

THE FORGOTTEN HEROES

Glenelg pioneers kick off with a win - 1920

BY PETER CORNWALL

It's a part of SA football folklore that when the Tigers entered league football ranks in 1921, they suffered 56 losses in a row before finally notching a victory.

But Glenelg Football Club actually won the first game it played.

In league ranks, Glenelg had to endure four seasons of losing every single game, before breaking through against reigning premier West Torrens to start the 1925 campaign in stunning fashion. The record 56-game losing streak is another one of those stats Tigers fans have heard more than enough.

But Glenelg actually won game No. 1. It was when the club played one season of Association, or reserves, football in 1920 as an apprenticeship before being given the green light to play league footy.

Despite kicking just three goals against South Adelaide at Glenelg Oval, the "seaside men" made a memorable start with a one-point win.

As the club's centenary of league football looms large in 2021, there is great excitement about recalling and honouring all the black-and-golden greats who have played league footy at the Bay. There are now 1083 league players who have made their mark.

But the heroes of the pioneering year of 1920 should not be forgotten.

They won three games in the historic season, beating wooden spooner South Adelaide twice and none other than Port Adelaide for their other victory – in their first clash with the long-time and sometimes bitter rival.

Among their ranks was a man who would become Glenelg's first to step into the bright lights of the VFL and played first-class cricket and two men who were also heroes off the footy field.

Roy Kappler knew the time was right. He proudly stood, glass in hand, before an enthusiastic crowd at a premiership social in the Masonic Hall, having coached the local Glenelg side to the United Suburban Association premiership of 1919. He proposed a toast for "the future League team". Kappler was "enthusiastically cheered for his sound arguments in favour of the

Glenelg team being submitted to League football," according to the Glenelg Guardian. The locals' push, that had been simmering for years, was on the verge of achieving its goal.

Kappler wasn't just talk, he was action. Despite being 37 years of age, Kappler, later a delegate, treasurer and committeeman and one of Glenelg's first life members, led the club into its historic 1920 campaign as captain. Roy was the second-oldest of seven brothers and younger sibling Jack played in Glenelg's debut league match in 1921.

While having to start out in the B grade competition was not exactly what Kappler and footy lovers at the Bay were after, it would be their stepping stone to league footy.

There were plenty of decisions to be made and much work to be done in a hurry after the Glenelg Football Club was formed at a meeting at Glenelg Town Hall on March 10, 1920. Glenelg Oval, founded in 1898, was in

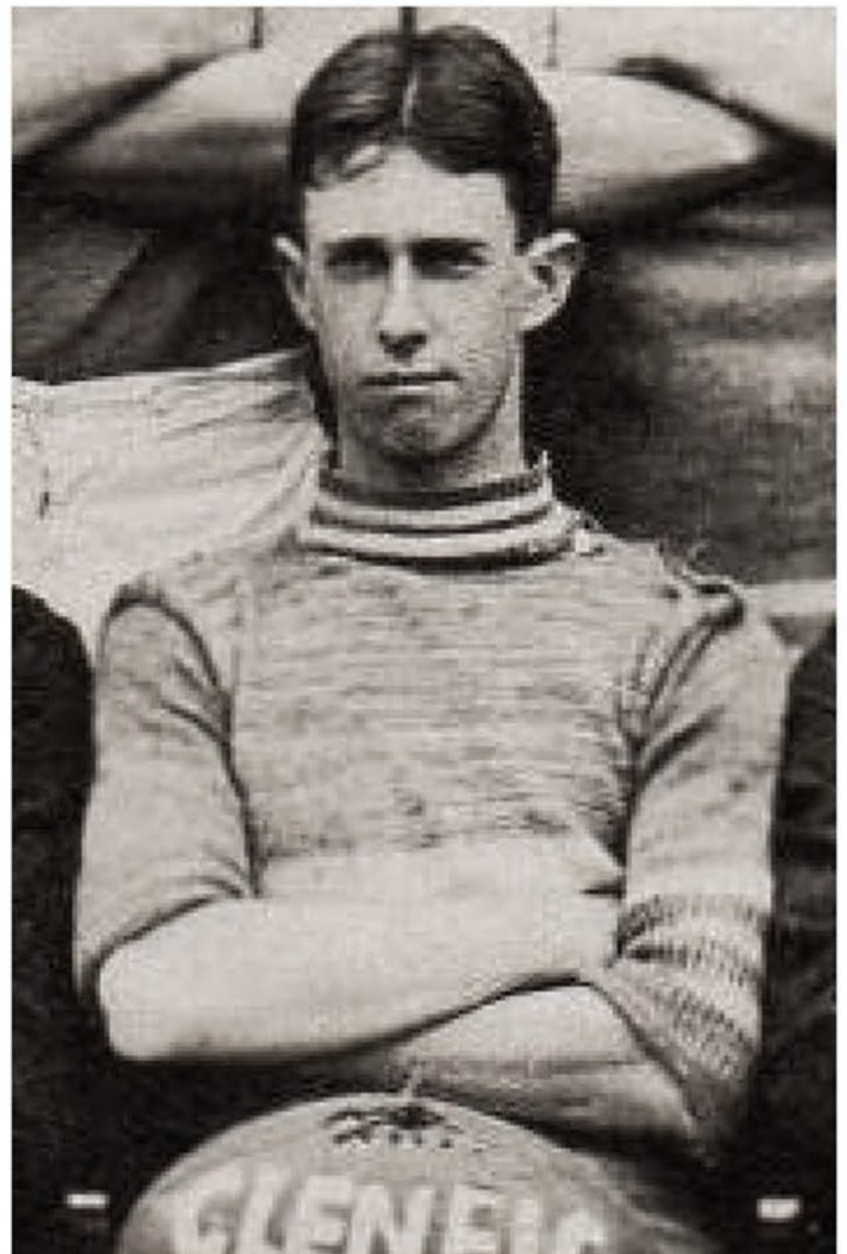


PHOTO: VIC HILLIER

need of attention and money had to be raised – there were working bees and fetes – one raised £94, impressive for the era – and guernseys and socks to be made once it was decided the club's colours would be “red, yellow and black, with white knickers”.

The colours became the familiar black and gold when the club was promoted to A grade the following season. Training kicked off on March 30 ... with the season opener scheduled for May 1! The pickets arrived for the boundary fence in the week of the opening game after the ground had been surveyed, the newly-marked arena measuring 175 yards x 125 yards. It was reportedly the second-largest playing arena in the State, being only a few yards short of Adelaide Oval.

Considering the way the team – and ground and club – had been thrown together it was hardly surprising the Guardian proclaimed: “It is expecting too much to hope that the team will win the first couple of matches, considering they are a new combination up against old-established teams.”

The newspaper did note, however, “the Glenelg team will not lack pace with such flyers as Charlie Martin (this year's Maryborough Gift winner) – he also won the prestige 130-yard sprint in 1923 – Grealy, Barnett and Stopford”. Glenelg locals were strongly urged to support their own club, the Guardian noting “the charge for admission has been fixed at sixpence (plus tax) and this low charge should prove a popular one.” (The fee is the equivalent of five cents today).

So 1 May 1920 came, described by the local newspaper as “a red-letter day” for Glenelg. Its team was: Ern Haddrick, Frank Gates, Sid Smith, Charlie Martin, Syd James (vice-capt), Cecil Stopford, Les Hawkes, Frank Grealey, Roy Kappler (capt), Robert Thomson, W. Milford, Eric Haddrick, Hugh Farrelly, Les Fidock, H. Mack, Reg Went, Leo Pelzer, L. Moyes and Frank Marshall.

And how they did the town proud.

The front page of the Guardian, under the headline FOOTBALL, declared: Glenelg District Club, First Match – First Victory.

“Souths had a strong wind in their favour and attacked strongly but the Bays were putting in from the jump off,” the paper's scribe wrote enthusiastically, noting “they restricted Souths to just 1.1 while they managed a point”.

In the second quarter, with the wind behind him, Grealy, playing a solid game on the wing, stormed through a pack and punted the ball forward, “where James marked splendidly and drop kicked a beautiful goal”.



PHOTO: SYD JAMES

The first goal in Glenelg's history was booted by a remarkable character who achieved or was part of some impressive firsts.

James, vice-captain on that opening Saturday, had such a good season he was awarded the Association's W.B. Carr Medal for B grade's best allround player – at the Bay he was voted the same, not surprisingly. James, who “always played a strenuous game”, was one of seven players from Glenelg's first game in B grade who also were in the team for its first league game in 1921, along with Farrelly, Gates, Grealy, Ern Haddrick, Hawkes and Thomson.

James, who made his league footy debut with Norwood in 1913, went on to have a much-travelled, varied sporting career, gaining the chance to mingle with sporting royalty. He played eight league games with South Melbourne in 1923, where the great Roy Ca-

was his team-mate. He also had a brief league stint with Hawthorn. Continuing his liking for being a pioneer he played in the now mighty AFL club's first league season in 1925 – he is the Hawks' player No. 25. A cricketer of some note he played one first-class game – for Tasmania against England's Marylebone Cricket Club in Hobart in 1924-25. The Tasmanians were flogged and James managed just six and a duck. He snared a catch but went wicketless, finishing with 0/98. Here he spent plenty of time in the middle with English Test great Herbert Sutcliffe, who made 188. He reputedly was an accurate fast-medium paceman – well he obviously hit the middle of Sutcliffe's bat fairly regularly! James was selected for Tasmania after coaching local football club Cananore in 1924. In later years he trained professional athletes.

But back at Glenelg Oval in 1920 James suddenly had more on his plate than he had been bargaining for. Glenelg, having edged ahead by half-time, was struck what could have been a crippling blow when Kappler, "at centre, in going for a mark, got a knee in his back, which laid him out and rendered him practically useless for the rest of the day". Kappler had suffered a broken rib and, although he courageously battled on for this game, James "was thereafter in charge of the team, and proved a capable captain".

Hawkes was swung into the centre and promptly rose to the occasion, producing "the most brilliant effort of the afternoon ... taking the ball at centre he made for the pavilion wing and, after passing five men, succeeded in kicking a goal, which was warmly applauded".

At "lemons", as three-quarter time was called in those days – the players would suck on lemons or oranges for refreshment – Glenelg led 2.6 to 2.4. The last quarter was "intensely exciting", according to the local footy scribe. "Glenelg were not playing together nearly so well as their opponents but were faster and played with greater determination," he enthused.

When Eric Haddrick snapped Glenelg's third goal a historic win was within sniffing distance but South snatched back a one-point lead with two quick goals.

Best-of-field James threw himself into the fray as the crowd of "several hundreds" urged the Seaside on and he and Greally attacked vigorously. A behind from the boot of Moyes levelled the scores. Surprisingly, there was no Glenelg hero with the last-gasp winning score, the Guardian noting, "the winning point was secured in a peculiar way ... Souths' goalkeeper, in trying to clear the ball, was jostled between the posts. The ball was on the centre line when the bell rang, leaving Glenelg the victors of their first big match by one point."

Glenelg won 3.13 (31) to South Adelaide B 4.6 (30) the best players listed as James, Gates, who acquitted himself like a veteran in the backlines and was Glenelg's best-and-fairest winner for the B grade season, Hawkes, Marshall, the A grade's first best-and-fairest winner in 1921, "Puddin" Greally, Fidock and Martin.

After a forgettable round two loss to the strong West Torrens at Hindmarsh Oval – where Adelaide United's home ground Coopers Stadium now stands – Glenelg lined up against a "much taller and heavier" and so-far unbeaten Port Adelaide at Glenelg Oval.

The Bays had most of the play in the first quarter but kicked six successive behinds. Port brought up the first goal of a rain-drenched game in the second term but "from the centre bounce, Greally secured and bolted down the centre and with a long running drop kick gained Glenelg's first goal". Eric Haddrick snapped two goals for the quarter and Glenelg was a point up at the main break.

With rain "treacherously chopping across the ground," Thomson nailed the only goal of the third quarter. When Port Adelaide tried its physical approach in the last quarter it was turned back time and again by Pelzer, Marshall and Gates.

Stopford showed evasive skill and a burst of pace to get the ball down to dangerous Eric Haddrick and he sealed the deal with a goal from a trademark snap. The speedy "Glenelgites" had done it again, winning 5.13 to 3.11.

It was never going to be easy for the new club, though. Local players had not necessarily been keen on changing clubs just to play B-grade football, while players from other league clubs were loath to switch for the same reason. And Glenelg was somewhat isolated nearly a century ago, heading there for training twice a week was tricky for people who worked in the city.

So there was little doubt the honeymoon start could not last. Indeed, Glenelg lost its next 10 games – some were close, like a desperately unlucky three-point loss to North when Haddrick narrowly missed with a last-gasp shot for goal.

Some things never change, because the umpire was right in the firing line after this defeat. "We can honestly say Glenelg were unlucky to lose. It is not our policy to slate umpires but Mr Crowther's exhibition, to say the least, did not suit Glenelg. Four of North's goals were scored from frees charitably given within easy distance of the posts," the Guardian declared.

Some losses were not so close, nor unlucky. After a 94-point thumping at the hands of Sturt the Guardian moaned: "The balance of the team gave an inglorious display; some casually strolling round in their places. What on earth was the matter with them, goodness only knows?"

The crowd, as always was passionate. A Sturt supporter wrote a letter to the editor complaining about some Bay fans he described as "the hooligan element".

He said the fans' instructions to the Glenelg players included: "Dump 'em!" "Bump 'em!" "Bring that man down!" "Break their necks!"

A goal umpire weighed in after Glenelg's clash with Port at Alberton, complaining one of his decisions "was doubted by a few supporters which quickly increased to a howling mob who abused and threw missiles at me".

The field umpire was on strike that day, the men in white in B grade seeking an increase in pay and refusing to take the field. Glenelg's trainer, Cain, agreed to umpire the game but Glenelg's fans probably weren't very happy with their own bloke either – Port won by 36 points.

So the Seasideers were left with one game to try to keep pushing their claim for a A-grade spot the next year, against South.

Eric Haddrick, Fidock and Hawkes goaled in the first quarter to give Glenelg a five-point edge and the Guardian noted "Glenelg's second ruck, comprising James, Hillier and Eric Haddrick put plenty of ginger into their play" to kick off the second. Best-a-field Fidock kicked a fine placekick goal – the sort used in rugby where the ball is kicked after being placed on the ground – a reasonably common goalkicking method in footy in the early 1920s. Hillier followed up with two fine shots and at half-time Glenelg led 6.4 to 2.3.

While the place kick may be gone, some things never change. The Guardian complained "the last term was marred in the early stages by both sides crowding the ball".

But suddenly Glenelg clicked. It "opened out and romped over the opposition, the kicking for goal was most accurate, for four attempts produced four goals". The new heroes were still attacking when the bell rang for the last time in this debut season, Glenelg winning 107 to 47.

Two of the on-field stars of Glenelg's debut seasons in B grade and A grade took their heroics offfield in the summer.

On 15 January 1921, Hillier and young gun Pelzer, who had won the trophy for most improved junior for the 1920 season, were sailing to Brighton on Sporting Lass, when they realised a yacht they had seen heading for Glenelg had disappeared. Sunbeam was about two miles out to sea when its crew encountered trouble in a sudden, strong gale, left in a desperate battle for survival when the boat capsized. For more than an hour the men were floundering in the surging sea before Hillier and Pelzer found two of them trying to swim ashore and four clinging to the boat, three being badly effected with cramp. "Had it not been for the plucky help of Messrs. Hillier and Pelzer, I feel sure not one of us would have reached shore alive," one of the grateful survivors, A.E. Kopp, told reporters.

They were Glenelg heroes who deserve to be remembered.

GLENELG 1920

Players who represented the club in its season in the Association:

Sydney James, Frank Gates, Leo Pelzer, Em Haddrick, Les Hawkes, Eric Haddrick, Reg Went, T. Keily, Frank Marshall, Robert Thomson, Hugh Farrelly, Les Fidock, Transvaal Barnett, W. Milford, Cyril Fidock, Vic Hillier, Sid Smith, Charlie Martin, A. Haddrick, J. Rowlands, H. Mack, H. Rugner, C. Stopford, G. Lehmann, F. Gabb, F. Gardiner, Frank Greal, C. Taylor, W. Edwards, T. Connor, L. Moyes, Roy Kappler, L. Rosser, R. Comley, A. N. Haddrick, B. Percival, C. Gardiner.

PIONEERS: Glenelg's Association team of 1920

Top row: L. Rosser (trainer), Frank Marshall, T. Keily, T. James (trainer), Cyril Fidock, Vic Hillier, B. Cain (trainer). Second row: Ern Haddrick, H. Mack, A. Haddrick, Leo Pelzer, Ern Rugless (hon. secretary), Frank Gabb, Les Fidock, Charlie Martin, Frank Gates. Third row: Frank Smith (committee), Roy Kappler (captain), Syd James (captain), H. McKinnick (chairman), Les Hawkes (vice-captain), J. Woodforde (committee), G. Fidock (committee). Front row: A. Haddrick, Eric Haddrick, R. Comley, S. Thomas (umpire), H. Rugner, W. Edwards, W. Milford.