

OPINION

Richard Marles: Tearful reflection amid pure pride and joy

Richard Marles, Geelong Advertiser

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OFF the club it was clear my son, Harvey, had made the purest contact. The ball carried the front hazard, landed safely on the green, and began to close the gap with the hole.

This shot had a chance. My heart was in my mouth. And then I saw it: the unmistakable sudden disappearance of white which could only mean the ball had dropped.

Harvey, at age 10, had a hole-in-one. The golfing gods had just bequeathed him the most wonderful gift which most golfers never receive in a lifetime. I yelled at the top of my voice and in the process gave Harvey a fright. He seemed excited about the hole-in-one, and embarrassed by me in equal measure.

Golf is a generational activity in my family.

My father Donald won the University of Queensland golf championship in the late 1940s. Yet from the ages of 25 till 45, with the onset of young kids and a busy career, he didn't pick up a club. It is a common story.

Once my children started to arrive, I quickly realised that if I was not to suffer the same fate then the kids would need to be joining me on the golf course. Seeking a leave pass for five hours to play golf on the weekend was never a likely proposition. Offering to take the kids off Rachel's hands for the afternoon was a very different discussion.

So from the very earliest days of their lives, golf was compulsory.

And so it was with me and my Dad. As the youngest in the family by some margin and Dad feeling more at ease with his career, he



took up the sport again and brought me along in tow. While it wasn't love at first sight, before long the game's grip had taken its hold and endless hours began to be spent with Dad on the course.

It was a place he taught me the lessons of life: patience and the acceptance of fate. But as I look back now it was mainly just spending time with him. And in the process feeling the sublime warmth of his attention.

I remember at the age of 14 beating my personal record by 7 shots. Dad was ecstatic. His pure joy for my triumph could only come from a place of deep love. Dad made me feel that what I did was important enough that it gave him pleasure. It was the sort of parental love that makes a platform for life.

I can only hope that I will be able to replicate Dad's fatherhood with my own children. Yet it is true that when I look over the last decade and a half of playing golf the great moments for me are the triumphs of my kids: Sam's first birdie, the day Bella broke 100, and Georgia's awesome drives which fly down the fairway even though she's only seven.

As Dad moved through his late 70s and 80s, the urgency to play with him grew stronger. And yet the opportunities dwindled. But still there were some precious games where three generations spanning 70 years spent hours together in a common pursuit. I suspect I will never feel the kind of contentment again on a golf course as seeing my son hit a blinder and then looking over to my father only to see his joy at my joy.

While there were not enough of these days, calling Dad on the way home from golf to fill him in on the triumphs of each of the kids became an honoured ritual. It was an integral part of the experience. Telling their grandfather what they'd just done became the certificate of their achievement. And I think for Dad these moments in his week were as important and happy as any.

In April this year my father died. With his death meaning in life has changed. There is no longer the intoxicating happiness that comes from



 GOLFING FAMILY: Richard Marles' father, Donald, with Sam Marles.

hearing him laugh. The ever wise counsel has gone. And there is no more reporting in. I miss him terribly.

And no more so than driving home after Harvey's hole-in-one. With the ecstasy of the shot still fresh, as we got in the car I thought to ring Dad. I paused and then burst into tears. I cried in a way that I hadn't since he died. And the tears didn't stop. By the time we were home Rachel was worried that something was really wrong. And something was. Dad was no more.

It was the most bittersweet moment of my life.

But Harvey did have a hole-in-one. And we still play golf as a family. And the joy of golf is still there.

And we have Dad to thank for all of that.

— *Richard Marles is the Member for Corio*



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