The All-Rounder: a memoir of Fremantle sportsman Arthur Marshall

by Roger Underwood

The champion sportsman who excels in several sporting disciplines is a well-known phenomenon. Don Bradman, for example, was also the South Australian squash champion and a scratch golfer; Test fast bowler Ray Lindwall also played first grade rugby league in NSW and was a top sprinter. Western Australians who were multi-disciplinary champions include Keith Slater, who played Test cricket and football, cricket and baseball for WA, Derek Chadwick who played football and cricket with distinction for WA, and Rick Charlesworth, an Olympic hockey player and also a State cricketer.

Fremantle all-rounders of note include John Baguley, who was an Olympic long and triple-jumper, played rugby for WA and league football for East Fremantle, and Merv Cowan who was captain of the Fremantle A Grade cricket team and the East Fremantle League football team, a State water polo player and State breaststroke swimming champion.

The phenomenon is easily understood. Champion sportsmen share key physical and mental attributes: they are naturally athletic, they have exceptional hand-eye coordination and lightning reflexes, are highly competitive, and they have that special inner strength known as "the will to win". This is best demonstrated in the champion who 'wins ugly' – sporting lingo for the ability to dig deep and find a way to win even when injured or having an off-day.

The champion who performs at the elite level in several disciplines is rarer today than in earlier eras. Modern sporting champions tend to specialise. They choose to become a full-time AFL footballer, a Test cricketer, or a swimmer or golfer, and they do this while still a teenager. They then devote their lives to their chosen sport. This is a consequence of the fact that sport has become business; to get to the top in one sport it is necessary to renounce all others (except perhaps for recreation).

This is a story about Arthur Marshall, another notable all-rounder in the era when multi-disciplinary sporting goals could be pursued: Arthur was a Fremantle boy who became an elite sportsman in four different disciplines. Despite the fact that he is today still a well-known figure in south-of-the-river districts – practically every club tennis player in the region was taught by him or by one of his coaching staff – and he has also been prominent in the media and politics, his story is not well-known.

Few people realise just what a dominant all-round sportsman Marshall was in WA in the 1950s. As a schoolboy at Wesley College, he excelled at tennis, football and cricket. Later, he became a champion tennis player (playing twice at Wimbledon). He was four-times the State junior table tennis champion and once runner-up in the State Mens Championship, and he played A Grade Table Tennis (for the Fremantle Police Boys Club) in the WA Table Tennis pennants competition. He played league football for East Fremantle during their glory years, and A Grade pennant squash. In his younger days he was a 10-handicap golfer and he is today a skilful lawn bowler. He owned and raced thoroughbred horses. He was also a coach, a sporting administrator and promoter, a sporting journalist, a businessman and TV and radio commentator.

Arthur Marshall's history is also interesting because he was a member of the generation of sportsmen who became enmeshed in (and were victimised by) one of the blackest episodes in Australian sport: the clash between professional sportsmen and amateur sporting administrations. The problem was that in those days, officialdom had the power to dictate where and when a player could play and how he could earn his living. The player had no say in it. In no other sport was this clash more diabolical in its impact on sportsmen than in tennis, although it was probably most laughable in English cricket. Here

the amateurs (referred to as "Gentlemen") and the professionals (known simply as "players") were not permitted even to use the same change room or enter the field by the same gate.

More of this in a minute. First, it is necessary to sketch in the Marshall background.

Arthur Dix Marshall[1] was born in 1934, into a sporting family. His father Horrie Marshall was a champion cyclist, ranked with the best in Australia and winner of multiple road and track State titles. Horrie won the 1929 Warrnambool-Melbourne race, at that time the Melbourne Cup of cycling, beating the international champion Herbert Opperman in the sprint home. Arthur's mother Eunice was a club champion lawn bowler at the East Fremantle Bowling Club. But it was his maternal grandfather Arthur "Cogwheel" Dix who had the greatest influence on Arthur. Dix was a miner who had grown up in Bendigo and then moved to the newly discovered goldfields in Boulder in WA. He was one of the top footballers in the goldfields, and in 1913 he was made an offer he could not refuse: move to Fremantle, play for East Fremantle football club (for two shillings and sixpence a game) plus a job on the wharf. Dix ended up playing in three premierships with Old Easts. Later he became Arthur's greatest sporting mentor.

The Marshall family lived in Carrington Street, Palmyra, and Arthur attended Palmyra State School, where he was bright enough to skip a year. He was scheduled to commence high school at Wesley College, but was a year too young, so he did his first year of high school at Fremantle Boys. Here he came under the influence of another important mentor: his teacher was Jerry Dolan, the legendary football player and coach, and stern disciplinarian.[2] It was at Fremantle Boys that Arthur's precocious sporting ability was first noticed: he played in the School First XVIII football team while only 12, most of his team-mates and opponents being 15 or 16.

He had already by then taught himself to play tennis, initially at Port's Courts in Palmyra (later to become known as the Palmyra Tennis Club) which was only a block from home, and where he would hit around with friends after school. Harry Port, who owned the courts, took an interest in Arthur, and would allow him to practice his serve in exchange for Arthur going over the grass courts pulling the heavy roller, once a week.[3]

When he entered Wesley College in 1947 he began to receive his first formal coaching (from Herbert Edwards at school and then later from Max Bonner when he became a member of the State squad). Both his passion for tennis and his tennis skills blossomed. He was soon winning tournaments, was the captain of the winning team in the inter-school Slazenger Cup competition, and when still only 15 won the men's singles championship at the Palmyra Tennis Club. He was successively the State Junior Champion in the Under 16, Under 17, Under 19 and Under 21 categories. He was selected to represent WA in the Linton Cup Interstate (under-19) carnival three times, and in 1950 and 1951 was invited to go to Melbourne and train with a national junior squad under the legendary Davis Cup captain Harry Hopman.

Had it been 2013, rather than 1953, Arthur would have moved straight into professional tennis after leaving school, or been offered a scholarship to an American college or to the Australian Academy of Sport. None of those options was available in those days. University was also not an option: he had just missed out on securing a Leaving Certificate, passing well in maths and science but failing the compulsory subject of English. Typically he had elected to play in the South Australian Table Tennis championships in Adelaide in the week leading up to the English exam. Needing a job he turned to his father's mate Les Baldwin, the owner of Swansea Cycles, one of Fremantle's most important manufacturing and retail businesses. Arthur already knew the place well and they knew him. He had worked there on Saturday mornings for many years as a delivery boy (he rode a bike with a trailer on

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1 Arthur's mother, before her marriage to Horrie, was Eunice Dix. The name carries through into the next generation with Arthur's daughter Dixie Marshall.

2 Dolan later became a Member of Parliament and Minister for Police.

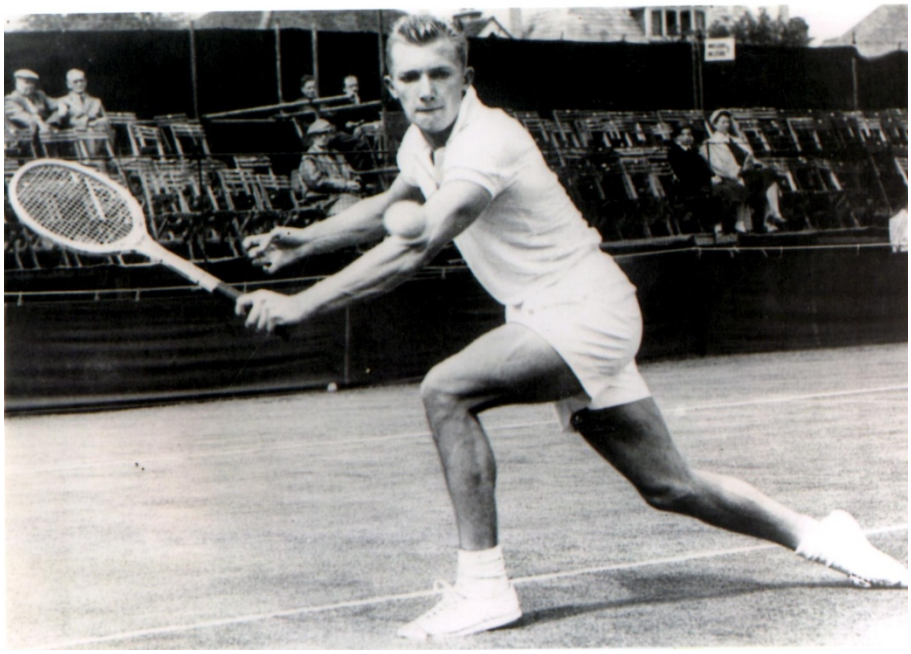
3 Port also encouraged Arthur's competitiveness. He would place a threepenny bit in a selected spot in the service box. Arthur could keep it if he could hit it with his serve. Threepence was not to be sneezed at in the early 1940s.

the back and would ferry eight brand new bicycles at a time down to the railway station) and fixing punctures. He was offered a job - as a clerk and a salesman – but allowed sufficient time to play A Grade tennis in the summer (for Hensman Park) and league football in the winter (for East Fremantle). He even played one game of first grade cricket for Fremantle and would have played cricket seriously had not his love of tennis been stronger.

A highlight for Arthur in his first year after school was being selected to play an exhibition doubles match as the curtain-raiser for the 1953 Davis Cup match between Belgium and India. Playing on centre court at Kings Park before a large audience, Marshall and Hamilton defeated the favourites Wilderspin and Blacklock. In some ways this result foreshadowed things to come. Arthur was a fine singles player, but an even better doubles player, with his swinging lefty serve, artistic returns (he played on the deuce side, unusual for a lefty), destructive overhead and deft touch volleys.

It was also at this time that Arthur's entrepreneurial spirit emerged. While still working at Swansea Cycles he and a tennis playing friend Brian Ford set up a Starting Price (SP) bookie business, taking 5-shilling bets by phone on the horse races. SP bookmaking was later to become illegal, but at that time it was both legal and profitable for a smart operator. Arthur made enough through this 'sideline' to finance his real dream: to become a full-time tennis player. In 1955 he quit Swansea Cycles, packed his rackets and (accompanied by his lifelong friend and then-tennis partner Bruce Francis) sailed away to play the European tour. That year he played international tournaments in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, France and Germany. He did well enough to secure a sponsorship arrangement from Slazenger's Sporting Company, who provided him with racquets and clothes, and to pick up tournament expenses – a package well in excess of his salary at Swansea Cycles.

In fact, he played well enough to be accepted into the draw for Wimbledon in 1955. But in the first round he met the eventual runner-up Kurt Neilsen (who lost to Tony Trabert in the final). It was no wipe-off, Neilsen winning 6/2 6/4 8/6. Although he was an excellent grass-court player with a strong serve-and-volley game, Arthur admits that he was mentally immature at the time of his first Wimbledon, over-awed by the occasion and the company.



Arthur Marshall photographed playing in a Wimbledon lead-up match at Surbiton in 1956

Arthur (again with Bruce Francis) toured overseas again in 1956, playing tournaments in India and Pakistan, then in Italy, Spain, France, Germany and Norway. His game had matured, and again he qualified for the draw for Wimbledon. This time he made his mark, advancing to the third round in both the singles and mixed doubles. In the first round of the singles he easily defeated the Egyptian Moubarek 6/0 6/1 6/1 and in the second round he overcame the Pakistani Pirzarda 6/0 6/2 6/3. The next match was an epic, with Arthur eventually losing the final set 22/20 to the fiery South African Abe Segal.

The doubles were tougher: in the first round Marshall and Francis came up against Neil Fraser and Ashley Cooper (both of whom later were Wimbledon champions) and lost. But the match was played on Court One and televised nationally, giving Arthur his first major publicity. Mind you, even if they had won this match they would then have had to face Lew Hoad and Ken Rosewall, the ultimate doubles champions that year.

Returning to Perth in 1957, Arthur decided to turn professional. The phrase "turning professional" does not sound much to a modern reader, but it was a massively significant decision back then. The Australian, British and American tennis associations in those days would not allow professionals (players who earned their living from playing or coaching) to play in their tournaments or even in local competitions or club championships. The wonderful Australian tennis players of the 1950s Frank Sedgman, Ken McGregor, Lew Hoad and Ken Rosewall had all "turned pro" at the very peak of their tennis powers and had each immediately been banned from playing Davis Cup or at Wimbledon or in the Australian or US championships[4]. The very best players, of course, could go on to make a good living as a tennis professional, even though they received little recognition in the media or the international adulation they had known as amateurs. But for the second and third-ranked players, becoming a pro basically meant the end of their competitive playing days. From the moment Arthur became a full-time coach, and for the next ten years until the advent of Open Tennis, he could not play another competitive match.

Two stories demonstrate the pettiness and sheer bloody-mindedness of Australian sports administrators in those days. Although he was banned from playing in the suburban interclub tennis competition and local tournaments, Arthur derived great pleasure from playing A Grade Squash, where he was the Number One player for Fremantle. In one year he was so dominant in the competition that he was being considered for selection in the State squad from which a team would be selected to play South Australia. However, his hopes were dashed when the Australian Squash Association ruled that a professional tennis player was a professional in all racquet sports and that he was therefore ineligible to play squash for Western Australia. Illustrative of the bizarre decision-making by sporting administrators at the time, the WA Squash Association was permitted to run an Open pennant competition and tournament season in which a tennis pro could compete.[5]

The second example is even worse. Arthur was by now a member of the East Fremantle Tennis Club and for many years he had been elected to the club committee. In the early 1960s he was elected Club President. The WA Lawn Tennis Association (WALTA) would have none of this. They advised East Fremantle that it could not elect a professional tennis player as its President, and threatened repercussions if they did. To their credit, the club stood by its election and backed Arthur. After bitter recriminations, WALTA eventually backed down. This turned out to be a significant win, as it set a precedent other tennis clubs could follow, thus ensuring a higher level of professionalism in club administration.

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4 My brother Peter has produced an exceptional analysis of the history of this whole debacle in his soon-to-be-published book *The Pros: the forgotten heroes of tennis.*

5 The champion tennis player Frank Sedgman once suffered a similar humiliation. He was banned from playing golf at the Royal Sydney Golf Course because he was a professional tennis player – even though professional golfers were allowed to play there.

Who knows what heights in the game Arthur would have reached had not the amateur-professional divide existed at the time or, alternatively, if he had decided to stay an amateur. In the former scenario he would have come up against the "real" world champions of the day, Jack Kramer, Pancho Gonzales, Sedgman, Rosewall and Hoad. Arthur was not in that league and would have found it very tough on the pro circuit. And if he had stayed an amateur he would have found himself up against Roy Emerson, Mal Anderson, Ashley Cooper, Neil Fraser, Rod Laver and John Newcombe. Although he had notched a victory over Emerson as a junior, Arthur was one rank below these players.

On the other hand, I believe he could well have become a top-flight doubles specialist on the international circuit where, with another year or two of overseas experience under his belt, he could have held his own in any company.

Unable to compete during the years before the advent of Open tennis (in 1968), Arthur channelled his love of sport into football (he played another season with East Fremantle in 1961), squash and golf, and into tennis coaching and tennis business. He designed and oversaw the development of the new tennis complex on Preston Point Road in East Fremantle, he opened tennis shops in Claremont and East Fremantle[6], and he wrote columns on tennis for *The Daily News* and *The Sunday Times.*

But above all, he founded the Arthur Marshall Tennis Academy (AMTA). The AMTA dominated the tennis coaching scene in WA for more than twenty years and became eventually the second largest tennis academy in the nation, with twenty-six coaches and an enrolment of 3,500 students. AMTA coaches working for Arthur were the Club Pro in nearly every tennis club south of the Swan River. He put a lot of time into his coaches, teaching them how to teach tennis, and ensuring that his standards were understood and passed on. He also took tennis coaching to the country, running a tennis school in a different country town every year, eventually covering most of the southern half of the State. In many small wheatbelt towns in the 1960s, Arthur Marshall was the first teaching tennis pro ever seen, and all these years later grown men and women in remote places like Kulin or Boyup Brook remember him, and the way he encouraged their love of tennis.

On an individual basis he was also responsible for nurturing some of WA's best players (including his son Scott who won the WA Junior Championship, just as Arthur had done many years before, and his daughter Dixie who, with Liz Smylie, was a semi-finalist in the Australian Junior Doubles Championship). The record is impressive:

- Arthur coached forty-six boys and fifty-two girls to multiple State titles;
- he produced a player representing WA every year for twenty years;
- four of his ex-pupils competed at Wimbledon;
- nine were awarded tennis scholarships to colleges in the USA; and
- ten became well-regarded tennis coaches.

After the advent of Open tennis Arthur was again able to compete. He was still good enough to win the club championship at East Fremantle on five occasions, and to dominate the local tournament scene in doubles with one of his former pupils Ross Olivieri.[7]

Arthur coached at three levels. First there were the Saturday morning sessions with an army of pupils lined up and following Arthur, up on the grassy bank above the courts, demonstrating a forehand, a backhand or a serve, all of them in perfect unison. The group drills would be followed by well-

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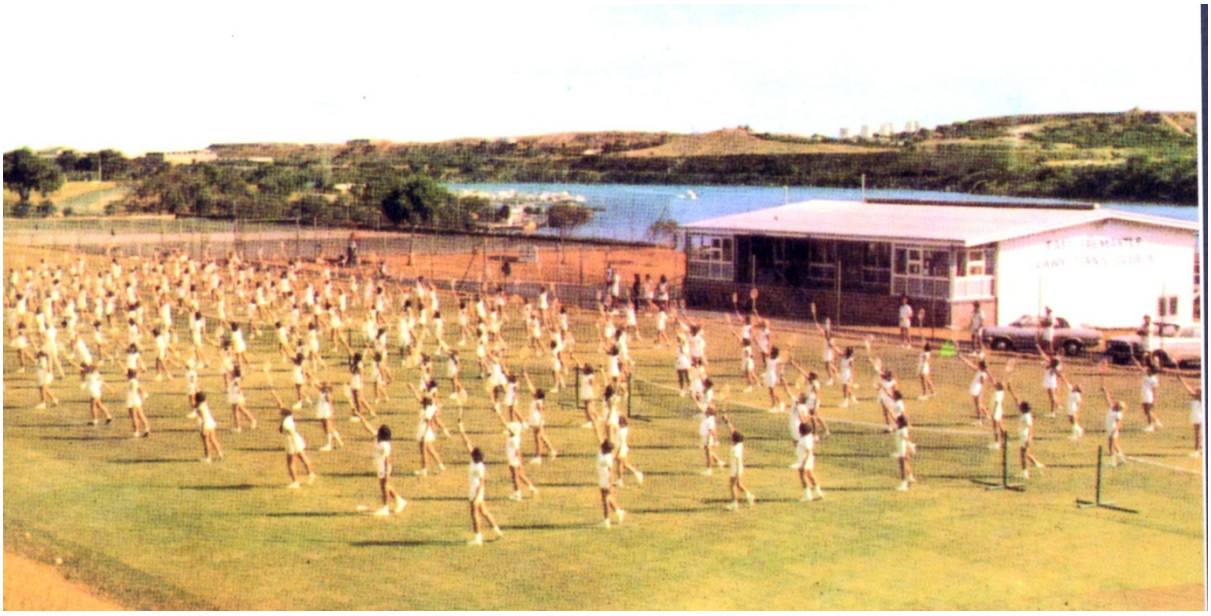
6 The shops were managed by Arthur's wife Helen, a Physical Education graduate and astute business-woman.

7 I watched Arthur (then aged in his 50s) playing A Grade pennants for East Fremantle Tennis Club when I was a member there in the 1980s. He rarely lost a match, and exemplified that great unwritten law for tennis doubles players: "your first job is to make your partner look good". Arthur was masterful at setting up a point which then enabled his partner to make a flashy put-away.

structured circuit training, with smaller groups spending 15 minutes each on their serve, forehand, backhand, volley etc, each group under the eye of one of Arthur's coaching staff. The morning would be rounded out with a half-hour playing sets.

These large group coaching sessions were replicated every Saturday morning by AMTA coaches at clubs all over the south-of-the-river suburbs.



An AMTA Saturday morning coaching session at East Fremantle Tennis Club

At a second level Arthur gave one-on-one coaching to adults taking up or returning to tennis. Some of Fremantle's most well-known names could be found in a list of these pupils, including Alan Bond, Warren Jones, Kevin Merrifield and Ray Laurie.

Finally, Arthur gave personal or small group session coaching to promising or gifted young players on weekday afternoons after school. To these young men and women, he was a stern coach who demanded that they meet high standards of discipline on and off the court and he insisted on proper physical conditioning. The word was that if you wanted Arthur to help you become a good tennis player, you had to be fit, you had to practice diligently and you had to look the part. His slogan was "the three S's: style, skill and stamina".

Arthur's students also had to conform. His 'tennis style' would today be considered old-fashioned and his teaching conventional: he taught the Eastern grip, serve-volley, the sliced backhand, clean hands at the net, a closed stance on the groundstrokes, the long swing – exactly the sort of tennis technique used by Ken Rosewall and all the other champions of the 1950s that Arthur looked up to, and the style that took so many Australians to the top of the world's tennis tree. He was also a well-organised and efficient coach (he used prepared lesson plans and kept notes), and he liked to make his training sessions enjoyable. He encouraged competitiveness, offering his pupils little prizes, like a can of Coke if you could hit the target he placed on the T with one of your first five serves. And if you had the time or the inclination to listen, he was a great talker, passing on the folklore of the game and its history.

As well as teaching tennis technique, Arthur taught tennis etiquette. He was of the generation of tennis players (pre-McEnroe) who respected opponents and court officials, and he demanded a similar standard of behaviour and sportsmanship from those he coached. He even encouraged his fellow-

professionals to study and sit for the Tennis Umpires and Linesmen exam to ensure that they knew the rules properly and could understand the perspective of the court official.

The Arthur Marshall story is wider than tennis. A full biography would chronicle his career as radio and television commentator, tournament promoter, journalist, Telethon Tennis Day organiser, Member of Parliament, Order of Australia Medal, and his role in supporting football development in the Peel region. Significantly, he has been awarded Life Membership by eight separate community and sporting organisations in WA. Above all (and his proudest achievement), he was the driving force behind the Peel Health Campus Foundation that raised $4.2 million for the financing of a new Paediatric Wing. Thus the multi-facetted sportsman was also a multi-facetted contributor across many fields, not all of them sports-related.

I doubt we will see another all-rounder like Arthur Marshall. The world of sport has changed dramatically over the last twenty years. The opportunities for gifted young sportsmen may well be far more financially rewarding, but they are also narrower and more constraining and (to me at least) sport appears less enjoyable. I am impressed by Arthur's absence of regrets, but more so by his pleasure in recalling his many and varied sporting friends, and his pride in his wide-ranging community ventures. And what is more, now approaching eighty, he still plays a cunning game of tennis, and can still make his doubles partner "look good".

The final word on Arthur is that he was, and remains, a 'Freo Boy' through and through. Only those who have grown up with Fremantle traditions understand this. He loves the Freo sporting heritage, and he was proud of the way Freo boys played the game: they were tough, they wanted to win, and they took no prisoners. But he also regarded sport as something to be enjoyed and he believed that the qualities that enabled a person to succeed in sport could also be applied for the good of the wider community. This, I think, is the essence of the man and of his philosophy.

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