William (Bill) Dankbaar – (1970)
Born 7/11/1952
Died 4/3/2013 aged 60 years

In March, the rowing world was saddened by the loss of Bill Dankbaar - a mountain of a man who dominated rowing in South Australia and nationally in the 1970’s and 80’s, firstly as an athlete, then as a coach.

Bill attended Pulteney in the late 1960’s and threw himself into sports including table tennis, squash, shot put, football and rowing which he excelled at immediately. Bill was undefeated in U/16’s and was in the successful 1969 crew winning the Gosse Shield for boys 1st VIII. Later as a coach, Bill modeled himself on Pulteney mentor John Marshall who he rated as his best ever coach.

The legend of the man possibly began when, as a 17 year old schoolboy, he was selected in the 4 seat of the state heavyweight mens eight, competing in the Kings Cup in Ballarat! Aside from dozens of state Championships, Bill gained Australian selection in 1976 in pairs, fours and eights, reaching the Moscow Olympics in 1980. Through the 1970's Bill was regarded by many as the best rower in Australia, through the 80's he became widely regarded as a coach at national and state level, more recently co-ordinating rowing at St Josephs, Sydney (1989-2007), ending his glittering career at Loreto Normanhurst (2007-2012).

Bill was a proud Pulteney boy and attended many Old Scholar functions. He leaves a massive legacy to the Pulteney Boat Club.

Richard Sexton
Rowing Co-ordinator
VALE – BILL DANKBAAR (OS 1970)

March 4th, 2013
Dear Rowing SA community,

"It is with regret that we inform everyone in Rowing SA that Bill Dankbaar, who rowed for Torrens Rowing Club, member of many South Australian King’s Cup Crews, Australian representative and Olympian passed away today, 4 March 2013, from a long illness. Bill died with his wife Lesley, who also rowed for Torrens Rowing Club, South Australian Women's lightweight 4 as well as an Australian Representative, and their two sons Josh and Toby in attendance."

On behalf of the Rowing SA Board.

Damien Derlique
Development Officer
Rowing South Australia Inc

March 4th, 2013
Dear Members,

It is with great sadness that I report on the passing of one of our clubs highest achieving members. Today, Bill Dankbaar lost his 3 year battle with Pancreatic Cancer.

Bill came to Torrens Rowing Club from Pulteney Grammar School during the 1970’s, where he excelled in rowing. For a period of approximately a decade Bill led the field in TRC colours before moving to Sydney for job opportunities. During his time at Torrens Rowing Club Bill competed in and won dozens of state championships. In 1976 Bill gained Australian selection for the World Championships in the pairs, fours and eight. He continued this level of selection through until 1980 when he was selected in the Men's Eight at the Moscow Olympics. Following the Olympics, he turned his hand to coaching and by the end of the next season he was coach of South Australia's first winning Kings Cup crew since 1937, he was again coach of the winning KC crew in 1982, and in the same year coached a full TRC crew at the Junior World Championships. In 1984, Bill took a crew with two TRC members to the LA Olympics as the Australian Women's coxed four, who won the bronze medal and were Australia's first women's Olympic rowing medallists. Bill's contribution to the Torrens Rowing Club, South Australian rowing and the sport more broadly was huge and we are all the better for it.

On behalf of the committee and members of the club our thoughts are with the Dankbaar family during this very difficult time.

Regards,
Leigh Chapman
President Torrens Rowing Club
VALE – BILL DANKBAAR (OS 1970)

March 5th, 2013
On behalf of Roly Dankbaar...

Yesterday morning, South Australian Olympic rower Bill Dnakbaar passed away at 60 years of age, after a 3 year battle with pancreatic cancer. His funeral will be in Sydney on Monday March 11.

Bill’s Rowing Story

1968  Bill started at Pulteney Grammar School in Year 10, Adelaide, South Australia and immediately began his rowing career in under-15 tub fours. In racing, the crew was undefeated throughout the season. Pulteney was then an all-boys school, offering a large range of sports, and along with several other private schools, a dynamic competitive sporting environment. Bill also represented Pulteney in squash, table-tennis, football and shot-put.

1969  Bill was in the winning crew for the Head of the River boy’s first VIII race on Torrens Lake. At this time, Pulteney’s first VIII crews were midway through a highly successful era when they won a succession of first VIII races. Entry of girl’s crews into the Head of the River was still a few years away, but the SA Women’s Rowing Association successfully managed the sport for women.

1970  Bill again was in the winning crew for the Head of the River on Torrens Lake. At the age of 17 and still at school, Bill was selected to represent SA in the four seat of the heavyweight mens VIII crew, racing for the Kings Cup in Ballarat. At that time selection for the Kings Cup crew was the highest honour is state rowing, and was almost the only way to progress through to Australian selection. For details of the history of the Kings Cup see http://www.rowinghistory-aus.info/interstate-championships/02-mens8.php

SA’s previous Kings Cup win had been at Murray Bridge in 1937. SA finished 4th in 1968 and 3rd in 1969. The 1970 contest was one of the great Kings Cup races, with SA leading narrowly through the first 500 metres from Tasmania. Tasmania then took the lead in the second 500 metres with SA and VIC in close pursuit. These three crews were level at the 1500 metre mark and SA made their move to lead with 300 metres to go. However Victoria, with a strong final spurt, took the lead and the Championship in 6m24s, final margins 0.7 and 0.6 seconds between first, second and third. Bill joined the SA Police Force and was recruited by Torrens Rowing Club.

1971  Bill represented SA in the Kings Cup VIII, this time stroking the crew to another heartbreaking ½ a boat-length second placing in Perth. After a false start, the restarted race saw SA take the lead and control a large part of the race. At the 1500 metre mark, SA led by 1.5 seconds. However it was to be thrilling finish between VIC, SA and NSW. VIC placed a well timed sprint which demoralised the tiring SA crew and enabled them to take the lead and the Championship.
1972  Bill represented SA in the Kings Cup, stroke seat, coming fourth in Tasmania.
1973  Bill represented SA in the Kings Cup, 5 seat, coming 3rd in Murray Bridge.
1974  Bill represented SA in the Kings Cup, 6 seat, coming 2nd by ½ length to NSW in Ballarat. He represented Australia in the World Championships in Lucerne, Switzerland, rowing in the 3 seat of the Men’s VIII, which came second in the petite final. At this time, selection for Australian crews occurred after the Kings Cup regatta, with the results of the interstate races having a large bearing on the composition of the national crews, e.g. the other nine members of the ’74 Australian VIII were all from that year’s Kings Cup winning NSW crew. There was little or no financial support for national representatives at this time, so rowers who moved from interstate somehow had to survive several months of training.
1975  Bill represented SA in the Kings Cup, in the 6 seat, coming 2nd to NSW by 6 secs in Qld. Bill was in a South Australian crew that won the Blundstone Cup for coxed 4’s at the Australian National Championships. This crew then decided to try its luck at some of the European regattas during the winter months of 1975.
1976  Bill represented SA in the Kings Cup, in the 6 seat, coming 3rd in Penrith, NSW.
1977  Bill had a break from the Kings Cup and made his interstate coaching debut as coach of SA women’s coxed IV, which finished 3rd.
1978  Again Bill did not nominate for the Kings Cup (SA finished 4th), but was somehow chosen for the Australian team as a result of the ergometer test following the Kings Cup in Tasmania. Bill Represented Australia in the World Championships in New Zealand, stroking the Men’s Coxed Pair, which finished 9th overall.
1979  Bill represented SA in the Kings Cup, in the 5 seat, coming 2nd by ½ length to Victoria at the recently completed West Lakes rowing course. Bill also coached the SA Women’s lightweight IV which finished in 2nd place. Bill met his beautiful wife, Lesley, in this crew.
1980  This was Bill’s last row in the Kings Cup, again in the 6 seat, finishing in 3rd place at Ballarat. Bill again coached the SA Women’s lightweight IV which finished in 2nd place. Bill was selected for the Australian mens VIII for the Olympic Games in Moscow.
1981 Bill took over the coaching role of the SA Kings Cup men’s VIII and had immediate success. The Queensland crew led throughout the first 1000 metres. South Australia and Victoria kept in close contact and with 500 metres to go, these two crews left Queensland behind and in a fine race the South Australian crew won by 0.63 second.

1982 Bill coached the SA Men’s youth VIII which came 3rd in Penrith NSW. The Kings Cup VIII (coached by Bob Cooper) repeated the win of the previous year by ½ a length over Tasmania. Bill was selected to coach the Australian FISA Junior 4+, all from SA, finishing 4th in the World Championships in Italy. Bill served as Captain at Torrens Rowing Club.

1983 Bill was back to coaching the SA Men’s Kings Cup crew in Perth, which came from behind to snatch victory by half a second from Victoria. The SA Youth Men’s VIII (coached by Bob Russell) also won but by an even closer margin. 0.03 of a second! (the judges taking 10 minutes to decide the winner). Bill was appointed coach of the Australian Women’s team for the first trans-Tasman series against New Zealand in New Zealand, winning 23 of 32 races.

1984 Bill coached the SA Women’s lightweight IV (3rd place) and open IV (2nd place) at Lake Barrington in Tasmania. He was then given the job of coaching the Australian Women’s coxed IV for the Los Angeles Olympics. The crew, with two rowers from Torrens Rowing Club, Robyn Grey-Gardner and Karen Brancourt, won Australia’s first women’s Olympic rowing medal (bronze).

1985 Bill coached the SA men’s lightweight IV which finished 5th at Ballarat.

1986 Bill coached his last crew for SA, again the men’s lightweight IV which finished 5th at West Lakes SA. Bill became coaching coordinator at Unley High School, beginning what became his life’s passion; mentoring young rowers and coaches. Bill also started coaching surf boats at Grange Surf-lifesaving Club.
1987 Under Bill’s coaching, Unley won 8 of the 15 events at the SA Head of the River, including the feature races, Schoolboy first VIII and Schoolgirl first IV (the Schoolgirl first VIII was introduced in 1988). The Grange Surf-boat crew, with Bill coaching, won the SA state championship title and narrowly missed the final of the Australian national titles in WA.

1988 Bill again had success at Unley where there were now 120 young rowers. Grange surfboats finished 1st and 2nd in the SA state titles, and performed brilliantly at the national titles at Cronulla beaches, NSW. They won both the interstate race and the interclub boat races, the only SA crew to have achieved that success. The Grange surfboat story here.

1989 Bill again coached Grange in Surfboats, this time finishing 5th in the National Titles in Coolangatta, Qld. Bill retired from the SA Police Force and spent the next year travelling through Queensland and NSW.

1990 Bill began work at St Joseph’s College in Sydney, mentoring rowers and younger coaches.

2006 Bill took over coaching rowing at Loreto College Normanhurst in Sydney, enjoying much success. Despite his illness, Bill continued to coach until the beginning of this year (2013).
Bill Dankbaar 1952-2013

Hero figure to young rowers

Bill Dankbaar was an Olympic oarsman and coach, King’s Cup oarsman and coach, surfboat coach and successful coach and mentor of hundreds of schoolboys and schoolgirls in South Australia and NSW.

He was a humble, unassuming, eternally optimistic giant among men. “Popular” and “mainstream” were two words that didn’t figure in his thinking. He was intuitive, insightful and always had a clear vision of what was required to get from A to B. He was also very much the family clown and he loved to play games - everything from chess, bridge, cards, table tennis and badminton to squash. At his funeral, 124 of his past and present rowers from Loreto Normanhurst formed a guard of honour.

William Dankbaar was born in Adelaide on November 7, 1952, son of William Dankbaar, a tram driver and musician, and his wife Hermine (known as Minnie, née Oostindie), a mothercraft nurse. Bill went to Pulteney Grammar School. He started classical cello lessons when he was 10 and played in the South Australian Youth Symphony Orchestra when he was 14. The school also started him on what became a lifelong involvement in the sport of rowing.

After being in the winning local Head of the River crew in 1969, Dankbaar, at 17, was part of nine crews for the South Australian King’s Cup (interstate men’s coxed eights) challenges. He was then selected to row for Australia, the first South Australian in about 30 years, at the World Rowing Championships in Moscow in 1973, Lucerne in 1974 and Lake Karapiro in 1978, and the Moscow Olympics in 1980.

In 1974, as well, he started coaching, for a women’s team from Adelaide University – a brave move for a man wanting to get ahead at a time when coaching women was considered less than serious.

In 1981, Dankbaar coached the South Australian King’s Cup crew to its first victory in the event since 1957. There were further wins in 1982 and 1983.

Dankbaar met Lesley Cummins, also a rower, in the early 1970s and they married in 1982, the year that also saw his first national coaching position, when he took four South Australian under-19 men to sixth place at the World Junior Championships in Italy.

In 1983, he coached the under-23 women’s team to a trans-Tasman clean sweep.

In 1984, in his only Olympic coaching role, Dankbaar coached the Australian women’s coxed four to a bronze medal – the first Olympic medal for Australian women rowers. The crew, from three states, had spent only four months training together in Adelaide. In fact, they had only three races together – the Olympic heat, repechage and final.

In 1986, Dankbaar became coaching coordinator at Unley High School in Adelaide, beginning what became his passion: mentoring young rowers and coaches. He also started coaching surfboats at Grange Surf Life Saving Club.

In 1987, Unley won its only South Australian Head of the River Schoolboy 1st VIII race.

In 1988, Grange S1SC won both the Australian and interstate titles at Cronulla – the only time a South Australia crew has achieved this double.

In 1989, the Dankbaar family moved to Sydney and Bill joined St Joseph’s College, Hunters Hill, as head rowing coach. He also joined the Strathfield and North Sydney community orchestras as well as playing cello in the St Joseph’s College liturgy orchestra and for yearly musicals.

After retiring from Jesseys in 2007, Dankbaar became head coach at Loreto Normanhurst. A rowing program of fewer than 30 athletes grew to 50 by last year and 16 crews raced at the 2012 NSW Schoolgirls Head of the River Regatta for nine gold, four silver, two bronze medals and one fourth placing.

His life was truly well lived; he left no one unturned and his legacy will live on through those he has loved and nurtured and spurred on to high achievement.

Bill Dankbaar is survived by Lesley, sons Josh and Toby, daughter-in-law Thu, grandchildren Saskia and Asia, mother Minnie, and siblings Margaret and Roland and their families.

Many interests: Bill Dankbaar (fifth from left in top photo) was a rower, coach and amateur cellist.

Leonie Lamont