

# CHOPPA CHAT

Edition 8 – 2017

For the eighth edition of “Choppa Chat” I caught up with Riley Heddles on a Tuesday night before training. We got together in the change rooms in what was probably the most public Choppa Chats so far to discuss injuries, high level footy and perseverance. Here’s our chat;

**TA: Hi Rizza we have a lot to talk about. We may as well get it out of the way early. Can you list all the injuries you have suffered in your career?**

RH: Well I’ll have a go at naming all the serious ones. Up until under 18’s I was untouched and I used to get comments all the time like “I can’t believe you never get injured” and so forth. Those comments came back to bit me on the arse a bit. It all started the day before the start of year 12, I broke my arm playing basketball. It was pretty bad and I had to get surgery. The surgeon managed to twinge one of my nerves which left me not able to move or feel my fingers for 4 months. That injury allowed me to play an extra year at the stingrays. I guess my biggest injury was my foot. I broke my foot 3 times in my first 3 years playing for the Frankston Dolphins. I had 2 surgeries on that foot. It was pretty devastating and a very long process to get back. I would say my most painful injury was my dislocated shoulder last year. There just wasn’t any relief. When you break a bone it’s initially painful but it goes away but there is no comfort zone with a dislocation, I didn’t realise injuries could be so painful. I’ve had a few others but they are the main ones.

**TA: What about your knee?**

RH: Yeah well prior to the surgery I’d never missed a game from it.

**TA: You had knee surgery?**

RH: Yeah in my last year at the dolphins.

**TA: Well that is serious**

RH: Yeah well I’d never missed a game from it and the physio’s just thought it was an ITB issue but when I went in for scans there was a meniscus tear and a few other issues. But it has been pretty good this year.

**TA: And your hamstring in last year’s finals series.**

RH: Yeah just another one on the list during a particularly frustrating year.

**TA: How did you cope mentally with all those injuries?**

RH: It was really tough. Especially when you know it’s a long road but you just have to get on with it. Show your face around the club and stay positive. Nothing else you can do.

**TA: Alright let’s get to the footy. You played your whole junior career at Berwick before 3 seasons at the stingrays, where I believe you have the games record. Tell us a bit about your time at Dandenong.**

RH: Yeah I have the equal games record on 49 games and I loved my time there. I still keep in contact with a lot of the coaches and players. I’d never played stingrays before in any of the junior sides and I was kind of just thrown in there in my first season of u18s. I wasn’t really expected to do much but I ended up playing every game in my whole first year as a bottom age with Madi Andrews. I was pretty lucky playing in successful sides that made grand finals. My third year was probably my favourite and we had a lot of great players in that side.

**TA: Anyone notable?**

RH: Well 11 players got picked up by AFL clubs. Our midfield was Luke Parker, Adam Treloar and Dylan Shiel. So it was pretty impressive side.

**TA: Did you have any AFL clubs interested in you?**

RH: There was a little bit of interest. I trained with the doggies, received a few letters and things but I was always an outside chance. Rookie list maybe but it wasn’t to be.

**TA: Is it true you are responsible for Steele Sidebottom getting drafted?**

RH: Yeah funny story actually. Still haunts me a bit haha. So this was my first season at the rays and we played off in the grand final against the Murray Bushrangers. We weren’t really expected to win and before the game our backline coach was discussing the match ups. Michael Hibberd had Tom Rockliff who was the leading goal kicker that year. Ben Wragg from Narre had Sam Wright who was meant to be the next Daisy Thomas and Tom Gillies had Jack Ziebell another gun. Then I had Steele Sidebottom. “Don’t worry about him

he's pretty slow" was the message. Five minutes into the game he had 3 on me and I got moved off him. He went on to have 35 touches and kick 10.

**TA: But only 3 on you.**

RH: Correct but anyone playing at the time loves saying that he kicked 10 on me.

**TA: You then spent 4-5 seasons at Frankston? You loved Frankston, what was so great about playing there?**

RH: Yeah so I got down there in Simon Goosey's second year. The club was a kick out of Grand Final in 08' then from what I've been told Shannon Grant came in 09' and he cleared out 30+ players and managed to only win 5 games. The Grand Stand famously burnt down, they were battling a bit. Jimmy Magner was playing at the time so he probably has a better idea than me. So I went down there without much expectation but when I got to know the quality of the people down there, I developed life long friends. We were struggling when I got there but by the time I left we had built a pretty good club and probably should have had more success. We were knocking on the door and we had earned the respect of the competition. It's pretty devastating to see the position they are in now.

**TA: How do you feel about their current situation?**

RH: It doesn't sit well with me, particularly being one of the players that left.

**TA: They were good to you? Did they ever not pay you?**

RH: Everyone who played there knew and understood that we were a poor club. And people would come to Frankston knowing they would be playing for less but they would get the senior exposure. We were a proud stand alone club and after playing for them I could never play for an aligned club. We were so tight knit, trained together, went out together and then we would come up against an aligned club who would have the same blokes as us but they would get forced out by the AFL listed players and it's just not the same.

**TA: Would you like to see them reinstated in the VFL?**

RH: I've heard rumours they will re-enter the comp next year and I hope they can but I just hope they have the right financials in place where they support themselves properly and obviously be competitive.

**TA: Despite injuries you managed to string some good footy together and play in some State of Origin sides. Again was there any interest during this time?**

RH: yeah so I had a break out year in 2013. My first game that year was against Port Melbourne. Their coach was Gary Ayres who was also the Vic coach and I played probably my best VFL game that day so that may have contributed to my selection. There was a little bit of AFL interest during that year but I ended up breaking my foot again in about round 15. I played the majority of 2014 but I had a pretty ordinary season personally and as a side we lost 4 or 5 games by under a kick and at the end of the year about 30 players walked out and the struggles started from there.

**TA: You obviously played some high level footy, did you have any standout coaches or mentors during this time?**

RH: Yeah I probably have two. One is Colin Dell who a lot of the boys would know. He was my under 16's coach and I'd just been cut from the u15s interleague squad. My dad organised for him to train me once a week on a Friday and without him I don't think I would have ever played at a higher level. He taught me about the basics of footy such as one touch and body positioning, which sounds simple but it really helped me. After that season I won my first club best and fairest and made the Stingrays squad. The other is Graham Yeates who was my Stingrays coach. I came into the stingrays very raw and he kind of took a liking to me straight away. I think him being a back pocket himself gave us some common ground. I was lucky he was the coach at the time because he really developed me as a player.

**TA: After a catastrophic amount of injuries you decided to have a year off from playing altogether. What did you do during 2015?**

RH: in the first half the year I was the backline coach at Frankston and then in the second half of the year I went to Europe for a few months. I'd had the knee surgery in January and I thought I would make the most of the time off.

**TA: Do you have a favourite spot?**

RH: Yeah probably the Greek islands in particular, Eos, spent a fair bit of time there.

**TA: How did you end up back at Berwick?**

RH: Well I was still umming and ahring about whether I would go back to Frankston or Berwick. And it really was only a choice between those two. But at the end of the day I wanted to come back and play with my lifelong mates like Gunny, Sheppo, Tenna and Shardy who I played all my juniors with. And I'm very happy with the decision I made.

**TA: Did throwing in the towel cross your mind?**

RH: It's kind of funny I remember when I broke my foot for the third time my parents said to me a few parents are asking if you want to keep playing at all. That was pretty funny to me because footy had always been a part of life and there was no second thought from me. I guess over the last 24 months the thought had crossed my mind as you start to feel the wear and tear and your career becomes a bit more important but those thoughts have been stowed away for the time being.

**TA: How's the body feeling at the moment?**

RH: Yeah pretty good, I had a bit of crook shoulder the other week. I missed two games. I could have played but we took the conservative approach this time.

**TA: How do you manage and look after yourself after games, trainings etc these days?**

RH: Yeah since the shoulder I've had to manage the way I play a little bit. Obviously after a dislocation there is always a chance it could happen again so I'm not as stupid anymore I guess haha.

**TA: You're a natural athlete, what other sports do you enjoy playing?**

RH: Yeah I love basketball. Growing up I was always a better basketballer than a footballer. Footy obviously took over but I still like to play a little bit here and there.

**TA: You enjoy having a beer and a good time, what is your alcoholic drink of choice?**

RH: Probably these days it's a vodka lie and soda so I don't put on too many kgs. But as long as I'm out with the boys I'm not too fussy.

**TA: You're in a nightclub what song gets you on the dance floor?**

RH: The boys would probably say Titanium from back in the Blitz days but again I'm not too fussed haha. I just like having a good time.

**TA: You're an electrician by trade but you've recently applied to join the fire brigade, how is that process going?**

RH: Yeah going well mate, into the final stages at the moment. Been a goal of mine for a while and we'll just have to see how it plays out.

**TA: Alright well good luck with everything, it's been awesome seeing you back playing some of your best football this year. You deserve a clean run at it, you're an absolute legend of a bloke. Thanks for chatting with me today.**

RH: No worries thanks mate.