

R.I.P. Mr Vic.

My swim coach died last week. His funeral was a celebration of a life well lived. 92 years in fact. I promised my wife I wouldn't cry. I cried.

Mr Vic. was my coach throughout what was a short, but successful swimming career. My father and Mr Vic. were the two men that most influenced my life in my teenage years. Between 1967 and 1973 I think it's fair to say I spent more time with Mr Vic. and my swimming comrades than anyone else.

At his funeral I learnt things about Kevin Raymond Vickery that I never knew. I realised I only knew Mr Vic. the coach, not the man. I reacquainted myself with his family, friends and many Central Coast and Woy Woy locals I hadn't seen in over 40 years. I shared stories with my swimming comrades. It was a good day. It was a sad day.

Under Mr Vic's guidance I won Country, State and National Championships. I had the privilege of training and competing with some of Australia's iconic athletes, many of whom I still bump into every now and then. Like me, they have their own Mr Vic. For some of this era it is Mr Talbot, for others Ruth Everuss and for a number it is Forbes & Ursula Carlile.

In the summer school holidays we trained three times a day. 4 kilometres in the morning session, a 'light' 2 kilometres at lunch and at least 5 kilometres in the afternoon. Every session started with the nervous wait for Mr Vic. to flip the whiteboard over to reveal today's training program. I remember one particular session where Mr Vic. had us swim 16 x 400m. There was no time to complain, so we just dug in and did it. Another time he thought I needed a little more edge in the last 25 metres of my pet event, the 100 'fly. The rest of the squad were told to do 4 x 400m freestyle but I had to do butterfly. The thing is, we could do it and we did do it without complaint.

He taught me how far I can push myself and, even when I thought I was done and there was nothing else to give, I could always find a little more. He taught me that training, commitment and preparation underpin success. He taught me that if you truly want to be good at something it's never going to be an easy journey. He taught me to always hold my head high if I'd given 100%, no matter the outcome. He taught me to be humble in success and gracious in defeat.

To all those coaches out there, I'd like to say thank you. You might be a sports coach, a fitness coach, mentor or maybe even a swim coach. What you do is important.

Mr Vic. thought he was my swim coach, but he was so much more. I never had the chance to thank Mr Vic. for the role he played in my life. I wished I had.

Kevin Raymond Vickery 24 August, 1923 - 27 November, 2015. R.I.P.

Robert McMurtrie
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