

CENTRAL GREAT SOUTHERN FOOTBALL LEAGUE

By Arthur Todd.

The Central Great Southern Football League, as we know it today in 1988, was formed in 1960 and is based in Katanning.

Australian Rules football has been played in the Katanning districts from the turn of the century. Unfortunately there are few records available of those early days, but the few that do exist can be found in the Katanning Museum. There were many teams recorded in those early times that have now faded into distant memory, reminders of a different day and age. Some of them were Moojebing, Woodanilling, North Katanning, Wanderers and Marracoonda.

Moojebing won the 1906 grandfinal. On the day of the big game the team was short of some of its players so Job Haddleton was despatched by horse to round up the stragglers who were out shooting possums. The game started late and was played in a rough clearing near the Moojebing hall and rail siding.

A magnificent silver cup can be found at the Katanning Museum. The inscription on the cup shows it was presented to the North Katanning Football Club for being runners up in the 1908 football grand final. There is no record of who

defeated it in that game.

Although it is recorded that football was played outside the Katanning Hotel on Sundays just before the turn of the century (and disturbed the church services held there for a time) it is likely these were informal games and the organised fixtures were played on Prosser Oval or the Recreation Ground as it was then known.

During the 1920's the competition was made up of three Katanning teams, Centrals, Federals and Australs. Kojonup was the fourth team in the competition.

The first Great Southern Football Carnival was held in 1922 in Albany and was played between various towns on the Great Southern Railway line. These included Albany, Mt. Barker, Tambellup, Katanning, Wagin, Narrogin and Dumbleyung/Lake Grace. This prestigious event in the football calendar has been held every year since (except the world war years and 1974).

Katanning and Kojonup produced many fine footballers in this period and won five of the first eight Carnivals played. Some of the stars of that period were Snowy Hamilton, Bluey Dorries, Alan Ball, Hookey Fewings, Eric and Ivan Thomas, Brownly Batchelor, Bonny Birchell, Bill Norrish and Maley, Billy and Eric Haywood. In those early days the roads were rough and teams often travelled to matches on the back of a truck or by train to Broomehill when they had later joined

the competition. Ivan Thomas recalls getting halfway to Kojonup on a Saturday afternoon and the truck breaking down. They were eventually towed back to town and played the match the next day.

After a break of several years (1940-1945) the football competition resumed in 1946 with several new clubs being formed in Katanning. They were Imperials, Rovers and Wanderers. Kojonup and Woodanilling made up the five team Association. Matches were still played on "The Rec" for the next four years or so, but in 1950 the five man Board of Control decided to move their headquarters to the Katanning Showgrounds.

The post war era saw football played on Sundays and the fifties were a boom period at Carnival level. Katanning won three Great Southern Carnival titles and four Fairest and Best Player Awards, known as the Caris Medal. No less than thirteen Caris Medals have been won by players from this district since 1950.

The Showground remained the main football venue until 1966 when, after much controversy and work, the Greater Katanning Sportsground (Kupara Park) was opened. Both the existing Katanning clubs, Australs and Wanderers, moved to Kupara Park and this continued to be their home ground until Wanderers moved over the road to adjacent O'Callaghan Park in 1983.

The historical development of football from the turn of

the century meant that there were many small associations in the Central Great Southern districts. As the rural population continued to decline in the post war period, these small groups had increasing difficulty in surviving and in 1960 the Central Great Southern Football League was formed to rationalise the teams and provide an organisation to preserve and promote the game. The CGSFL became affiliated with the Western Australian Football League and the National Football League at that time.

The teams then were Australs, Wanderers, Tambellup, Kojonup, Gnowangerup, Kent District, Broomehill and Ongerup. Tambellup won the first Premiership in 1960 beating Wanderers by 2 points in the Grand Final. Cranbrook later joined the League in 1970, but were soon forced to withdraw due to a lack of players. Kent Districts (Nyabing-Pingrup) transferred to the Ongerup Association in the early 70's, Dumbleyung joined the League in 1971 from the defunct Dumbleyung/Lake Grace Association. In 1983 Kukerin joined the CGSFL and in 1987 Gnowangerup transferred to the Ongerup Association.

At the time of writing (1987) the Showgrounds are about to undergo a major facelift. New grassed ovals are being prepared and an indoor sporting complex is on the drawing boards. It is planned that Wanderers will move to the Showgrounds and use it as its new home ground.

1987 will see the return of the Great Southern Carnival

to Katanning. The town has played host to many of the carnivals since its inception, but it has not been held here for over eleven years. It is the longest running and only surviving country football carnival left in Australia.

An important date on the country football calendar is the Football Championships held annually in the metropolitan area. Sponsored by the giant rural stock and merchandising firm, Wesfarmers, for the past thirteen years, it is known as the Wesfarmers Country Football Championships.

In the early days the carnival was played in various country centres but this proved difficult to organise and the Leagues had trouble travelling the distances involved. In the late 60's the carnival was transferred to Perth permanently.

The CGSFL has had representative teams at every Wesfarmers Country Championships. The League has played most of the carnivals in 'B' section. In the mid 80's, after winning successive B section carnivals, the League was promoted to A section and has had moderate success in that grade.

Many CGSFL players have made the 'big move' to WAFL clubs in an effort to succeed in the State's highest level of football. Many have done well including Brian Fairclough, Rob Barrett, Alan Quartermaine and Stephen Michael. Both Michael and Quartermaine achieved the distinction of winning the Sandover Medal, Western Australia's highest individual

football award.

Although the local football scene is played as a totally amateur competition, the volunteer administration has had to operate in a highly professional manner. In the past few years the League's turnover has exceeded \$50,000. pa.

With the advent of the extended Victorian Football League competition and the creation of the West Coast Eagles in 1987, big changes are taking place in the Australian Football scene at all levels of the game. The CGSFL will face many problems over the coming years as it struggles to come to terms with the changes.

The League will continue to survive however, just as long as people enjoy playing, organising and watching the greatest game on earth - Australian Rules Football.