

Peter Rooney

Peter Rooney's name is synonymous with the evolution of Touch (Football), not only throughout Australia but International as well.

A visionary who advanced the expansion of the sport from 1978 to the present day. His leadership skills allowed him to co-op people to fulfil various roles within the administration fields in building a solid foundation for park, regional, state, national and international Touch organisations. All the time overseeing the development in administration, coaching, selecting, player development and especially refereeing.



Extract from TFA web site - Life Membership



Peter became involved in Touch Football in the late 1960s as a referee before helping set up the Cronulla competition in 1972. Peter formed the NSW Touch Referees, and later, the Australian Touch Football Referees Association. During the 1970s Peter also became a Board Member, and later President, of the NSWTA.

In 1983, he became President of the Australian Touch Association (ATA), making him President of both NSW and Australia at the same time for approximately 18 months. He was also the Referees Director of the ATA from 1980 to 1982, and the first Executive Director of the ATA in the early 1980s. Peter was involved in the formation of the first National Championships on the Gold Coast in 1980 and continued his involvement through until the eighth National Championships. He also played a role in the creation of the Federation of International Touch (FIT). He became the Secretary General of FIT and was involved in the first World Cup on the Gold Coast in 1988. Peter was on the FIT Board from 1986 to 1989. He returned to the Board as Chairman of TFA for the 2006/07 period, and Director in 2007/08.

Peter Rooney recalls 30 Years of National Competition

*“It has been said that the success of Touch has been as much due to the ambition of its early players as their energy and enthusiasm. Never was this more evident than during the National Championship **inaugural** annual meeting at Newtown Leagues Club when it was decided that planning start on a National Championship competition to be played no later than 1980.*



The meeting itself was attended by delegates from New South Wales, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Victoria. A second meeting, on 21 September, which included representatives from Tasmania fixed the date and venue as the weekend of 6th and 7th December at the Gold Coast. The competition was to be at State level, therefore, only State teams could play in select divisions. These were: • Men's Open: ACT, NSW, QLD, SA, TAS, VIC. • Women's Open: ACT, NSW, QLD, SA. • Over-35s: ACT, NSW, QLD, VIC. Queensland and New South Wales also fielded junior players for an Under-16 National title, which proved the forerunner of what is now a highly successful division in mixed competition.

Its purpose was not to demonstrate the reaction of youth to the sport but illustrate how mixed competition would look in future competitions. Adding lustre to the scene was the inclusion of children of Rugby League greats, Billy Smith and Johnny Raper. Raper's son, Aaron Raper and Smith's daughter, Karen Smith followed the tradition of their parents by playing in the same team.

The Championships were an interesting and exciting time from start to finish although getting started presented a problem or two. The first was bringing the selected site of the Championships — the Gold Coast Trotting Club— up to match condition. This required almost completely rebuilding the centre of the arena then constructing bridges over both the trotting and dog tracks. As it was also a drought year a fair amount of watering was needed to bring the grounds to a presentable colour and condition. The total cost of more than \$10,000 was only met thanks to a generous donation from Johnson's Wax.

The teams duly arrived on 5 December to accommodation booked at the Golden Gate Hotel and promptly taught organisers a lesson they would never forget — it is perhaps not such a good idea to have competing teams from different states all under the one roof. Nevertheless, things somehow worked out well there was a great feeling among the players and only a few ‘instances’.

The Championships themselves were something else again for despite the sunny claims of the tourist brochures, it absolutely poured with rain. I had been on the Gold Coast for two weeks before the Championships holidaying and getting things ready for the big event. Watching the downpour was shattering. A group of us stayed up until 2am on the Sunday morning debating the options. Fortunately, someone had friends in the right places because when we had had a short sleep the sun was shining and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. And by about lunchtime when it was time to get into the main games and final series the ground was almost dry.

*1982 signalled the **second** National Championships, which were held at Bruce Stadium in Canberra. The Championships were a magnificent spectacle, and they again provided some excellent games including the shock to the New South Wales Men's side when the Australian Capital Territory tied for the Men's Open title.*

The competition also boasted some top-name Rugby League players thereby providing some excellent promotional spin-off for the lower-profile Touch.

*The **third** National Championships were held at the Hobart Showgrounds, Tasmania, in March 1983, and Sponsored by Dunlop.*

*The **fourth** National Championships were held at the Tempe Velodrome, in Sydney in 1984. The championships were held over seven days, and lunchtime crowds at the Sydney Domain got the chance to watch the best Touch in Australia with a day of games played in the heart of the city.*

*During the **fifth** Australian National Championships in Melbourne in 1985, the inaugural Trans Tasman series was played. Australia took out both the Men's and Masters divisions against the Kiwis, 4-1 and 3-0 respectively.*

The Championships was the first in Victoria, being held at the South Melbourne Cricket Club in St Kilda. Melbourne was chosen because of the closeness of accommodation to the grounds and the superb setting of the location at that time of the year.

The divisions were extended to include the Mixed Open division, Men's Over 30's and an interstate challenge introduced between New South Wales and Queensland in the Over 40's.

The major surprise was the Queensland Men's Open team defeating New South Wales to win the Championship title for the first time in history, while the Queensland's Women's team came agonisingly close in their final. The score was level at full time, and as extra time couldn't determine a winner, New South Wales was awarded the title due to their higher placement on the ladder.

*The **sixth** National Championships were held in Glenelg, South Australia in March 1986. The opening ceremony was timed to coincide with the arrival of the Queen and Prince Phillip at Glenelg. But it was not to be. History records that a fierce southerly forced the Royal barge to skip the Glenelg landing and detour via Port Adelaide. This meant the opening march – an impressive affair – was minus many of its intended spectators.*

New South Wales was unstoppable in 1986, beating Queensland in all the seven divisions contested, including the Over 40 Challenge. Queensland's Women's Open team came close to an upset again, going down to New South Wales in a shootout decider, after beating their southern rivals for the first time in history during the round games.

*The Queensland Over 35's side was the only team to beat the defending champions, New South Wales, when the **seventh** National Championships moved to Perth in April 1987. Queensland came agonisingly close in the Men's Open division, with the final result of the final 4-all, with New South Wales declared victors due to their higher placing on the competition table.*

*1988 saw the return of the **eighth** National Championships to Carrara, Gold Coast, and the Queensland teams made the most of the home crowd advantage, with Queensland displacing New South Wales as the Champion state for the first time in history, winning five of the eight divisions.*

Ken Irvine from the Gold Coast Bulletin reported on the history making Women's Open side's grand final win in his article: "A resounding 5-1 victory over archrivals, New South Wales, enabled the Maroons to break the Blues' stranglehold on the trophy since the inception of the national titles in 1980."

The Maroons completed a great double when the Men's Open team downed New South Wales 3-1. The victory gave Queensland only their second National Men's Open title in eight years."

Peter also recalls: *“1988 also saw the naming of the first two inductees into the ATA Hall of Fame, with New South Wales’s Karen Smith and Queensland’s Terry Jacks receiving the honour.”*

Touch Football Australia arranged the 30 Year Celebration Breakfast at the Caloundra RSL on Sunday, 14 March, the day after the 2010 National Touch League Championships. Peter along with past president were on stage to discuss the History of the Championship and the volunteers who made the events great. His insight to the development of the sport and its growth was invaluable.

For his insight and vision for the sport and especially his contribution, the Touch fraternity thanks you.

