

Belonging Matters' Podcast

Transcript

Episode 13: No Bias, Brother

Owen Hourigan

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Welcome to Belonging Matters podcast series. Now available on Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, Spotify, and www.belongingmatters.org. You can email Belonging Matters on info@belongingmatters.org. Episode Thirteen, "No Bias, Brother." Owen has been President of the Elwood Bowls Club since 2015 and a member since 2005. He has worked with Belonging Matters as a documentary producer, web designer, and publisher since 2011. In this podcast Owen Hourigan, President of the Elwood Bowls Club, reflects on how Michael's initial introduction to lawn bowling led to a passion and finding a place in the community where he is valued and belongs.

Elwood bowls club is a large part of Michael's life, just as it is a large part of the life of many of our members. Every now and then he has a quiet word in my ear questioning how the club is travelling, what the future may hold, and have we got enough

members. This passion is a result of Michael finding a place in the community where he knows he belongs, has purposeful roles to fulfil, is treated as an equal, and has genuine long term friendships. It is not uncommon for Michael to go to the movies or share a meal at a local cafe or restaurant with his friends from bowls. Michael's happy go lucky nature ensured that a nickname was inevitable, and it was not long before he was affectionately known as 'Brother'. What we did not anticipate upon christening Michael 'Brother' was his own use of the nickname for everyone else. I guess in his eyes everyone at the club is his brother, even the sisters. Michael and I first crossed paths on a pleasant Sunday morning in the early summer of 2008 at the Elwood lawn bowls club, in partnership with the Port Phillip Council and Bowls Victoria, formally the Royal Bowls Association of Victoria, our club embarked on a weekly introduction to lawn balls program for people with disabilities. Each Sunday for a period of around 10 weeks I volunteered to teach lawn balls, and over the 10 week period we had approximately 30 attendees. Michael was encouraged to attend by his father Amos, and did not miss any of the 10 sessions. My first impressions of Michael were of a bubbly, happy go lucky fellow with a very keen eye for his attire, rather dapper. Michael's passion for the game of balls was evident from a very early stage despite the initial learning curve. It was clear he took great pleasure in rolling the bowls down the green, fascinating at the curvature of the bias whilst taking time, as everyone does, to grasp the objective of finishing as close to the jack as possible, and the skills required to do so. As his mentor these hurdles held no fear, for witnessing Michael's enjoyment was the only assurance I required to understand he

was falling in love with the best game in the world. Sure enough, at the completion of the 10 week program, indeed it may have been earlier, Michael became a member of the club. There is no doubt the club has become a vital component in Michael's life. There's not a week goes by in which he does not spend time at the club, enjoying the strong friendships and roles that he has forged over the last decade. During winter, Michael never misses Saturday's social bowls, socialising with other members each weekend, the major attraction of which Michael may well argue is the afternoon tea. During the summer months Michael's bowls commitments include representing the club in Saturday pennant, each team consists of 16 players split into four teams of four, club practice sessions every Thursday after work, including sharing a meal, normally pizza, competing in up to five different club championship tournament's which stretch over the bowls season, participating in one day tournament's either at at our own club or at a range of surrounding clubs, the format of which may be pays triples or falls. The 2015-2016 season was a memorable one for Michael as he managed to reach the final of the minors, a singles tournament for new bowls and bowls who have not won the club championship. It was Michael's first final and his opponent James happened to have also discovered the club through the same introduction to bowls program that Michael attended back in 2008. A healthy portion of the membership turned up to watch the match, and both players had their fair share of butterflies in the lead up. We watched a terrific game of bowls in which James eventually prevailed. A video was filmed of the match, and interesting to note, in the post match

interviews the first comment from both Michael and James was to acknowledge the performance of their opponent.

Moving on to the next season, Michael entered the men's pairs championship with a new member John, who had crossed over from another club. John was a good bowler, although arguably not in the elite level at our club. Turns out John and Michael reached the final of the men's pairs and were drawn to play a formidable combination of club champions. No one gave Michael and John a snowflakes chance in hell. But they all forgot to tell John and Michael. They bowled like they were the club champions and managed to win the pairs club championship. Michael gave a wonderful speech at the presentation night, although we had to drag him off stage as it was clear the bubbles of his excitement would never dissipate prior to the pumpkin soup entree. Like all community sporting clubs, we rely heavily on the members volunteering to fill a variety of roles to keep the club ticking over. Michael of his own accord has embraced a number of different roles which include; member of the bowls committee, currently in his third year, volunteering at private functions, volunteering on the green when the public visit for barefoot bowls, unofficial club spokesperson, Public Relations Officer, and all round welcoming guru, working-bee volunteer, schools program volunteer, and barbecue chef. To this day, Michael remains a valued, respected, and much loved member of the bowls club, and I'm still to determine whether the club has added more value to Michael's life or the reverse.

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