

JOHN (JACK) O'TOOLE (1917-1983)

World champion wood chopper and star TV performer

Most people today only see competitive wood chopping if they attend the Royal Melbourne Show and make a special effort to do so but not so many years ago it was a sport that many people followed.

In the 1970s, world champion wood chopper, Jack O'Toole became a well-known figure in television sport when he appeared regularly on the popular TV show, HSV7's "World of Sport". The wood chopping contests, that he almost always won, made for exciting television - never mind that by then Jack was around 60. He won the police wood chopping competition at the Royal Melbourne Show in 1982 when he was 66 years old.

Jack was a fit and strong man, tall and heavy in the body, and he used these advantages in his work as a policeman as well as in his sport of wood chopping. He was known as a hard man and not someone to easily cross. He was often short tempered and held strong opinions about almost everything.

He was born in the country town of Warragul in 1917 to farmer parents but he honed his axe skills when he started working in the Erica forests of Gippsland. He joined the police force in 1942 and quickly became the force's heavyweight boxing champion as well as a competitive axe man.

He first started competing when he was 17 years old and participated in tournaments across Australia, New Zealand and North America. He was famous for ruining more axes than any other

competitor and he was continually working on the cutting edge of his axe, even just before a bout. He was extremely competitive in every aspect of his life whether playing football for the Hawthorn Reserves, racing his greyhounds, boxing or wood chopping. He always needed to win.

Jack died at home in 1983 and left his wife, Audrey and four sons. Two of his sons, Lawrence and Martin, were also champion wood choppers as is his grandson, Lawrence O'Toole junior.

He is interred at Templestowe Cemetery.



Find out more

Beckett, R. Stand by your Logs, (1983)

Haldane, R. The People's Force: history of the Victoria Police, (1986)

Preston, J. Racing Axemen: a history of competitive woodchopping in Australia, (1980)



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Jan is a professional historian who has worked across the fields of heritage, education and tourism. She has taught at several universities, including Monash University where she delivered the master of public history course. She is also a former Chair of the Heritage Council of Victoria. Jan was appointed to The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust in 2010.



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