

CHOPPA CHAT

Edition 7 – 2017

For the seventh edition of “Choppa Chat” I caught up with Premiership captain, Micky Harold on a cold Thursday night before training. We were locked out of the rooms so we sat down on the stairs of the social rooms to discuss his recruitment to Berwick, injuries and loving what you do. Here’s our chat;

TA: Hello Micky, thanks for joining me. You’ve had a big career but I’m going to jump ahead and start with your time at Berwick. You joined us in Roo’s first season as coach, 5 years ago now. How did you end up at Berwick?

MH: So I was actually about to sign with Cranbourne, when a lady named Vicki Andrews came into our personal training studio in Berwick. I was telling her that I was heading down to Costello’s to sign on with Cranbourne at Costello’s with Holty later that day. She told me there was no way I could sign with them and I needed to come down to Berwick and have a look. I met with her family and the rest is history.

TA: How did Cranbourne originally get in touch with you?

MH: Someone from Oakleigh, where I had spent 10 years, knew Doug Koop, who was the Cranbourne coach at the time. He got wind that I was keen to head to a club in the area.

TA: You’re a keen punter, any truth to the rumour that they tried to win you over with a trip to the races?

MH: Yeah that’s spot on mate they gave the wife and I two tickets to the Cranbourne races, all you can drink and buffet food, with all the Cranbourne boys..... and not one of the fuckers spoke to me. So I drank myself 25 bourbons and could barely stand up and I still didn’t like them, so that made me have a bit of a rethink.

TA: Not one bloke spoke to you?

MH: Ah I think one guy did but he was a retard.

TA: Berwick had its own go at winning you over with a couple of tickets to the major raffle. What sort an impression did that leave on you?

MH: Yeah good work from you Chop, you really have done your research here. So I brought the Mrs along with me and told her that Berwick is a real family orientated club and this and that. And my recollection is that towards the end of the day two fellas by the names of Cherry and Zimbi were walking round with a hat asking everyone for money for some strippers. My wife looked at me and said “it’s time to go”, I agreed. But we had a good laugh in the car. It was a great function and it definitely won me over.

TA: So some blokes spoke to you?

MH: Yeah absolutely, everyone did and that is what make this club so special.

TA: So then you had to go and tell Koop, how did he take the news?

MH: Well it wasn’t great. It was a short sharp phone call. Probably took me 4 or 5 goes to get on to him. I’d dial, then hang up but I finally got onto him. He wasn’t happy, basically said I should keep my word, amongst some other things that probably don’t need to be mentioned, he said he could get me a PT studio in Cranbourne but I just said “it’s too late I’ve made my decision”.

TA: And we are very glad you did. You started like a house on fire with us before doing your knee against Narre in round 6. How did the injury occur?

MH: Yeah well in the first 5-6 minutes, I went to change directions, I just felt something go in the back of my knee. I tried to ignore it and just strapped it up best I could and got on with the game. I copped a massive spray from Todd Devine at halftime, to lift my game, I tried and kicked a goal in the second half but the next day I found out I had torn my ACL and would need surgery. Not ideal but I let Todd know about it, and still do every chance I get. Thankfully the club supported through the whole situation.

TA: Being the fitness freak you are, I’ve heard your rehab was insane, describe what you did, to get back as quick as possible?

MH: Well I got back in about 8 months, when the standard is 9 months in the AFL system. Basically just with the nature of my work I was doing everything possible to get back as quick as I could. There was a lot of lonely times but I just convinced myself that they would be worth it and I feel I was rewarded when we won the flag a few years later. I like to think I’m pretty mentally strong and doing all those little extra’s I believed they would pay off for me. I believe if you do the work it will pay off. I think of it as Karma.

TA: How was watching on from the sidelines?

MH: Well I'm injured as we speak and it is completely pissing me off and I didn't enjoy back then. I had to take myself to the other side of the ground because I just get so worked up watching that I can't be around anyone.

TA: How long did it take you to feel confident on the field again?

MH: Well Roo was great, the week before the Tooridan game, Roo asked me if I was right to go and I said "yeah I think I am" and he said good you're playing. So I played in the 2s that week. I went and saw Dave Francis the Collingwood physio before the game and he instilled in me that I was right to go and I backed his judgement. I knew that I had done all the hard work and if the knee was to go again well then it's just not meant to be. From my perspective I saw my knee as being brand new and therefore it's as strong as it can be. I think that was the main difference between my rehab and others.

TA: That strong mindset that you have probably contributed to you being named Co-captain alongside Madi at the beginning of the 2015 season. Would you agree with that?

MH: Well firstly I was extremely honoured to be given that role. Especially being relatively new to the club, but I did have some experience as I'd captained my old club for a few years and I guess when I arrived at Berwick there was a bit of a weakness in the leadership department. A lot of talented footballers but very quiet and to win premierships you need some on field leaders and I thought I brought that to the table. Of course Madi had the skills, me not so much but the combination of us both worked really well. Hopefully I helped Mads in some way and now I'm very happy to take a back seat.

TA: Well I know he definitely credits you with helping him develop his leadership skills, so well done. In that same year you were captain of that interleague side. Do you enjoy playing rep footy?

MH: Yeah I do. I chose not pursue a VFL career but I decided a while back that if the opportunity to play rep footy or play a higher level, then I would take it. Anytime I was asked I would say yes and I guess I would just naturally find myself to be the loudest player on the field and got a few captaincies out of it. I've carved out a decent rep career, I think I've played about 8 years of interleague footy, played in a match over in Ireland. And I guess I've got the most out of my career without being the most skilful player. I would say I've got the best out of my abilities.

TA: I remember clearly seeing you shedding tears immediately after the siren in 2015 Grand Final. Why were you so emotional?

MH: It was just pure elation. It had a little bit to do with battling through some injuries/rehab but I was just so happy to see such a young group of guys buy in and just go for it. There was so much comradery from the 1st to the 45th player on the list, it was just terrific to be a part of. I put so much emotion into my footy and to get that ultimate success was just the best. I mean emotion takes over and it did take over, I was on cloud nine. Going out singing that song with 60 blokes in the middle of the ground back at the club with the lights on, to be a part of that and to have been co-captain is just something that I'll never ever forget.

TA: The following season on the eve of the finals you announced to the playing group that you would be retiring at seasons end. What were the reasons behind that?

MH: Well my business was really consuming me and I'm the sort of person that if I can't give 100% then I won't do it. With my business I'm working mornings and nights, it can be physically and mentally draining and I just didn't think I could give my full commitment to the club. I can't half arse things, I didn't want to turn up and train once a week and think everything will be sweet. I think if you commit to playing, you commit 100% to everything that comes with it. I told Roo probably 6 weeks before that and he just said alright we'll use that when we need it, so that's why it was announced just before the finals. It was a very hard decision but I felt I needed to make it and I felt good about it after I made that call.

TA: We had a relatively successful finals campaign. Made the Grand Final, had a shocking start before getting on a roll in the third quarter, kicking 5 in a row, before you kicked a magnificent 50m bomb from the boundary on the ¾ time siren, to bring us within about 9 points at the last break. What was going through your head at that stage?

MH: Well to be honest I'd had about 3 kicks to that stage and I had no choice, the siren had gone and I just thought "cmon mate, you need to do something here" we need the ascendancy. So I just went rip. I wish I

could say I was 50 out and it sailed through post high but in reality it was probably 40 out and it just got there. In the end it wasn't to be but we'll have another crack.

TA: You were retired for about 4 months. What made you want to come out of retirement?

MH: Well I was helping Stew out with the fitness side of the pre-season. Down at the preseason camp I did a bit of a fitness circuit with the guys. He approached me and said don't take this the wrong way but we really need you to play this year. Have a think about it. I drove away from that camp on my own, a 2 hour drive, and I was very emotional. I just thought to myself I'm too young to give up what I love and I love all these boys the comradery, im not ready to give this up. Although I wasn't sure if the body was going to be up to it. I was super fit but footy fit is something different as you know. I came down and watched the intra club match the next week and I couldn't believe how quiet it was, the ball was moving quick, it looked good but I drove away thinking I still had something to offer. Stew just said to me, "let's not put any expectations on, you're just one of the boys now, when you're ready I'll pick you to play". I haven't looked back since. So I'd say Stew's confidence in me is 100% the reason I'm playing.

TA: Alright let's back track a little and talk about your Oakleigh career. Multiple Best and Fairests, Premiership Captain. Tell us a bit about your time at Oakleigh.

MH: Yeah I started there when I was 17, played 10 years, snuck in 2 premierships, won 3 Best and Fairests, 7 years of interleague. When I started there the club was in D2, when I finished it was in B. Now that is not just because of one person but I would think I contributed my fair share along the way. There is no player payments in that league – wink wink nudge nudge – but it's pretty skilful footy but not as tough as the South East league. But it prepared me well.

TA: Do you have any pregame rituals?

MH: Yeah I have a tonne mate. I have to have my radox bath the night before, I need my tortellini pasta with pesto sauce. I need to be on the couch by 7 watching the footy. Definitely no sex the night before, that is a big no no, anyone who says different is kidding themselves, you need all the testosterone you can get. Then on Saturdays I need to have my 7 Weet Bix in the morning. Walk the dog for at least half an hour so I've had a little stretch. Jam sandwich and a banana before the game and then I'm good to go. Every week. It's my ritual.

TA: Never broken?

MH: Never broken and when it has, you've got me, don't even bother sending me out there.

TA: You own and run a PT business in Berwick – BFirm. How is business going?

MH: Yeah Bfirm you can find us at 27 Enterprise Avenue, Berwick next to the costume shop. Business is good. It's been a couple of tough years trying to get established but we've got a really good core group there now. A lot of the boys get down and use the facility which is great and all the sponsorship with the club we don't take it for granted and we are truly thankful. We try to look after the boys the best we can and we hope we are giving an advantage on the field to the boys by offering the service. It's been a hard road but it's starting to pay off now.

TA: I often tell people if I was going to get personal training I would want to be trained by a guy who looks and sounds like you. In a saturated market why have you been so successful?

MH: A lot of personal trainers these days seek to destroy. They don't actually put their passion into their clientele. If you're clientele want something I think you should cater for it and a lot of PT's don't do that. I know what I would want in a PT and that is focussed attention on what I'm specifically training for. If I wanted boot camp then I would go and do boot camp, if I wanted Muay Thai or self defence training then I would go to specific places. What makes us different is we focus solely on 1 on 1 or 2 on 1 training. We have just starting up group 6 on 1 boxing but we the clientele who wan that. I get back to being specific and not being what everyone else is.

TA: What did you do before being a PT?

MH: I came out of school and did a 12 month PT course, then did a 4 year refrigeration mechanic apprenticeship. Between me and Mozza there isn't too many brain cells in that industry. Moz is out of bed at 11 and back home by 3. So yeah I'm a qualified fridgey but I hated it mate, it's shit work and I only ever did it because \$400 a week when your 19 seemed pretty good. It's good to do a couple of cashies here and there though.

TA: For people currently stuck in a job they don't enjoy, what advice would you give to them?

MH: it's hard to do what you love for a job. I'm very lucky that I do what I love and when I first started out it was very risky but I'm lucky that I'm so passionate and if you work hard enough and make those little sacrifices well the karma train will come to fruition. And for those that aren't doing what they love, try and broaden your horizon. Because the biggest risk in life is to not take any risks.

TA: I love hearing that Micky and I admire you for having the courage to go for it.

MH: Yeah mate it's all about following your ticker and don't let anyone tell you what is right for you. Deep down you'll know what is right.

TA: You struggle to sit still, what are you like on holidays?

MH: Shit house! Got to have the runners packed. The only way I sit still is when I have 6-10 beers and then I'm on my arse, absolutely paro haha!

TA: You're a family man, been married for a few years, can you give us an insight into your family life?

MH: Yeah 3-4 years married now, happily married, we have a little boy Cruz, he's a Labrador retriever who everyone knows, he's like my little kid. Then I've got my 2 brothers, obviously Toddy who plays here and Brad. Then my two beautiful little sisters who are a part of the netball community. My parents are split up but they both love the footy. They never miss a game. Mum can't wait for Saturdays and Dad was spewing when he heard I was retiring. It's a family club and they love it.

TA: Thanks for chatting Micky. And thanks for all your years of service to the club on and off the field. Thanks for friendship and looking forward to watching you for the rest of the season.

MH: You're welcome and can I just say mate thanks very much. What you're doing for this footy club is second to none and people don't know how much goes into this, as we are sitting outside the rooms in the cold. You don't get paid for this, you don't get thanked enough and people like you need to be thanked more. So if I can say thanks to you and to the Berwick Football club it's the least I can do. So thanks mate. Football club it's the least I can do. So thanks mate.