

# Where Are They Now?

He has the reputation of being South's best 'tap' ruckman of all time. He led the ruck in four premierships. Selected as No 1 ruckman in the Champion Team 1946-76, he made life a cakewalk for our super-star little men in Steve Marsh (six premierships), Harry Carbon (three) and Barry White (three). When Colin Beard interviewed the spritely 83-year-old, Norm Smith, he found he had reached the top in several other fields. But it was on the footy field that he really excelled and he tended to 'petrify' the opposition with his favourite war-cry of warning ...

## ***Don't Mess With Me Boy, You're Dealing With Gilroy."***



*"Don't Mess With Me Boy, You're Dealing With Gilroy."  
Premiership player Norm "Gilroy" Smith trains enthusiastically  
at Fremantle oval.*

Norm Smith is a very humble man. A genuine great bloke, not shy but quietly and thoughtfully spoken and a very modest man. To us, the South supporter he is a legend, who gave his heart and soul to the club and helped us to four premierships and many matches of sheer joy watching his palming of the ball (somewhat of a lost art in modern football) and big-man skills around the ground.

"That's one part of my life I'd never ever want to swap," explained the enthusiastic 83-year-old on his time at South. "We were all great mates and had heaps of humour."

Official records credit Norm with 129 games, but he says in fact it was more than 150. "There was some mix up in the war years when the top footy was called the Under-age comp. For some reason all players were credited with 29 games and I know for a fact I played almost double that.

Norm's career began with South in the Under-age comp in 1943-4. From 1944-46 he was conscripted for airforce duty, then played a few games in Kalgoorlie before joining North Fremantle amateurs in 1949. He rejoined South from 1950-54 and 1956-7.

His premiership wins were in 1950/52/53/54. In 1952 he represented Western Australia for the first time and also played the 1953 carnival...playing six games and kicking six goals for his state.

Norm believes his best season was 1954 when he led the voting for South's fairest and best until he dislocated a shoulder at training.

We asked Norm for any comments on his coaches and outstanding players of his era. His eyes sparkled, a huge grin lit up his face and we couldn't stop him.

"Clive Lewington was the nicest man ever to walk the streets of Fremantle. He was a brilliant player (1947 Sandover medal, 1950 Simpson Medal, three premierships and coached four, three A.W.Walker medals) and a champion coach. Everyone worshipped him. He understood players, never got upset, always would say something nice and forever have a smile on his face. When we did make a mistake he would simply say: 'Don't do that again.' And the message got through loud and clear.

"Cliff Hillier (160 games) was a sensational Centre Half Back. Big, strong and bony with an outstanding left-foot kick. All-Australian player.

"Steve Marsh was absolutely brilliant. A Sandover, four A.W.Walker medals and six premierships speak for themselves.

"John Todd was the best I've ever seen. A Sandover medallist (1955) at 17 years (three A.W.Walker medals) he could kick with either foot and hurt your chest from 50 metres away.

“And I could not leave without mentioning my right-hand-man Ernie Grose (1953 premiership/125 games). We worked very well as a team to regularly out position and outfox the opposition ruckman.

For fifty four years Norm has lived with wife Joan in their Beaconsfield home. Married for sixty years they are both extremely proud of the message they got last year from the Queen congratulating them on an outstanding achievement.

Beaconsfield has been home to many a great South player. His great mate and co-ruckman, Dave Ingraham, (135 games, 3 premierships, 1948 A.W.Walker medallist and Sandover runner-up, Simpson medal 1948), lived just a Bernie Naylor punt kick away. Around the corner, one-and-a-half kicks away, was Frank Treasure (254 games and six premierships) and not far away again was Jack Murray (99 games and four premierships).

And why was South so dominant during the ‘Golden Years’?

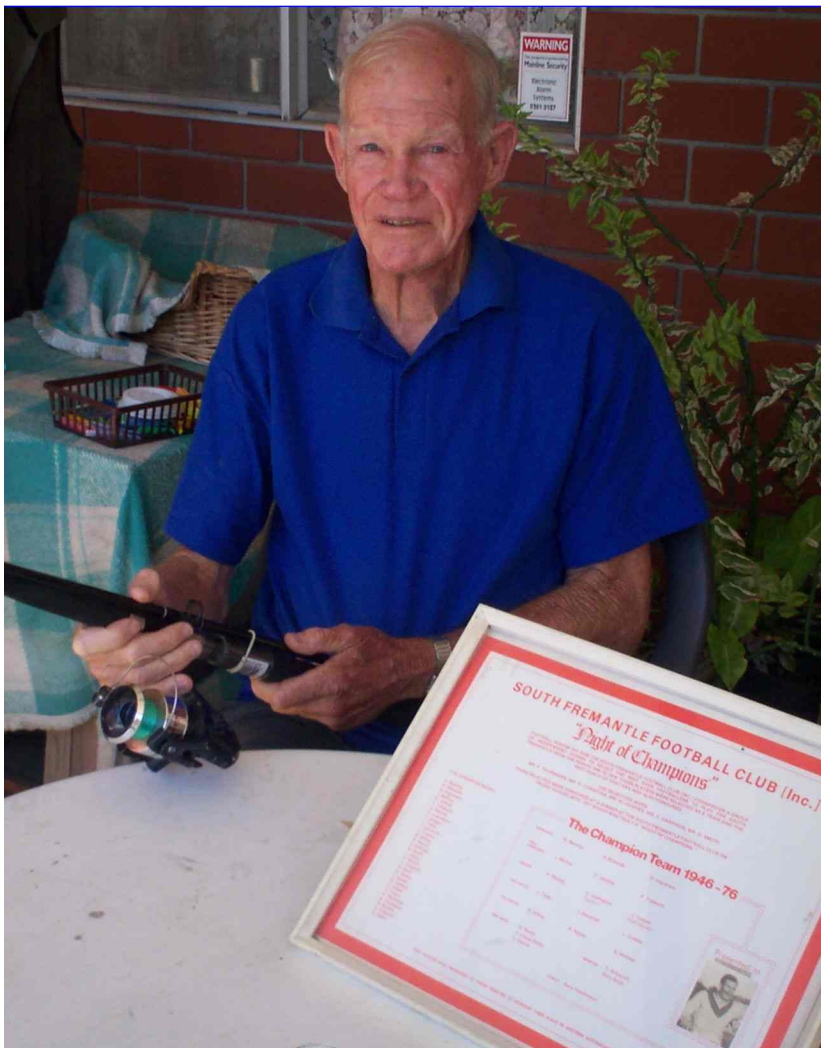
“Apart from what you may have already heard from other people, such as great mates on and off the field, wonderful coach, etc. we had great players. Specialists in every position, champions. Peter Amaranti (12 games) is a classic example. He was a brilliant centremen, outstanding week after week in the Reserves. But with centremen like Lewington, Todd and Tony Parentich (162 games, 3 premierships, 1957 A.W.Walker and 1956 Simpson medallist) what chance did Peter have?” Norm asked.

In 1958 South released Peter and five others to Subiaco.

For that era, Norm was a very big man (1.83m and 85kg). But what of his nickname ‘Gilroy’ and the war-cry: “Don’t mess with me boy, you’re dealing with ‘Gilroy’?”

“It was the words of a popular song at the time and the lyrics also said something like, ‘And soon you’ll have wings...’ Whether I thought I had wings, or was flying high, I don’t remember but I used the phrase one match day. The nickname ‘Gilroy’ stuck and whether I frightened the opposition into submission is problematical,” he added.

Gilroy or no Gilroy here’s a strong message to every South supporter. Keep well away from Norm if you should run into him in a pub or club around Freo, particularly if he’s near a snooker/billiard table or has a dart in his hand. It could be a ‘wealth’ hazard because he’s as deft in both those games as he was in taking apart the ruckmen in his younger days. He played for Western Australia in darts and snooker and won the Australian Championship in the latter in 1968 and ’69.



*Norm today: Equally at ease with a fishing rod as he was when challenging ruckmen in the 50's. The plaque (foreground) features South's Champion Team 1946-76 and Norm was thrilled to be selected No1 ruckman in that side.*

Fishing is another of his great loves. He bought a boat on his retirement at South and fished three to four times a week, generally with outstanding success... 30 King George whiting, all about 1kg was often the norm...pardon the pun. Today you can generally find our spritely former champ at Woody’s Point or the South Mole fishing with rod and reel.

Norm Smith was rewarded for an outstanding career at South with Life Membership in 1959.

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*“Where Are They Now” has been specially written for you the South supporter.*

*Do you have an entertaining or funny story about a past player or official you would like to share with other members?*

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