



Harry Kernahan with David, Gary and Stephen

WHEN Stephen Kernahan was a skinny, somewhat fragile 16-year-old Brighton High School student the signs were already there of a blossoming football superstar.

His then raw but unbridled talent for the game developed far beyond the usual local gossip. No fewer than eight then Victorian Football League clubs focused their interest and their money on securing the pleasant, unassuming youngster.

No one, it seemed, doubted the lad's ability to graduate with honors to the pinnacle of the game.

"Yes, they were after him all right," said Stephen's father Harry, now 54 and general manager of the South Adelaide Football Club.

"Eight clubs approached me and Stephen had not even played a league game here. With Stephen's approval we sorted out three clubs - Carlton, Essendon and Melbourne. Stephen and I met representatives of all three clubs before we eventually decided he should sign with Carlton."

Harry insists Carlton was then, and still is, a "marvellous" club.

It is history now that Stephen, in November, 1985, at the age of 22, joined Carlton from Glenelg to begin an illustrious career that was to catapult him into the game's "greats".

Said Harry: "We decided he should not go to the big league until he had filled out more physically... when he was big and strong enough to cope with the tough, relentless and battering opposition he would face."

And what have been Stephen's proudest moments?

"He has said he most values Glenelg's grand final victory over North in 1985 and his first year as Carlton captain in 1987 when they won the AFL flag," said Harry.

The current head of the Kernahan dynasty, Harry bluntly refuses to distinguish between the abilities of his three footballing sons.

First son Gary, now 32, also showed the hallmarks of a top-line player in Glenelg's Under 17s and Under 19s before suffering a career-wrecking double rupture of the achilles tendon when he was just 19.

TODAY Gary, married to Carmen, manages Port Augusta radio station 5AU and is still playing Spencer Gulf League football - after 200 games he has been awarded league life membership.

Third son David, now 27, burst into Glenelg's side as a lean, young wingman, but many of the pundits suggested he was too lightly framed to play VFL.

An asthmatic, David toiled assiduously to develop his muscle strength.

"In the end it was only natural that he should follow Stephen to Carlton," said Harry.

In his first year at Carlton, 1989, David underwent a complete knee reconstruction which put him out of the game for nine months. No sooner had David secured a regular position in Carlton's defence than he was hit by a groin injury and then a hernia, both of which required surgery.

Whereas Stephen had missed only four games in a Glenelg-Carlton career spanning 300 matches, David's setbacks have enabled him to string

My three sons

- By former SA great Harry Kernahan

- you name it, cricket, tennis, table tennis - they were all just naturally involved in sport and had no time for anything else."

Where did it all begin?

On January 14, 1930, one Belfast-born Harry Kernahan, senior, disembarked from a passenger liner at Outer Harbor holding the hand of an Irish girl, Ellen.

That very day Harry, senior, who had played Division One Irish soccer, and Ellen, from Bangor, just outside Belfast, expressed their vows at a small ceremony at The Manse, on the Esplanade at Largs.

Their marriage marked the beginning of the Kernahan dynasty in Australia.

For four years Harry and Ellen worked in the East-West rail links at Cook before settling in Port Augusta. The couple had barely seen a game of Aussie Rules football.

They had five children, starting with Jim (who later became a court reporter for The News in Adelaide), then Bob, Harry junior, John - who became a more than useful footballer - and finally a daughter, Elaine.

Harry jnr soon took to the game of Aussie Rules and at the age of 16 he met his wife-to-be Annette, then 15. They began to forge a life-long bond.

HARRY'S promise as a footballer soon was brought to the attention of West Torrens officials, and at the age of 19 he was invited to Adelaide for a try-out.

His first chance came in the reserves, where he was positioned to play centre half-back standing Port's Peter Obst, later to become an SA "great".

"He gave me a hiding," recalls Harry. "He kicked six goals and on the Monday I got the DCM (don't come back next Monday)."

Harry found himself playing for Kensington Gardens in the Norwood Union league, and by 1958 - the year after he married Annette - he was turning out for Brighton in the SA Amateur League.

Finally he was invited to train at Glenelg and in 1959, when he was 21, Harry made his league debut. He went on to play 176 games for the Tigers and 13 for the State.

Two great playing triumphs came his way - he was a member of the SA team which beat WA in Perth in 1962, the first time SA had won there for 26 years, and the following year he was in the memorable SA team which beat Victoria at the MCG for the first time in three years.

While Harry did battle on the field, Annette almost always watched from the grandstand, bottle-feeding their successive sons.

"Yes, they were born to football," Harry reflected on his three sons. "They were involved, I guess, from the very first day they could actually be taken to the football."

"During my football career here they would not have missed a game except for some extraordinary circumstance.

"Maybe it brought out in them the desire to play the game - it rubbed off on them, they began to pick up the clues."

- DAVID CAPEL



Birth of a champion... Annette and Harry with baby Stephen

together only around 50 league games. Of his three sons, who showed the greatest ability or potential for the game?

"Who can really determine that," said Harry. "At various stages they were very equal."

"They were all schooled at Paringa Park Primary and then Brighton High. They played every sport