

TOGETHERNESS:

*Bill & Jean*

LOVE THEIR GAME FOR LIFE



**They make a great team but have also forged individual paths in the sport they love. Bill and Jean Cassidy talk golf with MARTIN BLAKE.**

She has won multiple club championships and plays for love of the game.

He plays for the fraternal spirit and for the friendships he has made as a state-level rules official for more than 25 years.

Jean and Bill Cassidy have spent most of their life in and around golf; together at times, and separately, too. They are the epitome of the game for life.

Jean's 85 and Bill's 86. They both still play twice a week at Peninsula Kingswood Golf Club; Jean is a longtime member at Spring Valley as well. They would never think of taking a cart. They prefer to walk, although they recently bought a couple of electric buggies to help a tad.

Bill's had a bad back, eye surgery and a hernia to slow him down. "Everything's gone wrong this year," he says.

But he still wants to walk. "He wanted to get a push buggy," says Jean. "And I said: 'You'll need an electric if you want to play Peninsula!'"

They could almost do their own comedy act if they chose. For instance, talking about the time Bill caddied for Jean in a state veterans' championship at Kew in 1993.

**Bill:** "The only time I've ever told her anything was the final hole at Kew in the veterans' championship of Victoria."

**Jean:** "He's going to take the glory of that one good shot!"

**Bill:** "I said: 'You won't get there with that'. She changed to four wood and put it on the green."

**Jean:** "I don't recall that at all!"

*The Cassidys could do their own comedy act.*





*"It's been a good combination..."  
Bill and Jean Cassidy still play twice a week.*

**Bill:** "The other woman was on the green and she putted. I thought: 'That's a good putt'. Then it went past the hole. Jean putted and left it a bit short. I can always tell when Jean's going to get a putt because the feet plant hard on the ground and you can see it go 'bang'. Then she put it in for par and won one-up."

It had all started in Fiji, where Bill was posted with CSR in his engineering job in 1965. In the 1960s, CSR often built a golf course at its refineries for the workers. Both Bill and Jean started playing, although they had young children at the time. There were no coaches, so they learned by reading instruction books, some by Ben Hogan, others by Tommy Armour. "We worked long hours," says Bill. "So golf in a sense was the way to get away from that."

Jean won three club championships in Fiji, the first of many triumphs, but it was not until she came home from Fiji and went to see professional Bruce Green (then at Peninsula, later at Royal Melbourne) that she thrived. "I used to be so nervous about it all," she says. "Bruce taught me how to be confident. He said: 'Don't look at the other player, don't say 'good shot', just focus. Don't worry who they are or what their reputation is'. It's hard to do.

"I'd have a thing about a player. He said: 'Don't even look at them'. It sounds selfish doesn't it? I'm not like that now, but (back then) I was very fierce. Not nasty, but my personality is that I'm not outgoing at all, more inward, and that really suits the game of golf to be like that, if you can be. It takes time.

"We watch the overseas golf and they don't appear to even acknowledge anyone else".

Ultimately, she played to a six-handicap at one point and was a single-figure player

for decades. As Bill (who's very proud) put it to someone who asked him once if his wife played: "Try won club championships in five different decades and a state veterans' championship!"

In addition to her three championships in Fiji, Jean won four at Spring Valley and two at Kingswood. She was a pennant player, captain and manager for both her clubs in Melbourne and, later, was the inspiration behind a recruitment program for young girls at Kingswood that was highly successful. Under her guidance, Spring Valley leapt through the divisions of pennant level and the same thing happened at Kingswood, where she pushed the youth policy. "I liked to play the young ones," she says.

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Through her Monday clinics she became a mentor for many young pennant players, some of whom – like Lee Park and Soo Bin Park – became professionals. She loved the work ethic of the Asian players; it matched her own diligence to improve. "I practised Wednesdays and played Tuesday and Thursday. If I played a pennant match on Friday, no matter whether I won or lost, I went and practised on Saturday. I always believed you had to practise and it annoys me intensely when people don't put the work in. That's why I like the Korean culture and the Asian culture."

Jean Cassidy would not hear of excluding young learners from her clubs. It is the secret to finding new players, she says. "They have to learn and enjoy what they do. Even if they have 10 putts they're having fun. Mind you I didn't treat it all as fun. You still had to learn.

"Even down at Kingswood we had people saying 'we don't want them on the course'. But I managed to get them on! One gentleman wrote a letter saying he didn't want any boys on the course on a Saturday. It went to board level. We indicated to him that not only did we want them on; we wanted more! That was the last time we heard from him."

Bill Cassidy is not quite the golfer that his wife is ("He doesn't listen to me, see!" says Jean). But he loves the game equally and found his niche through undertaking a VGA rules course in 1993. He has refereed in six men's Australian Opens and countless pennant matches and Vic Opens, and he still referees matches. Once, he was overseeing a group including the American Charles Howell III at an Australian Open when he gave Howell a positive ruling. "He (Howell) said: 'You guys are better than the American referees because there's no favouritism!'"

It was the best seat in the house for Bill, who loves watching good golfers. He still recalls refereeing the famous Australian Amateur Championship semi-final for women when a teenaged Lydia Ko reeled in Tilly Poulson. "Either one or both of them birdied every one of the last seven holes until Lydia won it on the 20th hole," he recalls. "Best golf I've ever seen was those two girls."

Jean and Bill Cassidy occasionally played together and on one memorable occasion in 2011 won the prestigious Kingswood Cup foursomes event as a couple. They have seven grandchildren and one great grandchild to occupy them outside of the game, as well as a love of horse racing. "We have a life outside of golf," says Jean.

But they can't imagine life without it. Don't need to.

"Bill says it's the camaraderie!" says Jean Cassidy. "I think it's the skill level and the dedication and what you have to do to play it well. It's the game itself, the flight of the ball for me. It's always been that. It suits my personality and it's a game that's governed by the rules and personal honesty. It's been a great interest for us both, Bill with the rules and he's helped with everything I've done. It's been a good combination."