

# CHOPPA CHAT

Edition 6 – 2017

For the sixth edition of “Choppa Chat” I sat down with former Berwick champion player and coach, Rhys Nisbet, better known as Roo. Roo excused himself from the bar for quick chat about premierships, coaching and mateship. Here’s our chat;

**TA: Fittingly we are having a chat on a Thursday night in your new role as bartender. How's the bar treating you?**

RN: It’s going good mate. No pressure, although every now and again, Roycey gets his whip cracking. But no, its good mate, it’s important that I still get up and show my face and I guess that’s the reason behind it.

**TA: I’ve started most chats off with this question, so I’ll stick with it. Where did the Roo nickname come from?**

RN: Well believe it or not mate, most people probably won’t believe it but when I used to have hair, when it got wet playing footy it would stand up like a Mohawk, kind of like a roosters crest and one of the boys, Jason Harwood starting calling me Rooster and then it developed from there.

**TA: You're a member of the Thursday night crew, what do you love about Thursday night during the footy season?**

RN: Just chatting with the boys. I just think it’s an important part of the game to stick around get together after training or a game. I’ve always done it and that’s how I was educated around the club and especially on a Thursday night it’s good to chat a bit about selection and just have a bit of general banter, have a couple of beers and not want to go home to the Mrs.

**TA: Was it more than just Thursday nights when you played?**

RN: Well when I was playing we would do Tuesday nights down in the change rooms as well. Geoff Casey would bring a couple of slabs down and we would have a few beers till about 10-11, then on a Thursday night we would stay till about 1. We would get the microphone out and have a bit of a sing along.

**TA: What was your song of choice when the mic would get passed around?**

RN: I would generally stick to “Run to Paradise” by the Choirboys. I’d belt out a big “Baby, you were always gonna be the one”.

**TA: Very good one of my favourites as well.**

**TA: You've been a Berwick footy club person your whole life, what are your earliest memories?**

RN: Well I played all my juniors at Berwick and played my first senior game at 15. Running out as a young 15 year old with the likes of Homer, Todd Devine, blokes like that. It was a massive thrill. Berwick had only won one game at the time so they brought myself and Daniel Pabst down from the u16s for the last 3 games of the year. We won 2 of those games, which was good. So I guess just running out for the first time is an early memory and also one of my favourites.

**TA: First senior game at 15, what was your biggest fear going into the game?**

RN: Well it was getting whacked. Kids got targeted a lot more in those days. I ended up copping one in my first game, a bloke named Enzo Ferraro, he was as dirty as they come but Homer was first on the scene to help me out with that one.

**TA: Speaking of Homer, most of the boys know him for his sense of humour but what was he like as a team mate?**

RN: Homer was great. As I said he was always first in to help you out when blokes were trying to throw their weight around. I’ve got a couple of good stories about Homer. One day we were down at Seaford and they had this big ruckman, Wes George who was a pure c\*t and he was trying to take my head off all day. Homer went up to him and said “don’t have a go at kids, if you want have a go at someone, have a go at me”. So Wes George just went bang! And dropped Homer. I went past and said “thanks mate”. He got up with bloody nose and said no worries. Another time, again at Seaford Homer and I were going ok out of the square. Homer’s man starts bumping and getting into him and he says “mate I’ve just kicked 3 on ya, this bloke has kicked 4. We are dominating you. What do you want? Do you want me to sing to you?” The young

blokes behind the goals were pumping some tunes and Homer just starts singing Sweet Home Alabama to him. It was hilarious, classic Homer.

**TA: Who was the biggest influence on your footy career growing up?**

RN: Well obviously my Dad but also my Grandfather. They both had a hell of a lot to do with me but also blokes I played with like Todd Devine, Homer and Molly.

**TA: You mention your dad, he was a great player and coach in his own right. He liked giving a bit of advice when you were coaching too yeah?**

RN: He did but he always let me run my own race. If something was glaringly obvious, he would let me know but other than that, he let me do my thing. But I learned a hell of a lot from him also and I guess I modelled myself around him. With things like staying around on a Thursday night for a beer. He taught me that every player on the list is just as important as the other.

**TA: That was definitely a big part of your coaching philosophy and one of your biggest strengths. Why was valuing every player so important?**

RN: Well you just never know when you might have to call on someone. You might have a heap of injuries and you have to call on a bloke who may not really be a senior player but he is on that day and you need to have a relationship with him so he will have the confidence to do what is required. When I was coach I never wanted to have any favourites and wanted everyone to feel a part of it and I guess that was one of my strengths.

**TA: For sure, we'll talk a bit more about your coaching later but can you tell us a bit about Roo the footballer?**

RN: Well I played a lot of positions. When I first started playing seniors, I was a wing half forward type. I actually had a bit of leg speed back then. Not hard to look quick when you're running next to guys like Homer. But then I sort of developed into more of a centre half forward. Played a bit of centre of back and full forward also but mainly centre half forward – half forward.

**TA: You played in the draught breaking premierships in 99' how good was that?**

RN: Well it's a bit of a blur. Not just because it was 20 years ago but the day just went by so quick you know. We were playing Crib Point who we had beaten 3 times that year already. I know it's weird to say but it's always hard to beat a side for the 4<sup>th</sup> time in a year I reckon. But when we won it was a massive thrill. Being in the rooms after the game and seeing Jimmy Hower and Tommy Watson crying it was a big deal for the club and great to be involved in.

**TA: How long had it been since the last flag?**

RN: Well the last one was in 78', so 21 years.

**TA: Which your Dad, Daryl coached?**

RN: Yeah he did. He was also involved in the 99' flag. He ran the bench for Tony Blackford who was a playing coach.

**TA: What's the best sledge you've copped on the footy field?**

RN: Well I remember lining up for goal here against Keysborough. I was halfway through my run up and at this stage I was beginning to become a little bit follicley challenged, a bloke from the crowd yelled out, "number 27... you've got a hole in your haircut!". I had to stop, sort of acknowledge it, readjust and yeah I shanked it! Haha!

**TA: How many years did you play at Berwick?**

RN: Well I started in 95' and played until 01'. Todd Devine went and coached Inverloch so I played a year down there which was great fun. I was getting a bit stale so the move was good. I came back the following year and after a couple of years I got a bit stale again and I wasn't enjoying my footy and a bit of stuff was going on at the club so I took off to ROC, who were playing the West Gippy league at the time. I really regret that decision and don't like talking about it to be honest. I came back to the club again for the 06' season and as you would know the club was in a pretty ordinary position so I took off to Lang Lang as an assistant coach for 4 years after that. Which I really enjoyed.

**TA: We'll get to Lang Lang in a minute but can you elaborate on the state of the club under Peter Jensen and Ronnie Burns?**

RN: Well it was no fucking good that's for sure. Jensen just ran the place into the ground. We were flying blokes down from Darwin and showing no respect to local guys. I remember Jase Kelly, Dale Robinson even Brad Molineux getting played through the 2s. For these blokes from Darwin who wouldn't even come inside for a shower or beer after a game. It just didn't sit well with me and there was a lot of blokes up here who I just didn't like. I know there was a lot of blokes who just stuck it out, like Clog (David Van Dieman), Molly, Tucky and yourself and I admire you blokes but I just couldn't do it. It was actually really sad to see, the club was on it's knees but thanks to a lot of guys behind the scenes the club survived.

**TA: So getting back to Lang Lang, what was it like down there?**

RN: Well it was a different experience. And looking back on it, I was very immature as an assistant coach and I would do things differently looking back now. But it was great to go down there with Boofa (Clint Evans) who is a great mate of mine and we made some great friends down there. Lifelong mates that we still catch up with to this day. I learnt a lot about respect. They have a shit ground, their rooms are shit but they band together and it toughens you up a bit. You come up here and we have great facilities and we tend to take it for granted a bit. But you go down there and see how hard they have it, but work so hard at it. It's just respect.

**TA: Do you believe it was important to go and be an assistant coach elsewhere before returning to Berwick to coach.**

RN: Yeah absolutely. I don't think I could have stayed here and had the same respect. Because I just would have been plodding along. Then I just would have gone on to coach blokes who I was just plodding along with. When I left for Lang Lang I wasn't sure coaching was what I wanted to do but when I finished there I knew it was something that I really wanted to do and I wanted to do it at Berwick.

**TA: After you retired you came back to Berwick as an assistant coach, how did that come about?**

RN: Well Brucey gave me the initial call. Ricey had arrived and he didn't have a coaching team with him. He also gave me a call and I was happy to join him.

**TA: You took over after two years?**

RN: Yeah well towards the end of Ricey's second year I got wind that Johnsy had expressed interest in taking over. To my knowledge Ricey hadn't been told that he wasn't going to be coaching again but I could sort of sense that he wasn't. And I thought it was a good opportunity for me, so I approached a couple of people and expressed interest also. I told the club if you're going to go down that path I would like to put my hand up. Fortunately enough 3 wise me, Brucey, Sears and Cliffy gave me a chance.

**TA: How would you describe your coaching game plan at Berwick?**

RN: It was basically run the gauntlet. Fast footy is good footy if you ask me. So I encouraged the boys to take the game on. If you see an opening take it and get the footy moving quickly. I mean you have to coach to what you've got. We had a quick group and a stop start game plan wouldn't have worked.

**TA: Describe the journey to the 2015 flag?**

RN: Well at the start of the year we recruited Ash Smith. Which was a great pick up, possibly the best recruit the club has had. We also picked up Michael Riseley and Michael Johnson. That brought a bit of buzz to the place and I guess you could just feel the time was right to challenge. I remember telling Brucey and Searsy, give me 3 years and we'll be thereabouts and in the third year we'll be ready to challenge. I mean to win a premiership everything has to go right and on the day of the grand final everyone was fit, except for Shardy but we got him up and that's what you need to win a premiership. If you have one hiccup you don't win. I mean again the day is a bit of a blur but everything went right and we got the result.

**TA: What is the hardest thing about coaching?**

RN: I think training. In the sense of keeping it interesting. On game day you're in the zone and you should coach well. But keeping training interesting is hard. Coming up with new drills and keeping it fresh is easily the hardest thing.

**TA: What was the hardest call of your coaching career?**

RN: Probably the Shardy call in grand final week. That was tough but I remember backing him "he looked me in the eye and told me he was right" and too his credit he got through. But that was a tough call.

**TA: Do you have a coaching regret?**

RN: Not really but Tooridan knocked us off at home in 2014, and it's not really a regret but it just eats at me, because I have a big hatred for them as a club.

**TA: Yes I remember playing in that game also, any loss to Tooridan eats me up as well.**

**TA: Without coaching, have you been more relaxed at home?**

RN: Haha yeah I guess so, Emily tells me to get out of the house every now and again because I'm giving them the shits. But it is good to spend more time with the Mrs and the kids. But I do miss coaching and being a part of it.

**TA: Do you get itchy feet on a Saturday?**

RN: It's not so much on a Saturday it's just in general. It might be on a Monday night when I'm having a beer with the boys, there talking about footy and I just want to be a part of it. But my time was up, after 4 years the place needed freshening up and I was wrapped that Stew took over. But I will get back into one day.

**TA: So you see yourself coaching again?**

RN: Yeah for sure, looking back 4 years won't seem like a long time, like it did at the time, if that makes sense. So it might be next year or in a couple of years, something might pop up. We'll see.

**TA: You mention Stewie, you were involved in getting him to the club?**

RN: Yeah I called him every year for four years to get him here as a player but he never wanted to come. I told Skeg at the start of my 4<sup>th</sup> year that it would be my last year and that they needed to go and get Stewie. The wheels started turning and we met with him in round 5 or 6 and he expressed real interest and the rest is history. He's here now and it's great for the club.

**TA: You'd be pretty happy with how he is going and have you had much to do with him since his appointment?**

RN: Yeah he's doing really well. I told him the phone is always there but so far he hasn't needed to call me. It's his show and credit to him it's up to him to work it out and he's doing great. He's got the guys playing really structured footy, the guys are buying in and it's working. It's always hard to get guys buying in and he's done that and I couldn't be happier for him.

**TA: You've seen and played with some great Berwick players over the years, who do you rate as some of the best?**

RN: Obviously Molly and Toddy were as good as it gets. That's why they have won 4 best and fairest's each. But also a guy named Jason Harwood who played here for a couple of seasons at centre half forward. He was as good as I've seen, terrific mark, really aggressive and wasn't afraid to get behind a centre half forward and belt him in the head, he had real mongrel in him. I always played next to him and made you walk taller. Obviously coaching Madi Andrews he's as good as it gets, with the way he throws himself at the ball. And as an opponent, Andrew Harvey from Hampton park was as good as it gets also.

**TA: Discussions being held at the moment about our league, what do you think should happen?**

RN: Yeah I think the Peninsula is the answer. Let Hampton Park go to the Southern league. Tooridan to the Nepean, ROC can go West Gippy and then form a two division promotion-relegation league with the Peninsula league. You can't just keep going with what we've got, we need to freshen up.

**TA: Roo we have had thousands of conversations like this over the years and we could have put hundreds more stories in this interview but they'll just have to stay between the Thursday night crew. Thank you so much for not only what you have done for the Berwick footy club but for your loyal friendship along the way. All the best and I'll see you at the bar**

RN: Cheers chop