The Markham Cup

It is the nature of "man" to try to win each and every sporting contest. And that extends into contests involving individuals or teams; men, women, boys, girls or, indeed, any combination of these. In fact, the "will to win" has often proven to be the deciding factor in closely contested contests.

But, as we know, it has been drilled into sporting contestants from an early age that winning isn't everything – it is how you play the game that counts. One must learn to be humble in victory and gracious in defeat and respect the rules of the game.

Whilst we have long moved on since the days of the Panhellenic Games where winners received only a garland for their victory; trophies, honours, gifts and personal rewards are these days generally associated with sporting victories.

But the sport of hockey and the world of trophies haven't always been the most welcoming of bedfellows.

When hockey first arrived here in Sydney and the New South Wales Hockey Association was formed, the playing group in 1907 consisted of former and current students from Sydney University & Sydney Grammar and newbies. But the largest group were British ex-pats who had played hockey at private schools & universities back home. These were professional men who had come to Australia to make their mark. Their infusion with Sydney's professional ranks gave hockey an instant status in the community.

Both the men's and women's game in England were unashamedly elitist, but was, in the main, played in the "Corinthian Spirit" of the day which promoted sportsmanship and fair play, but moreover, championed the ideals of amateurism. The NSWHA instantly affiliated with the English Hockey Association adopting the English Rule Book and welcoming its ethos.

And that meant no trophies.

The annual win/loss record determined which of the competing clubs would have been awarded the imaginary garland in those early years but to remove any doubt as to which was the premier club, a point score was introduced in 1912.

The "no trophy" mantra continued until the Australian Hockey Association was formed in 1925. Enquiries on affiliation to the EHA by the new body revealed that trophies were now allowed. It was treated as a "game changer" in Australia with one of the first trophies to be introduced being the Noall Shield in 1926 – awarded each year to the winner of the Australian Men's Hockey Championships.

The NSW Association had at that time, two genuine "movers & shakers" amongst its executive: Will Foxall and Rupert Markham. In 1927 Foxall moved to introduce a twice-yearly match between Sydney and Goulburn to be played for the Foxall Cup, which he donated. Whilst Markham, having championed the cause of District Hockey, donated a silver cup to be awarded annually to the winner of Sydney's first grade competition. But unlike some others he didn't name it after himself. It was donated on behalf of the relatives of George Maxwell Markham who was killed in WW1.

George Maxwell Markham was born in 1889, one of seven (7) children born to Martin & Julia Markham (Thomas, George, Clarence, Margaret, May, Nellie and Ethel) and grew up in the Lochinvar/West Maitland region. A single man, he enlisted for service with the A.I.F. in August 1915 – the mid-point of the Gallipoli campaign. He was acutely aware of what lay in front of him having served in a local militia since compulsory military training was introduced in 1910.

But he did what very few of today's youth would contemplate – he volunteered to serve as a stretcher-bearer.

George Markham was part of 12th Reinforcements, B Company, 13th Battalion that left Sydney on the "Suevic' in December 1915. Part of the 4th Brigade, the 13th saw service at Gallipoli before sailing for France and the trenches of the Western Front in June 1916. Private Markham suffered shell shock in August 1916 and was hospitalised. But worse was to follow.

In the Battle of Messines, on 10 June 1917 the Battalion was getting into the trenches in preparation for action. Markham was following the Battalion in his role as a stretcher-bearer when a shell burst near him wounding him in the right leg. His leg was amputated that day in a field hospital and some days later he was repatriated to the Auxiliary Military Hospital, Southall, London. But his condition did not improve, and he was in great pain. It was decided that a re-amputation of the stump was necessary, and a Colonel Armowe performed the operation on 9 August. However, Markham gradually became weaker and passed away the following day, quite conscious to the last.

Private George Maxwell Markham was buried with full military honours. A firing party and buglers from the A.I.F. Headquarters Staff attended. The coffin was draped with the Australian flag and surmounted with a floral tribute. The "Last Post" sounded at the graveside.

In the mould of Private John Simpson Kirkpatrick and his donkey, George Maxwell Markham was a true hero.

Rupert Victor Roy Markham was born, bred and lived his whole life with his parents at Newtown, which, if taken in isolation, would imply a life simply led with little if any endeavour. The truth, however, is the total opposite.

Ruper Markham was one of the most dynamic individuals ever to have contributed to the game of hockey. He was a visionary in the true sense of the word.

Originally a soccer player in his youth, Rupert was educated at the Sydney Technical High School, where he was awarded to Turner Prize in 1919, before getting totally immersed in Sydney University's Hockey Club and Dramatic Society whilst studying Civil Engineering in the early 1920's. By the time he gained his B.E.(Civil) in 1924 he had become highly respected for his charity work, organising dances and other fund-raising activities for the poor, in particular the St Vincent de Paul Society. His organising capabilities were renowned.

But his boundless energy did not stop there. Professionally, he represented English company, Celotex that manufactured insulating boards from sugar cane fibre. The product was superior to wood & masonry and was used for ceilings in buildings such as the Capitol Theatre, Haymarket, Town Hall Theatre, Wollongong and the Senate house, Canberra.

And, as a "sideline", he became the Australian representative of the International Metric Association and an honorary member of the Metric Association of New York. Rupert not only became a prolific writer on the subject to the news media everywhere but appeared regularly in broadcast talks on radio stations 2BL and 2KY's "Listen-In-Tonight". Well ahead of his time, he urged Australia to change from the imperial system to the decimal system and suggested that, as a first step, the nation should change the measurement of our swimming pools and athletic tracks to meet the Olympic standard.

On leaving University he formed the Newtown Hockey Club (only undergraduates were allowed to play for Sydney University HC back in the day) and joined the executive of the NSW Hockey Association as Hon. Assistant Secretary. He was one of the main proponents for the introduction of district hockey to Sydney in 1928.

Rupert, who was regarded as a fast & clever inside forward, was selected to play for New South Wales in 1929, when the All-Australian carnival was being played in Perth for the first time. He also took on the Team Manager's responsibilities. The Carnival's timing drew a lot of criticism as it coincided with the Australian Men's Hockey Team's tour of New Zealand for which many from NSW and Queensland had been selected. Plus, it was a long and arduous trip quite beyond the financial resources of some, so a few from previous year's State Teams were simply unavailable.

Understandably, the Carnival did not go well for NSW, but it was somewhat worse for Rupert. He was admitted to hospital with influenza and could not return to Sydney with the team. But for Rupert Markham, even worse

was to follow. In August the following year he was admitted to Lewisham Hospital suffering from 'blood poisoning effects" and died there in September 1930. He was not quite 30 years of age.

His death was a tragic loss to many.

As it nears its centenary, the Cup that we have today should be both remembered and revered. There is no record of George Markham ever having played a single game of hockey, nor is there any record of him having fired "a shot in anger" during WW1, but his presence there gave wounded Australians hope – the hope of life. Doing his work often at dusk in the smoke, gloom, and muck of war, he and his fellows were easy targets.

George Markham paid the ultimate price in what can only be described as quintessential Aussie mateship.

One year after The Markham Cup was donated, well known hockey identity and architect, Ormonde "Ormy" Wood, donated a similar silver cup to be awarded to the winner, each year, of the Second-Grade competition. It was named The Pilgrim Cup in memory of the members of the Pilgrim Hockey Club who lost their life for King and Country in WW1. The number lost was so great that the club could not reform after the war.

Being someone who, in my playing days, has had a celebratory sip of champagne from both these Cups without knowing their background, I can only but now express my humbleness.

We must never forget.

Colin Allerdice