

Brian Dalton

Brian Dalton began rowing in 1964 at the South Melbourne Rowing Club where he remained until moving to Melbourne Rowing Club in 1973. He coached at Albert Park Rowing Club and South Melbourne and first coached women at the YWCA Rowing Club in 1978. The YWCA crew won the state titles and he was appointed state coach to women in 1980 when Barbara Griffiths and Gwenda Bennetts of MULRC were part of the crew. From 1980 to 1986 he was MULRC women's lightweight coach. He briefly stopped coaching in 1986 after the Commonwealth Games. From 1990–1993 he coached lightweight women and from 1995–1997 was AIS coach for the women's eight which went to the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. In 1990 he coached the silver-medal-winning women's lightweight four at the Lake Barrington World Championships in Tasmania. He continued to coach the lightweight fours for world championships in Vienna (1992) and Czechoslovakia (1993).

Barbara Griffiths

Barbara Griffiths (later Gillett and then Fenner) first rowed for Melbourne University Ladies, Rowing Club in 1978. She was Captain and Secretary of MULRC from 1979 to 1986 and was awarded a Distinguished Service Award by the Sports Union in 1989. She was a member of the Victorian rowing team from 1978 to 1982 and the national rowing team in 1978 and 1980. In 1982 Barbara was a member of the gold-medal-winning lightweight coxed four at the 1982 Canadian Henley. She went on to coach for the Victorian state team (1987–1989) and the South Australian team (1994–1996). Barbara became the National Director of Coach Education for both rowing (1997–2002) and equestrian (2002–2004).

incredibly narrow margin of two one-hundredths of a second.

Politics now seemed to dog international sporting events. The Commonwealth Games had managed for twenty years to successfully avert boycotts and protests because of apartheid in South Africa, but the XIII Games, the second to be staged in Edinburgh, were to become known as 'the Boycott Games'. Thirty-two Commonwealth nations decided they could not attend because of their opposition to apartheid in sport. Twenty-six nations did attend and sent a total of 1662 athletes and 461 officials.²⁶ This however had a minimal effect on rowing entries as the boycotting nations were from Africa and South America.

Local problems caused by international success

International success had its negative and positive consequences and in June 1986 the Club President, Rob Stewart, expressed his concern that the 'advent of the National Selection Policy based on results in pair-oared racing in 3 selection trials led to the demise of club rowing.'²⁷ Experienced oarsmen were rowing less and less with inexperienced oarsmen. Young rowers aimed at state youth eight selection and hoped for a place in Australian under 23 crews: 'If a schoolboy oarsman doesn't make the State Youth Eight then he tends to drift away from the sport. The base in the sport is simply not being built.'²⁸ The intervarsity and college competitions were divorced from the rest of the rowing season as focus built on international representation. Stewart was also concerned that the Club administration was too dependent on too few.²⁹

There is no doubt that from the time the new national and international selection process was in place, the once vibrant tradition of rowing at club regattas rapidly diminished in importance and popularity. MUBC also changed, with the focus increasingly on elite rowing. Although college and intervarsity rowing continued, and veteran's rowing was slowly becoming more popular, club rowing at local regattas at a non-elite level was fading from the scene. This meant that it was becoming more and more difficult to encourage a broad base of interest and participation in the Club, and the sport generally.

As Minnie Cade explains:

From when I started at the club at the end of 1985, IV rowing was already regarded as just a stepping stone to national and international success and not something to strive for in itself. Among the new members who began in 1986 that I knew who attended university, blues were not regarded with high esteem. There were still those who rowed college, IV and club but the majority were aiming for national selection. Barbara Gillett and Brian Dalton were instrumental at this time, from the end of 1985–1989, in further cementing the success of lightweight women at the club. The Victorian and Australian crews in these years always had a number of MULRC members as a result. The training program was now far more structured and onerous. The athletes that wanted to "make it" now had to invest far more time than in the past completing up to 13 sessions a week. Rowing at the club had a more professional focus and those going for state and national selection began to commandeer the use of the fleet and resources at the expense of club rowing.³⁰



TOP: 1986 World Champion Lightweight Single Scull, Peter Antonie

BOTTOM: 1986 MUBC Australian Champion Lightweight Double Scull: John McKenzie (bow) and Peter Antonie (stroke) Courtesy Hebfotos