



Family album: Rob, Craig and Wayne Hendrie in 1997.

HENDRIE CLAN THREE OF A KIND

An umpiring family has enjoyed having the best seats in the house.

As typical young boys growing up in Australia, brothers Craig and Wayne Hendrie spent their weekends running around footy ovals, clattering through change-rooms and fighting among themselves.

"By the end of a league game, Craig and I would've belted shit out of each other," Wayne says.

When not scrapping with his sibling, Wayne responded to verbal taunts from the crowd aimed at his father, until his mother clapped her hand over his mouth. "As a young kid you don't like hearing your old man get sledged," he said. "I'd fight back and yell out a comment."

Every week their father, Rob Hendrie, donned a long white coat to wave the flags as a goal umpire. The heckling never bothered him. "If you weren't copping abuse, you weren't happy because you knew the game was not exciting enough."

Wayne says he and his brother were not embarrassed having a footy umpire for a father and eventually followed in his footsteps, amassing a combined 513 WAFL and AFL games between them, with Craig as a field umpire and Wayne waving the flags. Their old man officiated in 218 WAFL and AFL games.

Rob enjoyed playing football until he was knocked out in a scratch match in 1976, just after Wayne was born. The responsibility of fatherhood weighed heavily on him so he took up his mate's suggestion to try umpiring. He began his career as a field umpire in the amateurs but soon realised he didn't possess the form to make league, so he transferred to goal umpiring. After five WAFL league grand finals Rob was promoted to AFL where he umpired 99 games, including a 1997 preliminary final, before succumbing to a niggling knee injury.

After undergoing a fourth knee reconstruction during his playing career with West Perth Colts, Rob's son Wayne decided that goal umpiring could improve his fitness.

He remembers his second league game as the one in which the three Hendries umpired together. "That was great, obviously a fairly special moment... and a fairly rare occurrence."

Rob maintains that goal umpiring is harder than most people think; it takes skill to read the play and understand positioning. He says umpires have to know whether to straddle the line, how to stand underneath the flight of the ball as it soars over the post, and they must move swiftly to follow the ball to acknowledge if it bounces out of bounds.

Umpires are human, errors happen, and players are not alone in being dropped from games. Rob's biggest blunder occurred in 1993 when he ruled that West Coast Eagle Michael Brennan had failed to thwart a goal kicked by a Geelong player.

Brennan grabbed his waist, spun

him around and claimed that he touched the ball. Unperturbed, Rob waved the flags and the game continued, but he was dropped for the rest of the season for failing to report Brennan for "manhandling" him.

Rob cringes at the memory of another incident in 1991 when Peter Sumich kicked from approximately 30 metres out. As the ball loomed close to goals, an Adelaide player cannoned into Rob from behind, forcing him to lurch forward and take his eyes off the ball. The field umpire indicated a behind, Rob complied and was booed for the rest of the game by Eagles supporters. He confirmed afterwards

that the ball had sailed clean through the goals.

Craig's decision to pursue field umpiring happened while playing for West Perth Colts. "I quickly realised that while I was a handy footballer I was never going to be a great footballer."

Craig officiated in some 150 WAFL games, including the 2001 and '02 grand finals, before trialling to join the AFL panel.

WAFL umpiring manager Darryl Sinclair, who manages the entire WAFL group of 130 umpires, 20 coaches and 20 support staff, as well as coaching the Perth based AFL



Front row: Craig Hendrie officiating in an Essendon game.



Great opportunities: Craig Hendrie.

umpires, says surveys show that like the Hendries, most umpires are blokes who never made league football.

They begin by refereeing junior community games; if competent they are nominated for a development squad where the best trial for selection for WAFL and progress through the colts, reserves, league and finally, if they excel, trial for the AFL.

Before getting to AFL level, umpires must complete courses in positioning, composure, communication, observation and the rules. They must also reach fitness benchmarks. But, Sinclair says, the most important ingredient is "a strong confident whistle—that's the main thing, to be strong, confident and composed."

"It's a lot cooler to be an umpire now than it was 10 years ago," Sinclair says.

Of the 130 people he manages, 10 are female. With 36 field, 36 boundary and 24 goal umpires required each week for the WAFL, it's interesting

to note that only two years ago the WAFL's best three goal umpires were women.

Sally Boud's high school maths teacher was also a boundary umpire and a coach and suggested she join. She wasn't attracted to boundary



Fitness test: Sally Boud.

'I'm probably the biggest sledger of umpires now, to be honest.'

umpiring as it required too much fitness so she chose goal umpiring.

"I knew that I had more potential to make it in that discipline than the other two," she says.

"My fitness wasn't at a standard that would ever be acceptable at a high level so although the fitness demands in AFL are still quite high for a goal umpire, they're at a different level."

It was eight years before Sally umpired the 2014 and '15 WAFL grand finals and as was put forward to umpire for the AFL.

She says she has goosebumps at the prospect of umpiring her first AFL game and knows the requirements for success. "I think preparation is a big one, commitment, obviously fitness, concentration and that's it, really. Preparation's the big one. A bit of courage too because we're scrutinised very heavily from the media."

The hardest things she thinks will be "concentration and not being complacent," to "expect the unexpected" and being miked up.

Wayne Hendrie didn't expect his first preliminary match at the MCG to be "probably the worst game I've ever umpired," admitting he was so overawed he couldn't concentrate.

"It's a magical place," he says. "I love the 'G and I think it was a bit of a surreal moment and I just got caught up in that."

He cites Chris Judd and David

Wirrpanda as the best players he's seen and one memorable moment was "Shaun McManus getting cleaned up by David Wirrpanda and then he went back and slotted it straight over my head... on a very tight angle."

Rob Hendrie says Sumich's close kicks for goal could go anywhere so a goal umpire had to be light on his feet.

"I really enjoyed umpiring where Jason Dunstall, who was a very, very straight kick from a long distance out, or short distance and he could kick on both feet pretty accurately and he was a player who never really questioned decisions just got on with it."

"He was great to be a goal umpire for, and the other player was Gary Ablett, who was just mercurial."

Though remuneration for umpiring is nothing to be sneezed at, it mostly remains a part-time job. Boud is a teacher and considers umpiring a hobby.

Sinclair says field umpires can earn up to \$90 in juniors and the best in the WAFL take home \$300. Rob was in banking and remembers earning around \$800 for an AFL game, \$3500 for a first-round final and \$4500 for the preliminary final. Years ago umpires mostly worked in banking, were teachers or worked for the government.

The Hendries retired from umpiring but continued to stay involved. Craig does WAFL match-day coaching. Rob coached the Perth AFL panel for two years and Wayne is a passionate Dockers member.

They try to be impartial when watching games but can't help questioning decisions. Craig is empathetic towards field umpires saying, "I don't become too abusive



Peas in pod: Wayne and Rob Hendrie.

toward my fellow mates. I understand where they come from." While Wayne says, "I'm probably the biggest sledger of umpires now, to be honest with you!"

They don't agree with all the rule changes and Sinclair says the difficulty is that by not involving umpires in the process, the lawmakers don't understand how hard rule changes may be to implement.

Umpiring gave Rob the opportunity to travel to London for an exhibition game and spend time afterwards touring Europe. Craig says, "It's given me great opportunities to be involved at the highest level. I've been able to see and watch players from probably the best seat in the house."

Wayne agrees, sort of: "I'd say it's the second best seat in the house after playing. You're out there... surrounded by the best in the game and you get to rub shoulders with them. It's pretty cool."

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