

Interview with a Formeroo (or two)

This month Greg Stock talks to the Henderson brothers

Andy and Billy Henderson are what you would simply term 'characters' - two brothers who could quite literally talk the leg off a chair if you left them there long enough.

The sons of Andy Henderson senior a former Socceroo player and coach, they grew up in Sydney's western suburbs with footballs at their feet. As teenagers they made the transition from junior to first grade club football with the now defunct Granville club. They became first team regulars in a side boasting internationals like Eric Hulme, Ken Vairy, George Sanders, Ray Marshall and Alan Garside, and kick-started the Granville dynasty of the 1950's.

Socceroo striker Alan Garside is one personal fan who still refers to the heroics of the Henderson brothers as one of the lynchpins of the side - Billy as his favourite goalkeeper and Andy (the elder of the two) the ever-reliable halfback.

Both Bill and Andy went on to representative careers with New South Wales but it was Billy who was selected for Australia in the early 1950's and went onto to being the choice goalkeeper in the Australian side in the 1950's with his lifelong friend Ron Lord.

To take them back to where it all started as juniors I started by asking Andy where it was he first learnt the game.

AH : "I started off at Kewpies with Alan Garside (Granville and Australian striker) who was about twelve months or two years older than me. I started at under fourteens and played right through to under eighteens then I went straight to the Granville senior club."

BH : "Kewpies was the feeding club for Granville. They were always winning the competitions with Kewpies no matter what age group it was and it was just a natural progression from fourteens to sixteens to eighteens to reserve grade to first grade."

AH : My preferred position was right half. When I went to Granville I played initially at inside right. Alan Garside was centre forward, Kenny Vairy at inside left, Ray Marshall on one wing and myself at inside right. They tried me at left half a couple of times. When I went to Auburn I was a right half and when Archie (McAllister) was there they put me at left half. It worked out okay and I played a bit of right back. I always preferred to play in midfield."

GS : So where did you start your junior career.

BH : "I started with Granville Waratahs"

GS : Always as a goalkeeper?

BH : "Much to my father's dismay. He tried every way he could to encourage me to go and play out on the field. I used to prefer in goals and it was a natural progression as I went through the different age groups. I finished up playing with Granville Kewpies under eighteen team and from there to Granville second team and then to firsts. I only had one year at Kewpies in the under eighteens. Dad was always encouraging me to play out on the field as I was quick and I could hit a ball. He used to say there was more chance of me doing well out on the field."

GS : Your father was former Socceroo player and coach Andy Henderson senior and your uncle was Granville legend Bill Adamson. What sort of influence did the family over your careers?

AH : "Our uncle actually finished playing (with Granville) the year that I started first grade."

BH : "At the time he was regarded as the best player never to play for Australia because the Australian left half was a fella called Jimmy Osborne from Metters and he was always the selectors choice for that position and Uncle Bill, even though most people considered that he was as good as Jimmy Osborne, never got picked."

AH : "Jimmy Osborne used to give the ball a good old reef while uncle Bill was a technical player."

GS : So the whole family was very soccer minded.

BH : "Yeah, Dad especially. Dad being a former Australian player, coached Australia against Hadjuk Split in 1947 and in the team I played in, 1955. You can see how well qualified he was on soccer and when we were single blokes at home sitting around the table, everything would be soccer. You'd play a game and we'd go over it again and again and he'd be able to tell you things. Most people wouldn't have that opportunity of having someone of his qualifications over the table. So he was a tremendous influence on both of us."

GS : Was he coaching Granville at that time?

AH : "A little bit but Matty MacGilvery was the coach mainly."

BH : "Dad passed on to us and a few blokes in Granville some of the knowledge that he had gained over the years. He came to Australia as a young man at 23 and he said he learnt his soccer here rather than over in Scotland. He played for Springburn Rovers near Glasgow before he came out here."

GS : Did you both go to Granville at the same time?

AH : "Bill actually played before me. In 1946 the goalkeepers were injured and they plucked him out of the district juniors at sixteen and put him in goals for three games. And then I went to Granville in 1947"

GS : Bill, do you remember your Socceroo debut?

BH : Do I ever. Against China in 1953 at what is now Fox Studios the old Sydney Showground. A 3-3 draw. We were leading 3-2 with not long to go. They got an indirect free kick just outside the penalty area and we put a wall up in front of them. This Chinese bloke hit the ball, missed the wall and made me dive. I dived and got my fingertips to it and it went in and because I had touched it with my fingertips it was a goal. If I missed it we would have won 3-2. So I thought that's the end of my international career but luckily for me I was picked in the next Test. How I remember it is my father played against China in 1923 almost to the day 30 years before I played against China. Dad was a centre-half and he marked the centre-forward, a bloke called Lee, who came out as the manager of the Chinese team in '53. His son was centre-forward against me and scored the winning goal against me in the last Test in Newcastle when we got beat 1-0. So history repeated itself.

GS : In your respective careers who was the best player you saw play.

AH : The best player I've seen would be Hanappi. He came out here with the Austrian Rapid team. Absolutely magical footballer who played at right half. Not only did he have good ball control but he could beat a man and swerve either way, tackle and shoot for goal.

BH : Back in those days England were always the top dog and every year England would play the rest of the world. They'd pick players from all around the world to play against England at Wembley and Hanappi would play in that world team against England, that's how good he was. He was the first bloke who I'd played against who could hit the ball with a bend.

I remember playing against him for New South Wales. I've got a photograph of it here where it says he was doing it all afternoon. I had seven belted past me and this Hanappi came with the ball on his knee, let it drop and half volleyed it. I dived and thought I've got this covered but the further I went the further away the ball went. They reckon I was one of the best players on the field that day and we got done 6-1."

AH : "They bend the ball a lot today but of course the equipment they have, with the footballs, the boots, you can do a lot more."

BH : I am amazed at how things have changed in the way football is now to what it was then. We got paid 50 pounds per year (at club level). You had to supply your own gear, they (the club) provided you with your socks and shirt. You had to provide your own shorts and boots, pay your own fare down the south coast to Corimal, Woonona and Balgownie and up to Newcastle Wallsend, Cessnock, Adamstown, West Wallsend and Mayfield. And you got fifty quid for the year. When you look at today, that Confederations Cup in Saudi Arabia where the boys were going to go on strike for more money. Okay they're professional and you can understand from that point of view but \$40,000 for a week's work they got. I played for Australia and got five



pound to play in a Test match. Five quid and they paid your expenses, fly you down to wherever it was three hours from Sydney to Melbourne. The plane left at 6 p.m. and got you down at 9 p.m. but that's the way it was. Five pounds to play against South Africa in Melbourne at the old Showgrounds. They paid us before the game and somebody broke into the dressing room and pinched the lot and the thirty quid I had in my wallet too. (laughing).

GS : Ron Lord and yourself (Bill) always had a duel for the Socceroo goalkeeping spot...

BH : "Yeah it was always either Ron Lord or myself. Sometimes if they went interstate they'd pick a goalkeeper from there because money was in short supply in those days. Ronny and I were always vying for the honours. (Bill digs out an old newspaper cutting from his scrapbook and quotes) This was after we played New Zealand - 'one of the first persons to congratulate Bill Henderson on his spectacular display last week was Australian goalkeeper Ron Lord. A grand pair of sportsmen this duo and it makes one sorry that you cannot play two keepers in a test match'. We're still good mates and play golf together and see one another regularly."

GS : The split between the federation and the association was a time of turmoil in New South Wales soccer. One of the reasons for the split was that the clubs controlled the players and had the final say in where they played. What were your experiences with the player transfer market?

BH : "Players in those days were loyal to their club. There was no such thing as transfer."

AH : "You signed for life."

BH : The clubs had what was called a retained list. If you were on that retained list you had to play for that club again. I am sure if Granville had have gone with the federation we would have stayed with the club and maybe things would have been different. The club was split up the middle the same as Auburn. Half the guys stayed with the Auburn association and the other half went to the federation so Auburn were in a worse position than Granville because they were split right up the middle. Ron Lord and Dougie Wendt stayed with Auburn (association) and that's why they got Andy and I to go over to Auburn."

AH : "They soon got Ronny Lord over to Prague."

GS : So the two Australian goalkeepers for a time were playing with the Auburn clubs?

BH : "One for the federation and one for the association. Bitter rivals (laughing). The irony of the whole thing is I played with Granville from 1948 to 1956 around 180 games, my last year of soccer was with Polonia in 1964 in second division and we beat Granville by a point for promotion. You can imagine they used to give it to me (after that) and it carried on for that long. It made bad friends amongst guys that had played together for years and years and been so successful as a club."

GS : Did the association and federation turmoil have an effect on you international career?

BH : "The biggest disappointment of my international career was I was picked to play against Hearts of Midlothian but because I was with the federation I was outlawed and Ronny Brown took my place."

Joe Marston was with the association and I withdrew and Ronny Brown took my place while I went into the New South squad to play against Costa Rica. Ron Lord played that game and I was only reserve, that's what upset me. I sat on the bench and I could have been playing against Heart of Midlothian and against Blackpool. I was also picked to play there but I couldn't because I was with the federation. I would have loved to have played against Sir Stanley Mathews. We had a bloke in our team at Granville named Kenny Hawkins. He was one of those blokes who was really only an average player but he made one of the New South Wales or Australian teams to play against Blackpool and he had to mark Stanley Mathews. They bought him on in the second half. He said to me once 'The only kick I got all day was up the ass'."

GS : The foreign born players who came to Australia in the 1950's and 60's, do you feel that the standard of soccer in Sydney benefited from them?

BH : "Oh yeah no doubt. Soccer was in a bit of a rut until the federation came along. You had all your local teams, your stronger and your weaker teams. We weren't improving internationally and weren't competitive and we weren't getting any bigger crowds and soon as this came in the atmosphere became electric not knowing which way a game would go. All the new players with better coaching skills all came and played and it had to help."

AH : "They bought a higher skill level to us than we had here. We had the endeavour but not the same skill level. Our skill levels since those days have just gone up and up and up. The kids of today are as good as anyone."

GS : Crowd trouble was always a problem in the 1960's especially involving teams like Pan Hellenic, APIA, Yugal and Croatia. As players for a district club like Auburn did you strike much trouble from players or spectators?

AH : "I remember a night where Ron Iredale (referee) wouldn't come off Lidcombe Oval against Budapest. The crowd were waiting for him when we came off. We finished up surrounding him escorting him off and they were throwing punches trying to get the referee, kicking and spitting on the players."

BH : I remember the crowd invading the pitch at Lambert Park after referee David Buchan. He sent off one of the APIA blokes and he wouldn't go."

AH : He sent him off for a bad tackle and he just dropped him (the referee). Freddy You our fullback came over and got him in a headlock on the ground. It was Paul Turella and he got off that. He was supposed to be suspended for life but he got off with a lighter sentence."

I concluded our chat by asking Billy a little about what he thought of the game today. The N.S.L. and the state leagues are still dominated by the many ethnic clubs. Do you have any thoughts on the status of the ethnic clubs in 1998?

BH : "People who aren't associated with the game think soccer is a game for new Australians. The kids are born here and are second generation but that's the image that soccer has got. When Australia is qualifying for the World Cup and you see all the names of the players, the guys at the golf club say "All your new Australian mates are in there" and it doesn't worry me because I played with and against them all the time."

But it's the crowd behaviour that they won't accept, the fact that soccer should be what they are interested in, not their own ethnic image in my opinion."

GS : Do you watch the local product?

BH : "I've got a gold pass and can go and watch any game. I watch the Ericsson Cup on television. I go to the internationals at the (Sydney Football) Stadium. I intend to go to club games more often and I've got a grandson, a goalkeeper aged fifteen, and I want to take him out to show him what sort of level he's got to get to."

GS : What does the standard seem like to you.

BH : "I think its gone down a bit at club level because we've lost so many players overseas. From a spectators point of view I really think it lacks that little bit of class it had a few years ago. We've got a hundred or so overseas and that's a tremendous drain on the talent still here. You do see some good games but a lot are predictable and uninspiring."

Bill and Andy Henderson are now enjoying their retirement in the northern suburbs of Sydney. Both swing a golf club regularly though Bill still maintains involvement and passes down the many tricks he has learnt as a specialist goalkeeping coach with some amateur clubs in the local area. His grandson Tim is also following in his footsteps and is currently playing youth league with Marconi. Andy has given up the administration side of things altogether and for all his many late nights spent with the federation he has turned it over to someone younger. About time too. For its all they're unheralded contributions that they do deserve a very relaxing retirement to watch the game they love, swing a golf club and be remember as federation pioneers over forty one years ago.