were great athletes and I can remember Peter Brown winning the 800m in a photo finish with Dale Shearer and Wayne Long, 200m ahead of fourth place! Craig Faessler and John Kennedy were also impressive athletes and footballers. Karen Cooper, Debbie Hall and Gail Weatherall were always the stars of softball and netball.

I looked forward to Wednesday sport day so I could get a lift to the Golf Club, where schoolmates Mark Warnick, Terry Halpin and I developed rivalries with all of us joining the Golf Club and competing with the members while at school.

The school had a sporting equipment room so at lunchtime everyone scurried to get their favourite equipment.

I was very fortunate to have very talented classmates like Peter Brown and Graham Perrett who were both gifted with a talent for acting and Peter was and still is a great singer.

Teachers Anne Reilly and Linda Noriek recognised their talents and each year the class was on a high doing comedy stage shows at the town hall and theatre restaurants at the Australian Hotel. One show Wayne & Shusters 'Rinse The Blood Off My Toga' booked out 3 nights in a row! School musicals were also very popular.

As Peter and I were both fans of cinema, most outback towns had a 'picture theatre'. St George had the 'Dexter' Theatre, with movies playing twice a week. That put us in touch with

Hollywood and the action stars of the 70s. I recall the Bruce Lee Kung Fu movies fascinated me and started my interest in martial arts and the orient. Being part of these shows and these rivalries inspired me to pursue my dreams in sports and tv/cinema.

In 1982 I left school to work in my father's shearing team and midway through the year left St George and moved to Bendigo, Victoria due to my grandparents ill health.

From 1983 to 1986 I worked at the Bendigo Golf Club Pro Shop which helped as I was considering a career in professional golf. I made the Victorian State Golf Team and a highlight was defeating the Australian No 1 Junior Brad Hughes in the Quarter Final of the Australian Junior Championship. Brad won the Australian Masters 10 years later and became one of Australia's great golfers and is now a leading golf instructor. His caddie had a karate dojo in Melbourne and Brad refused to teach him golf so I agreed to teach him if he taught me martial arts at his dojo.

In 1986 Chuck Norris (American & World Karate Champion and action movie star) visited the dojo along with his brother Aaron while in Melbourne for the premiere of his movie "The Delta Force".

Two of us in the State Golf Team had the opportunity to attend a Florida College on a golf scholarship and at the same time I was fortunate to get a cameraman job with Channel 9 working on sporting broadcasts, Hey Hey It's Saturday and A Country Practice.

During the Victorian Open Golf broadcast at my then home club Yarra Yarra, I got to play 6 holes with West Indies cricket legends Sir Garfield Sobers and Desmond Haynes. Garfield played off a four handicap left handed and three handicap right handed! While in the State Team we all got to play practice rounds with golf legends Tom Watson and Johnny Miller at Royal Melbourne prior to them playing in the Australian Open which Watson won.

In 1987 to 1998 as my father's shearing run was getting bigger I decided to go back to St George intending to only stay for six months however we were so busy with shearing work I stayed and the time passed very quickly. It was an opportunity to save money for travel in the near future. I was the wool presser in the team and my best day was pressing 81 bales at Noondoo Station. A 14 stand shed near Dirranbandi averaged 58 bales each day over the three weeks in 1990.

In 2000 my passion was to pursue and study the martial arts and travel around China and Japan. I lived and trained with the Shaolin Monks for 3 months where many of these Monks were 80-90 years of age and had the flexibility of cats. Their amazing energy came from green tea and eating tofu that I thought was fish. They presented the tofu in the shape of a fish as a joke on the westerner!

'Monkey Magic' was a popular show at 6pm in the early 80s and I was surprised to see drawings of this show which was 'The journey to the West' everywhere on walls and corridors in the forbidden city and the summer palace of the Monkey God riding his cloud!

2001 to 2003, having been to Japan previously and visited the Iga Province, the heartland of ninjutsu, I was keen to return and study ninjutsu intermittently over two years. The Momochi family/clan continue to train the cark arts of the ninja and weapon training from their families

history. Living in the old post towns of Tsumago and Magome was a step back in time to the 16th century.

During this time I also trained Aikido, another Japanese martial art, with Kyoto Police and watched American superstar Steven Seagal give an Aikido demonstration in his dojo. Seagal is the only foreigner given permission to set up his own dojo and teach in Japan.

Another unexpected highlight was meeting Sonny Chiba (Kill Bill and probably the most famous action star in Japan) at a Kyoto train station. His bodyguard was standing beside him carrying a snakeskin coat! I recognised him from older Japanese sahara movies. He was friendly and said he had never visited Australia and asked me to join him for the hour long train trip, gave me his card and a note in Japanese which were directions to the Toei movie studios in Kyoto. Many shows were being shot at the studios and I had the pleasure of meeting another Japanese star Hiro Yuki Sanada (Shogun series currently) on the set and spent time touring the city with him. In the 70s Chiba and Sanada formed the Japan Action Club and made hundreds of Samurai TV series and films. They are the Japanese Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson!

I recall giving Sanada a "Billabong" cap and shorts. He was wearing them around the streets and many children and fans all approached him and bowed silently then cleared the footpath for him.

In 2008 I followed Tiger Woods for seven days of the Masters Gold Tournament at Augusta National where he ran 2nd. Shortly after this I was part of a four man camera crew who travelled to Thailand to shoot a documentary of the Long Neck Women.

The Long Neck tribe were banished from Thailand years before and they settled on the Myanmar/Thailand border. There was civil unrest in Myanmar while we were there, so the Thai Government gave us armed soldiers to stay with our crew until the filming was finished.

2012-2013 I worked with Thai Channel 7 doing camera work on the LPGA Thailand and LPGA Singapore for the Ladies Professional Golf tournaments.

2014-2015 - Was part of the camera crew on the World Long Drive Golf Championship at Mesquite, Nevada USA. In this time I became a certified Golf Instructor with Dan Shauger teaching the Mike Austin method, and also a certified Golf Instructor with Mike Dunaway, American Long Drive Champion who was Mike Austin's star pupil.

2015-2016 - I was a Golf Instructor in London, students were actors Dougray Scott and John Malkovich. I also learned about Golf Club making at Urbon Golf in London.

2019 – I was studying a new golf instruction in Los Angles when COVID arrived. Have continued online instruction and due to COVID returned to the shearing work in St George and Victoria as a wool classer. With the school show team doing well with their sheep someone might be interested in becoming a wool classer. What a fantastic achievement! I received a top 10 Wool Classer in Australia award from the Awex (Australia Wool Exchange).

2024 – I had some recent success as a woolclasser at this years Australian Sheep & Wool Show. I had picked some fleeces for a grazier in Victoria where we received a 1st and 3rd place in the performance class and 2nd in the ultra-fine wool class.

I have enjoyed sharing my memories since high school days. The inspiration for my journey this far began at the St George State High School with great mates and teachers who encouraged us to explore our talents and that atmosphere made studying everything easy. My advice is to always trust your 'gut feelings' give whatever it is a go, it's better than not trying it and regretting it later. Chase your dreams! Life is not a rehearsal!

Rod Kelly