

History

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Players Records 1900-2009

The Founders

The club was formed in some haste at a meeting held 20 April 1900 at the old Club Hotel - where the Orient Hotel now stands in High Street. Haste was needed because the once invisible Fremantle Football Club that normally carried the hopes of football followers at the port was in debt and disarray.

The new season was only a month away. It was unthinkable that sport-mad Fremantle would not be represented when the season started in May so Tom O'Beirne and Griff John hatched a plan: they would simply abandon the old club and form a new one in its place. O'Beirne, publican of the Club Hotel and former president of the Fremantle Football Club, and John a young man who had played on the wing for Fremantle for the past three seasons, knew they had to move fast.

Registering the club

The WA Football Association had already called for applications for new teams and was to hold its annual meeting on April 18. To beat the deadline John appointed himself secretary of the non-existent South Fremantle Football Club and applied to join the Association. Finding a name was easy because the South Fremantle Cricket Club was already doing well in the WACA competition. As it happened the Association meeting was postponed until Monday 23rd.

The players and the committee

John and O'Beirne rounded up the Fremantle players for a meeting at the Club Hotel on the Friday night and the rest was straight forward. They already had the players, an Oval, changerooms and a trainer. They kept the Fremantle colours of red and white, and confirmed John as secretary.

Disaster struck but the club was resurrected

Led by George 'Smiler' Wills, the new club did well in its first year, finishing runners-up. However, over the next three seasons the performance fell away badly and, in April 1904 a Fremantle newspaper confidently reported that South Fremantle would not appear again. However, the club decided to carry on and centreman Harry Hodge took over as skipper, but the season was a disaster. The club won only one game. Something had to be done, and it was.

Five members of East Fremantle's premiership eighteen were recruited to the ranks together with several Victorian players and the club surged into the top four in 1905, only to lose the semi-final. In 1906 the Southerners were minor premiers for the first time, but again lost the semi-final. Eight times in nine seasons the club would make the semi-finals, never once advancing further.

Victories in 1914, 1916 and 1917

With Joe Coates settling in to a long term as coach the red-and-whites took the next step in 1914, not only advancing to the final but winning it, only to lose the challenge match. Still the club could claim to have been premiers one week though the Great War cast a shadow over this achievement. In 1916 Frank Collins took over as captain, commencing a

four-year term, and immediately led his men to a grand final victory. In 1917 with a team barely changed, Collins' men won a second premiership and collected the Green Stripe Whisky Cup now displayed in the social club foyer.

1919 - slipping back again

In 1919 Bonny Campbell switched from defence to attack and become one of the State's greatest full-forwards but the following season the club had again slipped back to last place.

1927 - more wins!

In 1927, with ruckmen Johnny Campbell and Jerry Sunderland carrying all before them, and new full-forward Sol Lawn in superb form, the club won both semi-final and final only to lose the challenge match.

1928 - 1932

In 1928 Jack Rocchi won the club's first Sandover Medal, and in 1929 and 1930 the club again played off in the final without success. 1931 ushered in a period of slow decline for the club, made tragic in 1932 by the death of popular young captain-coach Ron Doig who succumbed to injuries received in a semi-final.

1936 - 1938 club hits rock bottom and up again

The club hit rock bottom in 1936 - a year redeemed by the arrival of the three Hayward brothers, pioneering Aboriginal footballers. Bill Hayward would later be compared to Stephen Michael. Scranno Jenkins won the Sandover Medal in 1937 and the club's coming rise to power began in 1938 when Bert Chandler was appointed captain-coach, casually moving from full-back to kick a staggering 120 goals in his first year.

1939

The star recruit of 1939 was Clive Lewington and the club again reached the finals, played after the outbreak of the World War.

1940

Jack Polinelli commenced a record eleven year term as president, Bev Morris was well into a 29 year period as treasurer, and Frank Harrison - the "prince of secretaries" - took office for the first time.. The team again made the grand-final.

1941

The club found a brilliant young full-forward in Bernie Naylor but finished only third. However, with Australia under increasing threat of invasion, the League switched to an under-age competition in which South Fremantle fared badly despite unearthing young footballers in Eric Eriksson, Norm Smith and Frank Treasure who would be key players in the great days to come.

1944- 1948

The young red-and-whites went totally without a win. Things changed dramatically in 1945 with the resumption of the senior competition. Frank Harrison returned as secretary and immediately set about rebuilding club spirit. Aided by the almost accidental recruitment of goldfields rover Steve Marsh the Southerners climbed into the grand final but finished runners-up for the fifth time since winning consecutive premierships in 1916-17.

Naylor returned in 1946 and kicked 123 goals but the team stumbled in the first semi-final. The breakthrough came the following season when Polinelli and Harrison recruited a proven coach. Ross Hutchinson had already coached East Fremantle and West Perth to flags when he joined South Fremantle as captain-coach in 1947. Clive Lewington won the Sandover Medal, Bernie Naylor kicked another 108 goals and he, Steve Marsh and Frank Treasure enjoyed the first of six premiership victories they would share together.

Pre-war veterans Dave Ingraham, Frank Jenkins and Corp Reilly were also part of the club's first premiership in thirty years. The following season Clive Lewington took over as captain, and the new recruits included Charlie Tyson who, that October, enjoyed the first of his five premierships with the club.

1949

Clive Lewington added coaching duties to his captaincy.

1950

The Southerners failed to make the grand final but won another flag in 1950.

1951

The red-and-whites lost the grand final by just three points.

1952

Steve Marsh finally won a Sandover Medal.

1953

Bernie Naylor booted a staggering 167 goals, and South Fremantle won another two premierships.

1954

A Derby grand final in 1954 saw the Southerners make it three in a row, with a record winning margin. Bernie Naylor, having kicked another 133 goals for the season, retired while still at his best and the glory days were almost over. Naylor had topped the club's goalkicking list for ten seasons and kicked a total of 1034 goals for the club, despite the long war service that interrupted his career. Unbelievably, a young replacement appeared immediately.

1955

Local junior John Gerovich kicked 74 goals in 1955, and would be the club's leading goalkicker for no less than eleven seasons, his high-marking genius a delight to all lovers of the game. Young rover John Todd also had a sensational debut, winning the Sandover Medal at the age of seventeen. The Southerners came third in 1955.

1956

The red-and-whites fought back to make the grand-final in 1956 but lost to East Perth. Steve Marsh left to coach East Fremantle - the club he had intended to join in 1945 - and the golden years were definitely over.

For twelve seasons the club had been in the four, had played in nine grand-finals and had won six. In the next forty-three seasons the red-and-whites would play in nine grand finals and win only three.

In the lean period before the next flag in 1970 a string of long-serving players carried the hopes of supporters. The club enjoyed wonderful on-field service from Don Byfield (239 games), John Colgan (220), John Gerovich (221), Gary Scott (255), Tom Grijusich (258), Fred Seinor (219) and Brian Ciccotosto (211) who saw the club through some unrewarding years.

1957-1969

After the retirement of Lewington in 1958 the youthful John Todd was appointed captain-coach for one season. He was followed as coach by Marty McDonnell, a former Footscray and Victorian player who immediately steered the team back into the four and began the drawn-out process of turning Southerners into Bulldogs. However, the on-field improvement wasn't sustained and the sixties was the club's worst decade with the team finishing last in four seasons. Off the field, members were at least able to watch games in comfort, the social club premises named in honour of club founder Griff John, having been built on the club's own land in 1960.

1970

It was another Victorian, captain-coach Hassa Mann who took the club soaring from last in 1969 to a premiership in 1970. Brian Ciccotosto won the Simpson Medal.

1971

Mann's men fell back to sixth in 1971.

1972

The highlight of 1972 was the arrival of Sebastian Rioli, an Aboriginal player with a touch of magic. Brian Ciccotosto made the All-Australian team.

1975

In 1975 Rioli was joined by a wonderful trio in Basil Campbell, Stephen Michael and his brother Maurice Rioli, and the team shot up from fifth to a grand-final appearance. Brian Ciccotosto was captain but the team lost by a record margin. Attendances at WAFL matches peaked during the 1970s and an average of over ten thousand spectators watched each South Fremantle qualifying match.

1977

The increasing professionalism of football saw the club's first full-time general manager appointed in 1977.

1978

The year Foundation Day Derbies became a regular fixture, the club returned as a power in the football land. Mal Brown, a one-time Souths supporter who had risen to football fame at East Perth, took over as coach after finishing his playing career in red and white.

1979-81

Led on the field by former Richmond rover Noel Carter the club made the grand final in 1979, defeated Swan Districts in the 1980 grand final and were runners-up once again in 1981. Ruckman Stephen Michael won Sandover Medals in 1980 and 1981 while Maurice Rioli won Simpson Medals for his grand final performance in the same years.

1982-83

The club entered 1982 under the control of a Board of Directors as the traditional style of club administration was swept away. On-field, the club slipped from the four in 1982 before recovering to secure the minor premiership in 1983.

1984-85

Brad Hardie was club captain in and transferred to Footscray and won the Brownlow Medal in 1985.

Since the club began, no less than 63 South Fremantle players have gone on to play VFL/AFL football.

These players played in VFL premiership sides: Harvey Kelly (Carlton 1907-08), Norm McIntosh (Richmond 1921), Bert Beard (South Melbourne 1933), Colin Beard (Richmond 1969) and Bruce Monteath (Richmond 1980).

1987

Mark Bairstow, the 1986 Sandover Medallist, joined Geelong and Nicky Winmar commenced a long career with St Kilda. David Hart, Wally Matera and John Worsfold made their VFL debuts with the new West Coast Eagles in 1987. Jon Dorotich played for Carlton.

1989

Craig Edwards became the club's eighth Sandover Medallist the same year. Peter Sumich joined the West Coast Eagles. Maurice Rioli returned after a distinguished career with Richmond and led the team into the grand final in 1989. With the advent of West Coast, attendances halved at a time when all clubs were trying to meet increased player payments. A stock market crash and the collapse of 'WA Inc' exacerbated the club's financial position.

1990

Peter Matera joined the West Coast Eagles. In 1990 supporters had to rally to the cause, and a Save Our Souths campaign brought the club back from the edge of financial collapse.

1991

Glen Jakovich joined the West Coast Eagles.

1992

John Worsfold led them to premiership glory. David Hart joined his former Bulldog teammates for a repeat performance of 1994. In later years players returning from VFL/AFL service made a big impact. Wally Matera returned, won the Best and Fairest award and Mal Brown, in a brief return to coaching, guided the club into yet another grand final appearance.

1993

Brad Hardie reappeared and was the club's leading goalkicker.

1994

In 1994 Jon Dorotich and Peter Worsfold returned from Carlton and Brisbane. Dorotich would kick 352 goals in the next four seasons and Worsfold became the longest serving captain in the club's hundred year history.

1995-1998

Attendances fell further in 1995 when the Fremantle Dockers joined the AFL. South Fremantle Best and Fairest Peter Bell was the first Docker signed but few Bulldogs have followed him. Scott Watters was the inaugural vice-captain and James Clement and Clem Michael established themselves as Docker regulars while Peter Bell moved on to play in two North Melbourne premierships.

In 1995 John Todd who had twice coached the club before enjoying success elsewhere, returned for a third spell in charge of the Bulldogs. His efforts were crowned with success in 1997 in a dramatic grand final where South Fremantle came from behind to defeat old rivals East Fremantle by six points and end a seventeen-year premiership drought.

1999

In season 1999, the club's one hundredth, South Fremantle became the 'host club' for most of the spare players for Fremantle Oval co-tenants, the Fremantle Dockers.

Boosted by the injection of talent the Bulldogs climbed from sixth to earn the minor premiership. However, the host club arrangement saw much home-grown talent leave the club (a career move that brought Gus Seebeck a Sandover Medal) and which saw local draftees playing against their old clubs, to the fury of rival clubs and their supporters.

The club entered the finals with the worst of both worlds - antagonism from the football public and muted support from the Dockers who refused to release all eligible players for the finals campaign. South Fremantle supporters at least had the pleasure of seeing their team play in a grand final in the centenary year, though the day was spoiled by the cruel absence through suspension of key player Marty Atkins, victim of a "dobber" following an unremarked and harmless incident in the second semi-final. That, and the strength of West Perth, runners-up the previous year, denied supporters a fairytale rise from sixth to a premiership in the centenary year

2000-2005

Peter Sumich took over as coach for 2000 - 2001 and the club once again were runners up this time to Subiaco in 2001. In 2002 Peter Sumich joined the Eagles coaching staff and was replaced by ex Melbourne coach and Richmond premiership player John Northey for the 2002-03 seasons.

In 2004 South was back in the top four under the leadership of experienced WAFL coach John Dimmer. 2005 - A premiership year, defeating Claremont in a one sided Grand Final. Toby McGrath won the Sandover Medal and Clinton Jones the first of his two fairest and best awards.

2006 - 2008

Though the club made the finals each year its best finish was runner up to Subiaco in 2006. Terry Dean completed his sixth consecutive term as president and was replaced by Haydn Raitt.

2009

Attendances rose in the WAFL due to the inclusion of retired AFL players Peter Bell, Jeff Farmer and Jaymie Graham and the poor form of the two AFL clubs.

A premiership year, defeating Subiaco which ended their three year reign as premiers. Ashton Hams won the Simpson Medal.