

6 June 2011

RE – VALE – SYD FELSTEAD
PASSED AWAY – SATURDAY EVENING – 4th JUNE 2011 – 91 YEARS YOUNG

I have much sadness reporting the passing of Syd Felstead at home in Vincentia on NSW South Coast, Saturday evening 4th June 2011. Syd's sudden cause of death is not known at this stage! It appears; mature age may have caught up with our great colleague!

Syd's journey through life is an amazing story! His contribution to Australian Rules at St George, throughout Sydney and NSW is invaluable [I have Syd's personal and football lives recorded as part of the Club's history]. I will be brief in my summary; however on Syd's passing we have to pay a tribute, acknowledge who Syd Felstead was and what he did to establish junior competitions of Australian Rules throughout Sydney.

Syd Felstead born 26 August 1919, Bendigo Victoria, his father dying in early 1920's as result service at Gallipoli and gassing received in France in WW1. After moves around Victoria, and Paddington in Sydney in 1928, Syd and his mother moved to Dora St Hurstville in 1930 at start of the depression. A time when Syd and his mother eked out a living; Syd on his bike, he named 'Greenie' doing deliveries and collecting manure in his billy cart [made from a fruit box and wheels off a pram], selling a cart load to neighbours for sixpence [now five cents]!

In 1934 at age 15, having passed the Intermediate certificate, Syd left school eventually got an apprenticeship at ACI Glassworks as a crystal glass cutter, earning eleven shillings and sixpence per week [today's equivalent; one dollar and fifteen cents]. He traded his bike 'Greenie' on a new Malvern Star, paying it off at two shillings per week [present currency; twenty cents] and played junior Rules matches in local school and local park competitions! Syd commenced in 1938 with St George AFC, in Reserve Grade [St George Third grade was not formed until 1958].

Syd was associated with some greats of that St George era; likes of Phonse Kyne, Jack Browne, and Stan Powditch and was lucky to witness St George's Premiership in 1938. Syd also had a strong affiliation with the committee and between 1938 and 1957 (allowing for time spent overseas in WWII with RAAF, crewing in Wellington and Lancaster bombers), played a total of 128 senior games; was a member of 1951 Reserve Grade premiership.

After returning from war, Syd with partners started their own cut glass business, and continued playing with St George, mainly as fullback. During his time as a player, Syd was an active committee member, with Andrew Glass as President. In 1955 Syd became President, holding the position for 20 years when he stepped aside in 1974. Under his Presidency, St George played in three consecutive Grand finals between 1964 and 1966; winning 1964 Premiership!

Behind the scenes with colleagues from various Sydney Clubs, Syd was active developing the junior base of all Sydney Clubs. He chaired committees to establish St George junior clubs in 1950's; likes of Como, Peakhurst and Boys Town [since faded into history]. Present junior Clubs [Ramsgate, Miranda, Cronulla and Penshurst] established with assistance from; Ruben Fraser, Alan Gibbons, Alex Melville. Some of Syd's achievements, included -

Life Memberships and Awards –

- Life member of St George AFC - awarded 1953
- Life member of AFL (NSW/ACT) – awarded 1967
- In 2000, received from Prime Minister an Honour Award for 2000 Bi Centennial celebrations – for past contributions to Australian Rules
- St George AFC “Hall of Fame” – inducted in 2005 one of five initial inductees

Some other contributions and achievements [there were many] -

[As recorded in Syd's hand written notes, held by me]

- Elected to Board of Management of NSW ANFL 1956
- Appointed Team Manager for NSW Teams from 1958 to 1965
- In 1966 appointed by Sutherland Council to Ground Allocation Committee
- Awarded Australian Sports Medal by Commonwealth Govt
- Served as Chair Person in formation of both Junior Assoc, and St George body of NSW ANFL Junior Planning Committee
- Chaired formation committee of St George All Age Comp/Open Age League [now defunct]; subsequently became NSW League Second division comp
- Included in book published [2000] recording – History of Hurstville Oval
- Suggested, had passed initial concept of Club Championship Points at NSW League
- Held positions in 1950's and 1960's as President and Delegate to NSW ANFL
- Awarded 'Merit Award' by AFL Council

Olds Park - Syd was instrumental in 1968/1969 in securing the initial 21 year lease on Olds Park when St George made the move from Hurstville Oval. Syd was involved in 1970 in the unsuccessful application to obtain a liquor licence for St George at Olds Park which was backed at time by Bill Picken [Western Suburbs fame].

Due to his strong Australian wide connections in Aussie Rules circles, whilst President, Syd was instrumental in getting the likes of Dale Dalton, Don McKenna, Dennis & Ray Pegg, Ralph Todd, Graham Cornes and many other interstate recruits to play with St George.

Syd was always strongly supported by his wife, Betty [nee O'Reilly b.1924] whom he married during the war and had four children; Graham, Sandra, Robyn and David. Both boys played briefly at St George, where Betty was a pillar of strength, working in the canteen at Hurstville Oval, selling raffle tickets and organising social functions. They retired to live at Vincentia, where Betty passed away in May 2005.

It can be categorically stated; Syd fathered the St George AFC junior competition as it stands today - Patrick McCourt was a member of initial team that started Miranda junior club! Syd's blue print to establish St George junior clubs, was adopted by other Sydney Clubs.

Syd Felstead made a valuable contribution to successes enjoyed by a vast base of Australian Rules players, supporters. He established basis for present day operations for many persons who continue to participate, enjoy Australia Rules throughout Sydney and NSW. St George benefited from Syd's earlier work; winning eleven, Third Grade Premierships between 1958 and 1980; with two runner ups and only three times did it not make the final four in that era.

Australian Rules is poorer upon the passing of Syd Felstead. Syd was a pioneer; St George has lost an icon!

On behalf of all colleagues at St George AFC and colleagues from the wider community of Australian Rules throughout Australia and those who had contact with Syd, we offer our condolences to Syd's children; Graham, Sandra, Robyn, David and family members.

Patrick J McCourt

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NB – funeral details yet to be advised!