

# Northern Suburbs

THE changing face of suburban Newcastle sealed a sad fate for foundation club Northern Suburbs.

The story of North, which became North Newcastle in 1978 and won the last of its 15 premierships the following year, brings a tear to the eye of many old timers.

The club deteriorated from the pride of the league to its most embarrassing easybeat.

North's decline coincided with the industrial boom around Carrington, Tighes Hill, Wickham and Islington in the 1980s.

Passmore Oval, the Bluebags' home ground and site of many stirring victories, became a holiday destination for visiting teams.

It was not uncommon for North to lose by more than 100 points in the years preceding its death in 1988.

The club was short on players and many lower graders found themselves in firsts on the same day.

Australian lock Jack Hutchinson, one of the Bluebags' most famous products, felt sick when they folded.

Hutchinson, a hard man of the NRL in the 1940s and 1950s, still lives at Tighes Hill and becomes emotional when talk turns to the Bluebags' demise.

"It was disappointing for one of the original clubs to go by the board in such a fashion," the 1946 Kangaroo said.

"It would be like South Sydney not being around anymore. No one wanted to see North fold but it was better than all three grades getting embarrassed every week.

"Back in the glory days of the club this area was alive with people.

"Unfortunately when the rugby league people of the area left to settle in new suburbs, no one moved here to replace them.

"There were industrial developments going up everywhere and a number of migrants came to the area looking for work.

"Most of the migrants, Italians mainly, played soccer and the North junior ranks withered away as a result. The juniors were the lifeblood of North."

North Nelson Bay replaced the Bluebags as the NRL's 10th club in 1989.

Apart from one preliminary final appearance, the Bay has not set the world on fire.

Hopefully the Marlins will create a history of their own to rival that of their forefathers, who with Western Suburbs share the honour for most first grade premierships (15).

North won its first premiership in the competition's second year, 1911.

It upset defending premier Central Newcastle 10-2 in front of 4000 fans at Hamilton League Ground.

The team was G. Price, E. Jones, E. McGuinness, H. Dobson, H. Hodgson, J. Coleman, P. Holt, W. Scott, C. Croft, G. Hardy, E. Camps, F. Jones and A. Symonds.

Most clubs were finding their feet after World War I when North won its next title in 1920.

The team which beat South 11-0 was H. Woods, C. Bassett, C. Probert, C. Coleman, C. Wright, D. Probert, L. Hackworthy, A. Frewin, A. Toll, S. Amm, H. Williams, H. Irwin and B. Flowers.

It was a radically different Bluebags outfit which downed minor premier Eastern Suburbs 11-6 in the 1925 decider.

The newcomers were W. Hicks, W. Frewin, J. Cubitt, C. Stagg, G. Morley, F. Kelly, Reg Cody, E. Gilbert, Max Bailey, Wilf Cody, R. Marjoribanks, A. Cullen and R. McRae.

H. Taylor, N. Jones, A. Rice and L. Lulhame were the new faces in the team which clinched successive titles with a 13-8 defeat of South in 1926.

Another grand final triumph came in 1929 with a 10-5 defeat of Waratah-Mayfield.

Donna Fleming, the uncompromising forward who made his name under Australian centre Paddy Maher at Maitland in 1933, partnered Wilf Cody in the backrow.

Australian forward Herb Narvo was a member of the North team which took home the silverware in 1935.

The Bluebags thrashed Central 14-5 with "Chippy" Charlton and C. Lock scoring tries and Lyn Johnson booting four goals.

The team was Johnson, E. Mitten, Charlton, Eddie Howley, G. McQuillan, Arthur Toovey, Harold Grace, Lock, Narvo, Frank Wilkinson, W. White, Clarrie Sharp and G. Hardy.

Charlie Hazelton, Alan "Shoot" Farquharson, Jimmy Hattam, Dave Middleby, Alan Russell and "Chappy" Whatmore cemented first grade positions in 1938, culminating in the 16-3 grand final win over Waratah-Mayfield.



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Waratah-Mayfield.

An outstanding team won North's next first grade crown 10 years later.

Rangy captain Jack Hutchinson led the Bluebags to a bloody 5-2 win over Kurri.

"We had a good pack of forwards and our aim in the grand final was to get the ball and keep it," Hutchinson said.

"We led 5-2 at halftime and the Kurri players thought they were in with a good show. They were just about kicking down the walls to get back out there.

"Kurri had everything but the ball in the second half and back in those days the ball was God.

"The way we hung onto it and kept grinding away drove them mad."

Hutchinson's troops were Ron Crossley, "Tiger" Ratley, "Clinker" Robertson, Charlie Smith, Ned Davey, Billy McKenzie, Jack Dewey, Henry Davis, Ray Picton, Charlie Gill, Arthur "Dukes" Forbes and Colin "Boofa" White.

Backrower Henry Davis was a "raving mad punter who would run to the sideline of No.1 Sports Ground during a game to find out who won the third at Rosehill", Hutchinson recalled with a throaty laugh.

And prop Charlie Gill, who represented Australia, was unquestionably the hardest footballer to ever spill blood on the fields of Newcastle.

"Charlie was 13 stone but he was the hardest front-rower I ever saw," Hutchinson said.

"I remember one day we were playing Waratah at District Park in Broadmeadow and Charlie really whacked Tommy Liddiard close to the sideline.

"Tommy got up and gave Charlie a real verbal, lots of foul language.

"Charlie reprimanded him because there were women and children around and Tommy came back at him and called him a cad.

"A cad, can you believe that?"

North won grand finals in 1951, 1953 and 1959, beating Maitland 12-8, Cessnock 16-11 and Maitland 13-12.

Many of the club records from the 1950s have been lost.

It is a crying shame that when the likes of Hutchinson pass on, we won't have their memories to help piece together one of the Bluebags' best eras.

The great Brian Carlson was a North product of the

forgotten decade.

Carlson, who went on to play 17 Tests for Australia, his first at age 19, was a North junior who hypnotised opponents with his freakish natural ability.

"From memory Carlson came into first grade around 1951 and played in the grand final win over Maitland," Hutchinson recalled.

"He was a phenomenal player ... wasted more talent than he ever needed to use.

"Naming the best North player of all time is impossible because the outstanding players like Carlson and Herb Narvo played in different positions.

"Narvo was a wonderful footballer.

"He was a hard man to tackle because he appeared to be running sideways like a crab. Boy, he had a gait on him, but it worked."

Tireless lock Jack "Crocker" Gill led North to another premiership in 1962 with a 18-6 win over South.

Gill, a master of kicking the ball dead on the full to regain possession before the rule was changed, was in the twilight of his career when he led the Bluebags to the premiership in 1967.

Doug Ellis, Russell Cooper, Don Newton, Peter Watsford, Doug McManus, Les Perry, Brian Askie, Colin Ball, Karl Hutchinson, Denis Nichols, Bill "Bags" Owens and Alan Jones were in the team which beat Western Suburbs 13-11 in the grand final.

Australian halfback Johnny Mayes captain/coached the Bluebags to their last title in 1979.

The team which beat Henry Tatana's strong Cessnock side included Paul Grob, Glen Pengilly, Ziggy Niszczot, Bob McKiernan, John Tranter, Steve Olsen, Mayes, Tony Love, Dave Riding, Dave Edwards, Michael Donnelly, C. Morgan, D. Stafford, B. Taber and Col Mathias.

North still holds a world record.

Arthur Fairhall scored 61 points in North's 127-16 annihilation of Maitland in 1940 to get his name in the Guinness Book of Records.

North produced Australian players Charlie Hazelton, Charlie Gill, Jack Hutchinson, Herb Narvo, Brian Carlson, Arthur Collinson and Billy Owens.

The club claims international Lenny Dawson as one of its own, but the brilliant outside back played his early football with Eastern Suburbs.

