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ORTH NEWCASTLE:

NORTH Newcastle, one of country Rugby League's oldest clubs, was born in the rough and tumble of the Newcastle waterfront.

By JOHN ANDERSON

Early this century Newcastle was a thriving industrial port where ships departed daily bound for world markets with the city's wealth of coal and steel.

The men who loaded the vessels were a rugged boisterous breed, most born in the portside suburbs of Irlington, Wickham, Maryville and Carrington.

Life wasn't easy for these men who were accustomed to the energy-sapping, back-breaking work.

Brawls were triggered by heavy drinking and fast tempers.

They were tough, resilient men whose life revolved around ships, booze, betting and their favourite relaxation—football.

Into this setting North Newcastle Rugby League Club was born in 1910 when a group of Rugby Union players decided to switch to the faster, tougher game.

"Although the 'rebels' encountered hostile opposition and were dubbed 'money-grubbers' by fellow workers who had been inflamed by Rugby Union officials, they were unflinching and joined the newly formed NSW Northern Branch Rugby League."

Wearing blue jerseys, Norths were one of four teams that took part in the inaugural Newcastle competition started on May 14, 1910.

The four were Norths, Souths, Wests and Central, and the Blues went down 5-0 in their opening game to Central.

From that fiery birth, Norths grew into the most successful club in Newcastle history.

The depth at Norths in 1911 still exists today and the Blues pride themselves that more than 80 per cent of their playing strength is drawn from local juniors.

Norths captain-coach Jack "Croaker" Gill plays the Blues' former international star BN "Bugs" Owens a swig of champagne after their victory in the 1967 grand final.

Norths captured their second top grade title in 1914 with a hard-fought win over arch rivals Central before World War I halted senior League in Newcastle.

After the war the competition re-started with Easts one of several new clubs to emerge.

Norths, coached by goalkicking center Buck Coleman, stormed to the 1919 final against Easts but were downed 11-10 in a thriller.

The Blues were set for their third crown, losing 10-0 at balltime with tries by rookie teenage second-rower Ab Cullen and Coleman.

But Easts, spearheaded by brilliant Alf Gibbs, who had switched from fullback to five-eighth for the second half, bounced back to snatch victory by a point.

The setback was only temporary for the Blues and the following season they won their third title to embark on a glittering era of four premierships in the roaring '30s.



North Newcastle, 1948 premiers — BACK ROW: F. Price, A. Forbes, R. Kay, L. Wells, C. Gill, M. Bailey (coach) H. Davis, R. Crocker, J. Hutton, R. Palmer. MIDDLE ROW: F. Bailey, N. Hunt, K. Robertson, C. Smith, J. Hutchinson, B. Hough, L. Gilbert, J. Swain, J. Thomas. FRONT: C. Whyte, J. Drury, W. MacLennan, F. Passmore (ballboy), E. Dancy, D. Ratley, R. Pickett.

Rugged start for famous club



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Among the great Norths players of this era were halfback Indo Frezza and winger George Charles.

But the Blues' tremendous strength lay in their powerful pack, headed by bulky props Bob McCrae and Les Latham.

McCrae and Latham pounded rivals into submission, receiving solid support from Cullen, hooker Harold "Mud" Williams, Max Bailey and crash-tackling lock Eric Gilbert.

In the back the Blues were electrified by Frezza, exploiting the pace of center Joe Irwin and wingers Will "Squib" Frezza and Charles.

After beating Waratah 18-5 in the 1929 grand final, the Blues faded and had to wait until 1955 for their next premiership.

But it was worth the wait and many club stalwarts claim the 1955 team was the best ever fielded.

Coached by lock Claude Lock, the Blues stormed to the title 14-4 over Central with a team that included a brilliant young Carrington second-rower named Herb Narvo.

A former Australian heavyweight boxing champion, Narvo went on to team with the 1957-58 Kangaroos and stamp himself one of the greatest second-rowers in Australian Rugby League history.

The Blues' 1955 team was "I" Johnson at fullback, later to play for NSW, Mike Mitten and George McCallum on the wings, Eddie Howley and Clarence "Chip" Charlton in the centers with Arthur Toomey at five-eighth and Harold Grace halfback.

The forwards, led by Lock, were "Squib" Frezza, Frank Wilkinson, Claude Sharpe, Narvo and Charlie Sunde.

In 1958 Narvo coached Norths for the then princely sum of five pounds (\$10 a week and

Herb Narvo — a legend



Champion Australian Test second-rower Herb Narvo dives over for a spectacular Norths try next to the posts in 1936.

HERB NARVO, one of Australia's greatest Test second-rowers, learned his football in the dusty, bustling Newcastle industrial suburb of Carrington.

Born Herman Narvo of Polish parents in Sydney's Ultimo, Herb (as he was more commonly known) was only six months old when the family moved to Carrington.

During the past 80 years the heavy industrial suburb has been a genuine nursery for North Newcastle.

The tough life in Carrington's crowded streets has helped mould a unique breed of Rugby League player.

Narvo was a prime example of the rugged, tough forward nurtured in the district.

At 18, the giant Narvo, with powerful shoulders and incredible pace for a big man, was a

fixture in Norths' top side.

When he was learning his football, most Carrington men worked in the nearby Hutton colliery or loaded the coal onto ships at the local wharf.

Narvo grew up in the smell of coal dust and grime, but he loved every minute of his life in the town and often said he was proud to be a Carrington boy.

He made first grade with Norths in 1932. Seven years later he was chosen to tour England with the 1937-38 Kangaroos after replacing Joe Pearce who broke a leg playing with the Kangaroos in New Zealand.

It was the start of an international career that stamped Narvo a legend in his lifetime. Narvo's powerful running and block-busting defence made him one of the most

fearful men in Rugby League during the post-war years and he proved a sensation when he joined Newcastle in 1937.

As well as a great League forward, Narvo was a fine all-round sportsman, excelling as a cricketer, cyclist and boxer.

Narvo won boxing fame in 1942 when he won the Australian heavyweight title by knocking out Frank Price in the first round.

Narvo endeared himself to so many with his humanity and simplicity.

Before a Kangaroo match at Manchester against Salford Rangers on Christmas Day, 1937, Narvo was reluctant to play. He confided to team-mate Mandy Pearce that he'd rather write a letter to his wife and family.

Pearce sympathised, but pointed out no

thing could be done.

The match was only a couple of minutes old when Narvo threw a punch and was given his marching orders.

The giant forward strode from the field sporting a huge grin as he headed for the dressing room and the letter to "mum and the kids".

Narvo died of cancer almost 20 years ago aged 46, but the memory of the giant still lingers in all who saw his remarkable talent.

Narvo is a legend around the streets of Carrington and with the boys in blue at Norths. As Narvo's former friend and Norths' stalwart Dick Bootman says: "They made Narvo and threw the mould away — he was the greatest on and off the field."

look the Blues to a crushing 20-4 grand final victory over Waratah (Mayfield).

Charles and Tommy both received tempting offers to join St. George but stayed with Norths on a fee of 30/- (\$3) a week.

One of the stars for the Blues in 1938 was former Port Kembla winger Charlie Harrison, who later represented Australia.

Another player who emerged from Norths' lower grade ranks during this period was Charles "Chicka" Cahill, who went to Newtown in 1941.

"Chicka" Cahill is president of Newtown and a leading administrator in junior Rugby League.

The halfback in Norths' 1938 lineup was Jim Hartman who had played in the shadow of the Blues' great halfback Jack "Inky" Dempsey before winning his first grade spurs.

Dempsey is acknowledged as one of the greatest halfbacks ever seen in Newcastle, but Hartman made his mark in the administrative arena, firstly as secretary of Norths then as secretary of the Newcastle Rugby League — a position he still holds.

Norths continued to be a major force in Newcastle after World War I,

internationals. In halfback Brian Carlson, front-rower Charlie Gill, Jack Hutchinson and Arthur Collinson.

The Blues, coached by Max Bailey, staged the 1945 title with a 5-2 win over Kurri Kurri, then three years later emerged triumphant with a 12-8 grand final victory against Maitland.

The following year Norths achieved a unique

Doug Hawke, Col "Woofie" Whyte, Eric Barber, Wally Hardy and "Doc" Bond.

But the Blues again bounced back to the top in 1959 with an exciting 13-12 victory over Maitland.

Only Anderson and Burns remained from the 1953 premiership-winning combination as Norths, coached by "Nana" Byrne, edged home after Maitland

halfback Brian Askie to keep attempting drop kicks at goal, crossing the ball went dead.

In this way Norths were able to keep possession and wrap up the match, but the following year the rule was changed to give the defending side possession on their quarter line from such kicks.

Among the players in the 1967 lineup were Karl Hutchinson, "Blags" Owen, Ray Badler and Doug McManus, formerly of Canterbury.

During the past decade Norths have continued to be a difficult hurdle for rivals at their home ground, Paemore Oval (formerly Wreckham Oval), the heart of the waterfront district.

With former St. George Test winger Eddie Lumsden at the helm in 1971, the Blues made the semi-finals and clinched a berth in the 1975 final against Wests with former Balmain star Larry Leo coaching.

But premiership honours have eluded the Blues in this period despite the emergence of promising young forwards Dave Edwards, Zig Niszcot and Greg Masen.

The crash-tackling Edwards has since joined Balmain but Masen, Niszcot and others like Ken Wilson and David Riding have remained to help Leo keep



Narvo on the fly for Norths against Waratah in the 1930s with Jim Hartman (from Newcastle Rd, secretary) and Charlie Harrison (ex-Kangaroos, ex-Port Kembla) backing up outside.

distance of the leaders this season.

However, the long-term future of the club rests with its current half-back, transformed by livewire secretary Bob Woolston, to secure a licence for a proposed

League club.

The club owns a half-acre site overlooking the industrial complex at Port Waratah and have already secured a loan to begin building if the licence is approved.

The graining of the li-

cence could be the first step in the climb back to the top for Newcastle's battling waterfront Blues.

NEXT :
Dubbo Macquarie

COUNTRY CLUBS SPECIAL FEATURE

boner when three local prospects, Carlson, Gill and Collinson, were chosen in the 1952 Kangaroo team for the tour of England.

Collinson played all his junior football with Stokton which was thrust into Norths' territory in 1947 when Easts folded.

The only other change to the Blues' boundaries has been the inclusion of Raymond Terrace and Kararah, the birthplace of former Test fullback Eric Simms.

After winning the 1953 grand final 16-11 over Cessnock, Norths again slipped from the spotlight despite the presence in their lineup of such fine players as Bill "Slogger" Burns,

missed with a conversion attempt in the dying minutes of the game.

Many of the 1959 side, including Neil Hancock, Stan Gill, Neville "Spider" Boyd, Joe "Spider" Irwin and Bill "Blags" Owen, were the backbone of the sides which kept Norths near the top in the 1960s.

Byrne again led the Blues to the title in 1962 and that same year represented Australia before joining South Sydney.

Three years later Norths were the Newcastle champions once again after Jack "Cracker" Gill led the Blues to a controversial 13-11 win over Wests.

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