

"Blue" Johnston Analyses Old Club's Failures

Lack of Team Spirit Big Glenelg Weakness

Why haven't Glenelg figured more prominently in the fight for the league premiership during their 25 years as members of the league? In my opinion, the fault can be traced to one thing—lack of teamwork. And this weakness isn't confined to the players, it's evident throughout the many phases of activity which go to make up a league football club.

When Glenelg beat Sturt at Glenelg Oval last Saturday (incidentally, we beat Sturt in the last match of the minor round in my last league game in 1940, after which Sturt went on to win the premiership), practically every football enthusiast in Adelaide sat back and commented on the "fluke," saying condescendingly that "the Bays have to win one match a season."

That sort of comment is heard year after year—and not without some basis of truth. The fact cannot be disputed that Glenelg are usually one of the weakest teams in the league.

But make no mistake, Glenelg have had champion footballers. In fact, back in the late 1920's, they had a centreline made up of three State players—the late Jack Sexton at centre, and Gordon Barbary and Jack Lloyd on the wings.

Then there were other State stars in the late Jack Owens at full forward and Jim Handby at half-back.

However, with the exception of two seasons—1933 and 1934—the Bays have rarely played cohesive football. Whether young recruits or experienced seniors, our men always seemed possessed of the idea that their job was to go out and do well individually to ensure their being picked in the next week's game.

It seemed as if the psychological approach of players was that the Bays were only in the league to make weight, and that if they themselves played a good game, it mattered little whether Glenelg won or lost.

The first change for the better came in 1933 with the acquisition of Bruce McGregor, former West and State champion ruckman and half-forward, as coach.

Patiently, Bruce McGregor set about moulding us into a team—a machine which would function at least as evenly and as well as most other league teams.

He did it in three ways:

■ He knew how to get a man fit and keep him fit, which is, after all, the coach's main job.

■ Once a week he would call all the players together in the clubrooms, talk over the errors of the week before, and explain how it was proposed to remedy them for the next game.

■ He saw to it that a strong social side to our football was built up. And I cannot stress too much just what a strong club social atmosphere means to a football team.

Anyway, we won nine of our 17 games in 1933, a record for the club. That showed we were improving, and gave all the players a fresh heart for the new season. With the late Jack Owens—perhaps the finest goalsneak South Australia has seen—as captain, the Bays were out for blood.

But we just couldn't find our legs quickly enough. We lost our first three matches, Port giving us a terrific thrashing at Alberton when they won 33—19 to our 12—14.

We drew with North at Prospect, lost the next game, but the tide turned on June 2, when we defeated South. From then till the end of the season we lost only three more games.

We met Port in the second semi-final and were beaten, but we still went on to defeat Sturt, and then defeated Port in the grand final to take our first premiership.

Bruce McGregor picked Roy Colver up and carried him off the ground in his arms like a baby after the match.

I think that in Lance Leak, Roy Colver, and Arthur Link we had one of the best "mosquito fleets" that year that any team has had since or before.

Arthur and Roy were two of the fastest men off the mark you would see anywhere, and in the grand final they left accomplished players like "Cocky" Hooper and "Butcher" Parry standing as if rooted to the spot.

"Toot" Oliver, vice-captain, was in the first ruck with me, and I couldn't have wished for a better man. In fact, he was the best ruck shepherd I ever teamed with. He knew what I'd be wanting, and always did it, and he was so hard he'd stop a run-away train.

That was our year of triumph. But the same old rot set in again in 1935. First Jack Owens retired, leaving "Toot" Oliver to take over the leadership. Then, when Oliver retired, Harold Percy took over.

We lost one or two early games, and team changes became frequent, with the result that teamwork could not be built up.

It is folly to drop any player, recruit or veteran, after he plays one poor game. A player should be given at least three games to prove his worth.

Glenelg have never looked like reaching the finals since.

I mentioned earlier that in 1934 there was a strong social side to our football. In fact, I think the club spirit that was fostered by Bruce McGregor and other club workers in those years, 1933-4, was a big factor in our premiership win.

For instance, on Sunday mornings at the clubrooms there would always be some kind of organised entertainment, with refreshments. The boys would roll along, and whether we had lost or won the day before the match was talked over and over; players got to know each other, and a general feeling of well-being was the outcome.

It is a strange coincidence, but I believe the Bays had a happy clubroom get-together last week—and then beat Sturt.

Two things which have held football back at the Bay are lack of population and lack of interest.

Glenelg is racing minded, probably more so than any other district, and many of the wealthy men of the district look upon racing as their main pastime.

Again many players find it difficult to get to Glenelg Oval on training nights by 5 o'clock, and it is imperative that practice must start by then, or very soon after, if a team is to reap any benefit.

When I was playing for the Bays I was working at Thebarton, and I arranged to finish work half an hour early on training nights to allow me to get to the oval. I was doxed for the time off, but I meant to play football well or not at all.



THE BALL IS GOING, NOT COMING. "Blue" Johnston punched the ball away from Jack Regan, Victorian full-back, in the S.A.—Vic. game at the Perth carnival in 1917. Ken Farmer, the other South Australian, arrived too late to mark.

Clubs should see that their men can get to the ground by 5 p.m., and where players lose pay through doing so, the club should find some means of reimbursing them.

That brings up the question of payment to players, which I strongly favor. It's all very well to say that players get a bonus and often a trip away with the club at the end of the year.

But if every man received a set sum for each match and so much for attending at training, there would soon be a keenness on practice nights that is not seen now.

Further, I think trainers are very much underpaid. They're always on the job, and yet I think some average a paltry 2/ a match.

In 1927 and 1928 Glenelg players were given a bonus of £2 a match at the end of the season, and for any man who had played the full season the cheque for £34 was a handy present.

GEORGE ("BLUE") JOHNSTON COULD WELL BE CALLED ONE OF FOOTBALL'S "IRON MEN." HE PLAYED 203 GAMES IN LEAGUE COMPANY FOR GLENELG, EXTENDING OVER 14 SEASONS. MORE REMARKABLE IS THE FACT THAT IN PRACTICALLY EVERY GAME HE WAS GIVEN THE STRENUOUS TASK OF FOLLOWING.

"Blue" began his football with Black Forest, in the Mid-Southern Association. Len Sallis, another Glenelg champion, also played with Black Forest. In 1927 "Blue" joined Glenelg, and did not retire until 1940, at the aged of 34.

During that time he played in a score of interstate games, and in 1934—the season Glenelg won their first league premiership—he won the Magarey Medal.

Johnston was renowned for his prodigious leaping powers, some of his flying marks at times taking head, shoulders, and chest above a bunch of other high-marking players.

Sturt champion. I learned a lot from watching and being opposed to Riley.

When I first met him in league football, he was a lot more experienced than I, and I couldn't match him in the air. He was not a tall man, but he had the knack of being able to come in from the side, hit an opponent in mid-air, and take the ball at the same time.

I tried to copy Riley's style as I became more experienced.

Riley was a top-notch ruckman, but the best I've seen was Bruce McGregor. I played against McGregor on very few occasions, though.

Reval's Best Game

Ernie Bridgman, of Torrens, Rex Walter, of North, Carl Wightman, of Port—he was difficult to overcome because of his long reach and pace on the ground—and Alan ("Bull") Reval were other good followers.

"Bull," of course, was at his best in ground work, and in creating opportunities for team-mates.

"Bull" Reval's finest performance was in what I consider the hardest game I ever played—the second match against Western Australia in 1936. On the Saturday, Western Australia had trounced us, and we went out on the Tuesday determined to retrieve our reputation.

We kicked badly, out in the last quarter only points separated us. It was a case of survival of the fittest, and no man spared himself.

The harder and fiercer the game became, the more Alan Reval threw himself into it, amazing the Perth crowds by repeatedly coming out of the frequent tangles of thrashing arms, legs, and bodies with the ball—and his inimitable grin.

In the last seconds of the match Bill McCallum, of Norwood, kicked the point which gave us victory, and we ran out winners 9—21 to Western Australia's 11—8.

We carried our captain, Frank Tully, off the field.

In Running For Medal



RAY HUNT, 28-year-old Glenelg full-back, who is given a good chance of winning the Magarey Medal this season—cartoon by Coventry.