

Sharks Touch Club 1995-2004

1995 began with two of our members, Craig Pierce and Mick Hunter, leaving Aussie shores to contest the World Cup in Hawaii. Back home the season was shaping up to be another strong one, the Club nominating A, B, C, D and E Men, as well as A, B and D Women. All teams performed well in the '95 season, though none more than the A Men and D Ladies who went through to claim Premiership honours.

The social season started with a Progressive Dinner and culminated with the Banquet Night at Rotary House. Raffles and Saturday night drinks continued at the Spotted Cow, the Coorey family being one of the Club's major sponsors for the year. Coach of the Year went to Karen Vorpapel for her efforts with the Sharkettes (D Ladies). The Club's Best and Fairest was Kieran McGee and Gavin Gerrard was recognised for his commitment and dedication to Sharks with the Clubman of the Year.

The Club elected its first female President in 1996, Julie-Ann Hedge. By May, the strength of the Club was evident: C and D Men were equal first on the table, A and B Men second and the A and B Women third.

The Men's B Grade, Men's D Grade, and Women's D Grade (Sharkettes) competed in the Presidents Cup in June. All three teams played gallantly but unfortunately all were defeated by one touch down, the Sharkettes in a 3 on 3 drop-off. The Club finished the year strongly being represented in all men's Semi-Finals and at least one women's, the D Ladies going on to claim Premiership honours and the B Men their first of two consecutive titles. To top it off, Sharks was awarded the "Club of the Year" by the Toowoomba Touch Association.

Off the field, the Club was thriving. 1996 began a new era for Sharks with a move from the 'Cheyenne Hotel' to the more centrally located Spotted Cow. Saturday night raffles continued and the major fundraiser for the year - the Race Day - was a great success.

The Toowoomba Touch Association introduced a Junior Competition in 1996 (more info to follow).

1997 saw another move - Tattersalls Hotel became the Club's major sponsor thanks to the Gollan family. Raffles, a Fancy Dress and a Bowls Night ensured that the off field strength of the Club continued. On field, the Club's ten teams were once again performing well. The A and C Women's teams contested the Presidents Cup, unfortunately both went down fighting. Five of the ten sides qualified for the Semi-Finals - the A Men and Women, B Men, B1 Women and the Over 35 Men. The B Men went on to win the Premiership for the second year in a row, and the A Men once again came out on top on Grand Final Day.

The 1997 Banquet Night, held at Rotary House, was once again a great success. The Clubman of the Year was awarded to Karen Vorpapel for the second year in a row, the Club Best and Fairest went to Craig Pierce and Coach of the Year was Ken Murdoch. Julie-Ann Hedge and Rod Lord were recognised with awards for 10 year service to the Club. Two dedicated Sharks members were presented with Life Memberships at the Banquet Night. Ken Murdoch and Wally Hanley were the worthy recipients for their years of hard work and devotion to the Club.

The tradition of team continued - the men heading off to Straddie once again, and the women to Mooloolaba.

Sharks had grown to be one of the largest Clubs in the competition by 1998. The 120 plus strong Club fielded 11 sides in the competition, with 5 teams going on to make the semi-finals. The B Women and C Men (Torringtons) finished the season in fourth and the Over 35 Men who played their competition on Monday nights finished in third.

The B and A Men went on to make the Grand Final. The B Men were Runners Up while the A Men after struggling at times throughout the season and finishing third on the table went on to win convincingly.

The new playing strip introduced at the beginning of the 1998 season included a change colour for shorts and bike pants from red to black and the introduction of the body suit for women.

Of the nine teams entered in the 1999 competition, eight finished in the top 4, the B Ladies and C Men both going down by one in their Grand Finals. The 35 Men, however, were successful in winning the Premiership – the only Sharks team to do so this year.

Kathy O'Brien, an accomplished Australian Coach, joined the Club in 1999, which would see the Club's A Ladies develop over subsequent years.

With the last blank name plaque being filled last season, Warren Ingham and Dairy Farmers donated a beautiful new perpetual trophy for Clubperson of the Year and Rod Lord of NQX Freight Systems donated a new perpetual Coach of the Year trophy. Recognising the need to reward team managers for their hard work, Ken Murdoch instigated and donated a perpetual Manager of the Year trophy, of which Karen Courtney was the first recipient.

The 'noughties' began well for Sharks, major sponsorship from the Drayton Tavern saw Sharks returning to the old stomping ground. An injection of new blood into the 2000 Executive provided new opportunities for the Club. The Darling Downs School Championships were held at Kearneys Spring this year, Sharks being well represented by coaches Karen Vorpapel (U15 girls) and Ken Jackson (U15 Boys) and several players.

For the first time since 1974, the Club failed to elect a Committee in 2001. Despite not being organised at an executive level, Sharks spirit lived on in its teams and carried the Club through. The B Men won their first of three consecutive Premierships.

Life Member Ken Jackson stepped up in 2002 to provide the stability and direction the Club had lack in the previous year, supported by the Committee, who were all dedicated Sharks members. The Club had a great year on the paddock, the B Men and B Women, and Jacko's D Women all went on to take Premiership honours.

Sharks boys coached by Craig Pierce, entered the TTA Junior competition in 2002.

Sharks was once again a 100+ strong Club in 2003, With two A Mens sides coached by Scott Pierce and Michael Ryan, a B Mens, two C Mens sides and one of each grade (A to D) Ladies. B Men coached by Tom Kirby and Steve Briggs and B Women coached by Karen Vorpapel went on to win their respective Premierships. The TTA introduced 'duty referees' introduced to help with the provision of referees for round games.

The Club sadly lost one of its best ever players and clubmen in 2003 - Craig Pierce. Craig was inducted into the [Touch Football Australia Hall of Fame](#) not long before he passed, his Hall of Fame description reads: "Craig will always be remembered as a character of Australian Touch Football and will be held

close to the hearts of many. Craig was one of Australia's most capped representatives and showed determination and leadership, as well as a fighting spirit that encouraged many people around him."

In a fitting tribute to Craig after his farewell, Karley Banks wrote: "Craig was a one club man in all that he did, and it bought back great memories and touched his family to see many of the original players and supporters from his beloved Drayton Sharks Touch Club, South African Running Ducks, and Toowoomba Touch Teams present (at his funeral)."

The Best and Fairest Trophy was renamed the Craig Pierce Memorial Best and Fairest in 2003, and Sharks members - past and present - continue to support the Golf Day held annually in his memory.

2004 saw Sharks field 5 Men's teams and 3 Ladies teams, though for the first time since Ladies joined the Saturday competition, Sharks did not field an A Grade Ladies side. The season saw a number of Sharks teams in semi finals with three teams advancing to the grand final. The C Ladies were the first of these teams and they won the first ever C grade ladies premiership for Sharks. A great effort by the girls! The A & B Men both faced off against Saints who were minor premiers in both grades. The A Men had done very well reaching the grand final coming from 4th position through the elimination semi final. Late in the game they had a chance to take a winning lead but unfortunately the ball was dropped by the winger with an open line in front of him. To make matters worse, Saints went the length of the field and scored the match winner. Unfortunately the B Men also went down 5-1 but both sides had strong seasons. Scott Pierce was coach of the year and club best and fairest for his efforts with the A Men side. Julie Hedge was awarded the Clubperson and Manager of the Year for her efforts with the premiership winning C Ladies side and on the Committee.

NB Thanks to the many who have helped put this history together! If you have something to contribute please [contact us](#).