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## AUSTRALS FOOTBALL CLUB

By Brian Morey

Arthur Norrish recalls that the Australs football club was formed as early as 1918. He says, "I was ten years old at the time when my family moved in from the farm. Sport in those days consisted of football, bike riding, and hockey for the girls."

"After the Great War Rovers and Wanderers were formed, but it was only a couple of years before the Association realised that there were too many players missing out on playing at league level and in 1922 decided that three completely new teams should be formed. They were named Australs, Brigades and Centrals.

The following years saw many top players come and go. They included such notables as J.M. (Snowy) Hamilton, who was regarded by many as the best centre-man of his day, not only in W.A. but Australia-wide. His ball handling skills were nothing short of magic. A couple of other players that spring to mind are Abe Templeman and Jack Loxtem, who were also reputed to be extremely good. There was also Denny Coffey who went on to Captain a West Australian side in 1930.

Denny's family at the time were the owners of the Royal Exchange Hotel in Katanning."

Arthur continues, "I recall a game that wasn't to be. We (Australians) were picked up early by Arthur Hobbs (who was the local baker) in his Ford T truck which had seats down the middle of the tray, on which we sat back to back. Just as we left Katanning it began to rain, and by the time we reached Broomehill it was coming down in bucketfuls.

On arriving at the ground the umpire, Frank Olsen, (who by the way, was one of the best umpires during those times) had a meeting with the two captains and decided, because the oval was under a foot of water, to call the game off. We clambered aboard the Ford T and made our way back home. I don't know how we all didn't get pneumonia as we had no change of clothing or cover over the truck. It was the only time I've ever heard of a game being called off."

"During those years our modes of transport were limited. You either travelled by bike or horse, or walked. For a few years we had a special train which would take players and supporters to Broomehill. The train crew would park the train on a side track there while we played the game and when it was over we would all pile aboard for the trip home. These special trains also took us to the carnivals that were held along the railway line at towns like Narrogin, Katanning, Tambellup, Mt. Barker and Albany. These carnivals were held on the long weekends in ~~January.~~ *Sept. - Oct.*

Arthur Norrish played football over a period of 25 years or so and was a top footballer and an extremely good bike rider. He became president of the Katanning Association between the years 1949-55 and was also a committee man for a couple of years after that, before retiring from football altogether due to business commitments.

Australs must have disbanded in the World War II years but in 1960, due to a decline in the number of players, Imperials and Rovers amalgamated to become the new Australs club. That same year (1960) Alf Batchelor became the first life member of the Australs Football Club and also patron. Ron Collins was President and Charlie Bairstow captain-coach. Alf is able to recall incidents from the same period as Arthur. He says, "I remember some outstanding players like Brownie Batchelor (Alf's brother) and the Haywood brothers, Marley, Eric and Billy. <sup>Billy</sup> ~~(The latter~~ was a champion athlete, and won the State's 440 yds and 880 yds foot races held at Mt. Barker."

Alf is the founder of the Batchelor trophy which is presented to the fairest and best Australs League player every year. Alf, like Arthur, is a stalwart of the Club.

The 60s were fairly lean for Australs, and they only made the finals on four occasions, but lean years were left behind from 1969 onwards. They made the grand final that year but were beaten by Kojonup (15 points). Australs then appeared in the next 8 grand finals, winning four, the last one in 1978. We were privileged to have had players and coaches of

the calibre of Mal <sup>MCRAE</sup>~~McCrae~~, Merv, Barry and Brian Collins, the Coles boys (Terry, Colin, Brian, Gary and John), John Wintle, Russell and Peter Aitken, Brian Morey, Riley Miller, Allen and Tom Campbell, David <sup>HORNE</sup>~~Morn~~, Jerry Hansen, Rod Barrett, just to name a few who contributed to the success.

One of the highs of the Club came in 1972 when Australs beat Kojonup and then went on to win the Champion of Champions held at Mt. Barker in the same year. [This was a competition run by the Great Southern Council between the premisers of the four leagues in the Council at the time. It replaced the Carnivals but only ran for two years after which the Carnivals were resumed. Ed.] Another was in 1975 when the Club won all three grades - League, Reserves and Colts - which has not been done before or since.

President of the Club during these times was Fred Wolfe who had previously been President of the League between 1962 and 1969. His sons, Malcolm and Walter began playing for the club before 1969, and Gary after that date. Since then Fred has been made a life member and patron of the Club, and still takes an active interest, holding the senior Vice President's position. The captain and coach of the League side was Brian Morey, the coach of the seconds was Barry Collins and coaching of the thirds was a joint affair between Jeff Chezney, until he was transferred, and then Gunter Sukiennik.

1978 was the last grand final win Australs had under

captain-coach John Duthie. Since then Australs have been in and out of the top four on a few occasions.

In 1982, after many years of having a poor oval at Kupara Park, the Shire Council had its Enginner, Mr. Gordon McPherson, prepare a comprehensive plan to bring it up to standard. The estimated cost was \$43,000. (\$58,000.) and the football clubs were approached to contribute and participate in the care and maintenance of the oval. Wanderers declined the offer and eventually Australs worked out an agreement with the Council to contribute \$20,000. (\$27,000.) for capital works and undertook to take over completely the ongoing care and maintenance in return for the rights to play football there during the season.

February, 1987 was the Club's reunion when 300-400 past and present players and supporters and their wives were there to witness the culmination of improvements to Australs' home ground, Kupara Park, opened by the Shire President, Geoffrey Beeck. A great time was had by all, and they no doubt re-played many matches.

Players of more recent times who should be mentioned are the Saunders brothers, Greg and Vincent (Vincent has coached the League side on 4 or 5 occasions), Brenton Stewart, Ray Nicholls, Geoff Hall, the Batchelor brothers (Ian, Dean, Derek and Mike), McMahon brothers (Ashley and Chris) and Kerry Jenkins - just to name a few. There are many others. Players from the 1960s who deserve a mention are John Carr, Clarke Stewart, Allan Loo, Phil Riseborough, the Marris

brothers, Bert Hatton, Irwin Kowald, Ken Hastie.

There is no doubt that, although Australs Football Club has had a chequered history over the past 70-odd years, they have built a fine tradition and impressive record among followers of that best of football codes (some would say only), Australian Rules. With friends and supporters of the calibre of those mentioned in this story the continuation and success of the club is assured.