

11. A Sporting diet

In Australian sport, there have been a number of athletic exponents of vegetarianism. The Australian cricketer Warren Bardsley (1882-1954) was a teetotal vegetarian throughout his playing career. A record making left-handed batsman he represented Australia at international test level between 1909 and 1926. Bardsley's diet was part of his overall fitness regime, and seems to have been successful in allowing him to have a prolonged career, made notable by him becoming Australia's oldest ever test captain.¹

The migrant to Australia, Emil Voigt won a gold medal for Britain in the 5-mile run at the 1908 Olympics and credited vegetarianism for this feat. After migrating to Australia he continued running, and set national speed records in the process of winning a number of Australian races. Voigt was also a great believer in the benefits of massage, and wrote and lectured on the subject.

The most famous past sporting legend however was Annette Kellermann (1886-1975). Born in Sydney of a German father and French mother, Kellermann was according to her biographers a life long vegetarian.² Kellermann took up swimming to strengthen up her legs, which had been weakened by polio. Taking to the sport, Kellermann was soon earning good money from giving swimming demonstrations, diving into small bodies of water and long distance swimming. She created the balletic style of swimming for her displays, which is now generally known as synchronised swimming. Traveling to Europe her entrepreneur father made her famous by having her swim down the Thames, the Seine and the Danube (she had already swum down the Yarra). She later made attempts at swimming the English Channel and appeared for the first time on the stage in London. Moving to America, in 1907 she was arrested for wearing a one-piece swimming costume, which brought her more notoriety. After that she graduated to appearing on stage in London's West End and on Broadway. In Hollywood, she appeared in a number of films. One of her films, *Daughter of the Gods* (1916) causing a sensation as Kellermann

¹ Phillipson, Neill, Cricket cavalcade : great Australian cricketers past and present, Hawthorn East, Vic., Craftsman Press, 1977, p. 17

² Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 9 1891-1939, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1983, pp.548-9 and Gibson, Emily, The original million dollar mermaid, Crows nest, N.S.W., Allen & Unwin, 2005.

appeared briefly in the nude, apparently the first time a woman had done this in a Hollywood movie. From 1910 given her sporting acclaim and her being declared 'the perfect woman' she used her status to promote various exercise and dietary regimes in a series of guides and booklets sold via mail order. From these beginnings, during a lull in her career in the early 1920s, she studied nutrition and opened her first health food store in California. After another spell in Europe and Australia she was back in California running another health food store when she was cast back into the public eye as in 1952 her life story was immortalised in the film *Million Dollar Mermaid* starring Esther Williams. Having successfully divided her time between the United States and Australia she moved back permanently in 1970 to the Gold Coast.

Kellermann is assumed to have had a vegetarian diet from childhood, but it seems that at least until the 1920s her diet included fish and fowl. She said expressly on a number of occasions that she never ate red meat, a fact which was particularly exciting to the British newspapers when interviewed prior to her English Channel swim. In her wide-ranging guide to health and beauty, *Physical beauty : how to keep it* (1918) on the one hand she promoted vegetarianism by pushing, throughout the chapters on food, a diet of fresh vegetables, fruits and nuts but then undid this good advice by the following:

"I do not recommend vegetarianism except to those who have a strong sentimental bias in its favour. Good health can be maintained on a flesh-free diet, but it requires much more care in its selection and preparation than a diet which includes foods of animal origin. While I do not endorse strict vegetarianism, I must insist that excessive meat-eating is a far greater divergence from the ideal diet. The system of restaurant and hotel cookery that makes meat dishes essential to every meal has no place in the home. Nuts are very valuable to take the place of meat, but you should use them at meal time as you would meat, and chew them thoroughly. Other foods that will take the place of meat are eggs, peas, beans and cheese."³

This book however did come out before she had studied nutrition and the theories of Dr Kellogg, who much influenced her later thoughts and led to her greater role in health food promotion.

³ Kellermann, Annette, *Physical beauty : how to keep it*, New York, Doran, 1918, pp. 106-107.



Another swimmer and famous Australian exponent of vegetarianism for health reasons was the swimming champion, Murray Rose. Dubbed by newspapers 'the seaweed streak' due to his taking of seaweed extract supplements, Rose won 3 gold medals in swimming events at the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games and took another gold at the Rome Olympics of 1960. In doing so he proved to many the soundness of the vegetarian diet. Rose's family, which had originally

emigrated from Scotland, had become vegetarian while Murray was still a baby. Murray's father, Ian, had previously been in poor health and in 1939 was advised by a Sydney doctor as to the health benefits of a vegetarian diet. He was told, "If you'll agree to radically altering your dietary habits, we can be pretty sure of great improvement."⁴

Ian Rose followed the doctor's advice and adopted a vegetarian diet. His health improved so dramatically that he and his wife decided to raise their son as a vegetarian.

Rose's diet which he used while in training, was not exceptional by today's standards, but was different enough in the 1950s to cause comment and press interest. The diet consisted of:

Breakfast: Fresh fruit in season; nuts, sesame or skim milk

Lunch: Raw vegetable salad; egg yolks, soya beans or cheese

Dinner: Plenty of cooked vegetables. Pudding made with wholewheat or millet.⁵

Using Murray's success as a springboard, the Roses promoted vegetarianism through their son's achievements and the books they wrote on the subject. For a time during the 1950s, Ian also edited the Vegetarian Society journal, *The Australian Vegetarian*.

In recent years there have been a number of Australian vegetarian and vegan sportspeople, most notably the motor racing legend Peter Brock, 9 times winner of the Bathurst 1000. A prominent vegan is the Australian cricket international Greg Chappell who has written health and fitness books promoting the diet.

One vegetarian who caught the imagination of the public in 1983, was not a professional athlete but a determined amateur. Cliff Young, a 61 year old potato farmer from Victoria, entered and won the inaugural Westfield Sydney to Melbourne ultra-marathon - a run of 875 kilometres - which he completed in 5 days. Young became for a short time a minor celebrity, his amateur status and down to earth demeanor gaining him much attention from the press - and thus coverage of his diet. In variance to most sportspeople who adopt vegetarianism for health reasons, Young was motivated by his concern for animals, as he explained in an interview:

"We use to rear calves on a farm I once lived. I would feed the calves from a bucket, from the time they were born, and they thought I was their mother. They would follow me and trusted me.

⁴ Rose, Ian F., *Faith, Love and Seaweed*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 28-29

⁵ Famous vegetarians - Murray Rose, *New Vegetarian*, Vegetarian Society, Sydney, April 1992, p.30

Then when Autumn came we would send them in to get slaughtered. I couldn't sleep too good those nights when I knew they would get slaughtered. I hated having the poor things killed. It was on my conscience so I thought to myself I would give up eating meat altogether and get away from animals as much as I can. So now I don't have to see them killed or get them killed.”⁶

Given the continued success of local and international sportspeople on the diet, the efficacy of it particularly for those who compete in endurance sports is no longer seriously doubted.

⁶ Cliff Young interviewed by Tania Jamieson, Tania, *New Vegetarian and Natural Health*, Sydney, Winter 1997, p40