MY LIVES: A LIFE IN TOMMYBALL AND TOMMYBALL COMMENTATING

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UNMADE PODCAST

Acknowledgements

Many great athletes succeed because of help they receive along the way. For example, I still remember my mother taking me to the highway near Loy Yang Power Station and encouraging me to climb the fence to play amongst the heavy machinery and coal heap. But often our mothers get too much credit. I think we forget to thank the most important person in any great athlete's career – The man himself. For that reason, I'm dedicating this book to myself: The one person who never lost faith in my ability, my skill, my desire to succeed at the highest level. Thank you, Me. I couldn't have done it without you.

I'm often described as the most humble man to ever play Tommyball. Of course, it's not for me to comment on such things. But I do agree. Brilliant? Yes. A creative genius? Certainly. But it's my humility that I'm most proud of. "Why?", I hear you ask. Well, let me tell you. Because humility doesn't come easily when you're as good as I was, as good as I am. Sure, if I was an ordinary player it would be easy to be humble. But I'm not an ordinary player. Far from it. I'm an all-time great. The sort of player you'd expect to be boastful, and yet I'm not! I remain a mere servant to the great game of Tommyball. I bow down at the feet of Tommyball and say "Sure, I may be the greatest player to have played you, I changed you in ways that no one could have imagined, and yet I seek nothing in return beyond what is financially fair." That's humility on a scale rarely seen, if ever. And although I'd never seek it, for that I deserve considerable credit.

"But where does this humility come from?", I hear you ask. Well, for that we must return to my roots. To the story of a kid from the wrong side of the tracks who was born with nothing but desire, a will to win, and incredibly family wealth. The year was 1969; the date was July 20th. The twentieth day of the seventh month of the one-thousand-nine-hundred-and-sixty-ninth year since years began. There had been literally thousands of days before this one but this day was more special than those preceding days that had come before this day. Because while some eyes were fixed on the alleged "moon landing", one woman's eyes were fixed sOldly on the maternity ward at Traralgon Community Hospital. She was about to give birth to her third child. Although she didn't know it yet, that child was a boy. A boy that would become a man. And not just any man, a man that would change the course of history. That man – that boy that would become a man – was me! And that woman was my mother. This was the moment of my birth. One of the proudest days of my life. I didn't know it at the time, as I had just been born, but this was truly the start of a journey that would lead to some of the great Tommyball rhombi.

My father couldn't be there. He owned a local paper mill, and July was always a busy time of year, but I know he was secretly proud. Researching this book, my ghost writer uncovered Dad's old diaries and went straight to the day of my birth. Perhaps overcome with emotion there's no mention of me or Mum on that day. Or any other day actually. But he did note in his diary that the day was marked by unusually high sales – a good omen no doubt.

I was a spirited and slightly overweight baby. Both my nannies had their hands full dealing with a condition they jokingly described as "a highly active and catastrophic bowel disorder". I remain a fast digester even to this day, and I think it helps as an athlete. And, besides, a great sayer of sayings once said, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." And my active bowels certainly didn't kill me. It made me stronger. And also, very appreciative of ultra-absorbent toilet rolls. But look at me now: Not only uncommonly strong, but one of the greatest and most humble players ever to play the great game of Tommyball.

We will continue this journey in Chapter 2 where my childhood year are marked by more obstacles on the path to sporting immortality.

Chapter 2: The Next Chapter

Many of my teachers noted my struggles with reading. To this day I struggle to finish sentences because of. But my focus was never on the academic side of school. I'll leave that to the so-called "readers" in their ivory towers. For me, school was all about Tommyball. I still remember the first day at Kosciuszko Street Primary School. Seeing the bigger kids being stretchered from the rhombus and thinking to myself, "That could be me one day". Little did I know I'd be stretched from the rhombus later that same afternoon. But that was an incident I'd rather not talk about.

It was clear from an early age I was destined for greatness. Looking at my reports from my schooldays the police often noted I had an aggressive yet creative streak. While they called it "criminal intent", I preferred to describe it as "knock-about charm". When a court order resulted in psychological assessments, the word "aggressive" was often used, along with "narcissistic", "delusional", and "severely-deprived of love". Now I don't know about all those fancy doctor words, but I do know it all added up to one thing: Tommyball. What few people will know, except those who have read my five previous autobiographies, is that my career was almost cut short by an early injury. "An injury? On the Tommyball rhombus?", I hear you ask. "No", you'll hear me answer. It was something far worse and far more serious. But for more on that, you'll need to subscribe to my paywall-protected private blog where I'll reveal details not shared here in a book that cost you a mere 25.99. Let's just say this: Some of the stunts you see in the film "BMX Bandits" are not possible for someone with even my incredible hand-eye coordination.

After 16 weeks in hospital, and after extensive reconstructive surgery, which doctors described as "very personal", I was back on the rhombus. And I'd never felt better; although, to this day I still get a slight tingling and intense stabbing pains along my right arm whenever I'm awake.

I'm sure many of you are reading this book for juicy details about my love life. I know I have a bit of a reputation for being popular with the ladies. A reputation I certainly deserve. But I'm not one to kiss and tell... this early in the book. All that stuff will be in chapters 43-58.

In this chapter I'd like to talk about my other passion away from the rhombus: Animals. Well, not all animals. I find cats, dogs, and pandas a little distasteful, but I will always have a place in my heart for that most beautiful and graceful of creatures: The earth worm.

My love for worms is well-documented. In fact, many of you probably purchased items from my exclusive home worm farm collection, which was a fixture in many pet stores until controversially being removed due to alleged breaches of manufacturing labor laws. Plenty has been written about that, and hefty fines have been paid, but what has never been revealed in audiobook form is where my love for worms originated. The answer is in the foothills of the Strzelecki Ranges in Gippsland, where my parents would often take me on weekends while they went shopping in Melbourne. I still remember Mum dropping me by the side of the road with a spade and a bucket yelling at me to be careful as she sped into the distance.

I would putter for hours in the dirt pretending to dig for gold or diamonds or the bones of a dinosaur that died hundreds of years ago. But what I found instead were worms! Dozens of them. Not many people realize that Gippsland has some of the world's biggest worms. Up to two meters long! Some I would return to the wild, but others I would keep as company for the long walk home.

I remember one in particular. Old Bob. He was as long as my arm, and had a kind of charm and charisma that I identified with. Maybe I saw a bit of myself in him. I took Old Bob home and as the first worm to survive the long trip, I kept him under my bed for days. I would secretly smuggle dirt into the house to feed Old Bob. Sometimes scattering two or three saucepans full of soil onto the carpet under there to keep him happy.

Old Bob never really acclimatized to life in the house, and, if I'm honest, his life was a short one. But to this day he remains the best friend I ever had.

"What does this touching story about Old Bob have to do with Tommyball?", I hear you ask. Well, firstly, I think Old Bob, and worms in general, can teach us a lot about the game. Earthworms are patient, thoughtful, but also incredibly flexible. Sometimes too flexible. And although you rarely see it, worms are also capable of incredible feats of courage. Yet through it all, they remain generous and good-humored. They are the ultimate Tommyball animal. It is for this reason I have a series of earthworms tattooed on my left arm including, you guessed it, Old Bob himself.

During the winter months, when Tommyball players traditionally switch to sleeveless onesies, my worm tattoos would be on full display. Numerous opponents have told me that the sight of my worms on the rhombus would strike fear in their heart, and I'm not ashamed to say the memories of Old Bob often fill me with pride, determination, and drive to succeed. The smell of dirt under my childhood bed still fills my nostrils. In fact, had I not already dedicated this book to myself, I may have considered Old Bob for the honor. Maybe my next autobiography will be dedicated to him. But until then, Old Bob, this chapter was for you.