

Dr. Martin Jaffe

An icon for many years sitting around the medical tents attending to injured players and telling jokes to lighten the mood. After the games were over, he would sit with his fellow volunteers and on many occasions, selectors, and relate very interesting stories. Martin Jaffe was a true legend of the Touch fraternity.

When asked to write a bio for the amazing volunteers section of Thompson's Touch Almanac, Martin wrote the following.



In 1995 I was approached by Dr Martin Raftery and offered the position that he held at that time, namely Medical Officer for Touch Football NSW. Martin had taken up the position of Doctor to the St. George Rugby League Club and he needed to shed the Touch position. (Martin later went on to be the Wallaby Doctor). Being interested in Sports Medicine I was very happy to take up the post.

At that time the President of NSWTA was Steve Clements who also happened to be a patient of my practice. For the next 25 years I held the post of NSWTA Doctor. I enjoyed the task which involved several weekend and long weekend tournaments each year, consisting of State Cup at Port MacQuarie, the occasional States of Origin tournaments which alternated between Brisbane or the Gold Coast and NSW (played at Port Macquarie or Coffs Harbour or in Sydney).

On a couple of occasions these tournaments were held at the new football stadium in Mudgee. There were also the Country Championships which for many years were held annually in Dubbo and much later this tournament was also staged less frequently in Dubbo and more often in Sydney.

There was also the annual Junior State Cup, played in February at Penrith. I used to dread this particular tournament because, as you know, Penrith in February is unbelievably hot and with all these kids running around, ignoring the sun, and not staying adequately hydrated, there were bound to be problems. In spite of frequent warnings over the public address systems and to team officials for players (and spectators) to stay hydrated and to remain "sun-safe" kids being kids, these warnings were often disregarded.

The physios, sports trainers and I frequently had to deal with heat related issues in addition to the regular game-related sprains, bruises, lacerations and other minor injuries. Then one year we had a kid about 10 years of age brought into the medical tent in an advanced state of heat exhaustion, bordering on heatstroke.

The player was semi-conscious and in spite of smothering her in ice packs we struggled to bring her core temperature down. I had called for an urgent intensive care ambulance which arrived promptly but there was a brief period where I thought we were going to have a cardiac arrest on our hands. I learned the following week that she had spent 3 days in hospital and had fortunately fully recovered on discharge.

Anyway, the upshot was that the annual February Junior State Cups were staged at Fairy Meadow on the south coast near Wollongong from then on where the weather was much cooler. On another occasion, when Ken Crawford was the head of NSWTA he organised a marvellous 10 day tour of NSW players to New Zealand and this was the first of many trips I did to NZ, but as doctor for Touch Australia which I will talk about later.

An interesting anecdote from that NZ tour and I roomed with Sam Ayoub for part of the trip. At the time Sam was the assistant Men's Open coach, and it was during the time of the Australian Super League negotiations. Sam was the manager of several elite NRL players, and I recall that he spent an enormous amount of time on his mobile phone in discussions with his players back in Australia. Whether he was in the coaching box or back at the hotel, Sam's phone seemed to be glued to his ear most of the time."

Another interesting anecdote was the arrangement I had with Dean Russell. For several years at the beginning of each flu season I would arrive at NSWTA headquarters at Tempe with an esky containing flu shots and would proceed to administer shots to the staff.

One staff member who shall remain unnamed had an absolute needle phobia. Many were the times that the staff would run around the office trying to catch this individual who was trying to evade the needle. Eventually we were able to subdue and calm this individual down and I was able to administer the flu injection.

Over the decades I built up great relationships with the players, their families, Touch officials (including the needle-phobic one) and the people with whom I worked in the medical tent, namely the physios and sports trainers.

Many of these became patients of my medical practice and after I retired from General Practice in 2018, I still keep in contact with many of them socially.

In 1997 I was working at a NSW Touch tournament at Southport on Queensland's Gold Coast which happened to coincide with a Masters Touch Tournament also on the Gold Coast, being run by what was then called ATA (Australian Touch Association)

I was approached by Bill and Gwynne Ker who ran the national Touch body. Bill asked me if I would be happy to work for ATA in addition to my NSW commitment as apparently the ATA doctor had resigned. I thought long and hard about it as I also had my solo General Practice in Sydney to take care of. Anyway, I said yes to Bill and so began a very pleasant 23 year working association with ATA (later to change its name in 2005 to Touch Football Australia or TFA).

My first tournament was a World Cup in 1999 in Sydney and I remember this one well because Sydney had been devastated by a hailstorm a week prior to the tournament. A few years later (2002) Bill and Gwynne took an Australian Masters Squad on a tour to South Africa (my old country) and to the United Kingdom, (Wigan and Wales). We played in Johannesburg at an altitude of 1750 metres and many of our older players had problems with the altitude. As they were playing two games a day, often against opponents half their age, several players struggled.

At that time, Touch was very much in its infancy in South Africa, and I seem to recall that our Masters teams won all of their games. it was a good way to introduce Touch footie to this predominantly Rugby Union-obsessed country. One interesting anecdote that I recall from that tour was Gary Gallen one of our Masters players telling me about his teenage son, Paul, who was a promising junior, coming up the ranks in Sydney.

Who could have predicted to what heights Gary's son would soar in later years!

Matty Johns, playing for Cronulla Sharks at the time, and who had played for Wigan in the past, was a patient of my practice. Matty suggested that I contact two individuals in Wigan, Adrian Lam who was playing for Wigan in the English Super League at the time and the legendary ex-Wigan and Great Britain wing and centre, Billy Boston who ran a pub in Wigan.

I did this and the upshot was that Billy Boston attended most of our matches and Adrian Lam organised for our entire touring party to be hosted at a Wigan home game. We even were announced over the public address system at the game! I missed the 2003 World Cup in Japan due to illness but in 2007 I was

the TFA doctor at the World Cup in Stellenbosch near Cape Town. Wayne Grant and Colm McGuire were the senior TFA officials on that occasion.

It was great to be in Cape Town again, my place of birth, and between games I was fortunate to be able to catch up with family and friends, many of whom came to our matches in Stellenbosch. In 2011 I was again the TFA doctor at the World Cup, this time in Edinburgh, Scotland. One of the highlights for me was when we were hosted at a function at the conclusion of the tournament at Edinburgh Castle.

I was unable to attend the World Cup (in Australia) in 2015 because of family commitments. Dr Anne Drinkwater, herself an Australian Touch Football representative, kindly stood in for me (as she had done so often for me in the past, and to whom I owe a great deal of gratitude) Anne, or Drinkie as she is affectionately known, is a Consultant Accident and Emergency Specialist at Lismore Base Hospital.

In between World Cups there were the Trans-Tasman tests between Australia and our perennial rivals, the Kiwis. These occurred most years, alternating between NZ and Australia and were hard fought games but (almost) always played in good spirit.

I remember one of these Test matches which was played in Rotorua. After the game we were invited back to a pub in the town where a hangi was laid on for us (not the original type where the food is buried in a stone-lined firepit and buried, later to be dug up and consumed) but an electric one where one can track the progress of the cooking, and it was delicious. It was a great evening, the alcohol flowed, and the Haka became more boisterous as the evening wore on.

There were many other interesting anecdotes and experiences in the Medical Tent and away from the fields, over the decades. I won't even touch on the pranks and jokes we medical staff played on each other in our down times on tour, like the numerous times two unnamed physios apple-pied my bed or moved my bed from my hotel room on to the poolside terrace in Coffs Harbour. (you know who you are, Rob Hoy and Steve Cunningham!)

In conclusion I just want to say how enjoyable my years with Touch NSW and Australia have been in the course of my medical career. To this day I continue to catch up regularly for lunch with some of the senior stalwarts of this great game