



### Kooniba Football Club

6 March 2007

**Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders):** Kooniba Football Club is one of a number of Eyre Peninsula football clubs that celebrated their century last year. Koonibba is well known in Australian rules football circles for its successes and the many champion players it has produced over the years. There is even more reason for pride and for making this club a topic of a speech in parliament so that through *Hansard* some of its achievements will be recorded in the state's history.

Established in 1906, Koonibba Football Club is the oldest indigenous football club in Australia. It is based on the community of Koonibba situated about 40 kilometres north-west of a Ceduna. With a population of only 200, the club does a fantastic job to remain a competitive force in the Far West Football League. In fact, it went through the 2006 season undefeated. But, such is the unpredictability of Australian Rules football, the club, despite being top of the league ladder, lost the grand final. However, that does not detract from the club's remarkable performance over a century of competition.

Retired teacher John Gascoyne, who has chosen to live at Ceduna, has immortalised many of the indigenous champions in his book *A touch of magic: A history of Aboriginal football on Eyre Peninsula*, which was released at the end of the 2006 football season. It is usually difficult to pinpoint the start of a story so, for our purpose, let us begin in 1897 when the Lutheran synod decided to set up a mission station in South Australia. A suitable area was identified at a rock hole in mallee scrub some 40 kilometres from Denial Bay where a small European settlement existed. The synod leased 16 000 acres of land (about 650 hectares) from the state government and work began on the development of the land in 1898. Social football matches were played in the region, leading to the establishment of the first Koonibba team in 1907. To select a few sentences from John Gascoyne, he writes:

Speed, durability and enthusiasm were attributes the mission boys had in abundance. The game came naturally to them and they were instant drawcards. Koonibba went top in the first year of the County of Way competition, ably led by Mr E.E.E. Lutz. Several of those original team members are the ancestors of present day players. Dick Davey, at 14 years of age, was a member of the first premiership side and later went on to become a true legend of the game. Among Dick's progeny are the recipients of some 13 Mail medals, a Brownlow Medal and various other prominent awards.

Dick Davey became a gun shearer, who annually shored sheep with blade shears for the Proude's Tewinga merino stud at Louth Bay for many years. In his eighties he blade shored sheep in a demonstration at Poonindie. That goes some way towards explaining the physical capability and therefore football prowess of possibly his best-known descendant, grandson Gavin Wanganeen. Great grandson Aaron Davey plays for the Melbourne Demons. It is impossible to name all those who have become stars. However, Eyre Peninsula is well represented in the national AFL competition. Eyre Peninsula is proud of its representation through brothers Byron and Marcus Pickett, Graham Johncock, brothers Peter and Shaun Burgoyne, Harry Miller Junior, Eddie Betts, Daniel Wells and Elijah Ware.

The Mortlock Shield Carnival, the longest running regional football carnival in South Australia, is played annually at Port Lincoln. Many Koonibba players feature in the league teams from the Far West club. One of the most colourful was Norman Wombat, who was prominent in the years from 1945 to 1958. He sometimes played barefoot, and could run faster than the ball could be kicked. He is fondly remembered by my colleague the member for Stuart, for whom he shored sheep. He would taunt opposing players with comments such as, 'Have you ever seen a wombat fly? I'm going to jump right over you.' In his book Gascoyne wrote:

After receiving a lengthy massage at Mortlock in 1957, he asked a trainer for a pair of scissors. When quizzed on why he might need them, he promptly replied, 'I need them to trim my wings, as I will be flying so high today that I may not come down again.'

The Johncock name is well known in Eyre Peninsula football. When Roger and Trevor won Mail medals for the Far West and Port Lincoln leagues respectively in 1995, they became the first pair of brothers in South Australia to win the award in the same year. Their brother Barry 'Jack' Johncock (father of AFL star Graham) is still playing an excellent game of footy. This year in the Port Lincoln Football League he was the leading goalkicker in the reserves, while his son Barry Junior won the leading goal kicker award in the league.

Families feature in this tribute to our indigenous footballers, who most often are role models for their people. Evelyn Johncock and Iris Burgoyne of Port Lincoln, who were both awarded Order of Australia medals (OAM) in 2004, and Joy Reid of Koonibba, are three who epitomise the support and work that goes on in the background. Former Ceduna councillor Mitch Dunnett and the late Glenmore Miller are two more citizens of note who come to mind.

The Koonibba story has plenty of lows as well as highs, which we all prefer to remember and which flow over into the wider community. The more recently established Mallee Park Football Club in Port Lincoln owes some of its success to the Koonibba community and its achievements and the good example it sets. I hope that this club and all our clubs on Eyre Peninsula may continue for another 100 years and produce many more footballers of renown.

To this end, I spoke recently to renowned football guru Mr Leigh Whicker, and I was delighted today to receive an email in response to mine, which I will put on the record. It states:

Dear Liz,

Leigh Whicker has asked me to contact you in regards to the recent email that you have sent him in relation to the Eyre Peninsula Aboriginal Football Project. We would be delighted to offer assistance and support to such a worthwhile project and as a football league are very keen to be involved with this region. In recent times (late 2006) we have, with the support of the AFL, begun work preparing a proposal with a Federal Government Agency seeking funding to introduce field officers to help us implement programs on the Eyre Peninsula region and the APY lands.

We have been dealing with Steven Baz—Strategic Interventions Task Force, Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination who has been very helpful and supportive. However, this initial proposal has subsequently been directed to commence in the APY lands and has been seen as the priority location to go ahead with the planning of a football field officer with associated programs. We would welcome any further support to ensure we could tailor our program to meet the needs of the Eyre Peninsula region.

Leigh is very keen as are we, to provide meaningful programs that would be of benefit for the young aboriginal men in the region. One of our aims would be to provide a career path for those elite players and believe that the introduction of an Eyre Peninsula Aboriginal football project would go a long way to obtaining this goal. Thank you for the interest that you have in supporting this concept, I would be delighted to discuss this further with yourself, Perry Will and John Easton.

Very best regards,

James Fantasia, General Manager, Game Development, SA National Football League Inc.

That, of course, was a huge thrill to me, and such enthusiasm from the state National Football League augurs well for the future of Aboriginal footballers on Eyre Peninsula. I was also delighted to receive a long letter from Mr John Easton outlining some of the opportunities that he sees and some of the footballers he has coached along his way. He said:

Some footballers I have coached [like] Greg Phillips Port Adelaide, Milky Vivian who I recruited to Central Districts, Tim Masieroski who I recruited to Central Districts. The best footballer I have coached and strongly believe was as good as Tony Lockett and Jason Dunstall was an Aboriginal player Robert Jackamurra. Robert was sought by most WAFL and VFL clubs but did not like going to cities or towns where there were a lot of people. Robert was still kicking 130 goals a season at 32 years of age, until his untimely death in a car accident in Western Australia. Whilst coaching Tasmans, Cummins Red, Eyre United and Thevenard, I had approximately 50 per cent of the teams players [that] were Aboriginal.

He went on to say:

Once again I believe a Sporting Academy can be established, but it will have to be created in stages, localised, then maybe a progression to Port Lincoln for more competition and then on to Adelaide once a suitable standard has been attained. These are my thoughts on what I believe you may be looking for on reflection of what Perry Will has outlined.

I am quite optimistic that perhaps we will be able to go forward and once again get some very good footballers from Eyre Peninsula to Adelaide for the AFL.