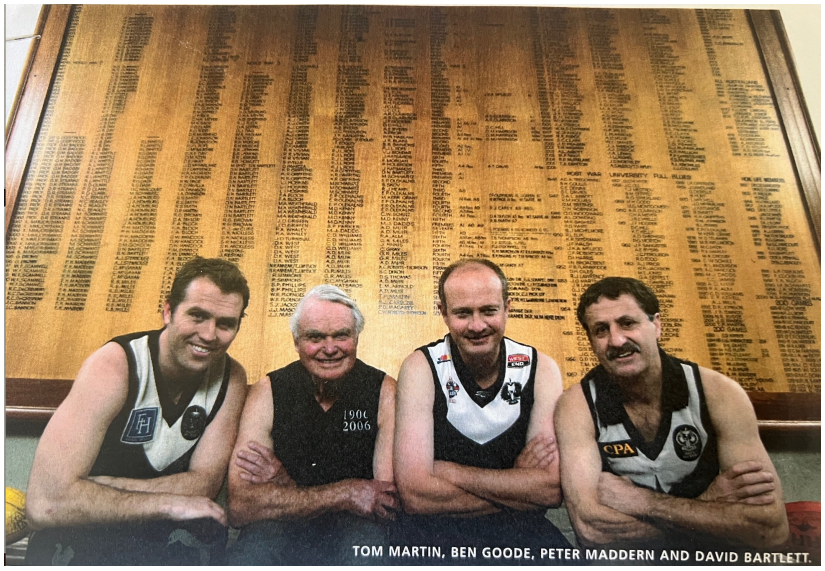
ADELAIDE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL CLUB INC.



TOM MARTIN, BEN GOODE, PETER MADDERN AND DAVID BARTLETT.

Words by Lance Campbell 2006

100 years of The Blacks

WORDS **LANCE CAMPBELL**

FOR 100 YEARS, THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WINNING and losing at the Adelaide University Football Club has been about half an hour. Well, maybe an hour back in the bicycle clips and Model T Ford days, Either way, that's how long it takes for all the Uni sides to gather at the pub of their choice to celebrate winning, losing, drawing or just playing with the self-proclaimed "world's greatest football club". Once all eight teams are together today, it's hard to tell who has won or lost, who is a Division 1 superstar, and who is a Division 8 Reserves scrubber.

They all come the same at the "Blacks", their nickname and their jumper unchanged since 1906, more egalitarian than the French Revolution and a lot more fun. "Greatest footy club" might be stretching the bounds of the English language, concedes present club captain Tom Martin, a graduate lawyer. Yet if a footy club is measured by the lifelong friendships it generates, the social events it thrives on, the support it provides, the good humour it demands – all as well as success on the field – then the Blacks give "greatest" a mighty shake.

Adelaide Uni has won 23 Division 1 or A1 premierships since the Amateur League was formed in 1911. Take away lost time for the two world wars and that's an A grade title every four years, an amazing statistic for a non-professional sporting outfit dependent for a century on a floating population of mainly impoverished male tertiary students with other things on their still-developing minds besides just going top. Like beer and girls.

With a 36-year start, Port Adelaide Magpies in the SANFL has an equally amazing 13 more senior flags than the Blacks. But would the Maggies commemorate a loss to bitter rival Norwood by making a cancan line after the game and singing a club song dedicated to the noble art of losing? Not in the name of Fos they wouldn't. That's what the Blacks did though, after trying their guts out and going down to Melbourne University in an inter-varsity showdown only four years ago. Naturally the Melbourne boys became confused.

It's precisely this go-for-it-play-hard-and-enjoy-life-to-the-fullest philosophy that has attracted youthful footballers for so long. At its heart, says Blacks president and 80s player Peter Maddern is the simple fact of young blokes in their late teens up to their mid 20s "rampaging around playing footy together in the best years of their lives, with no real cares before they go on to make something of their lives". Anybody who has played amateur league football, and in particular university or old scholars football, will know this is true.

It is, however, the longevity of the Blacks' philosophy – the whole 100 years of it – that intrigues. Club historian David Bartlett played 16 seasons up to 1985, went away for five years and returned to find the people different, the club the same. Ditto Peter Maddern, four years overseas in the 90s. "When I came back I only knew four A graders, but the club hadn't changed at all," he says, adding that he has observed old-time Blacks players getting together and behaving exactly as they had in their youth. Says 1946 captain Dr Ben Goode:

"We all had a very enjoyable time; a lot of nice fellows who got on very well. Most of us made lifelong friendships through playing football with the Blacks."

Sixty years on, 2006 captain Tom Martin: "I've gained so much personally by being involved with this club; the friendships have given me so much, and I expect they will continue to do so."

At the Blacks every player, no matter what division, up or down, gets to play on the beautiful University Oval. This insistence on equality runs all the way through the club's activities. When the club won five lower-division premierships on the same day in 1997, the celebrations were as one. When the club is fortunate to have a surfeit of players, as it does this year, a roster system of compulsory stand-downs applies from the Blacks' D6 side down.

Then there are the nicknames. Every team has one. Every player has one, sometimes bestowed by club organiser and legend Fred Bloch, naturally known as Chocka, the minute he sees the player's registration form and before he has seen the player. Thus a newcomer can arrive at training with his nickname already there waiting for him. At one of the regular Blacks reunions, a player from the 50s and 60s was overheard saying to another: "I can't remember your real name, but I know you're Ripper."

It can be argued that no article about the Blacks would be complete without a list of their stars. Not here, because the names would fill this space, and over a century, someone would miss out. In the early 60s alone, 27 Blacks went on to play league football. The same goes for lines of succession: grandfathers, fathers, sons, uncles, nephews.

Then there is the blend of amateur sportsman/professional person. Stockbroker and engineer Norm Shierlaw, rugged half-back flanker and 1941 club secretary, recalls "the beauty of playing with Uni. Meeting students doing other courses broadened your outlook on university life". It is still the case, and Norm can name the spine of the 41 side, starting at the pointy end: "Ligertwood, lawyer, Dunstan, scientist, Abbott, doctor, Betts, captain, doctor, Steele, vice-captain, doctor".

It is a fact that entire medical, dental and law schools could be filled from Blacks teams, though more so then than now. But it doesn't matter where you come from, says Tom Martin, "just as long as you're willing to be part of club life and have fun". And despite perceptions, private schoolboys make up only a small percentage of today's Blacks.

In the early 60s the Blacks' A grade team lost only two games in three years. It became so strong that the Amateur League asked it to split into two. After due consideration the club said no thanks, we're sticking together. That's the striking thing about the Adelaide University Football Club. Ben Goode points at the photograph of the Blacks' 1946 minor premiership team and says, one by one: "He's gone. So's he. I'm playing golf with him this afternoon. He's another one who's gone. I saw him the other day. He's no longer with us. I'm playing golf with him soon, too. We started so many friendships playing football at University. They were good times."

They still are.

David Bartlett's book, 1906 to 2006: 100 Years of the Blacks, *will be launched at the State Library on August 25.*

GRAHAM CORNES



KICKING THE BIG ISSUES AROUND...

sport@adv.newsltd.com.au

Why winners wear black

IN this modern age, when sport's rush to professionalism is as inevitable as it is ruthless and impersonal, it's uplifting to realise that one of our state's great monuments to amateurism will this year celebrate its centenary.

The Adelaide University Football Club "the Blacks", is 100 years old. What a history of excellence, achievement and mischief! Rarely has a club produced so many influential football personalities and players, and had so much fun doing it.

The club was formed in 1906, five years before the formation of the Amateur League which it has so dominated. However, there are references to football being played at the university as early as 1885 and the team definitely participated in the inter-varsity matches against Melbourne University at the turn of the century.

Anyone who has walked or run around the River Torrens will be struck by the ambience and aesthetics of the university's playing fields. When planning Adelaide, Colonel Light was insistent that the ribbon of land that bordered the Torrens would remain as a green belt separating the north and south of the city. However, a couple of buildings have tumbled out of the architectural chaos that is the Adelaide University. Among the mandatory boatsheds, the most dominant building is the sports pavilion overlooking the beautifully manicured oval that hosts Uni's cricketers in the summer and its footballers in the winter. It's also the most interesting building.

Like so many of those quaint heritage style grandstands beside a hundred suburban and country ovals, the pavilion at the Uni Oval could tell a thousand stories. It was built with monies donated in 1907 by 13 of the new colony's eminent (and wealthy) aristocrats. They are commemorated by a bronze plaque at the back of the grandstand, although one name that is definitely not



HOME OF CHAMPIONS: The grandstand at Adelaide University Oval and, inset, its plaque.

South Australian leaps off the plaque: Sir E. Shackleton CVO. Indeed, it is the intrepid British polar explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, who in a lecture tour of Australia to raise money for his famous expedition of the Antarctic, was so moved by the cause of young men participating in sport, that he too donated his one hundred pounds. It was on this tour that the valiant Shackleton inspired a young Douglas Mawson, one of our state's great men, and recruited him to the polar cause. Mawson didn't play for the Blacks, although he surely would have liked to!

The football club is proud of its high-profile past players: successive presidents of the SANFL, Don Brebner and Max Basheer, both of whom were All-Australian amateur footballers who played in the old ANFC carnivals; an AFL CEO in Wayne Jackson, great SANFL players in Tony "Doc" Clarkson, Dudley Hill, Fred Bloch, John Sandland, Ian Hockridge, Jim Katsaros; Crows board member and former DPP Paul Rofe; and hundreds of other young footballers who have graduated to significant positions within our community.

The club is predominantly comprised of students and graduates, although a "mates-of-mates" philosophy opens the doors to those who aren't of the university's alumni. It is fair to say, however, that despite the occasional exception, they are more blue blood than blue collar.

The club has an enviable record of participation and success, but the one thing that everyone enthuses over is the culture of a club that, while demanding success on the field, generates a raucous, boisterous, mischievous and irreverent party atmosphere off it. Sturt coach, former AFL player and SANFL Magarey Medallist Brenton Phillips, says the two years he had coaching the Blacks were as enjoyable as any he had in football.

Current full-forward Cameron Mudge explains it well. A product of the Sacred Heart College football production line, Mudge, after a stint at West Adelaide, retired to amateur football. His father Bob, despite being a life member at rival amateur club Henley, convinced him to play for the Blacks. "Dad said when he played against them they always played the game in the right spirit, but had so much fun doing it", said Mudge who has carried his "Bob Neil" banner as far afield as the West Indies.

It is the Bob Neil phenomenon that is as startling as any in the club's history. Neil, a humble mathematician, was a C grade player of modest but reliable ability. Without having met the man, you could imagine him wearing green or brown and playing in a back pocket. The sort of club man who was always there to tap the keg or to clean up the mess, Neil has been immortalised in what surely started as an irreverent "mickey-take". But the legend inexplicably grew, and the "Bob Neil" banner appears on stands at all the world's major sporting events and the club has its own business enterprise with "Bob Neil" memorabilia. Indeed in 1991, before the Crows' first ever-game against Sydney at the SCG, the players were bewildered but heartened to see the "Bob Neil" banner adorning the Bill O'Reilly Stand.

Despite it's proud history of achievement it's hard to see any future AFL players emerging from University's football ranks. The talented youngsters are dragged into football's high performance win-at-all-costs programs before they get a chance to see how much fun they could really have.

The ebullient Fred Bloch, a senior lecturer in accounting at the university, former coach, player, current football director, and author of the rousing club song, says of the Blacks' culture: "If winning is all there is, we don't want to be a part of it." It doesn't explain their success, but it does explain the fun they have.

I want to play for the Blacks.

P.S. Tickets to its Centenary Dinner next week are still available.

Words by Graham Cornes 2006 in the Advertiser

Graham Cornes played a game for the AUFC in 2006 in our Centenary Year as pictured below.

He thus becomes an “AUFC Past Player”. “One among equals” and a “A Blacker”



Graham Cornes in his last ever game of Aussie Rules, playing for Adelaide Uni Blacks against Edwardstown in 2006. “It is as memorable as any game I played,” he writes.

