

Clive Gaunt

... in his own words.

I was born in Malaysia in 1963, where my dad was stationed with the British Army. We (me, dad, mum and my sister) then moved to Germany with the army before heading back to England. I was too young to (now) remember either of those countries and have only limited memories of our few years in England before mum and dad signed the family of five up as £10 poms, and we landed in Brisbane in 1971. My only recollection of football when we lived in England was supporting Manchester United. We lived a long way from Manchester but not close to any major football club so I can only imagine I was attracted by the success the team enjoyed in the 1960s.

After arriving in Brisbane, and a short stay at Wacol Migrant Centre, we found a home in the Western Suburbs and dad took me down to Kenmore Rangers soccer club where I joined the under 9Ds. We were premiers in 1972 and were promoted to C grade in 1973. The trophy I still have indicates we won the grand final that year. The biggest trophy I have was from 1975 when I won the club's best and fairest award. I remember being presented with the trophy and a fancy jacket by Haydn Sargent, who was a celebrity media personality of that era.



Around that time, I moved from the local state school to a private school on the other side of the city and gave up club football to play for the school. But it was a rugby school and it seemed like we were always second- or third-class sportsmen as players of the round-ball, or wog ball as it was sometimes derisively referred to. After finishing grade 12, I played for the school 'old boys' team for a time, then returned to Kenmore, where I played Fourth Division Reserves with some of my former junior teammates.

Last year, a new face at Perry Park Thursday night Walking Football wandered up to me and said I looked familiar... It turns out we (that is Neil Brunner and I) played together in Fourth Division at Kenmore in 1989.



It was lovely to reminisce about those days at Kenmore Rangers, and great to have Neil and his potent left boot back on my team after all these years!

In the early 1990s I married, and we bought an old house at Wilston. At some point after two little munchkins arrived, I moved my football playing from Kenmore to Brisbane City joining the over 35s team. Ultimately, our team moved on to Grange Thistle, where my full field playing days ended in my late 40s with a dumb tackle (by me) and a career ending knee injury.

While my knee recovered, I reluctantly decided that the rest of me was no longer up to the rigours of full field football and my boots, shin pads, etc, found their way to the wheelie bin. Reflecting on my nearly 40 years of

playing I realised it had given me much. For starters, it made me very fit. Intermittent high intensity workouts are now all the rage, but I got that in spades playing football. Running, jogging, walking, twisting, tackling, kicking, passing, throwing (I could launch a ball into the penalty area from a throw-in). Then there was the fellowship. We were a diverse bunch of guys: a doctor, a real estate agent, a hairdresser, a painter, an academic, a stockbroker, a builder, etc. Football took me out of my narrow everyday world to a much wider, more diverse one. But out on the football field it didn't matter what you did for a quid; what mattered was whether you were a team player.

I can't remember how I heard about walking football but I recall being intrigued by what it was and whether it might give me back at least some of what I had lost when I had to stop playing. I went along to a Sunday session being held in mid-2019 at the now defunct Newmarket venue. It looked like fun and I was offered a chance to play for a bit of the session. I thoroughly enjoyed it - even though I was playing in jeans!

I remember it being quite a strange idea and a challenging practical thing to play soccer without running, and I think I probably ran a lot in those early days. Like many other walking footballers I'm a pretty competitive person and there is a constant internal tussle between getting to that ball first and being a law abiding player. While I remain competitive, I always try as best I can to play by the rules and with a generous spirit. Walking football helps me improve and maintain my physical fitness, but also my emotional well-being by connecting regularly with other walking footballers. I have made new friends through WF and I am grateful for this.

Through WF I have also discovered a talent, dare I say, as a forward. Ok, a forward is a bit of a stretch as we don't really play set positions in our weekly social games, but I like the freedom of roaming around the pitch, looking for a space where I might be able to receive the ball, and often this seems to be around the opposition goal. I've

scored a few goals now and this is very exciting, and a bit of a surprise as I'd spent my entire career as a full-back. It's never too late it seems to challenge long held assumptions about your own capabilities and limits. Which brings me to the last game of WF that I played, in October last year, when I took a shot on goal at Perry Park, slipped and fell, breaking two bones in my right hand. The shot sailed well over the cross bar, and I headed off to the after-hours doctor.

The broken hand took around three months to heal, and so I decided to use that period to ramp up my involvement in the refereeing side of the game. I'd had a go at refereeing walking football before my hand injury and enjoyed the challenge. I also attended the very first walking football referees course put on by Football Queensland. It certainly gave me a lot of respect for regular referees and helped me check any criticism I might otherwise have expressed about their decisions as a player! It is a challenging job, and like players, referees also sometimes make mistakes, and this ought to be accepted gracefully by everyone. Indeed, I would welcome some version of the AFL's zero dissent rule in our round-ball game.

One of my prized possessions is a referee's whistle given to me by my mum. It belonged to my English grandfather, who sadly died, much too young, when I was an infant. I recall

being told that he refereed at a high level and perhaps was even a reserve referee for an English FA Cup final - though I can't find any sort of record of that, so it's likely not true. In any case, I understand he was very good and enjoyed the role immensely. I have used his whistle to officiate at some walking football games but have now retired it in favour of the fancy modern electronic version.

In mid-May, my new bride Suzi and I are heading out of Queensland for the first time since pre-Covid days, to Europe and North America. The trip is

a delayed honeymoon and a celebration of our 60th birthdays, which occur when we are in Barcelona (me) and Vancouver (Suzi).

When we return, I am very much looking forward to getting back to kicking a ball with my walking football friends and hopefully scoring a few goals.

I retired from the workforce at the end of 2020 and the last two and a bit years have been a challenging period of adjustment to quite a different life. I have come to understand that some sense of purpose is important for me

to successfully navigate this stage of life. Being of service to others is part of that purpose, through volunteering, which includes assisting asylum seekers and refugees with visa applications and other government forms, as well as refereeing at walking football. Building and maintaining my physical and mental health is also purposeful. I pursue this in a variety of ways, and walking football is certainly part of that.

