

# Charlie Wrench

..... like many rugby league players, was also a handy cricketer, who opened the batting for the local Wentworthville team during his junior days. But it was rugby league that proved to be his life-long passion.

<b>Brotherhood v. Wentworthville.</b>	
<b>Wentworthville—First Innings.</b>	
C. Wrench, b B. Teasdale .. . . .	103
K. Hutton, b Creeley .. . . .	7
J. Bona, c McKenzie, b Creeley .. . . .	0
A. Riley, c Pollock, b B. Teasdale .. . . .	9
W. McLean, b B. Teasdale .. . . .	9
R. Strange, b Barnes .. . . .	6
A. Howard, b Barnes .. . . .	6
N. Allen, b Creeley .. . . .	5
A. Madden, c T. Boss, b Creeley .. . . .	5
W. Knight, b Barnes .. . . .	0
C. Fletcher, not out .. . . .	0
Sundries .. . . .	10
<b>Total .. . . .</b>	<b>156</b>

Charlie Wrench scoring a century for his local team

Charlie was graded with Wests in 1929, at the age of 19, and played eight Reserve Grade and eight Third Grade games in his first season. He was also selected in a Wests team, that contained a number of First Grade players which played a Lithgow District team in June of that year.

Ironically, Charlie's first foray in the top team was in the town where his birth was registered. Most of the extended Wrench family still lived in the broader Lithgow district, and so Charlie may have had some local supporters. Wests were popular in Lithgow and the Club followed up with a further visit in 1930 with Charlie once more in the team.

<b>WESTERN SUBURBS.—Full-</b>
<b>back: C. Fifield; threequarters: R.</b>
<b>Morris, H. Rigby, F. Boyd, J. Red-</b>
<b>mond; halves: J. Matterson and H.</b>
<b>Owen; forwards: C. Wrench, E.</b>
<b>Courtney, R. Lindfield, L. Gaskill, C.</b>
<b>Rhodes, W. McNee.</b>

Lithgow Mercury 10 June 1929

In 1930 Wests First Grade team won its first premiership. The First Grade squad was quite settled with thirteen of the team playing ten First Grade games or more through the competition rounds. Charlie Wrench had to bide his time in Reserve Grade as ahead of him in Firsts was Bill Brogan and Cec Rhodes, two of the games most experienced front row forwards at the time. Frank Spillane, Bill Carpenter and Charlie Cornwell were all competing for the second row position. Charlie Wrench played twelve games in Reserve Grade that year.

In 1931 the old firm of Brogan and Rhodes held their position up front and Charlie Cornwell played all sixteen games for Wests. The remaining second row position was open to challenge and Charlie Wrench played most of his seven First Grade games there in 1931. However Charlie missed out on the final series that year, with Bert Green joining Charlie Cornwell in the second row. The Rugby League News noted that Charlie Wrench had to withdraw from the early Finals matches, but was selected as a reserve for the First Grade Final against Souths

West's went all the way to the Grand Final challenge against Souths in 1932, and it was no coincidence that this was once again with a settled and experienced combination, particularly in the pack. For Charlie Wrench it was a situation of 1930 being revisited, as he played only one First Grade game that year. Again Bill Brogan and Cec Rhodes was the foundation up front, while Charlie Cornwell held down one of the second row positions. The main combatants for the other second row spot was Frank Spillane, who had regained form and the up and coming Bill "Hoot" Ryan.

It was a golden period for West's and the depth of talent was arguably the greatest since the Club formed in 1908. It was therefore hard to understand why West's were under represented when it came to representative selection. For instance in July 1932 only Frank McMillan and Cliff Pearce were selected to play for NSW against the touring English team.

On that day, a curtain raiser was played between Combined Sydney Reserve Grade against Combined Sydney Third Grade. Only two West's players were selected. Charlie Wrench was in the front row for the Reserves team and Bill Knowles was in the second row in Combined Thirds. Nevertheless, it was due recognition for Charlie Wrench and an encouragement to further his game.

SYDNEY CRICKET GROUND—1.40 p.m. Saturday, July 9, 1932	
COMBINED RESERVE GRADE v. COMBINED THIRD GRADE	
<b>COMBINED RESERVE GRADE</b> (Colors—Royal and Sky Blue)	<b>COMBINED THIRD GRADE</b> (Colors—Royal Blue and Red)
FULL-BACK: 13—D. Cluff (South Sydney)	FULL-BACK: 13—J. Colquhoun (St. George)
THREE-QUARTERS: 12—S. Sampson (South Sydney) 11—E. Neary (St. George) R. Goodwin (Balmain) 10 J. Gray-Spence—9 (Eastern Suburbs)	THREE-QUARTERS: 12—W. Anderton (Newtown) 11—G. Morrison (St. George) H. Gorman—10 (North Sydney) A. Ferrari—9 (University)
HALVES: 8—G. Owen (Newtown) L. Cadman—7 (Newtown)	HALVES: 8—B. Bourke (North Sydney) R. Pratt—7 (South Sydney)
FORWARDS: 6—J. Morrison (Eastern Suburbs) 5—W. Raynor (Eastern Suburbs) E. Bennett—4 (North Sydney) 3—S. Simpson (Balmain) 2—R. Sullivan (University) C. Wrench—1 (Western Suburbs)	FORWARDS: 6—J. Noon (Eastern Suburbs) 5—H. Gartner (University) W. Knowles—4 (Western Suburbs) 3—A. Sprouster (St. George) 2—H. Helmich (Newtown) J. Kidd—1 (Balmain)
RESERVES: 14—C. McLaren (University) R. Laycock—15 (North Sydney)	RESERVES: 14—E. Hinson (South Sydney) M. Doyle—15 (Eastern Suburbs)

West's had a year of disruption in 1933, losing five of its best player to the Kangaroo Tour, and then losing the last eight competition games of the season to take the wooden spoon. The stability in the team experienced in the preceding years was significantly diminished. Charlie Wrench played five First Grade games in the front row. It was also arguably Charlie's best season in Grade football as he was first picked in a City Possibles v City Probables match which lead to his selection in City Seconds then City Firsts.

In 1934 Charlie Wrench was one of almost two hundred players on the transfer list looking for player/coach positions in NSW country towns. The exodus of players was in part due to the lack of work in Sydney as a result of the Great Depression, and in part to the growing professionalism of Country football. Charlie became player/coach with the Grafton Rugby League Club and remained at Grafton for three seasons.

Since the beginning of the season the Country Rugby League has registered the transfer of 160 players. In most cases the players concerned are coaches or paid players, indicating the growth of the professional element in country Rugby League, and justifying the action of the controlling body in placing this phase of football under strict control.

Daily Telegraph 19 April 1934

Charlie was a popular player/coach during his time at Grafton, captaining the local Grafton team and the Grafton Cup teams and gaining selection in the Combined Group 2 and 3 representative team.

It was the era of the Great Depression and Charlie was paid at the lower end of the scale. It appeared that Charlie was playing for the love of the game as others inevitably moved on once their contract had ended, but Charlie stayed on to foster the game at Grafton.

At the start of the 1936 season, the Grafton Club announced that it would no longer engage paid players, but acknowledged the "heavy obligation" it was under to Charlie who, unbeknown to most, used much of his 3 pounds per week stipend to assist his players with accommodation expenses, bringing players to the town, and helping the game in other ways. As a young married man he showed great generosity.

them up into the Cup ranks. The club was going to cut out the paid players, but he wished to pay a tribute to the club's one paid player and coach, last year, Mr. C. Wrench. He had received £3 a week. As captain and coach he was admirable, and he gave practically the whole of his £3 away, assisting players with accommodation expenses, bringing players to the town, and helping the game in other ways. This was not known during the playing season, but it had become known since. The club was under a heavy obligation to Mr. Wrench.

Daily Examiner 12 March 1936

Charlie moved from Grafton to Port Kembla in the Wollongong district in 1937 where he captained and coached the Port Kembla team to premiership honors. At Port Kembla was former Wests First Grade player Laurie Roberts, who captained/coached the Port Kembla team from 1932 until 1936. Laurie retired from playing at the end of 1936, became the President of the Port Kembla Club in 1938 and went on to have a distinguished career in the administration of the Illawarra Rugby League.

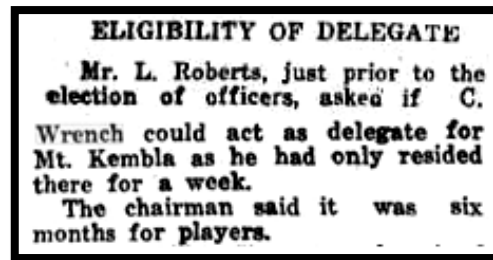
It is unknown if Laurie Roberts, had anything to do with bringing Charlie Wrench to the Illawarra, but it became evident that there was a ranking in the relationship. Laurie was described as having a forceful personality, and presented his views in a forthright manner, and as time went on it was also evident that Charlie was not backward in putting his views forward.



Laurie Roberts (L) and Charlie Wrench (R) in happier times  
Wests Reserve Grade 1930.

Charlie Wrench had only the one season at Port Kembla and then left to join the neighbouring Mt Kembla Club. He was appointed as the player/coach for Mt Kembla and was the Club's Delegate to the Illawarra Rugby League. At that time, to be eligible to play with a new Club a player had to have lived within the Club boundaries for six months. Laurie Roberts and Tom Ezart (former Wests lower grade player), were the Delegates for Port Kembla.

In February 1938 at a meeting of the Illawarra Rugby League, Laurie Roberts challenged the eligibility of Charlie Wrench as a Delegate for the Mt Kembla Club. Charlie had only lived at Mt Kembla for one week. The Chairman ruled in favor of Charlie Wrench as the qualification applied to players only and not Delegates, but it was the start of things to come.



South Coast Times 11 February 1938

The Illawarra competition started in late April 1938, and the Mt Kembla Club played Charlie Wrench in contravention of the residential rule. The matter was brought up at the Illawarra Rugby League meeting on 6 May by Tom Ezart. He moved that three Mt Kembla players, including Charlie Wrench, be severely dealt with, and they be put out for the season. In addition he wanted each to be fined two pounds. The move was clearly aimed at the players, as there was no mention of the role of the Mt Kembla Club in selecting the players nor initially any sanction proposed for the action of that Club.

The Illawarra Mercury reported on the proceedings and noted that Brother Campbell from the Christian Brothers Club brought some balance to the discussion when he said that it should be considered whether the players or the Club should be dealt with. The good Brother Campbell's words had an effect to the extent that the matter was deferred to the next meeting.

At the following meeting, it was confirmed that Charlie Wrench would have to serve out his six month qualification period, plus he received a further two week suspension on top for playing while unqualified. The Mt Kembla Club received a one pound fine for playing an unqualified player. Mt Kembla also lost four competition points for playing an unqualified player in the first two rounds.

Upon the motion being carried, Charlie Wrench got up and said that it was clearly seen that he was not wanted, and asked that his resignation be accepted. He was not only a Delegate of the Mt Kembla Club, but was also a member of the Illawarra Rugby League Management Committee and had recently been appointed Manager of the Southern NSW team.

While serving out his time, Charlie was able to play outside the district and also with non affiliated works teams. In July he played for Lysaghts and was described as the "stormy petrel" of the League. Charlie Wrench became eligible to play for Mt Kembla in late August, just before the Finals. Mt Kembla went through the competition rounds undefeated but lost to Port Kembla in the Grand Final.

Charlie Wrench's playing days had come to an end in 1938. In 1939 he was on the General Committee and elected as a Selector of the Mt Kembla Club, but he was now pursuing a different direction by becoming a qualified referee. In 1939 he was recorded refereeing Massy Cup games and in 1940 commenced refereeing First Grade games in the Illawarra competition. The last record of his involvement in rugby league was in 1944 and 1945 when he coached the Scarborough and Thirroul Rugby League teams in the Illawarra competition.

Charlie became the proprietor of the cafe at the Austinmer Surf Club, and made Austinmer his home for the remainder of his life. Charlie Wrench died at Austinmer in November 1983, and his memorial is at the Woronora Memorial Park, Sutherland, NSW, Plot DD Rose garden 22, 0019.

