

THE BIRTH AND HISTORY OF THE GLADESVILLE – HORNSBY FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

In the early 1950s the Hornsby/Ryde area was devoid of any organized soccer other than a few senior teams playing in the Sydney Churches Competition. However, Hornsby had a team in the State League Competition.

The area was firmly entrenched in Rugby Union with most primary schools having midweek rugby competitions which were segregated into weight divisions not age limits. The local boy's high schools supported Rugby and football of any other code was non-existent.

As a year-round sport tennis was extremely popular. The large backyards of many homes in the Shire were often developed with private tennis courts. This ultimately led to many local children taking up the game. Tennis associations were prospering and Australia's success at international level sparked a huge interest in the game. Scouting was also popular – most cub packs and scout troops met on Saturday afternoons. The commercial scene was also quite different to today with businesses including banks and insurance companies all opening of Saturday mornings.

In 1952 Herbert (Herb) Gilmour, a Chief Clerk in the Maritime Services Board was becoming increasingly frustrated with the Drummoyne Soccer Club with whom he had enjoyed a long association. He had lived in Concord West until 1951 and then moved home to Angus Avenue, Epping. At the age of 51 he decided it was becoming far to onerous for him to maintain his contact with the Drummoyne Club. Herbs son Keith had recently married, and he and his wife Avis had moved to Duffy Avenue, Thornleigh. Keith was only 25 years old and he was a talented player with the State League Club Concord. Keith's football career was unfortunately severely curtailed by being a chronic asthmatic. Keith and his dad decided that soccer was such a good sport they wanted "to get it going within the Hornsby Shire". They were highly ambitious and very optimistic of success. They envisaged forming teams in every suburb throughout the Shire. Later that year they called a meeting at Eastwood Town Hall of people they knew with an interest in soccer and who lived reasonably close to the area. The intention was to seek help and to discuss how they might best go about making their dream a reality. Apart from the Gilmours three other people attended the meeting –Messrs Les Williams, Arthur Hodgkinson, and referee Alan Foster.

The meeting late in 1952 decided that Herb & Keith Gilmour would try to recruit interested boys from the Epping Public School and West Epping Public School. In the early months of 1953 the Gilmours stood outside these schools and distributed pamphlets to interested boys to take home to their parents. The notes invited the parents of children interested in playing soccer to attend a meeting at the Angus Avenue home of Herb Gilmour one midweek evening. A handful of parents attended, and it was decided to proceed. About 8 boys aged between nine and twelve assembled at Epping Oval for the first training session on a midweek afternoon in March 1953. Within a couple of weeks sufficient boys had shown interest to make up a team. Unfortunately, the early records of the team were destroyed in a garage fire many years ago however Keith Gilmour recalled as many names as possible prior to his death in 1998, namely:

Jim (Scotty) Murray Laurie Jezard Gordon Shrubb Ross Boyd Brian Thompson Harvey Bromwich Bruce McLeod John Coxall Alan Best.

As was typical with new teams in that era, few of the boys knew much about the game other than having played the occasional game in the schoolyard. None knew anything about the skills of the game let alone tactics. Herb, Keith and Les Williams undertook to train the recruits in the fundamentals of kicking etc whilst tactics and positional play were taught using a large masonite gameboard painted with football markings and using coloured and numbered discs for players.

The team was named “Epping” and this club later developed to become the Epping Eastwood Football Club we know today.

Whilst this was only one team, the Hornsby-Epping Soccer Football Association had been born.

Due to the extensive contacts the Gilmours had in the game this team managed to play about six unofficial games in 1953 travelling by public transport to North Ryde (the club was then part of Northern Suburbs Association.), Lane Cove, West Lindfield (Bradfield Park), Haberfield and Granville. Keith Gilmour arranged the purchase a set of shirts (green & red quarters) chosen as these were the colours of Hornsby State League Club. The boys were responsible for the purchase of white shorts and the green and red hooped socks. The green and red colours were to be adopted by the Hornsby-Epping Football Association in its formative years.

Early 1954 the Gilmours decided to work their “Pied Piper” act and concentrated on the northern area of the Hornsby Shire. Keith was still living in Thornleigh when one day he observed a group of boys kicking a soccer ball on a little park known then as Duffy Park. (now Headon Park). He offered to form a team and put them in a competition if they could rustle up enough mates. He organized a similar meeting of parents to that held in Epping and as a consequence the Thornleigh Soccer Football Club was formed. Keith took on the job of Manager/Coach leaving Epping to his father and Les Williams. He seconded Earle Partridge to assist at Thornleigh. Keith somehow secured/borrowed permanently a second hand set of shirts (royal blue with a white pocket) which were many sized to large for Under 12's but this team loved them. Earle Partridge was to succeed Keith at Thornleigh and went on to be the major force in developing the club as it is today.

In the same year the Gilmours did a pamphlet distribution at Normanhurst School and this time they were fortunate to have an enthusiastic and knowledgeable parent Ron Bartholomew undertake the running of a new club. Ron was at the time playing soccer with the Hornsby Baptist Church in the Churches Competition and was keen to help out. He agreed to provide shirts for the junior team (all recruited from Normanhurst and Hornsby schools) and in its first two years the team played as Hornsby Baptist Church in maroon and yellow shirts.

Ron Bartholomew convinced his senior team to leave the Churches Competition and play in a fledgling local senior competition. Original teams in the senior competition were Epping, Epping Congregational Church, Brooklyn and St Anne's Ryde. In 1955 the Hornsby

Baptist Church junior team renamed itself Normanhurst. The senior team continued as Hornsby Baptist Church until 1956 when it changed its name to Hornsby United Churches and then in 1957 changed its name again to become Normanhurst. The Normanhurst Club played in royal blue shirts with white pocket and sleeves. The senior team had a white V neck.

By far the most dominant team in the 1954 under 12 competition was "Greenwood." Keith Gilmour had visited the Dr. Barnardo Home in Hinemoa Ave Normanhurst. The home comprised British orphans who emigrated to Australia following the second World War. Most of these boys grew up playing soccer and it was a daunting task for other teams who played them in those early days. "Greenwood" were driven to games jammed into a small brown delivery van which invariably arrived at a ground just minutes before the scheduled kick off time. They were enthusiastically managed by a gentleman affectionately known to all and sundry as "Uncle Bill". He assumed management of the team and as a consequence should he be unavailable for any reason the team just didn't show up to play.

By 1954 Herb Gilmour had secured Boronia Park Epping for the playing of matches and all games were comfortably played at this venue. Boronia Park was a newly constructed ground much smaller than it is today, however the ground had permanent soccer goal posts. Players in these early days never enjoyed the luxury of goal nets.

By 1955 the growth of the association was phenomenal and amongst the new clubs was Carlingford Church of England Homes. The major concern for the Association Executive was to secure additional grounds. Hornsby Shire Council allocated the Association tenancy of grounds at Epping Oval, Storey Park Asquith, and Waitara Oval on rotation basis with Rugby Union and Hockey. Thornleigh Park and Oakleigh Park were secured on a more regular basis.

The 1955 season culminated with the Association organising a presentation ceremony at Thornleigh School of Arts. Awards were made to the competition winners and trophies were presented to the Best and Fairest Player and the Most Improved Player of each team. Soccer films were shown, and a party followed. In the evening the senior presentation took the form of a dance.

In 1956 the Association changed its name to Northern District Football Association to accommodate the teams joining from beyond the geographical boundaries of Hornsby to Epping. The growth was so rapid to the south that in 1959 it was necessary to again change the name to Gladesville - Hornsby Football Association. It was at this time that Keith Gilmour suggested the Koala become the symbol of the Association due to the prominence of Koala Park at West Pennant Hills. This suggestion was adopted, and the two Koalas remain to this day on the Association emblem. Clubs which joined the Association in this era were Marsfield, (now Ryde District) St Andrews Eastwood, Gladesville Methodist, Epping Methodist and Gladesville Ravens. North Epping joined in the early 1960's. The pioneer clubs were also expanding rapidly, and most were fielding multiple teams in each age group. The Executive of the Association decided to encourage the formation of clubs within each suburb and it wasn't long before this was being achieved by clubs breaking away from established clubs. Pennant Hills was established in

1957 by breaking away from Thornleigh and shortly thereafter West Ryde Rovers was formed as a break away from Pennant Hills and Thornleigh clubs.

The game was receiving excellent exposure within the district and this generated more and more interest from people wanting to play.

In 1960 Keith Gilmour stood down as Secretary of the Association. The Association then had ninety-nine teams. Keith continued to serve on committees for many years but also took on greater responsibilities with the State's governing body. His service with NSW Amateur Soccer Association would later see him awarded Life Membership of that body.

From its earliest days the Association had a small but very active Referees Association. As mentioned earlier the Gilmours had co-opted Alan Foster to start the Referees Organisation. Alan was an accredited NSW Referee and he quickly ensured he had help by training and accrediting Keith Gilmour, Ron Bartholomew, Eric Hunt, and Laurie Seymour. It soon became obvious that the number of games were rapidly outstripping available Referees. In 1956 Keith Gilmour and Alan Foster encouraged some of the young players namely; Darrell Partridge, Brian Thompson, Barry Palmer and David Zeman to study the Laws of Association Football and become Referees. These boys were then aged between twelve and fourteen. Juniors had not previously been permitted to qualify as referees, but these boys had been volunteers and had unofficially refereed matches in junior grades due to the acute shortage of referees. They were the pioneers of what today has become a very successful Junior Referees Scheme that is universally used by all Associations throughout Australia. Gladesville Hornsby referees have produced many top-grade referees over the years. Unfortunately many were deprived of attaining their ultimate potential because of a FIFA ban on Australian participation in international matches during the 1950s.

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw the Association Executive seeking to establish permanent Headquarters. Up until this time all Executive meetings had been held in the lower meeting halls of Epping School of Arts. Fund raising was started in an effort to accumulate sufficient funds to permanently lease parkland and develop it into a dedicated soccer centre. The Association ran annual "Soccer Queen Competitions" along similar lines to the Miss Australia Quests. The clubs nominated young ladies and supported them by running functions to raise money. The winner was the girl who raised the most money. By the mid sixties the Association had successfully negotiated with Ryde Municipal Council a 21-year lease of Santa Rosa Park in Bridge Road North Ryde. After a lot of voluntary work and considerable expenditure a basic clubhouse had been built in which Association meetings could be held. Unfortunately, only a junior size ground could be constructed because of major drainage restrictions which had been imposed by Council. The Association was however able to conduct annual representative trials on the junior size field.

Despite years of goodwill and hard work from successive executives the Association failed to come up with any viable proposal to overcome the problems at Santa Rosa Park. In 1984 the member clubs of the Association decided to abandon any future development of the complex and instead seek to find and develop a new complex. A committee called "The Home Ground Development Committee" with Ross Iredale as Chairman was formed to investigate the options available in the area. Meetings with both Ryde and Hornsby

Councils were held and numerous proposed venues were looked at and in 1985 the Association put a submission to Ryde Municipal Council for the development of Christie Park.

Significant progress was made by The Home Ground Development Committee during 1986 but the trotting track presented a major hurdle. Announcement of the construction of the M2 had a marked improvement on the discussions with Ryde Council and sections of land were swapped between the Department of Land & Environment and Ryde Council. The trotting track was to be moved (although the Council was forced to put the track back around soccer fields, however it was never used). After extensive negotiation, discussions and consultations with the Council throughout 1987 the Council agreed to stage one of a development which comprised the construction of two playing fields and the erection of a amenities block to house the Headquarters of the Association.

The Association was required to make financial contributions over a ten-year period whilst continuing to pay normal council charges for ground rent and lighting. Work commenced in early 1988 with the complex sufficiently completed to enable the holding of the Association Annual General Meeting in November 1989. Stage two comprising the car park was commenced in 1989 and was completed in time for the official opening on the 7th May, 1990. At last GHFA had a home of which we could all be proud. The Association has made major improvements to Christie Park with field lighting, aluminium seating, fencing, dugouts, barbecue facilities, paving etc and in 1997 building extensions were carried out as larger office space and a board room were required for the ever-increasing workload the Association now found itself having to cope with. In 2001 a covering over the seating area between the two fields was erected.

The playing fields at Christie Park were kept in pristine condition for many years but began to suffer from the heavy traffic and badly required a major upgrade. The Association began to lobby Ryde Council for installation of synthetic fields and in 2017, Council agreed to fund the redevelopment of the fields, installing two synthetic fields and upgrading the surrounds. The fields were opened in April 2018, as Stage 1 of the Christie Park Master Plan. Stages 2 & 3 of the Master Plan provided for a new amenities building, futsal courts and a third full sized field.

Today the Association boasts 30 member clubs fielding over 1,000 teams and comprising around 12,500 players. This is a truly remarkable achievement which more than justifies the ambition and optimism of Herb and Keith Gilmour 60 years ago.

GLADESVILLE HORNSBY FOOTBALL CLUB

With the success of the Association's Under 21 team in the State Cup in 1962 factions within the Association decided a team should be entered into the NSW Federation 1st Division Amateur Competition.

The Club was not endorsed by the Association due to faction fighting between the NSW Federation of Soccer Clubs and the NSW Amateur Soccer Association.

Although not condoned by the Executive the team initially played its home games at Pennant Hills Oval but later moved to Englefield Stadium, Jenner Road, Dural when Bill

Englefield founded the Northern Districts Sporting Promotions Club. The team won the First Division Amateur Competition in 1963 and was promoted to the NSW Federation Second Division where it continued to play as an amateur team.

In 1979 the Club changed its name to Gladesville Hornsby to highlight its representative nature within the areas covered by the amateur association.

In 1981 the club was taken over by the Gladesville - Hornsby Football Association, thus formalizing its position as the District's representative club in Federation soccer. The club was funded by an annual grant from the Association. In 1985 and 1986 under the coaching of John Symon, the club had outstanding years culminated by winning the State League Division 2 Club Championship. (1st Grade being Runners - up in those years.) This magnificent feat was attained despite the NSW Federation of Soccer Clubs dictating that 2nd Division should be semi-professional in the 1986 season. They insisted all players should be signed to contracts. The club overcame this problem by gaining the cooperation of the players and signing them to a one dollar each a year contracts. However, in 1989 the NSW Federation of Soccer Clubs insisted players be properly compensated and for the first time in its history the club paid its players to pay.

Sponsorship became necessary to survive and the competition for the almighty dollar was extremely difficult given that the team was playing in the 2nd division with little media exposure. This ultimately meant the club struggled for funds and relied heavily on a grant from the Association.

The continued funding of the club became a contentious issue for the member clubs of the Association and finally the clubs voted to withdraw support from the football club with the obvious result being it withdrew from the competition.

In the early 2000s, FNSW required that clubs could only play in youth league if they had senior teams. At that time GHFA had a very good relationship with NSL team Northern Spirit and a partnership was formed where GHFA fielded their junior teams as Northern Spirit.

In 2004 Northern Spirit disbanded, and GHFA decided to form senior teams under the name of Gladesville Spirit to enter into the FNSW State League. Nepean Association agreed to sell their position in State League to Gladesville Spirit. Tony Walmsley (who later went on to coach Central Coast Mariners) was appointed as first senior coach and coaching director.

A few years later the club's name was changed to GHFA Spirit Football Club to more accurately reflect the club as the representative arm of the GHFA and its clubs.

GHFA Spirit has had many players over the years go through to higher levels of football, some of those players played all of their football in the GHFA Spirit system and others played for a few years then went on to other clubs eg Alex Wilkinson played right through from Under 11s to Under 17s then going directly to Northern Spirit. Some of those still playing who played some time with us are - Erik Paatalu, Bruce Djite, Sebastian Ryall, Aaron Mooy, all of whom played youth league with us, and Nick Fitzgerald played Metropolitan League before moving on to youth league elsewhere.

ADMINISTRATION

The responsibility of administering the ever-increasing numbers of players and clubs in this area was becoming a onerous task for the hardworking volunteer Committee Members and in 1982 it was agreed that the Executive should employ someone part-time to take the workload off those spending many hours on a voluntary basis to keep the Association running smoothly.

Kay Iredale was employed at that time and when the Association moved into their premises at Christie Park, Kay's roll increased to a full-time position with everything to do with the running of the Association being done from the offices there. Since that time as numbers kept increasing and the work-load continued to it became necessary to add another role to the organisation. Kay remained in the role for 33 years which was a remarkable achievement, and with her husband Ross contributed a combined 70 years of service to the Association.

In 2018, in recognition of Ross Iredale's contribution, the building at Christie Park was officially named the Ross Iredale Building.
