

Robert Shepherd

.... was in the Hunter Valley to play football, but little did he know that he would be caught in the middle of a dispute between the football administrations that were controlling the game at the time. The issue arose when Cessnock played Robert Shepherd, Harold Rankine and A. Kelly, their three imported players after a qualification period of seven days.

While the Newcastle Rugby League had a 28 day qualification period, The Country Rugby League qualification period was only 7 days. The Cessnock Club contended that this rule applied to them. Their opponents, South Newcastle and Kurri Kurri, lodged an appeal with the Newcastle Rugby League against the playing of unqualified players. Both appeals were subsequently upheld and as a result, Cessnock immediately lost four competition points for the two wins that it had while it played "unqualified players."

A peculiar situation has arisen as a result of the Cessnock v. South match, because the former club included three players, Rankin, Kelly, and Shepherd, in its team in contravention of the ruling of the Newcastle Rugby Football League. South is almost certain to protest at tonight's committee meeting, on the grounds that the three players mentioned have not fulfilled the 28 days' residential qualification. If it loses the protest, it is expected that Cessnock will appeal to the New South Wales Rugby Football League. It appears that the whole matter hinges on whether the Newcastle area is bound by the country constitution of the New South Wales Rugby Football League, or its own constitution. If the former is the case, Cessnock is on safe ground, but if this is not so, South's protest must succeed.

Newcastle Morning Herald 8 May 1933

Cessnock have won five games, equal to 10 points, but are only credited with 6 points pending the result of an appeal to the N.S.W. League.

The Cessnock Eagle 15 June 1933

By July 1933, Robert Shepherd had moved back to his home at Homebush but returned to the Hunter Valley each week to play with the Cessnock Club. This was an unusual situation, but one that the Newcastle Rugby League had approved.

SHEPHERD CAN PLAY
At the meeting of the Newcastle Rugby League last night Shepherd was given permission to reside outside Cessnock for the remainder of the season. Shepherd is working in Sydney at present and will make the trips at week ends to play with Cessnock.

The Cessnock Eagle 25 July 1933

Meanwhile the Cessnock Club appealed to the NSW Rugby League. Initially the Newcastle Rugby League refused to refer the appeal to the NSW body until ordered to do so. The NSW Rugby League then upheld the position of the Cessnock Club. It sent a letter to the Newcastle Rugby League conveying its decision but in a subsequent phone call between the NSW and Newcastle Leagues, the Newcastle Secretary indicated that it had received the letter but intended to take no action which meant that the Cessnock Club would be out of the semi finals.

The NSW Rugby League was clearly unhappy about the Newcastle position and it was reported on 22 August 1933 that the Newcastle League be advised to put into operation the NSW Rugby League's

decision by awarding the points to Cessnock that had been taken from them, and that the Newcastle competition be arranged accordingly.

The Newcastle Rugby League were in no hurry to resolve the matter and so by the final round of the competition it was unknown whether Cessnock would have the four competition points restored. If the points were not given back, Cessnock would have missed the final series.

The Cessnock Club sought relief in the Equity Court the week before the semi finals and received a decision in its favour. There was little choice but to allow Cessnock to participate in the final series, where they played against minor premiers Maitland, in the semi final. Unfortunately Cessnock lost the semi final 3-5.

(Before Mr. Justice Davidson.)
LEAGUE FOOTBALL AT NEWCASTLE.
 The dispute between members of the Cessnock District Rugby Football League Club and the general committee of the Newcastle Rugby Football League was before the Court, ex parte. The members of the club claim that their rights have been violated by the League, and seek an injunction to restrain the League from excluding them from participation in the semi-final matches of the competition conducted by the League.

SMH 24 August 1933

The Cessnock team for the final series in 1933 was comprised of the following players. It was a relatively young team and by today's standards was quite light. The Newcastle competition at the time was very competitive with a number of internationals in the ranks. Sydney teams would often travel up to the region and be assured of a competitive match. Both Robert Shepherd (10 tries) and Harold Rankine (11 tries) contributed to the success of the Club in 1933.

CESSNOCK PLAYERS

The Secretary of Cessnock Club (H. Taylor) has forwarded the following information relative to the Cessnock team—

Name.	Age	Weight, st lb.
W. Parker	23	10 4
R. Palmer	22	12 10
R. Shepherd	22	10 7
A. Kilpatrick	26	12 4
A. Rankine	22	12 8
R. O'Brien	19	10 12
E. Odgers	25	10 6
A. Kelly	22	13 0
R. Carroll	28	11 8
W. Bytheway	24	13 0
G. Heery	25	14 0
A. Parsons	24	12 4
F. Harris	29	11 12

Newcastle Morning Herald 1933

However the controversy for Robert Shepherd and the Cessnock Club was not over as they were once again caught in a dispute between the NSW Rugby League and the Newcastle Rugby League. A week after the semi final loss when the Cessnock Club hosted the Newtown Club from Sydney, at Cessnock for what amounted to be an exhibition game.

Despite Robert Shepherd receiving approval to live in Sydney and play at Cessnock earlier in the year it appeared that Jim White, Wests Secretary and NSW Rugby League delegate, took exception to the Newcastle League and the Cessnock Club approving and playing Robert Shepherd beyond his contracted tenure in the Newcastle competition. It was a relatively minor matter but it highlighted the tensions that existed between the administrators at the time..

<p>Attack on Officials</p> <p>The secretary (Mr. H. L. Irwin) referred to a statement alleged to have been made by Mr. White, delegate for Western Suburbs, at last week's meeting of the N.S.W. League.</p> <p>"I informed these officials that they were acting wrongfully in continuing to play Shepherd," Mr. White is reported to have said when referring to the Cessnock Club and the playing of Shepherd. "They said that they had received permission from the Newcastle League to play him, despite the</p>	<p>fact that Newcastle knows that Shepherd is living at Homobush. He played against the Newtown Club yesterday.</p> <p>"Newcastle thinks that it can do as it likes as far as what benefits them. They have broken a rule, and have encouraged a player to break the rule. Shepherd has been acting under the instructions of both the Newcastle League and the Cessnock Club.</p> <p>Mr. Irwin protested against the remarks and moved that Mr. White be asked whether he had been correctly reported, and if so, to explain his reasons for making such statements.</p>
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Maitland Daily 26 September 1933

The Cessnock Club at its Annual General Meeting provided a good summary of the 1933 season. The off field issues relating to the "residential rule controversy" and the subsequent Court proceedings were an unnecessary distraction, which consumed a lot of energy and focus away from what would have been a very satisfying season for the Club.

Robert Shepherd was held in high esteem by the Cessnock community and they maintained an interest in his progress after he returned to Sydney. Those that saw him play knew that he was quick, but he took his running seriously off the football field competing in various athletic events as a sprinter. In October 1933, it was reported that he took out the 100 yards Railway Handicap in a time of 10.25 seconds to win the Norman Cunningham Memorial Trophy.

<p>SHEPHERD SHINES</p> <p>Success in Foot-running</p> <p>Cessnock Rugby League followers will be interested to know that the local club's five-eighth, Bob ("Snow") Shepherd has been gaining distinction as a foot-runner in Sydney.</p>	<p>Shepherd won the 100 yards Railway Handicap off scratch in 10 2-5 sec. The prize was the Norman Cunningham Memorial Cup.</p> <p>"Shep" showed plenty of pace on the football field, and his success as a "ped" will come as no surprise to coalfield fans.</p>
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The Cessnock Eagle 31 October 1933

The 1933 season wasn't over for Robert Shepherd. At the end of the 1933 season the NSW Rugby League introduced a night time competition for Sydney Clubs. It was a novel concept but part of the growth and promotion of rugby league. Robert was selected in the Wests squad for the night time competition.

WESTS' NIGHT PLAYERS

The following players have been selected to commence training to-night at Concord Oval at 8 o'clock to represent the Western Suburbs Rugby League team in the summer night football competition:—T. Magaus, S. Black, S. Tancred, A. Brady, L. Midson, R. Shepherd, H. Rankine, A. McGuinness, F. Sponberg, C. Wrench, J. McConnell, C. Rhodes, R. Linfield, C. Cornwell, F. Banner, A. Blake, W. McLeod, W. Howes, C. Anderton and L. Frappell.

The Sun 19 October 1933

Robert remained with Wests playing lower grades in 1934 and 1935, and trialling in 1936 before retiring. During his four seasons with Wests he played one First Grade, thirty one Reserve Grade and sixteen Third Grade games. He scored eighteen tries and one goal for a tally of fifty six points, all scored in Reserve and Third Grade.

After finishing his football career, Robert Shepherd remained living at Homebush and no doubt kept an involvement in junior rugby league. It wasn't until 1956 that he became involved once again with Wests. He became a member of the Club that year and remained associated until well into the 1960's.

The first official record found of him is when he appeared in a team photo of the 1958 Wests President's Cup team which had taken out the premiership that season. Robert was a Selector for the team, which was coached by former First Grade player Eddie Hooper and supported by other former notable Wests players such as Jack Cobcroft and Mick Lee.

Robert once again appeared in a team photograph of the Wests 1961 Jersey Flegg team which made the finals that year. It is possible that Robert had an involvement with Wests junior representative teams over a longer period than that which has been identified to date, but records are limited so an accurate account of his involvement has not been able to be compiled at this time.



Western Suburbs DRLFC President's Cup 1958 Premiers

Back: S Addison (Ass Sec), J Cobcroft (Sel), W Jennett, B Wilson, P Hickey, W Lenehan,
B Tagg, J Hayes, M Lee (Train), W Beaver (Sec)

Middle: J Dunn (Treas), K Stacey, L Wyatt, R McNamara (Pres), G Theodore (C), E Hooper (Coach), R Small, R Moore,
R Shepherd (Sel)

Front: D Davidson, C Ainsworth, J Buttenshaw (VC), L Scotts (Ball Boy), D Barsley, J Rochester, B Beeton,

Absent: K Hilton (Sel), J Walsh (Sel)



Western Suburbs DRLFC Jersey Flegg 1961 - Finalists

Back: H Burns (Sel), P Panagiris (Ass Sec), R Shepherd (Sel), V Kelly (Sel)

Middle: W Leet (Tres), D Pittard, D Taylor, M Alchin, R Yott, J Armstrong, R Bond, G Walsh, W Thurston, S J Addison (Sec)

Front: S Walsh, D Speer (VC), J Tagg (Pres), B Beer (C), R McFarlane (Coach), J Kearns, N Stone

Seated: G Bond (Ball Boy), K Blundell, M Reardon (Ball Boy)

Absent: E Byrnes (Sel), P Rowley, T McDonald, P Kilkeary (Amb)

Robert Shepherd lived most of his adult life in the Sydney suburb of Homebush, but by the mid 1970's had moved to the southern Sydney suburb of Bundeena, where he died in November 1986.