

# Steve Cunningham

## Physiotherapist

Stephen Cunningham graduated as a physiotherapist in 1996. That same year, with minimal experience in Touch Football, he was given the opportunity to attend a Country Championship in Dubbo. It was a modest beginning, but it became the start of a long and significant involvement in the sport.



Stephen quickly developed a love for Touch Football — not only for the speed and skill of the game, but for the people who made it what it was. Later in 1996, he attended his first State Cup with his wife, who was also a physiotherapist. By 2000, Touch Football had become part of family life, with Stephen and his wife attending the Junior State Cup with their three-month-old son, Henry, who was placed in the corner on a blanket while they worked.

From those early events, Stephen's involvement expanded across almost every major level of the game. He has worked at countless **State Cups, Junior State Cups, Country Championships, State of Origin series and National Championships**, providing medical care, managing staff and helping raise the standard of support available to players.

Since the early 2000s, Stephen has been a constant presence at national-level tournaments, often responsible for coordinating and managing tournament medical teams. His work has extended well beyond treating injuries. He has helped build systems, support staff, improve preparation, strengthen tournament medical coverage and create a more professional environment for athletes, coaches and officials.

Stephen's contribution has also extended across the international stage. He has been involved in multiple Touch Football World Cups and major international campaigns, including:

- **2003 World Cup — Kumagaya, Japan**
- **2007 World Cup — Stellenbosch, South Africa**
- **2011 World Cup — Edinburgh, Scotland**
- **2015 World Cup — Coffs Harbour, Australia**
- **2019 World Cup — Putrajaya, Malaysia**
- **2024 World Cup — Nottingham, England**

In 2007, Stephen was selected to lead the High Performance medical team at the World Cup in Stellenbosch, South Africa, where Australia retained the World Cup. It was a significant moment in his Touch Football journey and a turning point in the direction of the medical and performance program.

At that tournament, Stephen discussed a new vision for the program with then Australian Touch Football High Performance Manager, Colm Maguire. The idea was to move beyond traditional event coverage and build a more professional, integrated medical and High Performance model for Australian Touch Football. That vision was fully supported and helped place the sport at the forefront of athlete care, medical management and performance support.

Stephen has also contributed to major international senior and age-division tours and events, including the **2002 Wales, South Africa and regional England tour**, which centered around the European Championships in Cardiff, and the **2004 Jersey, Channel Islands tour**, where Australian senior and age-group teams competed internationally. These tours were important not only competitively, but also in helping develop relationships, share knowledge and support the growth of Touch Football internationally.

His involvement has also included Youth World Cup events, including the separate international Youth World Cup pathway, further extending his contribution across the full development spectrum of the sport — from juniors through to elite open teams, senior teams and masters players.

Over time, Stephen has played a key role in developing the medical and performance program within Touch Football. His focus has always been to make the program as professional as possible, with the best available information, resources and, most importantly, the right people involved. His goal has remained clear: to make Touch Football a leading sport in the management, care and support of its players and staff.

In 2014, Stephen was honoured to receive both the **Ron Hanson Medal**, recognising his role as an Australian flagbearer, and the **Phil Smith Medal**, awarded to those who show outstanding passion, enthusiasm, dedication, commitment and Australian spirit during an international event.

For Stephen, the tournaments have never just been fixtures on a calendar. They have been milestones in a lifelong connection to the sport. He has watched young players grow into adults, get married, and now bring their own children into the game. He has seen players become coaches, officials, staff members and future leaders of Touch Football. Many of those people have become lifelong friends.

Stephen is the first to admit he is a terrible Touch player. He cannot sprint, pass, or reliably listen to instructions. But he has always understood where his real value lies: helping keep the people who can do those things on the field.

After decades of service across local, state, national and international tournaments, Stephen's passion remains as strong as ever. He continues to give countless hours to Touch Football with the same commitment that first drew him to the sport in 1996. His philosophy remains simple: they are not just players — they are people, and they deserve the best care possible.

At the conclusion of the 2003 World Cup in Kumagaya, Japan the FIT and Australian officials played Japan's Mens over 40 years team in a "friendly". After a dive touch went wrong the player ended up on Steve Cunningham's table being patched up. Two hours later the players' impact with the ground was blamed on the earthquake that registered 7.1 on the Japan Meteorological Agency magnitude scale

