

Dick Vest

..... had no intention of playing with Wests when he got the call. He enjoyed playing with his mates in the Parramatta Third Grade team, but as Parramatta was a feeder Club, he had no option but to turn out for Wests Second Grade team.

His mates told him to play "crook" and he would be back at Parramatta soon enough, however in his first game against Norths, one of the opponents hung one on Dick and he forgot all about playing "crook" and in Dick's words, "I was into it." Dick Vest was selected in First Grade the following week and never looked back.

Dick Vest represented NSW in 1919 and made his Test debut on the tour of New Zealand that year, scoring two tries in Australia's Fourth Test victory. He played in three Tests in Australia's Ashes victory over England in 1920 and toured with the Kangaroos the following year. On tour he played in all three Tests against England and in 23 other matches.



NSW v Queensland - NSW Team 1922

Back Row: W Benson, H Horder, H Caples, J Toohey

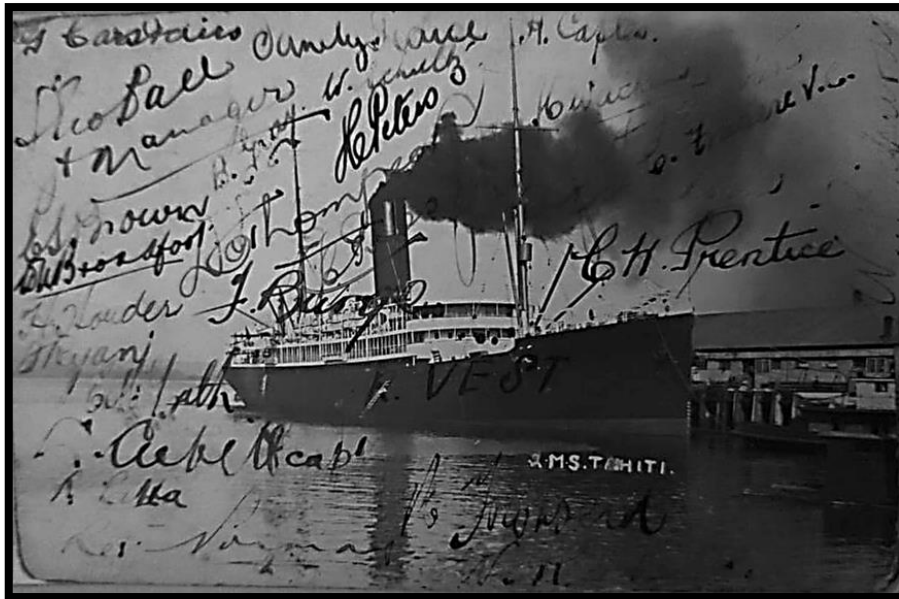
Second Row: R. Vest, C Tye, A Oxford, C Blinkhorn, W Ives, F Rule,

Front Row: F Burge, B Gray, G Carstairs, H Flegg (Manager), L Schofield (Manager), C Prentice, W Gillespie, V Sheehan

On that Kangaroo Tour, Dick Vest was offered a £1200 contract to stay in England and play with the Leeds Club, but according to author Gary Lester (*Clouds of Dust, Buckets of Blood*) Vest's mother wouldn't allow him to stay in England. Dick also had similar offers from the Huddersfield and Hull Clubs.

However in an interview in 1972, Dick Vest said that it was Harold Wagstaff, the English captain who advised him not to take up the offer. Dick Vest played opposite Wagstaff and respected him as a footballer and a gentleman. Apparently Wagstaff told Dick to, "go home to Australia as they'll kill you over here." Wagstaff no doubt respected Dick Vest and knew how good he was, but he also knew the English club players would mark Dick heavily and take him out of the game.

Dick Vest also made two tours of New Zealand with a NSW team in 1920 & 1922 and played eight games for Australia and six games for NSW.



Post Card of MS Tahiti which sailed to England with the 1921-22 Kangaroos

Dick Vest played continually with Western Suburbs up until the start of the 1923 season when he took up an offer as player/coach with the West Wyalong Club. He was paid 15 pounds per season. West Wyalong is not far from Barmedman where Dick was born. Dick remained with West Wyalong for three seasons before taking up similar positions with Forbes, Tumut, Wellington, and Yeoval between 1926 and 1929. The role of a player/coach was not a full time role and the incumbent had to hold down a job at the same time. While in Forbes he was working at the Harris Flour Mills.



West Wyalong Rugby League Team 1923

Back Row: C Miller, J Franklin, S McEwen, C Davis, F Broad, R McFadzean, B Brogan, R Castles, N Gardiner, G Broad, J Young
 Middle Row: J Stumph, J Howard (Secretary), Dick Vest (Captain/Coach), H Cameron (President), G Kearns
 Seated: J Kean, C Joyce

Dick returned to Sydney and settled at Enfield in 1929, and in 1930 trialled with Wests but ultimately was not graded in First Grade. His return to Sydney was mainly due to the need to find employment during the Great Depression. He did make a return and played Reserve and Third Grade for Wests in 1932 and 1933.

Dick Vest turned his hand to coaching, first up with the Marist Brothers High School, Darlinghurst, Holy Cross College, Ryde, and Merrylands in the A Grade Competition. He was later a club selector and lower grade coach at Wests during the 1930s.



Holy Cross College - Metropolitan Catholic Colleges A Grade - Premiers 1932

Back Row: T Williamson, D Duggan, C Cross, P Murphy, B Shanahan, R Garforth (VC),

Middle Row: Mr M Lee (Trainer), B Franklin, J Steinmetz, Mr J J Rubinson (Patron), P Dalton, P Rowe,
Mr Dick Vest (Coach)

Front Row: A Rowe, P Maher, D Connolly, H Connolly (Capt), W Ireland, L Penman, R Heath.

Dick Vest coached Holy Cross College Ryde to the MCC premiership in 1932, ably assisted by "Mick" Lee Wests #170 as trainer and Jack Rubinson, a Wests official.

Dick Vest didn't stray too far from the Western Suburbs district and in his 70's he could be found at his local pub at Burwood, where he could enjoy a beer and talk football. Dick was a little worse for wear having lost one leg and about to lose the other. He had bumped his little toe which became infected and gangrene had set in necessitating the amputation of the leg.

It is hard to imagine these days, but the football heroes of the past, were rarely set up for life as a result of their sporting achievements. Nearly all players held down employment while playing and continued to work once they retired from the game. Even someone like Dick Vest who was a star of the game for many years, had to look for work during the Depression years and lived a humble life.

In an interview not long after the first amputation he was quoted as saying that the cost of an artificial leg (at least 200 pounds), was beyond him. As he put it; "I want to be able to keep moving and I can't do that with a peg leg or wheel chair."

Dick's illness cut him off from many of his contacts and an article written in the early 1970's described his plight. It noted that Dick Vest is lying almost forgotten in a Sydney hospital, minus the use of the legs that swept him to glory. Apart from a visit by the Magpies, he has largely been forgotten by the football fraternity.



Dick Vest 1970's

Dick, while in Liverpool Hospital, commented that;

"It's funny, years ago I couldn't walk down the street without a crowd gathering, chatting, and offering to buy me a grog. I'm not bitter, people change and old guys are always forgotten. I'd just like to see someone now and again just to talk about the game."

"But I still love the game and I am determined to make it to this year's grand final. Mind you, my Wests side could trounce all your Saints, Manly and Easts and still look around for more."

Dick Vest was a Wests man through and through and maintained his connection with the Western Suburbs District throughout his life. He died at Enfield, NSW in June 1974. Dick Vest is buried in the Catholic Section of Rookwood Cemetery, Sydney.