

UNE
University of
New England
Alumni



UNEX Alumni Cricket Day 2021





UNEX. We Met at UNE...50 Not Out?

Friendships forged on and off the cricket pitch sustained a group of UNE alumni for over a half-century. Most of the men met in 1968 as strapping young competitors in UNE's hard fought inter-college cricket competition.

One of them was John Coughlan, who lived at Wright College and studied for a Bachelor of Economics. "Our cricket was very tribal – you either played for Wright, Robb or Earle Page – and we were fiercely competitive," he says.

When John completed his degree and moved to Sydney in 1973 to begin his professional career as an accountant, he became reacquainted with many of the players he once competed against. "A lot of us worked in accounting or the public service and shared networks; we would sometimes get together to have drinks," John says. "We were united by the shared experience of having studied at UNE and this created a special bond. It wasn't long before we floated the idea of forming a team."

UNEX (not to be mistaken with eunuchs) members went on to play together every Saturday for three years in the Northern Suburbs competition. "We were fairly fit and good cricketers in our 20s then," says John, who became team captain. "We won the competition twice."



Come 1976, however, families and work commitments meant UNEX was effectively put into mothballs. But the friendships prevailed. Over the next 30-odd years players kept in regular contact and periodically met to reminisce, play tennis or a round of golf. "And when most of us turned 60, ten years ago, UNEX was resurrected at the 2009 Armidale O60s carnival" John says.

The teams' colours included Green for (Robb), Red (Wright) and a Black cap (Page).

Since 2010, with their numbers sometimes swelling sufficient to field two teams, UNEX has travelled to New Zealand (Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch), Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide, Port Macquarie and Armidale to play in over 60s cricket championships twice or three times a year.

"We've performed reasonably well, but it's never been about winning and more the camaraderie and memories," John says.

A trip to Christchurch, New Zealand, in April 2018 for a Golden Oldies carnival was meant to be UNEX's swansong, marking 50 years since the cricketers first took to the crease in Armidale.

"We won a few games, but at the presentation we were awarded the inaugural Bert Sutcliffe Award for the best over 60s team on and off the field," John says proudly. "When I congratulated everyone on our swansong, they said 'Swansong? We're just getting started'."

In 2020 the team was booked for its Tom Vincent Memorial Tour of Harrogate, Yorkshire, in honour of one of its esteemed members, who died in August 2018. Some 25 men committed to the tour, along with 18 partners, many of whom the cricketers also met at UNE. Coronavirus prevented the tour from occurring so this contest was held in Armidale at UNE in March 2021 where they played three 40-over games between "The Originals" and "The Young-Ones" ? and claimed as their last "outing".

"A lot of the guys did very well in their professional lives, one became the Director-General of the Public Service, others partners in or the managing directors of major firms, but we all went to university in Armidale and UNEX means a lot to each of us," says John. "We have become very close and supported one another through some of life's greatest challenges."



Like 15 years ago, when another of their team mates – Bernie Coffey, formerly of Earle Page College – was dying of cancer in the St Vincents Hospice in Sydney. "Four or five of us would take it in turns to visit and sit with him throughout the night in two-hour shifts, to support both Bernie and his wife," John says. "After Bernie's death one of the guys set up a scholarship in his honour, to support a high-achieving regional student, and we all contribute a bit to keep it going. If any of the UNEX guys are in any degree of trouble, the others will jump in to help, without exception."

They're a little less hirsute and a little more rotund than in their UNE glory days, but the

UNEX team bonds remain strong, even if the running between the wickets isn't.

"These days you see plenty of singles and the occasional two, but hardly ever a three," John says with a laugh. "But it's a great group of guys and we have a lot of fun; there's plenty of singing and laughter when we get together. The bonds have strengthened significantly over the years. Nothing is taken too seriously, except we don't like losing."



Pictures

1. Armidale swansong 2021
2. 1975 shot of "Originals"
3. Perth Carnival November 2016.
4. March 2009 taken at VC's dinner in Booloominbah – the first Armidale over 60s carnival. (Branded as the heaviest team).