

RHYS MULDOON LOOKS ON THE BRIGHT SIDE IN *VALENTINE'S DAY*, THE ABC TV DRAMA FILMED IN RUSHWORTH.

MEAT TRAYS, MUMS & FOOTY MATCHES

IN JULY, ABC TV SCREENED *VALENTINE'S DAY*, ABOUT A COUNTRY FOOTY CLUB AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY. IT WAS SET IN THE VICTORIAN TOWN OF RUSHWORTH WHERE, AS JULIE PERRIN DISCOVERED, IT'S WOMEN WHO REPRESENT THE HEART OF ANY SPORTING ASSOCIATION. AND A WEEK IN RUSHWORTH IS, IN ITS ESSENCE, REPLICATED ALL AROUND AUSTRALIA... EVERY SPORTING SEASON.

FRIDAY

5am: Kim Damon, the first female president in Rushworth Football & Netball Club's 126-year history, starts another day. Before breakfast she has fired off a volley of emails. She calls out to her boys to get up. By 6am she leaves home for work in Shepparton, almost 50km away, where she is a factory supervisor.

9am: Lisa Hitchcock, the netball coordinator, looks out of the office window at St Mary's Primary School. It's raining. She calls Councillor Marion Riley, who confirms that work on the courts has been put back. Lisa wonders if she should have asked Marion to umpire tomorrow. She is still two umpires down.

3.30pm: Pauline Perry, the butcher's wife, delivers a meat tray to the pub and another to the footy clubrooms. She checks that the raffle tickets are stocked up, then sends off a slew of text and answering machine messages for a catering job at a funeral on Monday. The catering is a big fundraiser for the club.

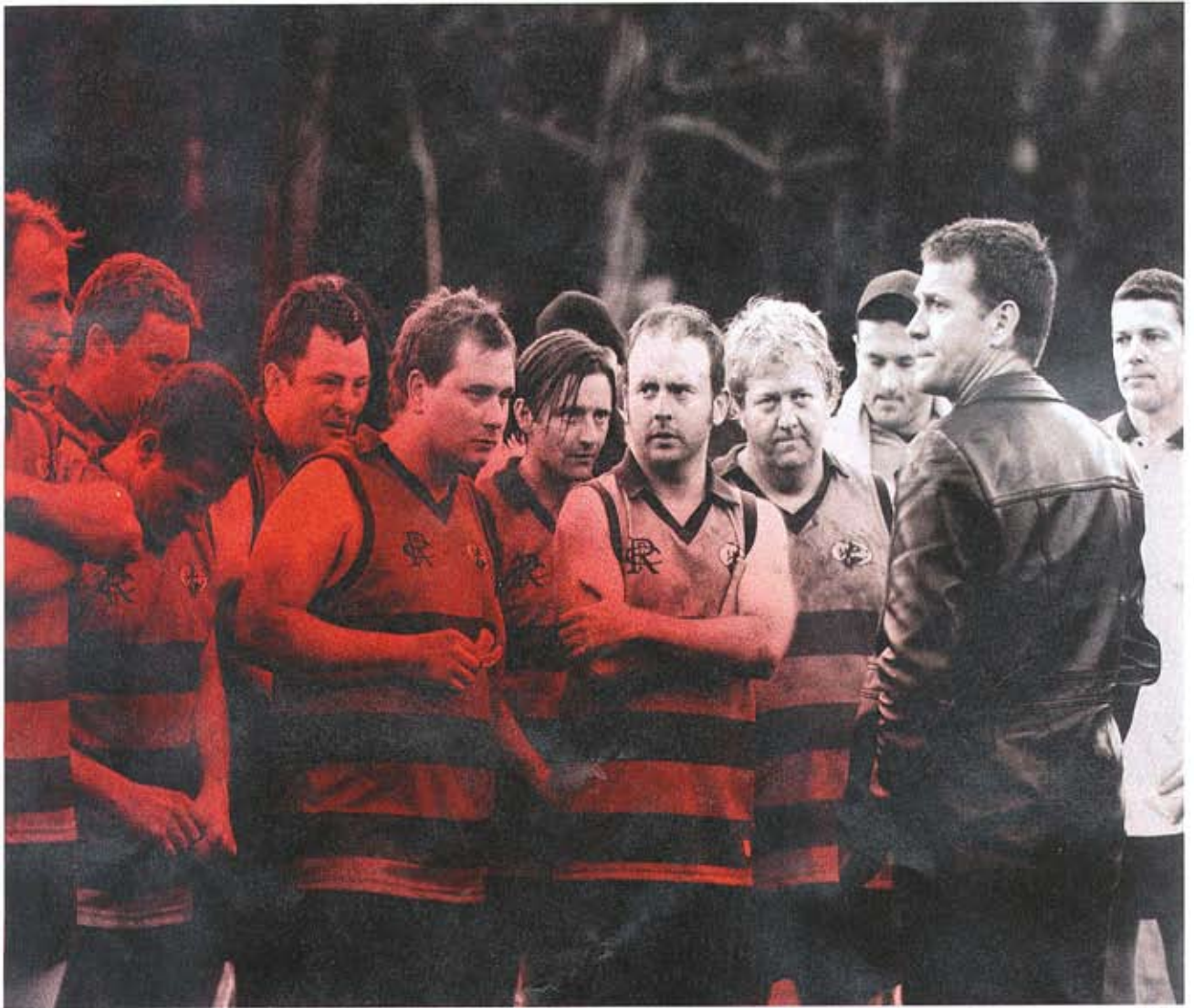
6pm: Kim stays back at the factory, to check in with the nightshift crew, then heads home. Once there, she checks emails and texts the coaches, then she and her husband drive to Kyabram to see their younger son, Troy, play in the under-14s.

7pm: In the pub, the meat tray raffle commences. Around the corner, Lisa gets her netball umpires after the seventh phone call. Her sons cheer – now they can use the phone.

SATURDAY

6am: Ray and Sheryl Lloyd's alarm goes off. Sheryl is the club treasurer and runs the canteen for the home games. After the butcher shop closes, Pauline Perry comes in to do the afternoon shift.

8am: Sheryl and Ray stop at the bakery and pick up the home-game order. They open the canteen and turn on the pie warmers, then bring in a laundry basket loaded with aprons, envelopes, rubber bands, the float money, Panadol, bandaids, scissors and bank bags. Ray carts in the chips, soft drinks and dim sims, then drives back to collect Mrs Geisler, who, with her grey hair fastidiously permed, straightens the snack packs and arranges the lollies. She knows exactly how many lollies



MULDOON RALLIES THE TROOPS.

will fit in a bag and exactly how much profit each sale makes for the club.

9am: Lisa, the netball coordinator, eases her car out of the driveway. When she arrives at the courts she unpacks the esky, bibs, netballs, team sheets, club jackets, score sheets, camera, vote cards, incentive awards, umpire jackets, pump, whistles, time clocks, spare socks, t-shirts and first-aid gear.

At homes all around Rushworth, uniforms are dug out of washing baskets, and socks and runners located. Junior netball mums and dads are ready in their roles as chauffeurs, timekeepers, scorers, first-aid volunteers and cheer-squad members.

Kim arrives at the footy ground with a computer, piles of equipment and a head full of all the things that have to happen over the next 10 hours. With her presidential duties in order, she checks to see if she's packed her own netball gear for the afternoon game.

10am: The Don, a Life Member, climbs up into the scoreboard with his tranny and settles in for the day. He is a local institution with an encyclopaedic sporting knowledge.

Kim watches the first quarter of the under-18s game from the coaching bench. Her older son, Shaun, is not too shabby in the midfield.

12pm: Over at the netball courts, the under-16s lose but Lisa nominates awards for some great play. She greets Kim and the other women who've arrived to play in the C-grade game. By the end of the match Kim has collected the goalpost with her shoulder. The scorer for the B-grade game has vanished. A-grade has another win. Lisa collects vote cards, checks score sheets, pays the umpires.

3.30pm: Kim's shoulder hurts like hell but she heads back to the footy. The seniors win against Violet Town – there's much hooting and hollering.

5.00pm: Tuddy the gatekeeper carries the brown suitcase with the gate takings to the canteen. Mrs Geisler packs up the lollies, Ray turns off the pie warmers, Sheryl bags up the money for banking. The canteen closes and the bar and barbecue open.

6.30pm: The votes are in and the incentives are given out. Kim's son, Shaun, gets Best On Ground for the under-18s. Kim's a bit teary.

SUNDAY

8am: Kim winces as she rolls to one side; better get that shoulder looked at.

At the laundromat, the proprietor puts a load of footy jumpers into a washing machine.

10am: Kim heads back to the clubrooms to help with the clean up; the rooms need to be ready for the funeral catering job on Monday.

6pm: Lynn Cruz – past player, former netball coach and avid club supporter – checks her answering machine. There are three new messages. She is about to turn it off when an older message comes up. “Cruz, Perry here, four sponges Monday.” How did she miss *that*? She sighs and pre-heats the oven.

Kim’s shoulder is now seizing up; she won’t be able to drive to work tomorrow.

MONDAY

6am: Sheryl Lloyd fires up the fan-forced oven and bakes five dozen scones for the funeral. Kim rings in sick – her first sick day in a year.

“AT HOMES AROUND RUSHWORTH UNIFORMS ARE DUG OUT OF WASHING BASKETS, AND SOCKS AND RUNNERS LOCATED. JUNIOR NETBALL MUMS AND DADS ARE READY IN THEIR ROLES AS CHAUFFEURS, TIMEKEEPERS, SCORERS, FIRST-AID VOLUNTEERS AND CHEER-SQUAD MEMBERS.”

10am: Kim and Lisa submit match reports to the *Waranga News*.

Lynn delivers four passionfruit sponges to the footy clubrooms. She sees Mrs Geisler’s cream lilies, Marg Toohey’s salmon sandwiches, Colleen Draper’s mock turkey, Marg Morgan’s steak paste, Ros Thomas’ chocolate cakes and Sheryl Lloyd’s scones. Looks like a fair spread. Pauline Perry has been through; the tables are dressed with linen and flowers.

3pm: Sheryl goes to the bank with the takings from Saturday’s games.

5pm: Kim goes to the doctor, who tells her to see a physio.

TUESDAY

9am: Ray and Sheryl head to Shepparton and return with a carload of canteen supplies, as well as Mrs Geisler’s lolly order.

11am: Kim gets some physio treatment on her shoulder. She’s told not to use the computer.

3pm: Someone updating the netball player lists sees Amy Harris’ name and calls Lisa. “Yes, I *know* she’s just had a baby,” Lisa says. “She rang me from the hospital to make sure she’s registered to play, she didn’t want to miss out!”

8pm: Kim checks her emails, makes a few calls and goes to bed early.

WEDNESDAY

6am: Kim’s son drives her to work in Shepparton. She’s still got her arm in a sling.

4pm: Lisa texts nine girls from the club. *Are you up for Net Set Go* (rather like Auskick for young netballers) *tomorrow? Can you do some drills with the little girls?*

8pm: Kim sends out agendas for the committee meeting and prints them off for the people who don’t have email.

THURSDAY

6am: Kim gets driven to work again. Her shoulder is still frozen.

3.30pm: Back at St Mary’s, Lisa unpacks her car. Out come bags of netballs, witches hats, cones, bibs, skipping ropes... It will be nice when the courts are re-done and they have a storeroom again.

4pm: Twenty-five girls turn up for Net Set Go – their little brothers are here, too. The girls finish up with their favourite game: Toilet Tiggy. The noise is unbelievable.

6.30pm: The netball teams go through their drills and get stuck into a game. At the footy club, Pluto and Baz rip up a couple of beer cartons and throw them in a drum with a bit of diesel fuel. Soon a fire is blazing. There’s an unofficial committee meeting in the office shed. Kim is there. “Next year,” she says, “recruitment, membership drives should all be done and dusted before the first bounce of the ball. It will be a busy summer.”

9pm: Lisa arrives home and looks in on the family. She heaves a huge bag of gear into the hallway, prompting her husband to say: “I guess you’ll be a bit happy once those new courts are built!”

9.30pm: Standing around the fire drum at the footy ground, someone congratulates Kim on Shaun’s efforts in the under-18s. She can feel herself tearing up again. “Oh, this shoulder!” she quips. “Shouldn’t have taken it out of the sling.”

She realises it’s not just because it’s her boy; she’s rapt to see people rallying and helping out – it means a lot for the town. She’s seen a town die when they gave up on their sporting clubs. That’s not going to happen here.

“Now where were we?” she says to the committee, trying to stay on task.

To keep up with news of the Rushworth Football and Netball Club, see rfnclub.org.au.