

1919

Because of a deep division in Newcastle Rugby League circles, prior to the commencement of the 1919 season, a separate competition was conducted by each of the warring factions, and was composed of teams shown as follows:

Northern District Rugby League Football Association.

(Commonly called "The Bolsheviks")

Teams competing; North, Central/South, West.

NSW Rugby Football League - Northern Branch.

(Commonly called "The Lilywhites")

Teams competing; North, South, East, Kurri.

The catalyst for this split was the player Dan "Laddo" Davies. In 1917 this popular player found himself embroiled in a row which threatened to tear rugby league apart in two cities. The story of Laddo Davies, though one of the code's most colourful, has long been forgotten nowadays.

Davies much loved at his home club, Western Suburbs Newcastle, was enticed to Sydney by Glebe in 1917. In 1916 he had scored the winning try in the Potter Shield Final in Newcastle. Of Welsh ancestry, he was a big lump of a bloke whose "shorts" reached below the knees and who carried his football gear in a large black handkerchief.

In those days league's residential rule was strictly enforced in the Sydney Competition. Players who wanted to change club's in the metropolitan area, had to live in the district for a year before they were eligible to play, while footballers from the country, interstate or overseas, had to live in the district for 28 days. When country boy Laddo came to town he moved in with a relative at Annadale, apparently with the full approval of Glebe officials. On May the 12th, 1917, Glebe, with Laddo Davies in the side, played Annadale, and beat them easily, 26 to 5, Laddo was one of the stars.

The following Monday night Annadale fired in a protest on the grounds that the Annadale-domiciled Davies was not residentially qualified to play with Glebe. After an enquiry, NSW Rugby League upheld the protest, took the two competition points away from Glebe, and disqualified Davies for life. Glebe were later to suffer other penalties from unrelated incidents by the League, which led to strike action by the players, and ended with the NSW Rugby League suspending 14 Glebe players until the start of the 1919 season.

Meanwhile in 1917 the man in the hot seat, the banned Laddo Davies, had returned home to the green valley of Lambton, Newcastle. Untiring efforts were made to persuade the League to relent and allow the Newcastle West banished star back into the game. All were rejected. In frustration the West players took a stand, and declared they would not play a scheduled match (against North at Wickham Oval) unless Laddo Davies was in the side. So Davies played.

The Newcastle Referee's Association promptly notified the NSW Rugby League that a disqualified player had taken part in a competition match. A NSW League delegation travelled to Newcastle and as a result the entire Northern Branch, with the exception of East Newcastle delegates, was disqualified. To that time rugby league in the district had been under the direction of the Northern Division of the NSW Rugby League.

The League's hard line stance split the Newcastle Competition wide open. North, South, West and Central broke away to play a separate competition, staging their games on unenclosed grounds, whilst East Newcastle, plus parts North and South along with Kurri Kurri stayed in the NSW Rugby League fold. The two factions became known as the "Lilywhites" and the "Bolsheviks". Through 1917-1918-1919 separate competitions were conducted in Newcastle. Finally common-sense prevailed in the early months of 1920 and with the formation Newcastle Rugby League all suspensions were revoked and football matters reverted to normal.