

Harry Owen

..... played with Burwood Juniors Rugby League team in 1925 and again made the President's Cup team, being appointed as captain. An article in the Sun newspaper on 20 May 1927 noted that it was Wests foundation player and administrator Charlie Elliott who "called up" Harry Owen to Reserve Grade in 1925.



14 Esher St Burwood -
Owen family home standing in 2022



The Owen Family soon after arriving in Australia
Harry Owen (far right) - Source: Ancestry.com.au

Wests Reserve Grade team of 1925 was full of very talented players that either had played or would play First Grade rugby league with Wests. Names such as Pony Redmond, Fred Elliott, Jack Holmes, A Smith, Arthur Mendel, Harry Owen, Jim Parsons, Cec Gilbert, Jack Peterson, Frank Spillane, Johnno Rhodes and Athol Smith were all members of the team that played in the Final of the League Cup. Ray Morris who went on to become a Kangaroo could only make it as a reserve!

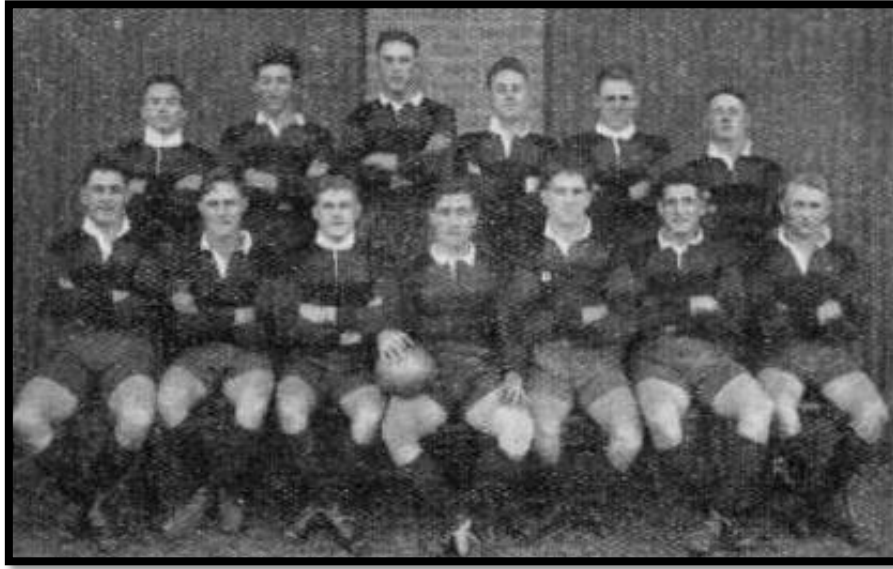
| FINAL-LEAGUE CUP. | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| WESTERN SUBURBS v. NEWTOWN | | | |
| Newtown | | Western Suburbs | |
| Color—Royal Blue. | | Colors—Black and White. | |
| FULL-BACK: | | FULL-BACK: | |
| 39—F. Lind | | 21—R. Buckley | |
| THREE-QUARTERS: | | THREE-QUARTERS: | |
| 19—P. Little | R. Walton—17 | 40—F. Redmond | |
| 23—W. Torrens | J. Bell—6 | F. Elliott (Capt.)—23 | |
| HALVES: | | HALVES: | |
| 24—E. Tate (Capt.) | | 43—A. Smith | J. Holmes—25 |
| | R. E. McEnroe—20 | 26—A. Mendel H. Owens—20 | |
| FORWARDS: | | FORWARDS: | |
| 36—G. McCarthy | B. Lind—1 | 17—E. Parsons | C. Gilbert—31 |
| 29—W. Cullen | V. Plummer—40 | 32—J. Peterson | A. Spillane—33 |
| 32—H. Melville | W. McMillan—14 | 41—J. Rhodes | A. Smith—41 |
| RESERVES: | | RESERVES: | |
| 35—W. Parkinson | W. Wade—34 | 38—F. Harpley | A. Spankie—46 |
| 38—A. Riley | L. Davis—27 | 31—R. Morris | C. Clay—47 |
| 37—A. Gurney | A. Davies—18 | 22—O. Rumph | |

League Cup (Second Grade) Final 1925 - H. Owens

Harry made his First Grade debut with Wests in the middle of the 1926 season and played four First Grade games that year. Harry had his break out year in 1927, playing ten First Grade games with Wests, a game against Western Division in the Country Carnival, a game for Metropolis against NSW

Country Firsts, four games for NSW Firsts against Queensland Firsts and games for NSW Firsts against the regional sides of Ipswich and New England.

The Sydney Sportsman newspaper took an interest in Harry Owen and in its edition on 17 May 1927 wrote; "If you want to get a bite, call Harry Owen (West's expert half), 'Pommy.' Not that that stops the crowd calling him so. He was born in England, but came here at an early age, and thus only Sydney can take the credit of the good job he has made of his football. It is no good attempting to measure his chest with a yard measure, he is built solid all the way. He is a model young man, too. Booze cuts no ice with him, and to Madame Nicotine he has not been introduced."



Metropolitan Firsts 1927

Back: H. Owen(s), E. Lapham, G. Treweeke, A. F. O'Rourke, B. Wearing, J. Brien,
Front: J. Parsons, A. Righton, H. Finch, V. Lawrence (Capt.), A. Kelly, E. Root, A. Justice



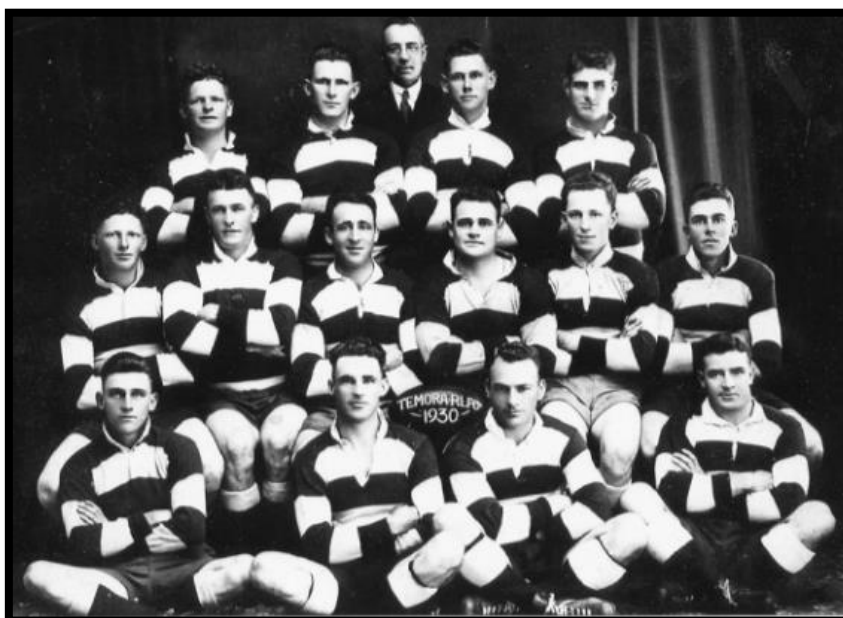
Wests NSW Representatives 1927 - Harry Owen, front left side.

1928 and 1929 were lean years for Harry Owen with Jerry Brien and George Mason preferred to fill the half back position in 1928, with George Mason almost exclusively filling this position in 1929.

Nevertheless, Harry Owen turned out in Reserve Grade, playing eleven and sixteen matches respectively during this period.

Harry once again donned the black and white in 1930, but only played two Second Grade games before an opportunity came up to play with the Temora Club in the south west of NSW. Harry Owen received a clearance from Wests, and immediately took the field with Temora. Harry was described in the local newspapers as; "the clever half from Western Suburbs." The Temora Rugby League Club played in a strong regional group which included participation in the Maher Cup competition. The Temora Club also had signed Kangaroo wing three-quarter Alan Ridley, however Ridley hurt his knee and sat out the 1930 season. Alan Ridley, played with Western Suburbs in 1931.

Harry played in his usual position of halfback and formed a combination with the great Eric Weissel at five eighth. The Temora Club had a great deal of success during 1930 and at season's end Eric Weissel was presented with a cheque for 150 pounds and Harry Owen, who was returning to Sydney, was given a writing desk. At the presentation, Eric Weissel expressed the hope that he and Harry Owen would be able to play for Temora again next year. Clearly, Eric and Harry had formed a tight bond during the season. The week before Harry left Temora, he showed his versatility by turning out with the Temora Cricket Club, top scoring in a close match with the Springdale Club.



Temora Rugby League Club 1930

Back: Eric Curran, Charlie Bray, Norm Bland, George King, Reg Maker

Middle: Leo Curran, Horace Anthony, Eric Weissel, Norm Dundas, Alan Lynch, Bob Boyd

Front: Joe Constable, Harold 'Mucca' Thomas, Harry Owen, Jack Stephenson,

Source: Temora Dragons Rugby League Club

The year at Temora resurrected Harry Owen's football career. Perhaps playing alongside a player of the quality of Eric Weissel reinvigorated Harry and built his confidence, but whatever the reason, Harry hit the 1931 season with gusto. Wests were the premiers in 1930 and so to break into the First Grade team would have been no easy task.

Nevertheless, Harry regained the halfback position and combined with Jack Rosa at five-eighth for the first half of the season and during the second half of the season, Harry moved to five-eighth, with Harry Cameron at halfback. Harry only played First Grade with Wests in 1931 and had the honor

of being captain in the last two rounds. Wests made the finals in 1931 and were runners-up for that year. They beat Easts in the semi final, but went down to South Sydney in the final.

Harry Owen's good form at club level was noticed by the selectors, and Harry was picked as a reserve in a Probables versus Possibles match. Harry made it onto the field and scored a try and kicked a goal in the Probables win. He was then selected for NSW Seconds to play against NSW Country Seconds at halfback. Harry kicked seven goals in his team's 45-12 win.

Arguably, Harry Owen's greatest honor was to be selected for the NSW Firsts team in 1931, this capped a perfect comeback for the gritty half back. Harry was the captain and played all four series games against Queensland Firsts. The series was drawn 2-2 and Harry acquitted himself well sharing goal kicking duties with Dave Brown.

Harry Owen's selection in the NSW team was not without controversy. The Referee newspaper on 3 June 1931 reported; "Selection of Harry Owen, both as halfback and captain is the main cause of contention. The Western Suburbs boy is a solid rather than brilliant scrum worker, and can stand any amount of hard stuff. Pope, the Eastern Suburbs captain, looked to be an odds on bet for the job last week, but he failed to show up on Saturday against the fiery Country pack.

It is evidently Owen's solidity that has won him his place. The new captain is 26 years of age, came to Wests in 1926, and represented the State the following year, but has not since been prominent enough to gain inclusion in a light blue side. His ability as a leader is not known, but he is a solid youth, and the responsibility should not affect his play."

On Harry Owen's return from the Queensland series he was confronted with the news that he had been dropped from Wests First Grade team and replaced by Harry Cameron. The Penny Post newspaper reported on 8 July 1931, that; "the decision was taken because he was not good enough to hold his place against other claimants. Tassie Cameron, formerly of Goulburn, is taking his place."

Harry Owen was selected in Reserve Grade to play North Sydney on 11 July but he did not play. Wests lost the First Grade match to North Sydney 11-17, and Harry Owen was back in First Grade the following week.



Five Wests players named in the 1931 NSW team to play Queensland
Back: Wild Bill Brogan, Cliff Pearce, Ray Morris
Front: Ken Sherwood and Harry Owen

After a successful 1931, Harry Owen was now in a position to seek further honours in the game. He turned out for Wests in a main trial game against Balmain in March 1932. Just after half time, Harry was involved in a heavy tackle and broke his left ankle, which ended his season.



Harry Owen, Rugby League State Captain, about to kick the ball.
South Sydney v Wests 1931

While Harry Owen was out of action, he still took an interest in the game and it was reported that in June 1932 he stopped off in Grafton on his way up to see the Second Test match against the English side in Brisbane. He spent the day with his ex-club mates, Jerry Brien, Jack Horder and Les Midson who were playing with South Grafton. Brien had played First Grade with Wests, Horder was a lower grade player and Les Midson returned to Wests the following year and played First Grade. Harry attended the South Grafton training session the same evening.

The news report noted that; "Owen was considered a certainty for inclusion in the Test matches against the Englishmen this season, but was unfortunate enough to break his ankle in the trial matches, fourteen weeks ago and is still hors de combat."

1933, was an interesting year for Wests. After round six, Wests were in second position on the competition table, but this was also a Kangaroo tour year and Wests lost five players to the touring party. The effect on the team was immediate and the Club lost the next eight games to finish with the wooden spoon. Harry Owen made a come-back in 1933 and started the season playing in Reserve Grade. He remained there for the first six rounds, but was elevated to First Grade to replace Les Mead who was on Kangaroo duties. This coincided with Wests run of losses. Harry played only four First Grade games before being dropped back to Reserve Grade for the last four rounds.

Wests form in the second half of the 1933 season could not be attributed to Harry Owen as there was a number of factors including the loss of key players to the Kangaroo tour and erratic selections that brought some young players to the top grade without providing the opportunity to embed a consistent combination. This may have been a deliberate strategy particularly towards the back end of the season whereby new talent was given a taste of higher level football in the knowledge that the Kangaroo tourists would be returning the following season. If this was the strategy then it appeared to work as Wests had a very successful 1934. However, 1933 was the end of Harry Owen's rugby league career.

There is no doubt that Harry Owen was a great Club man for Wests. He was a talented rugby league player who represented and captained NSW and played finals football with Wests in 1931, but was

often in the wrong place at the wrong time. He broke his ankle at the start of 1932 when he was considered a strong prospect to play for Australia against the touring English team. He missed out on Wests first premierships when he went to Temora in 1930. He regained his form, but by the end of 1933, his race was run and he missed being part of Wests second premiership in 1934. Through all of the ups and downs during his career, it is evident that he made a significant contribution during this golden period for Wests.



Wests v Newtown 22 July 1933. This was Harry Owen's last First Grade game (Harry at far right)

Harry Owen however was not finished in the sporting arena. He was a talented cricket player who played with the Croydon Kiara Club as early as 1922. He represented Western Suburbs as a junior in the Daily Telegraph and Martin Shield competitions. His talent as a batsman/wicket keeper was recognised with an invitation to train with other selected juniors at Pratten Park as early as 1923.

The Arrow newspaper on 1 January 1926 wrote; "H. Owen, the sturdily built Croydon Kiara lad, was the outstanding batsman. He drove anything overpitched past cover, and gaining the strike brought Wests total to 177. A few grade club members were very much impressed by Owen's knock, and an invitation to practice at Pratten Park ensued."

He was selected along with future Wests Rugby League team mate Bert Green, to play in a Western Suburbs junior representative team against NSW Colts in the 1925/26 season, and then in 1926/27 he was selected to play in a NSW juniors team that played Victoria juniors. By 1928, it was reported that H. Owen, Croydon Kiara's opening batsman, is gradually making claim to be considered the soundest batsman in the Association.

In the 1933/34 season, Harry Owen was playing Second Grade with the Western Suburbs Cricket Club, but quickly made his First Grade debut against North Sydney on 7 October 1933. He became Western Suburbs Cricket Club, First Grade player #277. In the 1934/35 season he was the Second Grade wicket keeper, but was playing so well, he displaced Jim Bowden, the First Grade keeper, although Bowden remained in the team.

Harry Owen, remained at Esher St, Burwood until well into the 1950's before moving to Concord West and then Haberfield in his final years. Harry Owen died at Haberfield in May 1986.