

CHOPPA CHAT

Edition 11 – 2017

The 11th edition of *Choppa Chat* is with Luke “Sheppo” Sheppard. Fresh from his game winning, butcher redeeming goal against Doveton, Sheppo and I sat down to discuss footy trips, cobras, doubling up, leadership and the importance of mateship. Here’s our chat;

TA: Hey Sheppo tell us about that goal against Doveton?

LS: It was pretty nerve racking but I didn’t really have to do the hard work, the boys did all the hard work and it was pretty straight forward once it got to me.

TA: Very modest of you, how did the ball end up in your arms?

LS: Well I think Madi got the ball across half back and as always he dribble kicked it along the ground, Gunny tapped it to Graham who handballed to me and then yeah... piece of cake.

TA: Were you exhausted from the run or the celebration?

LS: Yeah the celebration haha! I cramped up and had to come off but the job was done.

TA: Maybe Mad’s will take the butcher award from you?

LS: Hopefully, I was pretty stiff to get it.

TA: You also cost yourself a \$50 when you could have got away with a \$20.

LS: If I knew it was coming my way I would kept my mouth shut about the \$50 but it’s all good. More money for the trip.

TA: I’m going to back track here and go to the beginning. Where and when did you start playing footy?

LS: I started my juniors at Hallam. We used to get flogged by 200 points every game which wasn’t much fun. Gunny was obviously at Berwick so I had my name down on a waiting list to join for a few years. Then around under 13’s or 14’s I got the call from Phil Scully.

TA: GWS recruiter Phil Scully?

LS: Yeah that’s one. We went on to win the u15’s flag which was great and I’ve been at Berwick ever since.

TA: You arrived at the senior club as a skinny shaggy haired teenager almost 10 years ago now. You’ve since matured a bit, neatened up the hair...

LS: Still skinny!

TA: Yes still skinny! What are your memories of your first couple of seasons of senior footy?

LS: Well I was playing in the u18s at Berwick and training once a week with the Stingrays. In order to get a game they said I needed to be playing senior footy at Berwick. So I was pretty motivated to break into the side. I played my first senior game as a 16 year old and I remember playing with guys like George Gorozidis, Andrew Tuck, Brad Molineux and Dave Van Dieman. I got chucked in the deep end but the experience was great.

TA: The club was struggling when you first arrived but you were part of a very successful under 18’s side that would form the basis of the senior side in years to come. You would play u18’s in the morning and then double up with 1’s game a couple of hours later. Was it your choice to play both?

LS: Yeah it was. It was tough on the body, I was pretty rooted by the end of it. I obviously enjoyed playing in the 18s with my mates and having success. But if I wanted to play Stingrays I needed to be playing senior footy. Obviously didn’t tell them I was doubling up though.

TA: Are you aware of a pretty public confrontation, based around your selection, between senior coach at the time Daniel Charles and 18’s coach, Greg Talbett?

LS: Yeah a little bit.

TA: Well I saw it so I can give you the run down. Both coaches wanted you to play in their side. Greg didn't want you playing seniors because it was too much stress on the body. He believed Charlesy was forcing you to play. Charlesy believed the best players should be playing 1s and that the 1s side should be considered priority number 1. Can you clear it up? Was it your choice or were you being forced to play both?

LS: Tough situation to be in. But at the end of the day, it was my choice to play both. I think both coaches had my best interests at heart. Particularly Greg, he was looking out for me knowing I was only young and Charlesy thought I was good enough, knew I wanted to play seniors so he pushed for me to play.

TA: Alright we'll leave it at that. When did you eventually break into the Stingrays side?

LS: I played 5-6 senior games before being selected to play against the Bushrangers. I was in and out of the side for the rest of the year. Then the following year I played every game at the Stingrays. We ended up playing in a Grand Final at Etihad. Went down by 14 points unfortunately.

TA: Who played in that Stingrays side with you?

LS: Riley Heddles, Tom Scully, Ryan Bastinac, Dylan Robertson. Some pretty good players.

TA: Teams used to target you physically when you were young. How did you deal with that?

LS: Probably not well. I remember playing against Cranny one day. I was going alright, then start of the 3rd quarter they put Andre Young onto me. He basically threatened to kill me amongst some other stuff and I shat myself, didn't go near the ball for the rest of the game. Bit embarrassing but as a young fella I wasn't sure how to take that sort of stuff. He actually came up to me at the end of the game and said don't listen to what I said, it's just part of the game sort of thing. Bit surprising coming from that flog haha.

TA: Very surprising! Did you feel supported by your team mates? Would you have liked them to have done more to protect you?

LS: I'm not sure my team mates knew he was getting into me but there was definitely some times early on that I didn't feel I was being looked after. In saying that I never said anything about being tagged by him. It would have been good but I don't blame anyone.

TA: Over the years do you feel the senior players have protected the young guys well enough?

LS: it's definitely improved, especially since Roo started coaching where he emphasised the team and doing anything for the team and that included flying the flag. Especially for the young boys. I think we do that pretty well these days.

TA: How long did it take you to feel settled in the senior side?

LS: It definitely took a while. Early days there were a few clubs who were offering me cash and it looked pretty tempting at times but luckily I was always talked out of it. Probably took until I was 21-22 to feel really comfortable at that level.

TA: You were approached by Cora Lynn at the end of the 2010 season. They opened the cheque book and you ended up signing on with them just before Christmas. But you were back in a Berwick jumper in the New Year. Explain how that all came about.

LS: Well someone from their club called me and asked me to come down and train with them and have a meeting afterwards. So I did and they made a pretty nice little offer.

TA: Can I ask what the offer was?

LS: Yeah it was \$400 a game with a \$3000 sign on.

TA: Very tempting for a young guy.

LS: Yeah well it definitely opened up my eyes a bit. So I signed and started training with them. Then over the New Years break I went away with the Berwick boys and I thought "what the fuck am I

doing?" So I spoke to Bruce Andrews, said I want to stay a wicker can you help me out? He did and I am very grateful for what he did for me.

TA: You talk about that New Years trip, Airlie Beach I believe. What was it in particular that made you realise you had made a mistake?

LS: Well for starters my best mates Gunny, Trenna, Shardy and Mitta Talbett pretty much talked me out of it. We just drinking in our room one night, having a really good time, drinking beers and that, they just said "What are you doing? We've come up through the juniors, lets stick together". That sort of thing. And it just clicked in my head that I'd made a blue. I couldn't leave the boys.

TA: So how did you inform Cora Lynn that you had changed your mind?

LS: Yeah well I sent through a text. Stating my reasons and he basically said "no worries mate". That was it.

TA: Did you have to give the sign on back?

LS: Yeah I did.

TA: Had you spent it?

LS: Yeah some of it haha.

TA: What on?

LS: Shitload of piss! But yeah it all got taken care of.

TA: You haven't looked back since. Do you have any advice for young players who may find themselves in a similar situation to you?

LS: Well I think there is a lot of value in being a one club player and building a side over a number of years that hopefully becomes successful. Which obviously happened with me and has paid off way more than any ridiculous money offers. I look back on it and I'm so glad I made the decision I did. In saying that I think if you have the opportunity to play at a higher level you should pursue it because you never know what might come your way. At the end of the day money can come and go but mates will be there forever.

TA: Over the years you have developed into a great player and also a fantastic leader. A member of the leadership group for many years and Vice-Captain this year. Do you enjoy having a position of leadership?

LS: Yeah absolutely. The second year Rooley was coaching I asked to be in the leadership group. He responded pretty well and put me in. My footy was going alright at the time too and I was lucky enough to be named Vice-Captain the following year.

TA: Without a doubt you are the leader of the boys off field too. You love a beer and getting around the boys. How important is team bonding?

LS: It's very important, one of the most important things at a club. All my best mates are at this club. I don't catch up with mates from school anymore. You see your teammates 3-4 times a week, pretty much year round, train hard during the week then battle it out on Saturday, then there is nothing better than having beers with those same guys on a Saturday night.

TA: Couldn't agree more. You have been my footy trip apprentice for the last 3 years and have taken over the reins this year. How's the trip planning going?

LS: Yeah it's actually a tough job mate.

TA: That's what I thought you would say. What has been the hardest thing to organise so far?

LS: Probably getting blokes to pay haha.

TA: I don't miss that haha. Where is the trip this year?

LS: Off to Albury. Getting the bus up there, should be good fun. Think we have 8-9 virgins this year so we should have some fun and games.

TA: Obviously you can't reveal what you have in store, but you have planned some things?

LS: Yeah can't reveal but we've had a few meetings and planned some things out.

TA: How is the fundraising going?

LS: Not so well this year. I've palmed the roll off to Jammo and he's done shit.

TA: I noticed you were raffling off a wheel barrow of piss without the piss the other day. What is happening there?

LS: Yeah that's my bad actually I organised the booze with Troy Donegan a few weeks back but I didn't pick it up till earlier this week. Will be good to go now.

TA: You've mainly played on the wing and across half back throughout your career. Do you have a preferred position?

LS: Yeah I like half back. You can see the game a bit better. Sling shotting from there is probably my strength. Then hitting up blokes like Gunny and Mozza who I've played a lot of footy with over the years.

TA: Who have been the best players you have played with?

LS: Definitely Madi Andrews. He's unbelievable. Toughest bloke and just wills himself to win every contest. Gaz (Ash Smith) is unbelievable across half back, particularly in the year we won the flag. Then probably Tom Scully was the best player I played with at the Stingrays.

TA: Who is your toughest opponent or who is the best player you have played against?

LS: Ryan Jones from Cranbourne springs to mind. I used to line up on him a bit. He's just so quick and if you're not paying attention he gets forward and does a lot of damage. I rate Ryan Davey pretty highly as well.

TA: I hear you're a bit of pool shark. Any truth?

LS: Haha definitely not but I do play in a mid-week comp with Sarah's dad. He got me into it and I'm pretty hooked on it now. We play down at the central on a Wednesday night. It's good fun.

TA: Finally you've been with your lovely partner Sarah for a long time now. What does the future hold for you two?

LS: Who knows mate, she's pretty lucky to have me I would of that. But yeah we are looking at buying a house together pretty soon. Just working through that at the moment. She's a pretty good bird.

TA: All the best with that mate. Thanks for having a chat tonight. Well done redeeming yourself after receiving the butcher's award. I always enjoy watching you play and look forward to you leading the side to some more success this year.

LS: Cheers Choppa.