



4350:

*a pivotal postcode
for Bernie Pramberg*

BY: ROSS STANLEY

A YOUNGSTER, FASCINATED BY SOME CUSTOMERS AT HIS LOCAL SHOPS, DEVELOPED A LIFELONG PASSION FOR THEIR INDUSTRY'S CHARACTERS.



Bernard Frederick Pramberg was born in Toowoomba on December 22, 1946, the year when Bernborough's illustrious feats captivated a nation.

His first stamping ground was Newtown, a Garden City destination for letters with 4350 under the address. During his primary education at the Church of England Boys School, Bernie was intrigued by the jockeys and racehorse trainers he spotted at the butchery and the general store.

"I contracted polio when I was five and spent six weeks in Toowoomba Hospital. I was very lucky, as so many sufferers were paralysed. My back and left leg were impacted, but I came good after treatment that included physiotherapy," Bernie said.

"Despite being strongly discouraged by my mother, Marjorie, around the age of nine, I would cycle down to the races at Clifford Park. Most of the gatemen were pretty good and they would let me in. The colour, excitement, and the sounds at the track really got me in.

"My immediate family had no background in racing. A great-uncle in Les Plant was

a butcher and a hobby trainer. My father had a mate who raced Regal Pier. He was second, beaten a half-length, in Blueden's 1959 Toowoomba Cup. Les Wrigley was overweight on the 66/1 shot."

The pair had warmed up with a sixth placing, two days earlier, in the James Taylor Handicap on Weetwood Day.

"During the Second World War, Dad was a Petty Officer in the Australian Navy. He had a stint in Darwin," Pramberg said.

"He had business involvements as the Queensland agent for British tobacco products at a time when everyone smoked. Laminex was also massively popular then, and he had responsibilities for its Toowoomba and western Queensland sales. He was always into mechanics and motor bikes."

In 1926, Bernie's grandfather "Ted" Pramberg and Bernie (Senior) signed up as foundation members of the Downs Motor Cycle Club. It is now the longest continuously running club of that type.

The Brisbane Telegraph (July 3, 1939) reported that Mr Humphrey, the DMCC's patron, presented Ted with a handsome

writing desk in recognition of his long time service as the club's president.

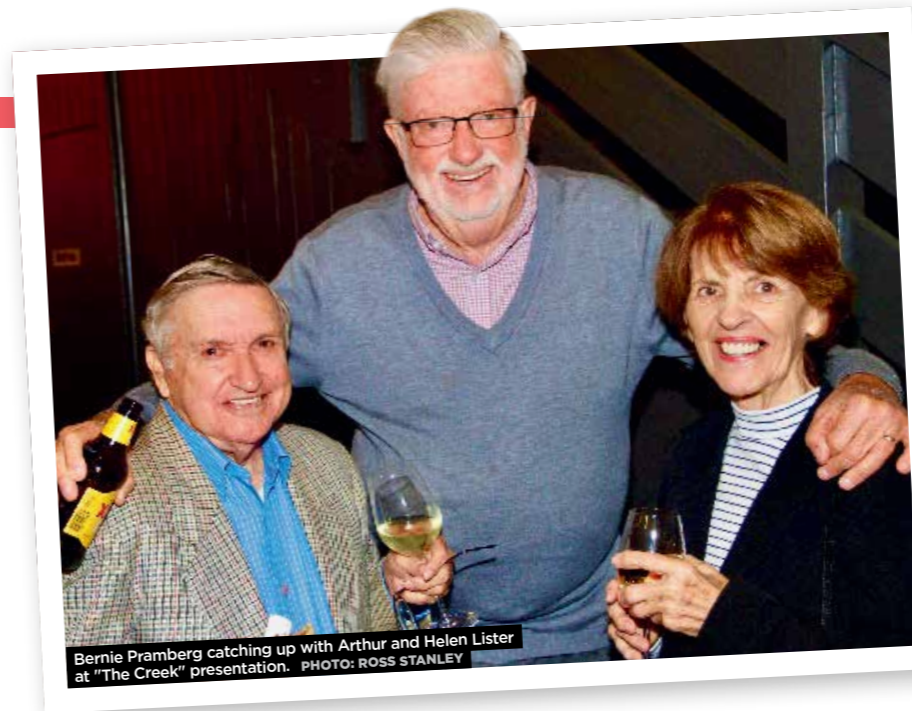
Bernie (Junior), who was destined to be a prolific producer of desktop work, was a five year old when Phorger Frederick "Ted" Pramberg passed away.

After the Prambergs moved further to the east of the city, Bernie, who is of Swedish descent, derived the typical teenage pleasure of playing sport.

"I was a batsman and did some off-spin bowling. During my scholarship (year 8), our team did well against the older lads in the Under 15A competition. I was a rugby union second-rower; I was tall and gangly and not much good. I never played League but did have a season for North Stars in Brisbane's Warehouse cricket," Bernie added.

"I loved English, especially the written word. Before I reached my early teens, I had read every sports book in the Toowoomba Library. My bookworm habits have endured. Travel has given me the chance to increase my collection of racing books.

"I left school after completing Junior (year 10) and then spent about a dozen years in the public service in Brisbane.



Bernie Pramberg catching up with Arthur and Helen Lister at "The Creek" presentation. PHOTO: ROSS STANLEY

"I wanted to keep fit, so I applied to become a referee with the Brisbane Rugby League and ended up handling three Grand Finals and two Queensland versus New South Wales clashes before State of Origin was introduced.

"After I sent off Queensland forward

Ray Higgs in my first interstate game, I feared that the Queensland Rugby League president Ron McAuliffe would mark 'never to reappear again' on my file."

However, McAuliffe, who became a prime mover for the Origin concept, thought otherwise. Pramberg was to have a different

association with the Queensland Senator down the track.

As well as Lang Park being a cauldron that fired up first rate professional reporting, the added benefit was the collegiality for those who packed down in the pressroom scrum.

Steve Ricketts wrote in *The Column* (August 5, 2020) that "the offices of the Queensland and Brisbane Rugby Leagues were located below the Frank Burke Stand, along with a licensed club, the dressing rooms, and storage areas.

"In the 1970s and '80s, QRL chairman, Senator Ron McAuliffe, affectionately known as 'Gunsynd', loved to host guests, particularly members of the media, in his private bar, which doubled as an office during the week. Paul Sweeney and Kev Keliher were two of the media regulars, along with likes of David Falkenmire, Bernie Pramberg, Errol Harris, Barry Dick, Lawrie Kavanagh, Jack Reardon, and yours truly. It became known as the Gunsynd Bar, in honour of the charismatic, grey-haired host."



Bernie Pramberg chats with Fred Brophy at a Bernborough Club fundraiser PHOTO: ROSS STANLEY



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NEW PATHWAYS

After Pramberg stored away his whistle in 1978, opportunities for media work in football broadened. An early assignment was a column in *The Telegraph*, Brisbane's afternoon paper.

"Naturally I was thrilled to be approached by radio station 4IP to be on its Rugby League commentary team with Ross Lawson. I had a lengthy partnership with John McCoy on 4BC. In 1982, we covered the first State of Origin. I was also a Rugby League panellist on SportsScene, the massive show compered by Rod Gallegos. It ran for three hours every Sunday morning," Bernie recalled.

In the mid 1980s, Pramberg linked up with Gerry Collins and David Wright in the ABC radio studio at Toowong for a host of Saturday morning League programs.

Bernie was a co-compiler with Paul Colman, Paul Malone, and Barry Dick of *Broncos: 20 Fabulous Years* (2007).

Thoroughbred reporting began for him on a part-time basis at Brisbane's *Sunday Sun* (formerly *Truth*) in 1980.

"I worked at Saturday city programs and learnt a lot from Bart Sinclair and Mr J.C. Anderson. I wrote up three races and had a column. I had let them know that I would do any job. I didn't want to be typecast as a football reporter," he said.

Soon afterwards, the stablemate the *Daily Sun* was launched, so through that decade Pramberg was kept busy.

"During my time as a public servant, an Albion Park meeting was the scene for a fantastic Christmas Eve party. Another huge crowd attend The Creek's last thoroughbred meeting on December 30, 1981," he said.

The Daily Sun's demise, with the loss of 166 jobs, was announced on December 1991. Its Sunday counterpart was killed off four months later. Fortunately, Pramberg was able to join the staff of *The Courier Mail* and *Sunday Mail*.

THE TRADEMARK VERSATILITY

A couple of years before he brought down the curtain on full-time employment, *The New York Times* honoured the Australian in its March 31, 2008 edition.

It reported that "*Brisbane-based journalist Bernie Pramberg has been writing about sport for Australian metropolitan newspapers for more than 30 years. He has spent the last 17 years of his career working at The Brisbane Courier Mail, covering a wide variety of sports, including Olympic and Commonwealth Games, golf's major championships, and rugby tours of Europe. But for the past 12 years, golf has been his prime focus as group golf writer for the News Limited newspapers throughout Australia. He*



Bernie Pramberg at the start of a Birdsville race. COURTESY: PRAMBERG COLLECTION



Bernie Pramberg always stood tall with his Bernborough Club committeemen. PHOTO: ROSS STANLEY

rates Tiger Woods' record-breaking victory at the 100th US Open at Pebble Beach in 2000 as a career highlight, together with countryman Geoff Ogilvy's win at the 2006 US Open."

Pramberg's work on the Australasian Tour started in 1998. He covered 10 US Masters for News Limited and took out the prestigious 2000-01 Ericsson Award for the best Australian golf story. Bernie also served as a captain of the Australian Golf Writers Association.

For The Love of the Game was a peerless series comprising more than 500 columns over some 13 years. Bernie continued the run on what was a staple diet for *The Courier Mail's* Saturday readership after calling stumps on his central career.

Pramberg was akin to a fossicker, finding nuggets as strangers were welcomed to the hearts of sports fans.

Illustrations include the Yellow Socks Charity Softball Challenge (November 28, 2015), "Dick" Lugge (the Coolum

lifesaver who perished in a 1948 rescue bid, December 30, 2017), Tom Veivers (high drama at the Gabba when Ian Meckiff was no-balled, November 10, 2012), Australian boxing champion George Fleming (despite being a headline attraction, he travelled by tram to fights at the Brisbane Stadium), and Peter Poole (the shepherd boy from Northumberland who travelled solo to Australia and was the first secretary of the Australian Rough Rider's Association, a national champion, and friend of R.M. Williams, October 3, 2011).

Racing aficionados were absorbed by the paragraphs about John "Sticky" Dyer (the strapper who had been runner-up to Bruce Devlin in an Australian PGA Championship, November 13, 2010), Jockey Cyril Small and Jeff Perry (Vo Rogue's colours score again, June 3, 2017), Jockey Freddy Marsland (I was never in the limelight, June 8, 2013), Geraldine Evans (the 81-year-old Brisbane on-course tote operator retiring after 60 years at the window, June 21, 2014), and Ron

Murphy (Bookmaker, June 15, 2013)

RACING CORNERSTONES

"I was never a full-time racing writer, but I loved talking to and writing colour stories about people in racing. There is a diversity of characters. So many sports have become sanitised. Racing is still open and very stimulating. I unashamedly leant towards the battler rather than established big names," Bernie said.

"I just enjoyed all those yarns and derived great pleasure from hearing everyone's story. Most of the people I wrote about had not heard of self-promotion and were generally very humble."

The role also applied to preparing special features during Brisbane's winter carnivals.

Pramberg and his wife, Deborah, attended this year's Melbourne Cup. After a healthy number of Tuesdays at Flemington, nothing will beat the peak scaled in 2005. On that occasion, he teamed with Bart Sinclair to furnish *The Courier-Sunday Mail* with accounts of Makybe Diva's unforgettable third straight Cup win.

For nearly all of the first two decades of this century, Pramberg was a contributor to the *Racing Queensland Magazine* and its successor *Race*. Some of the banners were *Outback Racing*, *Industry Profile*, and *Spotlight On*.

A scan of Bernie's early pieces in 2003 reveals themes that were right up his alley.

The February item explored "enjoying the characters of bush racing" at a Longreach meeting and a Central-West awards function.

March: Bell's popular January fixture was reviewed. It contained references to the Downs trainer "Billo" Castles, steward Jack Ross and journeyman jockey Jimmy Cook.

May: Readers learnt about Peter Clarke. The 44-year-old was the only dual jockey-trainer licence holder in the Downs and South Western district.

June: Multiple generations of the Bryant clan, namely George, Frank, Len, and Wayne were outlined. Before the nemesis of weight prevailed, the youngest of the set had been an outstanding apprentice in the late 1980s.

"Wayne has made every post a winner outside racing, rising from part-time employment with Repco Auto Parts in Toowoomba to the position of state manager of the company's operations in Western Australia and South Australia," Pramberg said.

August: The write up was about the training endeavours of the pioneer South Burnett lady jockey Glenda Richardson. She won at Gayndah on the legendary Mick's

Luck, a valiant campaigner that she also prepared for part of his long tenure on the turf. Incidentally, Bernie relished seeing the old iron horse salute in an Oakey Newmarket.

September: The well-honed skills of Brisbane Valley's Max Guldbransen were highlighted. He was a rodeo bull-riding star, horse-breaker, and trainer.

October: Rebecca Kerwin's victorious effort on Marauding Lass, a mare from Michael Flanigan's Toowoomba yard, in the Birdsville Cup was the first by a female jockey.

November: The centre of attention was Craig Smith's phenomenal strike rate at Roma and his successful partnership with stable jockey-cum-brother-in-law Tony Lane.

Later, of course, the line-up embraced many notable names such as Chris Munce (November 2017), Jeff Lloyd (October 2015), Barry Baldwin (June 2017), Damien Browne (July 2011), Winning Ways (August 2019), Black Caviar (June 2011), Tim Bell (December 2015), Tony Gollan (September 2016), Robert Heathcote (June 2012), Spirit of Boom and the McAlpines (May 2018), Michael Cahill (July 2019), Desleigh Forster (June 2019), Michael Rodd (February 2020), and Billy Slater (November 2016).

In 2006, at the Queensland's Racing Industry Awards Pramberg took the prize for the Best Print Story. The trophy for the Best Photograph went to Noel Pascoe, the doyen of cameramen who usually rode shotgun when Bernie went out to meet the subjects.

Face to face rather than telephone conversations was Pramberg's preferred



Bernie Pramberg at the 2022 Melbourne Cup PHOTO: DEBORAH PRAMBERG

mode. He also stuck to the principles of not writing anything he wasn't prepared to say to the person directly and also refrained from putting himself in the story.

The most positive outcome for Bernie's limited cracks at thoroughbred ownership was Plumes shedding its maiden tag at Clifford Park. The Downs influence in the pedigree was attractive. The 1976 foal was by Dalray's wonderful son Tails, the outstanding staying chestnut that was initially trained at Toowoomba by Hiram Philp.

The dam Harbour View, a full sister to the stakes-winners Ampass and Electric Glance, was a handy performer by the Wattle Brae sire Passing Glance. Plumes was a three-quarter brother to the 1973 Ipswich Cup winner Fall Guy.

For Bernie, the sectors of camaraderie strongly extend to the Bernborough Club, a horse-racing charity that traces back to 1976. When he stood down from its committee in 2020, his labour of love was acknowledged with the bestowal of a life membership.

Interviewing the luncheons' special guests had been his forte. The swag of sporting stalwarts he chatted with included Wayne Bennett, Wally Lewis, Alan Langer, Chris Johns, and Barry Muir.

Also at the microphone was Fred Brophy, the showman whose boxing troupe is synonymous with the Birdsville Cup carnival.

The son of a circus operator and a trapeze artist was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2011 for his fundraising for charities in Birdsville and for services to the entertainment industry.

Pramberg is also a supporter of the Thoroughbred Racing History Association, the voluntary body that operates the Heritage Unit and Museums at Eagle Farm and Doomben.

In conjunction with the Brisbane Racing Club, the TRHA puts on a presentation each May during National Heritage celebrations. This year's function showcased a nostalgic revisiting of Albion Park's history.

Just as Bernie has used innumerable opportunities to take in race meetings and visit studs in Australia, he has done likewise when abroad.

"I always go to public areas because there is more of a genuine feel for the occasion. In the United Kingdom, I've been to Newmarket, Doncaster, York, Sandown, Cheltenham, Weatherby, and Catterick, where the temperature was coldest I have ever experienced on a racetrack," he said.

"Ports of call in Asia have been Happy Valley, Sha Tin, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok,

and Manila where a bloke was gunned down in the betting area the day I was there.

"The Curragh, Leopardstown, Galway, and Roscommon were Irish venues while my American list includes Saratoga in New York State; Pimlico, the Baltimore home of the Preakness Stakes; Longacres and its replacement Emerald Downs near Seattle; Santa Anita and the now defunct Hollywood Park in Los Angeles; and Del Mar near San Diego and San Francisco's Golden Gate Fields."

WHAT THEY SAID

Following are some of the tributes expressed when Bernie Pramberg retired from his full-time multi-media career in 2010.

- "No one ever sang the Sheikh of Scrubby Creek so well. An absolute pleasure, education to Queensland's ways and a fun filled 19 years as workmates. A career of true worth." (Jim Tucker)
- "Bernie, I never understood what held you back from your real ambition to be a jockey... or a male model! Being a top notch journo and an even better bloke were decent consolations. My life is better for your friendship." (Len Findlay)
- "I've never forgiven you for sending off Ray Higgs. But, like most things, you got it right on the night." (Steve Ricketts)
- "Bernie had great integrity as a referee and great integrity as a journalist. I have especially enjoyed his *For The Love Of The Game* series." (Wayne Bennett)
- "There are fine gentlemen in this business, but you are one of the best. A great writer, worker, but more importantly a great bloke, colleague, and friend. I will miss your invaluable experience, composure, and candour. (Brian Burke)
- Jim Tucker (*The Courier Mail*, January 30, 2010) wrote that "*Bernie Pramberg's retirement present said a lot about the man. The Courier-Mail sports scribe asked popular Caboolture artist Margaret Courtney to paint what they reckoned would be Bernie's favourite scene from his 33-year sporting career.*"
"It didn't come from the 10 Masters golf tournaments he covered at Augusta National, or his distinguished career as a rugby league referee or journalist," he said.
"It was a country racing scene picturing Bernie in a mounting yard with his favourite jockey, the knockabout Jimmy Cook who was famed for travelling extreme distances for rides at country meets. Bernie followed Jimmy's progress from Bundamba to

Birdsville and countless venues in between and was known to ring Brisbane from the hallowed halls of Augusta to ask how did Cookie go at Goondiwindi."

WRAPPING UP

"Honestly, I get as much satisfaction at a bush meeting as a being at a Melbourne Cup," Pramberg said.

"Race clubs have introduced so many young persons to racing, but they miss something if they don't go to the tie up stalls and don't watch the mounting yard action, particularly seeing the interaction between jockeys and trainers before and after a race. If you are an observer and appreciate the game, you enrich your raceday experience and pick up so much."

There are parallels between Pramberg and the late artist Brain Malt. They shared an entrenched bond with the Downs and both focussed on depicting the quintessential elements of racing, particularly in rural settings.

While one used keystrokes, the other portrayed with brushstrokes. Early impressions of the sport were indelible for the duo.

Malt, who was born in Paddington in 1940, witnessed Bernborough's historic Ahern Memorial success in 1946. He was lucky enough to be perched on the shoulders of his father Norm when Doomben was enveloped in euphoria.

During Brian's formative period, his work as a clerk for bookmaker Joe Howlie took him to country tracks. Those down to earth experiences inspired many of his compositions.

Pramberg's yarns were attractive threads that were deftly woven with abundant facts and quotations. Admiration for his subjects was implied. His quiet style was the antithesis of a town crier.

Nowadays, the 77-year-old dyed-in-the-wool stayer is a member of the Ipswich Turf Club. At the relaxed midweeks, he can refresh acquaintances and make new ones over a rail in the horse stalls, around the birdcage or with a beer in the bar.

Like Ol' Man River, Pramberg keeps rolling on. If he were still engaged in formal journalism, he would find a way to update the Bryant story. By word of mouth, he informs friends that Wayne is now Chief Executive Officer Automotive Division Genuine Parts Company (GPC) Asia Pacific with Repco a subsidiary. Tracking accomplishments of racing personnel is still a joy.

Arguably, Bernard Pramberg, who chronicled the feats of the globe's elite golfers at Augusta's Masters, is an august master of his chosen craft. ■

An edited exemplar: For The Love Of The Game (April 25, 2014)

It's "Cheap Tuesday" at Victoria Park Golf Club and "Fearless" Fred Casey has just teed-off on the 10th hole.

Brisbane's oldest public course is buzzing with recreational golfers—students, housewives, pensioners. It was quieter when Fred started his round at daybreak.

The former Australian heavyweight champ has set himself a challenge. He wants to play a round of golf every Monday to Friday this year. Weekends are taboo.

"My wife lets me do the cleaning, washing, and ironing on weekends," he jokes.

In February, Fred, 72, and his wife visited their daughter in Dallas. He was quickly playing with a member at Vaquero Golf Club in freezing temperatures. The only other golfer on the course was the local pro, Todd Hamilton, the 500/1 shot who had lifted the British Open trophy in 2004.

The five-week holiday in America disrupted Fred's schedule, but up until yesterday he'd played 77 rounds this year, including 26 this month. Most days he plays 18 holes, sometimes it is 27 or even 36.

Fred Casey is an endangered species as one of Brisbane's surviving colourful characters from the 1960s and '70s. Many have gone, but some endure.

"Likeable rogues and racetrack raconteurs like his old mates "Umbrella Harry", the dogs bookie who ran the illegal betting ring on the terraces at Lang Park, "Aeroplane Jelly" who never settled, and "Shifty", an SP bookie and bit-player at the Fitzgerald inquiry.

An Olympian (Tokyo 1964), Fred won the Australian heavyweight title as a professional the following year. He's been a beach inspector, racehorse strapper, rugby league player, kangaroo shooter, publican, raconteur and rascal. Until its closure in 2008, Fred had been manager of the Bookies Club in Wharf Street for 25 years.

For many years he ran 15km from his home at Tingalpa to work at the Bookies Club.

During the 1960s, he was a front-rower for Wests rugby league club and is currently a committeeman of the Men of League organisation's Brisbane branch.

As an amateur, the Brisbane boxer he twice beat Tony Madigan to win a berth in the Australian team for the Tokyo Olympics.

"Only two blokes in history ever beat Tony Madigan twice," fires Fred.

"Muhammad Ali and Fearless Fred Casey." A couple of years earlier at a Southport beach kiosk, "Fearless" foiled a robbery attempt by two armed men. "I grabbed a golf club so it was a pretty even fight."

"One of the coppers asked me how many times I hit 'em with the golf club. I told him I had four shots, but to write me down for a three," quipped Fred.

"I got more publicity over that than I ever did for one of my fights."

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