



History of the Brighton Centre

Little Athletics started in Geelong in 1964 and in 1969 Brighton was the 63rd centre to join to the Victorian Little Athletics Association (VLAA**). At competitions for State and Regional Championships, the children wear the Brighton colours of royal blue and orange with the number 63.

We can thank Mr Val Swyer who, as the official representative from Brighton JayCee's and City of Brighton, formed part of a committee that included the first President, Fergus Niall. The Chairman, Dennis Smith, recommended our formation.

We were called Brighton/St Kilda and competed in an area in front of the current pavilion at Elsternwick Park. Most of the events of today existed, however, there was a time when the javelin was dropped from the program and hurdles were only introduced in the '70s.

The Centre nearly folded after 2 years, but with local community help, council support and a shift to Dendy Park, it survived. The clubs were originally known by their geographical area and consisted of Brighton, East Brighton and Gardenvale.

The early morning set up during these first few years was particularly tiring with lane markings and some mowing being done before the Saturday morning start. There were no permanent marks as there are today. In the 1973/74 season the clubs were renamed Jets, Thunderbirds and Rockets. The Comets were added in 1975 by splitting the Jets into the schools we had until the 2013/14 season when the clubs were abandoned. See the attached for more information relating to the clubs at Brighton.

Brian Dixon, who was a Minister in the State Government, was involved in Little Athletics with his children. He was a close friend of local identity and Barrister Frank Dunphy and gave a great deal of assistance by way of publicity. The Brighton Council

continued assistance, but the majority of the finance was raised by way of raffles and regular functions at Frank and Annette Dunphy's home which was a large property in Drake Street, capable of catering for 500 people.

The Frank Dunphy Trophies were instituted at Brighton by Frank who had an obsession with the trier and he spent hours every week setting up a system of handicap races, thus allowing for a more even competition for children of varying capabilities.

These trophies were (and still are) seen as encouragement awards for children who were not necessarily champions but who regularly attended, performed to their best capabilities and improved throughout the season. The trophies were renamed as memorial trophies in honour of Frank when he died in January 1979.

Parental assistance was a problem, with a minority of regular helpers. Quotes from Alison Ball, Secretary from 1972 to 1974 and President from 1975 to 1977 typify many of the committees thrusts for those years.

“... but Little Athletics can never continue to operate successfully without the interest, co-operation and help of the majority of parents.”

It is clear that without a tremendous amount of effort by Alison and Maureen O'Callaghan history might have turned out a bit different, Maureen started her involvement as a parent in 1971 and apart from President has pretty well done everything else, Secretary, Registrar, Team Manager and Results Recorder. She stepped off the Centre Committee in 1982 however she continued her involvement as our one of our State Delegates and helped out organising “State” competition until recently.



Ray Parry is another who deserves mention here as Arena manager in 1977, Jets Club President 77/78 and Centre President in 79/80. Any parent who has had the misfortune of standing around in a group at a finish line trying to hand time and pick the placings of a horde of children who always seem to cross the line at the one time, will want recognise Ray for the work he has done in building the finishing gates you can now see at Brighton. Some 20 other centres now rejoice in the fact they have Ray's expertise to work with and all state championships are now timed using the Ray Parry system.

The Brighton Little Athletic Centre has played and continues to play an important role in the athletic and social development of children within the Brighton area. Parents who give of their time generously to the Centre and thus to the children who participate share the rich rewards which accompany this family involvement. There are very few other sports that seek to have the family as a central theme. Our motto of Family, Fun, Fitness and Friendship says it all.

We thank Gary Wills who researched and updated this history as part of our 25th Anniversary, 1994.

Fifteen years have passed since Gary Wills researched and wrote part one of our history and in that time there have been many additional outstanding individual contributions to the Brighton Little Athletics Centre leading us to the fortunate position we enjoy today. This includes Gary who continued his involvement and in 1997 coached our U14 Girls Medley Relay team to a Gold Medal at the State Relay Championships.

In season 1996/97, the Ray Parry Award was instituted to commemorate Ray Parry's efforts and it is still awarded each year to the club with the most personal bests for the season. The award has been dominated by Thunderbirds who won for the 10th time in season 2008/09 with Comets, Jets and Rockets so far having won the award once each. Also following on from part one of our history, Maureen

O'Callaghan's tremendous contribution resulted in her being honoured by the association as a VLAA Life Governor.

The list of those who have been awarded life membership of our centre continues to grow and they are appreciated for the generous gift of their time often continuing many years after their children have stopped competing at Brighton.

Peter Wells, who began his involvement with our centre in the mid 80's, had several administrative roles at Brighton and was Finance Director and Vice President of VLAA. Peter was recognised by the association for his contribution receiving a VLAA Distinguished Service Award a few years ago. But in addition to his dedication to the administrative needs of Little Athletics, possibly the achievement that made Peter most proud was his role in coaching our throwers which has resulted in great success for Brighton's athletes both at State and National level.

Another notable contributor, Ian Scott, has been associated with Brighton since the early 90's and is still seen every Saturday morning (and at mid-week coaching sessions) sharing his valuable knowledge with athletes and parents. Ian also has had many roles at both centre and region level and his commitment to developing the skills of the children is always evident.

In recent years, improvements have been made to the Dendy Park pavilion and infrastructure including the throwing rings with the resurfacing of the High Jump completed and the Long Jump area scheduled to take place very soon. We have also upgraded some of our other equipment aiming to improve safety via new high jump mats and hurdles and also to reduce the physical effort required to run an athletics program through trolleys and storage alterations. These improvements wouldn't happen without the dedication of the committee members who take on projects voluntarily and are required to spend time negotiating with the council, suppliers and contractors, making sure that our investments



are made wisely. Other changes in the last ten years include our new Brighton 63 uniform which is bright, smart and is the envy of the other centres (unofficially voted 'best' in Victoria) and the arrival of our centre in cyberspace with the launch in 2004 of the popular and informative website - www.brightonlittleleaths.com

Even with all of this activity in the background, the atmosphere at Dendy Park during competition programs continues to make it a great place to be around! Our focus on family, fun, fitness and friendship will help ensure that athletics can be enjoyed by all children for the next forty years...

Researched and written by Judy Pfanner in 2009 for our 40th Anniversary.

** Victorian Little Athletics Association (VLAA) was renamed in 2010 to Little Athletics Victoria (LAVic)