

Nineteen seventy-four.

It was the year that a teenage Richard Rault from the Pines would play his first game of basketball down in Frankston, Melbourne.

Rault would quickly develop a fond sense of belonging within the basketball community and has since become the mainstay of the Frankston District Basketball Association (FDBA).

His involvement from such a young age meant that he was able to witness the merge between Chelsea Gulls and Frankston Bears which eventually become the Bayside Blues.

As well as the un-merge that followed.

When prompted to, Rault is still even able to recall on his first-ever coach as the fondest and earliest Basketball memory of his.

In fact, young Norma *still* coaches the U14 Boys at Western Port as an effervescent eighty-one-year-old.

'She actually came to my sixtieth birthday last Saturday night and she said "*Gotta go home! Got training in the morning,*"' said Rault jovially.

That same passion that Norma exudes toward her basketball is the exact same that was instilled in Rault from the ripe age of thirteen.

For proof, you can fast forward to 2021 where Rault is currently completing his *fiftieth* straight season in the FBDA Men's Masters League as part of the Paperboys team.

Incredibly, Rault has competed in the competition with his team, the Paperboys, for the last twenty-five years in a row.

From the moment he could enter their competition, the Over 35's league has treated him well enough to remain there ever since.

Although his physical prowess is not what it once was in his younger years, he still feels like he can contribute to his team while enjoying the health benefits of getting a regular run around the court.

'I'm getting to that age where I can't even shoot from three anymore without getting my entire body behind it,' he said after a close loss on Sunday night.

'But it's great to get a run-around. So long as old Pete is out there to shoot for us then we'll be good.'

Pete is the Paperboys designated seventy-one-year-old scorer, which Rault seems somewhat envious of considering his own physical capabilities at age sixty.

Raults' long-time passion for the game would inevitably also extend well beyond the local leagues down at Frankston.

Over the years, he and his team have regularly competed in Over 35's Leagues held all over Australia.

He would even be lucky enough to compete in the Worlds Masters when they came to our great nation.

And with all that said, it is his coaching that perhaps provides the most obvious tell of his passion for the game.

"The coaching. I'm not happy with my own game anymore. I just love to run around and have a shot if I get the chance,' he said when quizzed about what he loves most about the game.

'But it's watching and helping the kids get better that really makes me smile.'

Rault still, somehow, finds enough to be able to coach two separate teams as well as completing his beloved Sunday ritual.

The women over at the Mt Eliza Meteors Under 21 and the Frankston Under 18 Thirds team are undeniably grateful for his involvement in their progression.

Most importantly, the social element which underlined Raults own career is the dynamic to which most of his coached players have taken such heed.

'I began coaching players back in the nineties that are now competing in the Over 35's competition with me,' he said jokingly.

'And that's such a fantastic feeling because we're all still friends. Even with their families, too. There's such a great appreciation for the social aspect of our game.'

This is especially highlighted in his family dynamic.

Raults brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and his own five children regularly get together to shoot some hoops on their own.

All because they want to remain social and keep in close physical contact.

'It really is a sport that galvanizes communities. Just take a look at the NBL1 for example. We all get down here and yell as loud as we can to support our team.'

Truly connected through basketball.

But just how does Raults manage it all?

'Well, it all comes down to balance,' he says.

'Work, home and basketball... That's about it. It's great!'

A rather simple, yet decisively effective mindset.

When faced with the challenge of a COVID-19 ravaged society, the Mortgage Broker from Frankston was undeniably disappointed.

'I couldn't believe it. But we made it work. The single hour of exercise each day was a godsend,' he said of the lockdowns that plagued Victoria in 2020.

'You wouldn't get my partner doing that again now, though!'

Of course, there was a silver lining to be found for Rault.

He found an opportunity to spend even more time with the kids.

'I got to drop them off at and pick them up from school,' he said with a smile from ear to ear. 'Sometimes you've just got to find opportunity in the smallest of things.'

And with that, a tired but cheerful Rault departed our short interview in the quest to reinvigorate his body before next Sunday's chapter of his story.

With a forty-seven-year long story that has thrown out countless curveballs, the only thing certain is that Richard has, and will continue to witness to so many different events throughout his basketball journey.

From the humble, yet numerous friendships as seen with Norma, his first-ever coach, and 71-year-old Pete who still runs rings around him on the court - to the recollection of new stadiums being developed and the mergers of local teams to support them.

It's clear that even casual, semi-competitive level basketball has undeniable social benefits to each and every single individual involved in the system.

All it would take to realise is just one look at the youthful, charismatic smile of Frankston local, Richard Rault, and you would be convinced that you're somehow missing out on so much that a simple game of basketball can offer.