

Cec Fifield

..... when he was graded from the President's Cup team in 1922 played seven Reserve Grade games to see out the year. It set the platform for the talented young player to make his mark in the 1923 season. Cec was selected to make his First Grade debut in round one of the 1923 competition and became a regular in the team playing thirteen First Grade games at either five-eighth or centre.

The Arrow newspaper in August 1923 commented on Cec Fifield's attributes as a rugby league player. These attributes would eventually be seen around the world during Fifield's long career.

The best Western Suburbs back was C. Fifield, the centre three-quarter. He showed speed, splendid tackling, and some initiative. He reminded me a good deal in some of his work of Vivian Farnsworth in his best days.

Arrow 31 August 1923

After a very successful 1923, Cec Fifield seemed to have disappeared from the Wests playing ranks. He played one Reserve Grade game, and in the later part of the season, three City Cup games. So where was he? The available rugby league history sites are silent on Cec Fifield's 1924 season, but the answer to that question was found in past newspaper reports. Cec had moved to the NSW City of

Newcastle, and was playing with the Central Newcastle Club.

Central Newcastle have the services of Fifield (Western Suburbs), and in addition to this Sydney player, have the benefit of the team building of last season. Towards the end of 1923 the

Arrow 25 April 1924

Cec Fifield had his first taste of representative football when he was selected to play five-eighth for Newcastle against Combined Country in May 1924. He scored a try in Newcastle's 5-10 loss. He was again selected to play against the touring England team, this time in the centres. Newcastle played well and held a lead into the second half, with Fifield scoring a try. However Newcastle were reduced to eleven men and the tourists gained the upper hand late in the second half.

Cec returned to Sydney in 1925 but found it difficult to find a place in the Wests First Grade team. The odd thing is that while he played seven First Grade games, he played no lower grade games even though he was selected as a Reserve for First Grade on a couple of occasions. Whatever was happening at Wests had no consequences for his representative ambitions. Cec was selected to represent Metropolis against Country Firsts and then with NSW for its northern tour and the interstate series against Queensland.

1926 was arguably Cec's best season with Wests. He played fifteen of the sixteen First Grade games that year, and was by far Wests top try scorer with ten tries. However in 1927 Cec was on the move. He played four First Grade games with Wests early in the season before taking up an opportunity with the central NSW Club of West Wyalong where he was engaged as a player/coach. Interestingly, West Wyalong played no Maher Cup football in the years 1927, 1928 and 1929, so it is not clear what the objective was for Cec Fifield's appointment.

Towards the end of the 1927 season, there was an incident when West Wyalong played Temora. Cec Fifield was captain of West Wyalong and Bill Brogan, Wests player #271, was also in the team. West Wyalong was losing the match and close to full time Brogan was ordered off the field by the referee, but he refused to go. The referee turned to Cec Fifield as captain, to have Brogan removed. However

Fifield said to the referee, "He is too big for me!" Bill Brogan received a four match suspension which was implemented in the following season.

One of the oddities of this situation is that upon the referees report, the local officials recommended that Cec Fifield receive a four week suspension. The referee explained that he did not expect Fifield to use physical force to remove Brogan, but to use his influence as captain. Anybody who saw the size of Brogan would think twice about pushing him off with force. Cec Fifield did not remain in West Wyalong in 1928 but had to face the judiciary in Sydney at the start of that year. The officials determined that the proposed suspension was only a recommendation and discharged the matter.

Cec returned to Wests in 1928 but only played First Grade in rounds two and three of the competition. He was the captain of Wests First Grade team for the first time in round three, but left the Club soon after to take up a player/coach position in the northern NSW town of Narrabri. In July, Cec lead his Narrabri team against a Combined Railway/Tramways team in a curtain raiser to a Newcastle versus England match at Newcastle.

In the early match Narrabri made hacks of the Railway and Tramway team, whom they beat by 29 points to 7. Fifield, Narrabri's coach, captain, and half-back, was a power on his own, and on one occasion carried the ball from goal-post to goal-post.

Arrow 13 July 1928

In 1929 Cec Fifield returned to Wests. It was a Kangaroo touring year and no doubt Cec had plans to be in contention for that tour. He played nine First Grade games for Wests, was selected for City Firsts as well as NSW's northern tour which included three games against Queensland. He was in great form and was subsequently selected for the 1929-30 Kangaroo tour. The team travelled to England via the Panama Canal and stopped off in New York where they played an exhibition game.

On the Kangaroo tour Cec played four Test matches against England and a further seventeen tour matches against Club sides. He became Kangaroo number 152. Towards the end of the tour, Cec suffered an injury which was diagnosed as a cracked fibula and was unable to play after the final Test.

On his return from the Kangaroo tour, Cec switched Clubs and joined the Balmain Tigers as captain/coach. It was rumoured that he would receive payment for each match played, a novelty at the time. He only played in the first five rounds of the competition with Balmain. It appeared that Cec had not fully recovered from the injury he received on the Kangaroo tour and as a result his form was below his best. Cec was listed as the Balmain

co-coach with Norm Robinson for the remainder of the season.

What is wrong with Fifield? That is what all Rugby League enthusiasts are asking. He returned to Australia with the reputation of being the greatest centre in the R.L. world. His injuries have been blamed, but Fifield declares himself to be physically O.K.

Northern Star 17 May 1930

However it was evident that Cec had moved on and he was appointed as the player/coach of the Junee Rugby League team in the south west of NSW in July 1930. He was out of work in Sydney and was found a job in Junee as a Motor Mechanic. He played three Maher Cup games as well as matches for the Weissel Cup while at Junee. He also coached the Junee junior rugby league team while there. At the end of the season, Cec returned to Sydney, but the people of Junee wanted him back for the 1931 season and guaranteed him 50 pounds if he came back to coach the Junee teams, a sizable amount given that the Country was in the grips of the Great Depression.

The Junee Junior Rugby League Club, after a successful season, closed the year with a banquet in the Scouts' Hall on Monday night. Mr. O. Bye (president) presided. Numerous toasts were proposed. During an interval in

the toast list Cecil Fifield was presented with a leather suit case on behalf of the junior footballers for the interest he had displayed in them during the season. Fifield left for Syd-

Daily Advertiser 2 October 1930

Cec was in communication with the Balmain Club during the off season but work was unable to be found for him in Sydney. The Junee Club followed up and came to terms with Cec to coach and play at Junee in 1931. Cec once again coached Junee's junior teams, and visited towns within the region promoting rugby league and giving lectures on the finer points of the game.

In July 1931 Cec Fifield announced that he had entered into a contract to play with the Hull Club in England for a term of four years. The sign on fee was 500 pounds which would have been an incredible sum at the time. He would also receive match payments for wins, losses and draws. He left Australia in October 1931. Hull were struggling in the English competition at the time Cec Fifield joined them, but had great value from him. He played two hundred and twenty four games for Hull, scored eighty tries and gained England Championship honours in 1936.

SYDNEY, Monday.—Cecil Fifield, the well-known Rugby League footballer, announced to-day at Junee that negotiations had been definitely concluded and he had contracted to leave Australia on October 10 for Hull, where he will arrive a fortnight prior to his first engagement. It is said the signing-on fee was £500, while Fifield will be paid £7 for each winning match, £6 for a draw, £5 for a lose. He also may be found a position, probably in a sports depot. The contract covers four years, which is longer than usual. Fifield will be able to complete the local season

Tweed Daily 28 July 1931

Cec Fifield returned to Australia during the English off season in June 1933, and was requested to coach the Junee Rugby League team once more, at least for part of the season. On arrival in Australia, he indicated that he might play for either Wests or Balmain, but his position needed to be clarified by the NSWRL as he was effectively still under contract with Hull in England. The matter was considered by the rugby league authorities but it was decided to take no action which made Cec Fifield ineligible to play in NSW that year. Cec decided to return to England to play out his contract with Hull, and sailed with the 1933-34 Kangaroos on his return passage.

In 1937, Cec Fifield returned to Australia from England. He had a successful career in English football. On the eve of his return an article appeared in the Leeds Sports Post which analysed the methods of the Australian. It noted;

"Fifield always believed in going down the middle of the field, and he is not easily turned away from that aim. He shows his greatness by the ground that he is able to make, and he shows his greatness too, in the way he always seeks to bring the tackler into him before parting with the ball. There is little chance of a tackler leaving Fifield for the other man after Fifield has passed the ball. He plays the best type of Australian football. Even now he is quick to an opening and is able to work in little room as all great footballers are. He has always understood to the full need for backing up in attack. He will be remembered at Hull for the part he played in the building up of a passing and running pack. He knew their value last season, when they were at their best, and it was good to see the way in which he worked for them. He was a member of the great tour team, 1929-30, and it may be that if he had the aid of a scoring winger three-quarter with the speed and skill of say Eric Harris, he would have had a hand in the making of a record or two in Club football in this country."

Cec played seven City Cup games with the Canterbury Bankstown Rugby League team on his return in June 1937, however the following season he made a return to Wests as a player/coach. Wests had a terrible start to the 1938 season, losing the first five games. They were well beaten in the first three games with an embarrassing 11-57 loss to Balmain in round three. Cec hadn't played up to this point, but in round four he put some steel back into the team with a narrow 4-8 loss to Souths. In the last nine rounds, Wests had four wins, one draw and four losses, some of those with narrow margins. During his time at Wests Cec played fifty nine First Grade, ten Reserve Grade and five City Cup games. He scored twenty seven tries and kicked eight goals in all grades.

Cec Fifield's top grade rugby league career came to a close in 1938, although there were reports in April 1939 that he was playing with the County Council team in the City Houses League, and then in March 1940 he was to have made a possible comeback with Newtown. There is very little information from these years.

However Cec Fifield did appear to have an involvement with the Canterbury Bankstown Club in the early 1940's. In March 1944, it was announced that Cec had been appointed as the Reserve Grade Coach at Canterbury. Ron Bailey had been appointed as the First Grade Coach, but after five straight losses to start the season, Cec Fifield was nominated as a Co-Coach of the First Grade team and then from round eight, he became the Canterbury First Grade Coach. Canterbury took out the wooden spoon in 1944 and Cec Fifield was not reappointed in 1945.

Cec Fifield returned to England. In 1950 he was approached by English club Rochdale Hornets and appointed as Manager-Coach. He was asked to select several young Australian players to help strengthen the Rochdale team. He selected Tom Duffy, Wally Elliot, Cec "Babe" Kelly, Reg Stanford and Ron Stanford. They arrived in Rochdale in September 1950 and commenced training but the Australian Rugby League lodged a complaint against the five men playing for Rochdale owing to the then current "poaching" ban being in place. The Rugby League case was lost because the men were junior rugby union players, not affiliated to any Rugby League Club, although they had played Rugby League as teenagers. Each had a successful career before returning to Australia.

Cec returned to Australia and was appointed as Coach of the Griffith Rugby League team in 1953. His tenure there lasted from the start of the season until mid-year. His last coaching position was at Parramatta in the 1956 season. Parramatta struggled to make an impact in the Sydney competition from 1947 until the early 1960's, and Cec only had a limited effect in turning the fortunes of the Parramatta Club around. Despite his efforts, Parramatta took out the wooden spoon in 1956.

Cec "Dick" Fifield died suddenly at his Earlwood home on 7 December 1957 at the age of 54. After a largely attended funeral, he was cremated at Rookwood on 11 December 1957. ***His epitaph read: "He was the most marked man on the field, but the most respected off."***

Notes:

- 1. Cec Fifield never had any sons. Jack and George Fifield were his nephews born to Norman Fifield. They both started playing rugby league in Sydney in the late 1940s.*
- 2. In 2008, Cec Fifield was named one of the Australian Rugby League's 100 Greatest players of all Time.*
- 3. There is a note in Wikipedia that Cec Fifield played for West Wyalong as a teenager. There was a Fifield that played for West Wyalong in 1914, which would have made Cec eleven years old at the time. Even given Cec Fifield's great rugby league abilities, it is highly unlikely that this was the same Fifield.*
- 4. Some rugby league history sites indicate that Cec Fifield played over one hundred First Grade games with Wests. Cec played fifty nine First Grade games with Wests.*