

Clem Jones Oral History Project

Interviewee: Daphne Pirie

Interviewer: Lindsay Marshall

Recording date: 13.12.2018

Recording venue: Daphne Pirie's house at Royal Pines, Gold Coast

Duration: 36 mins

LM: This is an interview being conducted on 13th of December 2018 as part of the Clem Jones oral history project. The interviewer is myself Lindsay Marshall and I'm talking to Daphne Pirie and we're doing the interview at Daphne's house at Royal Pines on the Gold Coast. Daphne thanks very much for taking part in this.

DP: It's a pleasure and it's an honour to speak of the promotion that Clem always... I don't like that, can we start again?

LM: Yeah. Just start again.

DP: Okay. It's a privilege and it's an honour to speak of Clem and all his promotion of women's sport over nearly seven decades.

LM: Now your involvement in women's sport is extensive and very deep in both the performance side and the administrative side but going right back to your childhood can you tell us just a little bit about where you grew up and where you went to school and how you actually became involved in sport at a young age.

DP: Well we were brought up in Paddington, Brisbane, eight of us, six boys and two girls and it was during the depression and then the Second World War. During the Second World War all sport was stopped because everything had to go for the war effort so I only was introduced to sport apart from racing my brothers and having a box in the backyard or something. I was introduced to sport at the Brisbane Girls Grammar School in 1946 and that was the beginning. So after the war women's

sporting bodies were reformed and once the Athletic Association of Queensland was reformed I started winning the Queensland sprint titles and high jumps so I was an allrounder but I held about 40 open titles in that period and it's more in that period that I indirectly came across Clem because he was well respected in the sporting community and my father also was very well-respected and one occasion my father took me to Clem's house at Camp Hill for just a Saturday night party. Nothing glamorous but just the top sporting people across all sports just getting together and that's what Clem seemed to do for sport right from the beginning.

LM: You mentioned your father there, so he went off to the First World War and lost a leg...

DP: Yes. He was a telegraph messenger, horseback, so obviously he was one of the first to enlist from Toowoomba in the Second Light Horse. So eventually, he really enlisted in 1915 but in 1917 he lost his leg fighting in the battle of Bullecourt so there was no more sprinting for him or football. So he threw himself into sports administration and among other things he was president of Queensland Rugby League but he was president of Easts Rugby league and that is where his contact with Clem began even though Clem was "soccer", Dad was "rugby league" but once again all sports we all got together all the time. Dad also was on the Trust of the Brisbane Cricket Ground so obviously there was connection there with Clem.

LM: And you father Arthur Welch or he was known as Taffy...

DP: Taffy yes.

LM: ... Taffy and your mother Mary, what sort of encouragement as a younger child like I understood you went to Milton State School before you went to Brisbane Grammar, at that young very early age, what sort of encouragement did they give you about sport?

DP: Well every Sunday after Sunday school we'd go out to Brookfield in our 28 Essex, all eight of us and mum and dad. But dad would always have us competing against each other like potato races. We'd get the coolies or the rocks out of the brook and then it was always competition but it had to be fair competition and we weren't allowed to cry if we were beaten,

we had to smile and as I went on in my career if I, and I was winning a lot, I think dad taught me more to be modest about winning and being very happy about losing which was hard.

LM: And just explain the potato race, how does that work?

DP: Oh you put down rocks about every metre, you put about six down and then you'd have a starting line about 10 metres back and on "go", on dad's "go" we'd run and get the first rock and then take it back to the starting line then to next one back to the starting line. So really sometimes you can see our football players doing something similar and we were doing that back in the 40s.

LM: Now you mentioned going to Brisbane Girls Grammar School. Was there encouragement about participation in sport at the grammar school?

DP: Yes I had a wonderful Phys Ed. My housemistress she wasn't very supportive. She always told me not to worry about sport because I'd get all the exercise I could by pushing a broom and that was bad for my body, which I ignored. But my — Meg Rourke, she was a pre-war athletic champion and she was just my mentor and whatever she told me to do, if she told me to jump I'd jump higher.

LM: So she was the one that encouraged you rather the other teacher with the bizarre belief about sweeping?

DP: Oh goodness me, yes. I think my grades showed it too. I'd win the gym prize and I wouldn't say much about the rest.

LM: Now I read that you were actually, is this true you were sort of almost banned or discouraged from representing the school because it was detrimental to your schoolwork, is that correct?

DP: Yes, yes and it was a very unfair situation and Miss Lilley was the headmistress. I think really she had a very, she had a lass who was a prefect who would have won GPS and she did, but with me running I would have won. So she took me up and she left it to Mrs Rourke who told me I had to spend more time studying. Well it really broke my heart and I mean every lesson I went to I had tears rolling down my eyes. It hurt me a lot but I think it helped me for later on in life to know these

things could happen. Then straight after that GPS, the Queensland men, Queensland Athletic Association they started the, reformed the, they introduced two sprint championships for women, that's before the Queensland Women's Amateur Athletic Association started and at this stage Estelle Christie and I raced and I beat her by about six yards and the whole Grammar School turned up for that one. But it's something I don't talk about much but it's always a sad part of my life but I'm still here so it wasn't the end of everything.

LM: You mentioned being an allrounder and you did excel at a number of sporting activities. At that time, were you able to like today someone who is as good as you could look forward to a professional career in one of their sports that they excelled at, was that opportunity available to you in those days?

DP: Not really no because even in athletics, even my really good friend Marjorie Jackson who I always ran against her and we're still longstanding friends, we only had the 100, the 200 and the hurdles in the track events, the high jump and long jump. The 800 didn't come in till 1960 at the Olympics and the 400 in 1964. I currently in those years, I was running 400s and 800s and coming runner-up in Australia because I'd run both races. I guess it was because I was a Queenslander and we had small teams so you had to do a lot but, and the same thing with the hockey. I loved hockey and I was a sprinter so it was easy to play hockey and we were chosen in '55. I was running during the summer and playing hockey during the winter. That kept us fit. So I was chosen in '55 to train for the Olympics in the hockey but then in '56 they only put our Australian men in. So it was timing. But now it's a level playing field everywhere so that's fine. I've got no regrets there it's just timing.

LM: So at school, what did you want to do after you left school? Did you have any firm ideas?

DP: Not really. I really wanted to be an interior decorator I thought but you couldn't do that. You had to go to Melbourne just to a college to learn. There was nothing at uni or anything. So I went, I got a job with, you could just walk in a place and get a job in those days. Dad thought I was going to be with the Postal Institute because when he came back from the war obviously being a telegraph messenger even though he was on horseback, there was no way he could do it with one leg on a bicycle so

he went into telephone accounts in Queen Street and he wanted me to go, well he hadn't told me that he'd organised I'd go into the Postal Institute where I might have had a better chance with a sporting career. But he said instead I had a strong will and he let me do it my way. So I worked with this lady until she closed the shop and then I worked with Clem Fox, an accountant because I had done the secretarial course and then I was offered a job with Charlie Whatmore opened up his famous sports store in Adelaide Street just opposite King George Square and working with Colin McCool and Errol La Franz — all those wonderful names and that was a lot of fun. But then I was introduced, offered by the Queensland Government a position as a National Fitness Field Officer which came under the Department of Education. There was no Department of Sport even in those days. So really sport was just never thought of much. Still it's still not thought of as much as it should be. So then I became a field officer out in South West Queensland teaching swimming in Mitchell, Inglewood, Goondiwindi, Charleville, Cunnamulla and then I was stationed in Gympie doing Gympie, Maryborough and so it was a wonderful job. I would teach and in the swim campaigns I'd be given five days in each town and I had to get a 75% success rate. But I seemed to do that and then after the swimming classes I'd do some athletic coaching or tennis because I played all those sports. I was an allrounder and the idea was from the government that they try somebody who had runs on the boards and had a name within Queensland sport rather than fully qualified Phys Ed's. So I worked side by side with Phys Eds but once again many long friendships with them.

LM: So at what stage did you decide that you were sort of going to move into sports administration rather than sort of active participation?

DP: Well I married Mick in '58 and then obviously I was couldn't keep working because our government policy, that was the Department of Education, so I couldn't work. But then we came to coast and I was doing, I was using my secretarial skills doing books, etc. I had a son like you do pretty quickly and then we started hockey on the coast. So then I started women's hockey and I was coaching different, in an amateur way because I was a proud of my amateur status and you were not allowed to be paid. Even if I taught somebody swimming I could not be paid and that happened, well I think that happened well into about the 70s that amateur status thing. The moment the Olympic Games dropped the word "amateur", all those rules went out. We couldn't even play for a

trophy in hockey and you weren't allowed to be given medals. When I was running our Queensland medals were silver if you won, bronze if you came second, this is at Australian Athletic Championships and you got a certificate if you came third because gold medals were solely for the Olympics.

LM: Oh okay.

DP: So that's the times were living through and that's how times have changed now and then we went into, I went into administration then forming the Gold Coast and then I went onto Queensland, etc, then on the Australian board and still then you were never allowed to be paid any board fees. So everything I've done in my whole life's been voluntary with one exception, the Queensland Academy of Sport. I was on that board and you got a board sitting fee, a very small one. But then I'd drive to Brisbane and come back so all the petrol I used would have taken up that board fee. But my era, Clem's era, we didn't expect, we had a passion to help sport and if you can't keep doing it although we did go into world masters track and field. But that's kept me closely associated with sport and I got many, many friendships through sport.

LM: And when you were moving into administration, given that you'd lived through and been personally affected by that sort of, even if it was unconscious in those days, a discrimination against women, did you consciously think you could make a difference to women's sports?

DP: Well all I did Lindsay was always, I think it was Guy Foley — who's the ABC — he'd had me when I was Queensland champion in those periods from '49 to '55. Every year I'd win about six titles. He'd get me in there and say "Is women's sport good for you?" and I'd say "Oh yeah it's great". I've always been banging the drum that let's do it women, it's good for you and it's fun and it makes you a better person I think because once you're married you have to still manage your house and you've got your pride and your kids. I've got two sons now. It was good. Makes you good managers and I think women always have been. But I'm even now today, I'm so proud of the girls that I have coached as champions too like Olympic gold medallist Debbie Bowman and people like that. They're back in the sport playing in the masters and I love seeing that because they look good too and like with me now at my age

87 like I still want to get up and keep going and I don't want to go to seed but I guess that might be difficult.

LM: You mentioned your father early on taking you to Clem Jones's house for parties. When did you — and I understand your father was on the Brisbane Cricket Ground Trust as was Clem Jones so there was obviously a network of people that Clem Jones and your father were involved with. When did you sort of become conscious of that?

DP: Well I really wasn't ever because when you're brought up in a big family like those days like dad was a really strict father and he wouldn't talk about Clem Jones or anything like that to us, perhaps to mum. But I just assumed since I've met you and I've been thinking about it there had to be a connection and there had to be a connection for me going to the party and it's Brisbane, you'd need a car for that because we lived at Paddington and you didn't go out with boys those days when you're training that hard. So I do remember that night because I've always told Clem that walking up the steps like it was just madness, it was like I going to The Ritz. That's how it felt to me and there he was in his long white pants and his shirt and he was a nice guy like he always thought young and he always acted young. He was good influence on me.

LM: And this would have been before he was Lord Mayor?

DP: Oh yes. See I'm talking very early 50s. But he was still out and about everywhere like everybody knew him like he was an icon. And when he became Lord Mayor in '61 well I was then living at the coast and my husband had worked on a couple of the flats that he bought down there because Mick being a builder and it was just, I don't know, it was just events that flowed on and then of course dad being East Rugby League, Coorparoo well all those guys live up that one way they're pretty passionate about their, where they live. But I've always thought as well, so Clem would have known me as an athlete. Then possibly he could see as I went on that I was getting on boards because, and then suddenly I'm invited to become a vice-patron of the UQ Sport. Well I didn't ever attend university and what an honour that I was on that board with him. I was on another board the World Masters Games in Brisbane with Clem. Also the Queensland Museum and I know Clem definitely invited me that time. But the others these invitations had just come and I had not lobbied for any of them.

LM: Do you suspect it was him that had put your name forward for those other ones?

DP: Oh I'm sure. I'm sure of it. And his friendship too whenever I did see him or Sylvia. And even when they after, well I don't know, I imagine he may still have been Lord Mayor, they had the unit at Main Beach and I know Sylvia definitely played bridge and a couple of my friends now have told me they used to pick Sylvia up.

LM: So you then became, you sort of worked a little bit more with Clem I guess directly in those positions?

DP: In those positions yes.

LM: So what was he like to work with?

DP: Oh he was good. He was really good and always supportive. But he was a really good mate of Ian Brusasco too and I think Ian was chair of the World Masters and I'd been connected with World Masters before and I know how everybody's proud even though they're masters they're considering that they're representing their country and I suggested we have flags and they said no way we can't have flags and I felt like saying you don't know anything about masters. But that was about the only time I took a bit of stand and I tell you what my stand went from underneath me.

LM: So that was the sort of the individual versus the national participation was it? Was that the debate?

DP: Yeah and soccer has got like it's such a world sport and there's, they do have problems with too many flags flying brings on a few little different opinions.

LM: And how helpful was Clem when you needed something done or you had an idea to prosecute?

DP: Oh no, he was great and I'm now patron of the McLeod Country Seniors Club and I'm patron and we're very proud of that club, group of females could start a club.

LM: That's the one at Jindalee out in the Centenary suburbs?

DP: Yes and definitely I have checked and definitely they'd been in contact, the people, and with Clem when he was, they had a meeting — it's in the minutes with Clem letting them know what they wanted to develop and then Clem liked the idea and passed it onto the planning committee. So Clem had a lot to do without lots of publicity with the formation of the McLeod Country Club — run by women and a wonderful club today.

LM: And what about when you were establishing Womensport Queensland?

DP: Oh look he was wonderful and he instigated the Rising Stars Award. With the Womensport Queensland people like Tracy Caulkins. She's famous, Tracy Caulkins from the United States, she married Mark Stockwell. Tracy had come to Australia to live after she'd married Mark and then Wilma Shakespear — she'd come up to be the director of the Queensland Academy of Sport and I sat on that board. Clem didn't have a connection with the Queensland Academy of Sport but Ian Brusasco did. Anyhow we've all represented our countries, Wilma with netball, and we decided that we wanted to promote our Queensland sports women so we decide to run a nice classy dinner where we'd all have to buy a new frock and we went to Clem and he was very supportive and he suggested the Rising Stars Award. So he helped so many young Queensland athletes. He was marvellous.

LM: And this was after he was Lord Mayor obviously?

DP: Yes. This was in the 80s. Late 80s.

LM: And I guess you were battling, in establishing those sorts of public events which help project the image of the sport, were you battling against the more high-profile men's events in that awards sort of...?

DP: Yes. Well that was another thing that used to, it hadn't touched Tracy because she'd only, she hadn't been in Australia that long. But Wilma and I if we did get an invite — and at that stage I was on the board of

Women's Hockey Australia and things like that — we would go the dinner. You wouldn't take a guest and the men were all in their black ties all at the front tables then we'd be at the back tables. And we got sick of really being at the back table, we wanted to get down the front. And so that was another move. And Daphne Fancutt, very friendly with Clem because of their passion for tennis where the whole Fancutt family are Wimbledon finalists last eight players so, and like Clem's tennis... and then another thing we had in common, the more I think of Clem... At what age did he die?

LM: Well this year 2018 he would have been 100.

DP: Righto.

LM: So he died late...

DP: So he'd be....

LM: ... December 2007.

DP: Yeah. So I think I used him unconsciously as a role model, and like we seem to have the same traits by just being passionate about what we were doing and being able to see the whole picture across all the sports. That's another thing about Clem he did like, and he could understand what youth needed when he had his Carina centre built.

LM: Yes, I was just going to say that he had a philosophy about helping young kids keep on the straight and narrow so to speak by getting them into sport and you had that same view?

DP: Yes with Ned Hanlon when he was Premier, that's when we were living at Paddington when we were the Rosalie Youth Club. It was the, I think we called it the Ithaca Youth Club because it was Town of Ithaca. So he wanted to get kids off the street because we didn't have sport at school. So he started the Ithaca Youth Club and that was wonderful and I did compete in athletics for the Ithaca Youth Club against other clubs that were around the place like the Boys' Brigade and the Girls' Brigade. But that was getting us off the street, going to the club, having physical exercise and then going out and competing once a year. I think it was Youth Week they called it and then the idea spread and Ned, well it was

Ned Hanlon still around the place. They built the first Police Youth Club up at Lang Park and they closed the Ithaca Youth Club. I guess they needed numbers too and we were all told we had to go down to Paddington and go to the Ithaca Youth Club. And then I got a bit older and I was in their netball team. But once again that's exactly, I guess that's what Clem was doing because society's changed with us. There was nothing much to do apart from going to the pictures or something. Well now it's a bigger population and a lot more problems and so he's brought that out but oh no I'm certainly a product of that as well.

LM: And just back to the parties at Clem's place, he had a Christmas party each year, you went along to those?

DP: Oh yes. Very proud to be able to get a, have an invite to that. There'd be a big Fourx marquee covering the entire tennis court. Beautiful prawns and ham, you name it. The food was wonderful and everybody who was everybody was there and like you know all the Ministers and the Ministers for Sport. It was a good opportunity to network for me, a very good opportunity because you'd be there with the CEOs of big companies like Fourx and we needed their support with Womensport Queensland. So once again I think my invite came through Clem thinking that's a good opportunity for us without telling me that.

LM: That's right. Yes so I was just going to say they're more those, from what I understand I've been told they were more than just a social event at the end of the year weren't they, they were...?

DP: Oh they were networking. The who's who of Brisbane went to those.

LM: And just sort of looking back now how would you sum up the influence that Clem had on your life?

DP: Well as I was saying to you because I've been giving it a lot of thought lately and I respected him tremendously and I really think well I was trying to follow in his footsteps as far as sports was concerned. He was always very fair-minded. He was well respected by the sporting community and that's not easy respect to gain. Sporting people are a little bit touchy about, so you have to be you have to be seen as being fair-minded, living by sportsmanship and just being a down to earth ordinary person and that's what I liked about Clem. I was never in

awe of asking him anything. He had a lovely smile and I really think he was like, I'm sure he was really. I was proud of, and proud of what he did for Brisbane like the bridge and everything like that. Just Clem Jones, everybody knows Clem Jones, that's the kind of man he was.

LM: Yeah but he'd always be there if you needed something, you could ask?

DP: I could.

LM: And if he couldn't help he's what, direct you to someone else or open the door for you?

DP: Yeah or tell me "no that won't work". But we were determined not to go to the government to help us. We wanted to be standaloned. We didn't want to have grants or anything like that or be controlled by bureaucracy and I think we learnt that from Wilma, as she always said, and I was founding president and I'm really proud that I was. But always will thank people like Clem for standing by us and Del [Townsend], Del was marvellous and going back to Sylvia I always remember the first one of those functions I went to out to their house I went to talk to her because I didn't think she'd remember me and I just said my name's Daphne Welch and she said oh yes I know you, she was lovely. She said sit down and we'll have a chat. So like she too was a wonderful person but I didn't come across her much. It was quite really the way things were with women in those days. The women worked mostly in the background.

LM: So what do you, do you see a legacy that Clem Jones left behind in terms of sports or sports administration?

DP: Oh I think so. I think another thing I used to love about Clem and everybody laughs and talks about it and gives him credit, you know the way he'd get out and he'd mow that cricket pitch himself like I think I told you Mick and I if we had to have a hockey match Mick and I had to go out and mark the hockey field with sump oil or if we're having an athletic meeting we'd have to you know mark out the track.

LM: Yeah. It was very hands on.

DP: Well that's how you were. So I think Clem being older than me again and he probably had a tough life because I mean I was born in '31 well he must have been born in '21...

LM: 1918. Yes.

DP: Well that's the end of the First World War and that must have been a dreadful time to be brought up. Like even in the second world war we'd say our prayers every night, don't let any bombs fall on us things like that. So we really, so I think he must have come through, I don't know, I'm sure he wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

LM: No.

DP: And that, he stayed a modest type of man and well respected.

LM: Have you come across anyone who's sort of a similar operator to him in the sporting field, in the sporting administration?

DP: I can't think of one.

LM: No.

DP: I really can't and like there wouldn't be too many of my type of people left at age 87 who, I was at an elite level. See really I had to be in the elite level I guess to have ever had any personal contact, even though it was very, very small. Like I didn't, like our father they used to say was very Victorian in the way he brought us up. But it didn't hurt us. But he wasn't the one to sit down and, like he wouldn't talk about the war or things like that. So no I cannot and I've known some wonderful people, but I can't think of a man who's become so successful but still gives so much back and even now he's passed his Foundation is just giving enormously back to the community. Like he was a really community man and he must have been a fine Mayor of Brisbane to achieve what he did and to stay there that long.

LM: Okay. Look. Thanks very much for doing the interview today and contributing your memories of Clem. Thanks again.

DP: It's my pleasure and I feel proud and privileged. Thank you.

[end of recording]