



By
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Racing stalwart Bruce McLachlan will be sorely missed by the industry

A tribute to Bruce McLachlan

IT WAS SADLY IRONIC THAT THE VERY MORNING NEWSPAPERS RECORDED THE OBITUARY OF LEGENDARY IRISH TRAINER VINCENT O'BRIEN, WORD SPREAD OF THE UNTIMELY DEATH OF CHAMPION QUEENSLAND AND AUSTRALIAN TRAINER BRUCE MCLACHLAN.

Just as O'Brien was a Goliath in the annals of European training, so too was McLachlan in Queensland and Australian racing.

A larger than life character with the gift of being able to walk and talk just as easily with boardroom generals as with battlers, McLachlan will be missed just as much as a man, as a hugely successful racehorse trainer.

With 16 Brisbane premiership victories, seven Group 1s and innumerable feature race wins, McLachlan had been at the peak of his career since the mid-1970s.

His stature in his chosen calling was matched by his physical presence...he was a big man in every respect.

Queensland Racing Limited's chairman Mr Bob Bentley described McLachlan as a "true icon" of the industry.

"Bruce not only influenced racing in Queensland, but had a significant impact in other states of Australia," said Mr Bentley.

"He was a man who was larger than life and in 2003 was inducted into the Queensland Hall of Fame.

"Notwithstanding that Bruce has been at the fore in the training ranks over the years, having won more than 15 premierships, it has been his most recent successes that gave him great pleasure as he made a further mark on Australian racing in partnership with his son, Jason."

Less than a year ago, Bruce entered into a training partnership with his son, Jason, that has yielded more than 50 winners in seven months. The father-son combination triumphed with Phelan Ready's wins in the Magic Millions and Golden Slipper.

McLachlan grew up at Cribb Island, a blue-collar suburb near the mouth of the Brisbane River and his first full-time job was as a member of the Queensland Police Force. He was transferred to Mount Isa where he met his wife Lorraine.



Bruce's greatest thrill came in his successful training partnership with son Jason Noel Pascoe photos

When the family returned to Brisbane he had made the decision to become a horse trainer.

They were humble beginnings back at Cribb Island where McLachlan built some rough-hewn stables and worked his horses on the mudflats.

From Cribb Island, McLachlan transferred to Bundamba for a short period before acquiring stables in the hub of the racing action at Hendra. It was there he learnt the nuances of his craft by observing the practices of the long-established and successful trainers such as Fred Best and Jim Griffiths.

Top rider Graham Cook was riding plenty of winners for McLachlan, but the trainer took on an apprentice, Gavan Duffy, who had met success in Sydney. Duffy was talented, but on his own admission, had an oft-times fiery temperament.

"Graham Cook was Bruce's number one rider,

but I eventually got the job when he moved from Hendra to Thornhill Park," said Duffy.

"Bruce had about 20 horses when I first went there in 1980 but had built his team right up by the time I left in 1986."

During that period, Duffy rode more than 200 winners for the McLachlan stable.

"Bruce and Lorraine were tremendously supportive to me. Bruce was like a father," said Duffy. "Whenever I needed advice on anything he was a big help."

After Duffy returned to Sydney, McLachlan had a successful association with Kiwi riders Grant Cooksley and Brian York.

York rode many of McLachlan's most outstanding gallopers and remained a close friend of the McLachlan family after injury forced a premature end to his riding career.

Always aware of securing quality jockeys,

Bruce



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he was later instrumental in bringing South African Glyn Schofield to Thornhill Park.

From the outset, McLachlan imposed high standards on himself. To be successful, he insisted that horses in his stable had the best environment, feed, staff, trackwork riders and race jockeys.

Prominent race broadcaster Wayne Wilson, whose career has charted all the years of McLachlan’s success, described him as “a racing visionary”.

“He was truly a great man, extremely loyal and before his time in training,” said Wilson. “He’s probably one of the greatest success stories in Queensland racing.

“His operation at Thornhill Park was a huge step forward for Bruce and trainers of that era. He modelled the complex on Eagle Farm, just as Vincent O’Brien made Ballydoyle a replica of Epsom and Colin Hayes did something

similar at Lindsay Park.”

At Thornhill Park, McLachlan exploited his love of gardening. And, as Gavan Duffy recalled, occasionally fell victim to his erratic driving.

“I remember a four-wheel drive that ended up in a watery parking lot in a dam up there,” he said.

In a 40-year career, he trained more than 3000 winners and accumulated legions of friends who were collectively shocked at the passing of a great man.

Bruce is survived by his wife Lorraine and sons, Grant, Ian and Jason.

On Stradbroke Day, the big crowd of 26,000 joined industry participants in paying tribute to Bruce’s life when one minute’s silence was observed between the first and second races.

It was a fitting tribute to a big man with a big heart. ●