

Alan Ridley

..... was playing with some of the greats of Country football in 1929. His team mates included Eric Weissel, Jack Kingston and Charlie Cornwell and Colin York.

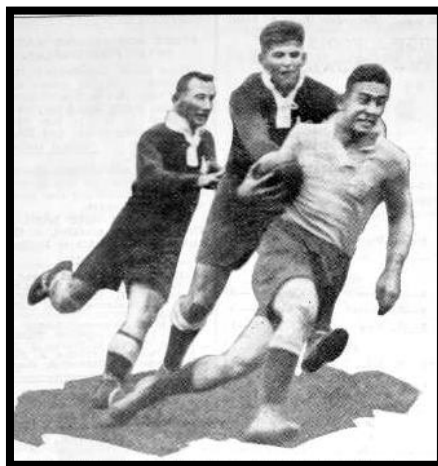


Southern Districts Rugby League Team 1929

Back L to R: E Bussy (Train), V Marsh, A Ridley, J James, C Cornwell, T Forbett, R Cook,
Sitting: J Kingston, W Bradley, A Bowers (Manager), E Weissel (C), S Keys, T O'Connor, C York,
Front: F Blundell, R Maker, Purcell

Alan's spectacular rise up the representative ladder continued in 1929 with him being selected in the NSW squad for its tour to Queensland and northern NSW, and then selection in the Kangaroos squad for the 1929-30 tour of Great Britain. Alan scored eleven tries in seven games on tour, but his time on the field was limited as he was hampered by a knee injury.

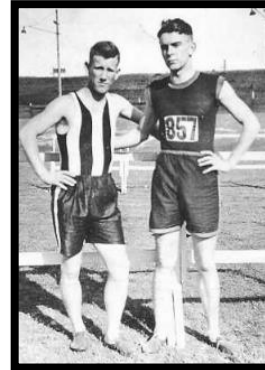
On his return to Australia he was one of fifteen applicants for the position of Coach of the Junee Rugby League team, however the Temora Club, which boasted in its playing ranks the likes of Eric Weissel, jumped in and offered Alan a position in a Temora store, which he accepted. However a recurrence of his knee injury brought about a premature end to his season and he returned to his home town of Queanbeyan, where he took up an Assistant Coaching position.



Alan Ridley on the burst - RLN 1929

In 1931, Alan relocated to Sydney and signed up with Wests. It was a productive relationship for both Wests and Alan Ridley between 1931 and 1936. Alan played sixty four First Grade games and two Reserve Grade games, scoring sixty three First Grade tries. In 1931 Alan was Wests top try scorer and overall top scorer with twelve tries and 36 points.

In 1932 Alan scored 18 tries in sixteen matches, including a try in Wests Grand Final loss, which was only equalled in 1994 by West's Paul Smith who scored 18 tries in nineteen matches. Alan also kicked a goal for a season tally of fifty six points. He was the picture of athleticism and a big man for a wing three-quarter which made him difficult to contain. His physique can be gauged from the photograph taken with team mate Vic Dwyer, circa 1932.



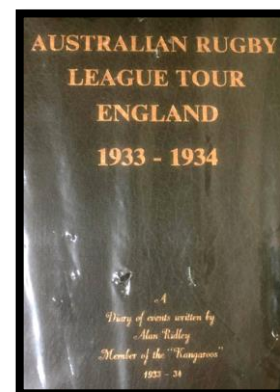
Alan Ridley (Wests jersey) with NSW team mates Jack Beaton and Dave Brown



Alan Ridley Ilkley Eng. 1933-34

1933 was a year to forget by Wests and Alan Ridley only managed four matches before being one of the five Wests players that were chosen mid-season to go on the 1933-34 Kangaroo Tour to Great Britain. On tour Alan played twenty seven matches, including three Tests and scored twenty seven tries.

While on tour Alan kept a diary which chronicles the whole tour from the time the team left Sydney until they returned to Australia eight months later in 1934. The diary not only records match results but also what the team did while in transit and also gives a real time account of important events such as the illness and tragic death of team mate Ray Morris. The diary is proudly kept at the Wests Archive.

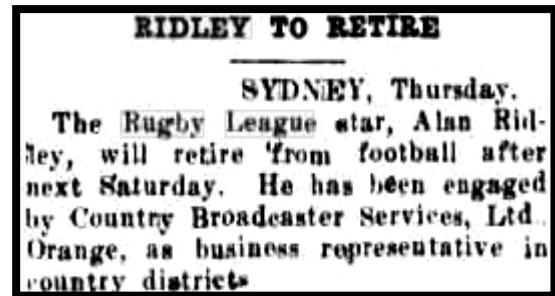


Alan Ridley's Tour Diary 1933-34

Alan came back from the Kangaroo Tour and slotted right into a Wests team that was rejuvenated and heading for premiership success. Alan missed a few games mid-season but was there at the end when it counted, scoring two tries in the Final to defeat Eastern Suburbs 15-12 and take out the 1934 premiership.

Alan kept his form up in 1935, once again being the top try scorer for Wests with fifteen tries in twelve matches. Wests made the semi finals again but bowed out in the first semi final to finish the competition in third place. However the major news in August that year was the announcement by Alan Ridley of his retirement. This came as quite a shock to the rugby league world as Alan, at the age of 25, was only just reaching the peak of his career.

Economic conditions in the 1930's were quite tough and jobs were not easy to come by, so the offer of employment by Country Broadcasting Services at Orange, NSW was a rare opportunity and one that could not be readily dismissed. Alan became the Business Representative in Country districts for the broadcasting group which would make it very difficult to continue with his rugby league career.

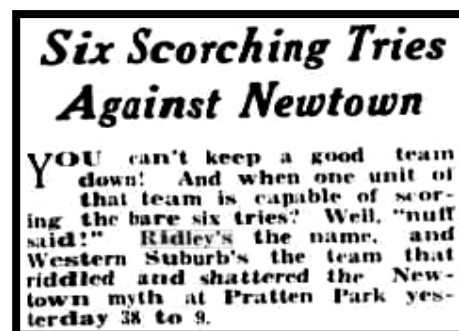


Daily Advertiser 23 August 1935

Alan settled in Orange and commenced work with his new employer, but by March 1936 moves were afoot to have him play once more, as he was seen as a necessary part of the Australian Rugby League team which was to take on the visiting Great Britain side, later in the year. Alan's announcement that he would play for Wests in 1936 was no doubt assisted by the work done in the background by his brother, Jack Ridley, who was the Advertising Manager at Country Broadcasting Services at the time, and who went on to manage radio station 2UE in Sydney. Jack Ridley let it be known that Alan's return to rugby league was conditional on the company being granted exclusive rights to broadcast in the Country areas, as well as club and international matches played at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

The arrangement appeared to be a win by both the NSW Rugby League and Country Broadcasting Services, however there were other issues to be addressed as well including residential qualification rules. Alan would be working and training in Country centres during the week and coming to Sydney on weekends to play with Wests. From a personal perspective Alan had put on some weight during the off season and was reported to have reached as much as 16 stone, but was now heavily in training and was starting to shape up well.

These problems were overcome and Alan took the field with Wests in round one of 1936. Alan scored nine tries for Wests in six matches in the 1936 season. Six of these tries were in a match against Newtown where Alan Ridley completely dominated.



Truth 12 July 1936

However the main game for Alan in 1936 was to play against England in the three scheduled Test matches. Alan played in all three games, scoring a try in the First Test, but the tourists took the honors winning the Second and Third Tests.



Alan Ridley evading the English forward H. Beverley (Telegraph 8 June 1936)

At the "League Ball" that farewelled the English tourists in July 1936, Alan Ridley announced that he would be retiring from all representative rugby league and that he intended to complete the season with Wests, but was not likely to play at all in 1937. Alan only played the one further game with Wests after this announcement. He had achieved a lot in a relatively short period, and maybe had more to give, but without the incentive of playing further representative football it didn't make a lot of sense to continue to play in Sydney on weekends.

He would be missed at Wests as Alan Ridley was not only a great player but he was an excellent Club man as well. An article in the Truth newspaper on 30 August 1936 noted that; "The Western Suburbs Rugby League Supporters' Club, formed three years ago by international footballer Alan Ridley, has the proud distinction of being the only one of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, and it is with much pleasurable anticipation that members look forward to their annual ball."

Alan married Edna Pritchard, a well known basketball player, at the end of the season and settled in the town of Orange, NSW where his career in communications and his community involvement flourished.

Alan Ridley enlisted with the AIF for service in the Second World War in January 1942 and went into camp in March of that year. He had retired from top level rugby league some years earlier and at the time of enlistment was Assistant Manager of Country Broadcasting Services and Manager of Orange Radio Station, 2GZ.

It was reported that Ridley now weighed 17 stone, with a chest expansion of six and a half inches. "Standing well over six feet in his socks, he is among the finest specimens of Australian manhood." After putting away his football gear, he took up golf, and has won the reputation of being among the longest drivers in the west.

In May 1942, it was reported that while serving in the Army, Alan Ridley agreed to play with Eastern Suburbs in the Newcastle rugby league competition. It was noted that he was fit and well and that his knee was sound again. Alan was sent overseas soon after and served at Milne Bay in New Guinea with the 55th Battalion. However he was invalided back to Australia in late 1942, suffering a recurrence of a knee injury and Malaria. At the time of his return he held the rank of Sergeant.

ALAN RIDLEY BACK
 Sgt. Alan Ridley, former international Rugby League winger, has been invalided back from New Guinea.
 Ridley was at Milne Bay. He suffered recurrence of a knee injury, and developed malaria.

(The Sun 9 October 1942)

A description of tomorrow's Rugby League match-of-the-day also has been arranged by "The Sunday Sun." It will be broadcast over the same stations by Alan Ridley, former League international, assisted by Si Meredith.

RIDLEY FIT AGAIN

A writer in the sporting columns of the Sun states: "Sergeant Alan Ridley, of the A.I.F. has been discharged fit and well from hospital, passed A1, after having returned from active service in the islands, where, in addition to an old football injury going against him, he suffered from malaria."

In the 1940's Alan Ridley became a radio broadcaster of rugby league matches as well as a radio program producer. In 1959, his Company expanded into television services for the central west region. He was the Managing Director of Radio 2GZ and TV Station Channel 8 in 1975. Alan was involved in a range of community activities, such as flood relief programs through his role as Manager of the local broadcasting station. He was a very competent golf player and became president of the Orange Golf Club. In 1953 Alan was elected to the Orange Council and became Deputy Mayor and then Mayor in 1956-57. In 1970 Alan was awarded an O.B.E. for services to the community.



Alan Ridley Mayor of Orange, NSW 1956

Alan Ridley was interviewed in 1983 and gave some personal insights into his career. He said; "When I first started with Wests there was no fee for signing on, we just played for the love of it. I think the most I ever got was forty pounds and that came in Wests Premiership year of 1934. When I toured the pay was one pound ten shillings a week."

He said that when he started playing his biggest hurdle was his father. "Dad was the Schoolmaster in Queanbeyan and a regular church goer, and he didn't like the idea of me playing on Sundays. I didn't think he knew I was playing because he never let on, but years later I found out that he used to sit on the hill and watch me. I discovered one time, at the Sydney Sports Ground it was, that he clocked a woman over the head with an umbrella, when she called out that I was a dirty player."

When asked how he saw the game today, Alan responded; "Oh, I don't think that the game is any harder, but it is tougher. There are more of the sort of incidents in evidence today that irritate a player, like pushing a hand on an opponent's head to get up from the ground. That sort of thing is ugly and serves no purpose. We didn't do it anytime. When I played, the game was more open and the winger got the ball, pretty quickly too. There weren't 13 forwards in the team getting in the way."

Asked what he reckons about Wests these days; "I always watch the side on television, that is, when they get the chance to play on camera. I am inclined to go for the underdog no matter who it is, but Wests are my team."



Alan Ridley with his Rugby League Memorabilia

In 2003 Alan Ridley was voted in as a member of both the Western Suburbs and Wests Tigers (Combined Wests and Balmain) team of the century. He was elected as a member of the Western Suburbs Rugby League Hall of Fame in 2009.

Alan Ridley lived the remainder of his life at Orange, NSW and died at Orange in September 1993.