

## **QRL History ....pt. VI (The 1930s & the district concept) by Mike Higginson**

A MAJOR shift in the game's focus occurred in 1933 when the BRL introduced its "district concept", where players had to reside within set areas to remain eligible to play for a particular club. The motion had been defeated by club delegates a year earlier following years of debate about the idea. A major focus of district football was providing a definitive identity to everyone associated with the individual clubs and their supporters, while also attempting to arrest clubs' competition dominance which had been an issue previously. Thus, a number of clubs were forced to change their names in order to reflect the district they represented, which was basically designed on electoral boundaries. Under the new seven-team competition, Carltons became Southern Suburbs, Coorparoo and the Wynnum district competition combined to form Eastern Suburbs, Past Grammars became Northern Suburbs, while Western Suburbs, Fortitude Valley, University and Past Christian Brothers all remained.

With the new restrictions on players, it is needless to say that Brothers, and lesser University, were disliked by the other five clubs over their unique restrictions. The BRL edict stated that Past Brothers would be allowed to draw upon players from Catholic schools throughout Brisbane without any residential qualifications, while University would have access to all tertiary institutions in Brisbane. It was perceived by clubs that the demographics of the average "catholic family", were much higher than regular rugby league "types", and as such they had an advantage drawing on private school "*Old Boys*". This discontent towards Brothers lasted until district football was finally phased out in 1968. It was slightly different with the University club, as they struggled for player numbers and on-field results from the outset. Brothers on the other hand, had plenty of depth and enjoyed much success on the field.

New issues began emerging in the Brisbane rugby league landscape in 1934. With the Past Brothers club's "special" regulations already putting them offside with a number of opposition clubs. Souths objected to the League about Brothers utilising Davies Park for training purposes. Compounding the issue was that the club's finances were stretched, and Carltons were also a foundation part of the Brothers club, with allegiances still running deep from the turmoil of Brothers' formation back in 1920. Eventually, the original Souths club withdrew from competition and a new Southern Suburbs club was formed with the assistance of the BRL. With major pressure being applied by the growing Rugby Union for University to switch back to their original code, their player numbers dwindled to such an extent that the club was forced to forfeit the second half of the season, and unfortunately they were lost to the code.

The following year again saw the game's popularity grow, culminating in sensation on grand final day, when extra time was required to separate Eric Hogan's Brothers side from 'Firpo' Neumann's Valleys team. The crowd was in silent shock as the full-time bell rang with the scores locked at 6-all. After another willing 20 minutes of play, Brothers lock Vince Hogan landed a sideline goal in the dying seconds to beat a Valleys side that had scored three tries to their one. It sealed a popular victory for Brothers- their first since 1926. Much focus was on the Brisbane competition during the mid-1930s, with NSW dominating the interstate series and Ipswich the powerhouse in the Bulimba Cup.

Somewhat of a curiosity in the game during the 1920s and 1930s was referee Jack Quinlan. Quinlan was a sporting nut who enjoyed playing rugby union and boxing in Wide Bay before signing up for the Great War. His first placement was at Pozieres, where during the battle of the Somme, he was one of 23,000 Australian casualties, receiving German gunfire wounds to both arms. Complications saw Quinlan lose his left arm altogether. His footballing and boxing days over, he returned to Australia and took up residency at Yeerongpilly. He then approached the QRL about refereeing rugby league and was given the chance. He did not let the QRL down – rising to the ranks of first grade, controlling Bulimba Cup fixtures, the deciding interstate fixture of 1930 before controlling the rough-house 1932 grand final between Wests and Carltons. At the age of 44, Quinlan retired, and donated the Quinlan Cup contested between Valleys and Wests for many years. Quinlan later served as Referees Association official, and BRL delegate, while also attempting to establish a political career with the ALP.

1937 brought about the biggest scare the BRL had encountered until that stage. The Brisbane Referees Association declared in the press that they were on strike, unless the BRL changed its structure of having club delegates on the referees' appointments board. The referees felt their views were not being heeded by the BRL and wanted autonomous control of their appointments, without club bias. The argument was fierce, with Peter Scott and the BRL appearing less than sympathetic to their cause, making immediate moves to have members of the Referees Association disqualified and a new Association formed. The dispute took a downward spiral when referees refused to control the first round of fixtures. The BRL hastily organised volunteers to referee so the season could get underway on time. Thankfully, the QRL stepped in to arbitrate and assisted in negotiating a new structure for referee appointments. With a resolution reached, the League's suspension of referees was lifted, and the game experienced its most successful season to date.

Another positive to the Brisbane Rugby League's year was the establishment of the Geraghty Cup competition. Affiliate leagues from the Wynnum, Beaudesert and South Coast regions each had solid local competitions and the Geraghty Cup fostered competitive relations between the three leagues. So competitive (and at times brutal!) did this competition become, that two years later the BRL programmed the final between Wynnum and Beaudesert to be played as the main curtain-raiser to the Norths versus Brothers grand final. History will show that Wynnum won the final 29-14 against a game Beaudesert.

That same 1937 season also saw the end of an era when Harry Sunderland announced he had had enough at the game's helm. By early 1938, Sunderland decided to move on to greener pastures when he took up a role at Wigan as secretary-manager. Often described as dictatorial, the end of Sunderland's regime was truly the end of an era for the game in Queensland.