

All for the kids

By Kathleen Cliff

“Incredible timing,” Lesley Timmins says as she pulls into the driveway of her Kiama home. “I’m telling you, if you can keep track of me you’re doing exceptionally well.” She steps out of her black Commodore, unlocks the front door and continues, “I’ve always got so many things going on at once.”

Today is no different. Fifty-five year old mother of four, Lesley Timmins, has been to work, merchandising for dairy company *Bulla*, had afternoon tea with friends and spent the rest of the day delivering homemade lasagne to her children, St George Illawarra football star Shaun, as well as her other children Brendan, Justin and Carly. “I don’t know how good [the lasagne] will be,” she says laughing. “I made them last night after having shared two bottles of wine over dinner with friends.”

“Shaun’s got a busy week coming up, so I thought I’d do something to help him out,” Lesley says. She’s referring to St George Illawarra’s preliminary final against Melbourne on Saturday.

“Then I thought, ‘Oops, you have three other children.’ So I was up half the night making these four massive lasagnes.”

Not that she minds. Although she’s always done some kind of work. -“With kids in sport it does cost a lot of money so I always made sure I made some sort of contribution,”- she and husband of thirty-five years, Peter, have always placed importance on her being at home getting meals ready and, “having a real family situation going on,” she says.

Now that it’s just her, Peter and dog Scooter at home she admits, “I miss all the kids. I really do. I was always used to having big meal times and also lots of other friends around.”

She pulls out a photo album. There's Shaun, aged two, in an Illawarra Steelers football jumper. She smiles.

“He asked us if he could play rugby league when he was five,” Lesley says. “He didn't care about putting Lego together or anything like that, it was just always football.”

Twice a week, she'd take him to training in Kiama and sit with the other mothers, waiting for him to finish. She never missed a match and even recalls buying their first video camera so she could tape his games. “It was that big that it looked like a Channel Nine camera,” Lesley says, laughing. “So the kids actually thought they were going to be on national TV from an early age.”

In 1992, at 16, Shaun was accepted into the IAS. On top of his other football commitments, this meant being driven to Fairy Meadow once a week to learn about nutrition, health, public speaking and football skills.

“It was really exciting for him because lots of high profile sportspeople would come along and give them lectures,” Lesley says, “I just used to sit in the car for the three hours waiting, waiting, waiting.”

It also meant getting him to matches anywhere from the Blue Mountains to the Southern Highlands. “I'd be going flat-out to get him somewhere all the time,” Lesley says.

“But we always knew the Academy was a good thing for him because it was a discipline thing and Shaun wasn't all that good at school and used to get into a fair amount of trouble,” she says, sighing.

“And if he ever did get into trouble he used to say, ‘I don't care because I'm going to play football.’”

“Thank God he did, because if he didn’t, I don’t know what would have happened,” she says, shaking her head.

There’s a long pause, then she adds, “The start of his career really was the Academy of Sport with its discipline and its rewards.”

In his first year with the Academy, Shaun was taken on a tour of England. It was the first year the Academy did a big overseas tour with league. Shaun captained the side and they won. “And that was absolutely the beginning of everything for him,” Lesley says, with a huge grin. Her blue eyes light up. “Then the Steelers took notice of him.”

She runs downstairs to find his first contract with the Illawarra Steelers. It was for \$1000 a season. He played with them from 1994 to 1998, when they merged with the St George Dragons, to become St George Illawarra, and has remained with the club ever since.

Shaun’s career has seen him go through nine operations, something he describes as his “career low.”

“Mum’s been great,” Shaun says. “She’s always been there for me, through the good times and the bad.”

“She’s been at every operation with me and driven me to all my appointments.”

Not to mention the fact that she’s cleaned his house each week for the last six years. “I don’t do that anymore, now that his girlfriend’s moved in,” Lesley says.

So why has she done it all?

“One day, sitting in the grandstand at Kiama when Shaun was playing under 7s, another mother, whose son was in the same team, turned to me and said, ‘Shaun is going to play for Australia one day and I want a ticket when he’s there.’”

“I thought, ‘Don’t be stupid.’”

“But he did show natural ability and a lot of potential,” Lesley says, “So we just helped him make something of it and do something that he loved.”

In 1999 he did represent Australia. His signed, framed, green and gold jersey hangs proudly on a main wall in the downstairs living room.

“I don’t expect any pats on the back about it all,” Lesley says. “But if ever he has to get up and say anything, he always thanks us.”

She heads into the kitchen to look for her mobile.

“I sent him a message on the way up to State of Origin which said, ‘we’re on our way up hope you have a good game,’” she says, clutching her phone, trying to work out how to find his reply.

“Yeah, here it is, this is the message I got back and I’ve kept it because it’s so special.” She reads it aloud. “‘Thanks mum I’ll be thinking of all the family when I run out there tonight.’”

“And I just cried,” she says, trying to hold back tears.

She also gets teary as soon as Shaun’s name is called out at a match and he runs onto the field. “Every single time,” she says.

“She still gets pretty emotional,” Shaun says, laughing. “She’s just so proud of me.”

Lesley says that football has given her an exciting life. “This might sound crazy, but sometimes it makes you feel like a celebrity yourself because you go somewhere and you don’t realise the impact and the importance people place on football,” she says.

“He is just a St George footballer but people follow it religiously and love it and it’s so important to them that when they actually meet you they get excited and think they’ve met the player, and it’s only the Mum and the Dad.”

Lesley Timmins and The IAS

Program: Parent of Rugby League player Shaun Timmins

Time spent with the Academy: 1992-1994

IAS Highlight: “My favourite memory would probably be Shaun getting accepted into the Academy as a member. With the Academy, you go along to an introduction day and you get all this really fantastic stuff. You turned up and you got a fantastic brand new red tracksuit and shirts and bags, everything! Shaun brought a lot of items home that day and you could just tell that he really felt like he belonged to something big and special. I can still remember the look on his face when he came home with all his new gear and showed us all. He was absolutely ecstatic.”