



The following advert appeared in the Bunyip, March 9, 1889, entitled "Football". "A meeting will be held in the Institute tonight of those interested in this champion winter game. There seems to be a divided opinion as to the availability of joining the South Australian Association this year. The club (Gawler) has not been as successful during the two years it has been in the Association as the members would wish but then it has a chance of improving. However, there should be a large meeting and the matter thoroughly discussed tonight. A Junior Association will in all likelihood be inaugurated to improve players in the Gawler district, and there should be no difficulty in raising teams from Gawler, Gawler South and Willaston, and this with the Gawler (Association) team would interest a large number of spectators".

Following this special meeting, the Gawler Football Club held its annual general meeting on March 15 at the Gawler Institute, where its members decided to remain in the SA Football Association – now the SANFL, for the 1889 season.

So with the league club continuing, the new supporting Gawler Junior Football Association was underway. The three teams went about organising themselves, and it was on the evening of Thursday March 21, 1889, that today's South Gawler Football Club was born. A meeting of people interested in the formation of a football club in the Gawler South area was held at the Mill Inn with about thirty people attending.

James Fitzgerald – a ten-year veteran with Albions and Gawler – chaired this first meeting, and with foresight explained that the object of the meeting was to form a junior club in the locality for now, to join a senior association that was likely to be formed in Gawler in the near future. He pointed out that the endeavour to get more matches for junior footballers would increase interest in the game, and would provide practice so that some useful players would be brought out.

James Fitzgerald – perhaps the father of the Lions, was elected as the first Captain, with former Havelocks and Athenians great George Sanderson appointed as his Vice Captain. TH. Willett was declared the first Secretary and Patron. The colours decided on were blue and red, with white bands. Great interest was generated with about fifty names handed in as members.

On April 6, 1889, South played its first 'game'. It was a scratch match at Sedgeley's Paddock and about forty potential players turned out. South's first official game was the first GJFA game, against Salisbury at Salisbury Oval on April 20, where we began our history with a win. The following year, 1890, the GJFA was christened the Gawler Football Association proper.

With so many young men keen to play football for Gawler South, soon after on May 14, 1889, forty members on another Thursday evening at the Mill Inn formed a second Gawler South Football Club. Basically an affiliated club for Reserves and junior footballers, it was this entity which for much of the twentieth century competed in a separate seconds or B Grade competition as an independent body, sharing the South name and colours but often with different emblems. The two entities would eventually unite as one singular club in 1934, however they would not play in the same league until 1951.

The senior Gawler South club were first known as the Tri-Colours due to their red and blue gurnsey with white vees, until they merged with a club called Wanderers based at Gawler East in 1890. Upon the union, the club adopted their royal blue and white hoops similar to today. Throughout the 1890s South were nicknamed the Barbarians and then in the late 1900s referred to as the Blues.

Interest in the local competition soon surpassed the league side, and by 1894 Gawler had withdrawn from the SA Football Association to completely fold, but the GFA remained.

By 1896 there was still no organised B Grade competition, but the Conquerors Football Club had evolved from the seconds – basically from those footballers unable to secure a regular game with the first South team. In 1897 the Conquerors changed their name to the Gawler South Pirates, playing

makeshift fixtures against sides from Adelaide and beyond Gawler. Many South people were involved at both clubs, with prominent positions shared by the same members and several senior players often representing the Pirates when South were not scheduled to play.

At the Pirates Annual General Meeting of 1899 there was talk of a unification, but they decided to continue under their own management, although pledging their allegiance to the senior South club. Interestingly, that year South voted against the GFA's proposition of electoral district clubs, an innovation the Association would contemplate again later in history.

In 1899 South were playing well when Willaston forfeited the rest of the season following a dispute with the GFA over the disqualification of players who had been reported by umpires. The Association was declared disbanded, and holding top position South were proclaimed 1899 premiers. The following year talk arose between Central and South of resuming the Gawler Football Association without Willaston. The discretion was soon resolved however and the whole Association was reformed again in March 1900.

During these days, the boom of young footballers in Gawler was so extensive that many of these less-organised seconds clubs came and went, contesting such invitation matches against teams both within and outside the area. The Gawler South Pirates unfortunately were not to last – as in 1900 a new senior club was established called Shamrocks, recruiting many of their players of the day. Despite the demise of the Pirates, South were able to temporarily continue on without a seconds club.

Eventually in 1902, the surviving disparate seconds clubs were assembled together into a competition called the Gawler Junior Football Association – revisiting the name of the original feeder competition to the old-time Gawler league club. The Souths Seconds Football Club came to be, once again fielding a Reserves team against the seconds of Central, Willaston, Shamrocks and a B Grade club called Rivals. While the senior teams played at Gawler Oval, most GJFA fixtures were played at the North or West Parklands, however the common term B Grade was not actually coined until 1921.

The GJFA was gradually becoming a formal competition, with another B Grade club, Imperials, joining the GJFA in 1904. Then, in 1908, the South Seconds Football Club became officially known as the Gawler South Rovers. They continued an autonomous existence, as did the Willaston Sharks who formed in 1909. Like the Rovers from us, the Sharks became a separate club from the original Willaston, playing Adelaide teams and our own Gawler South Rovers.

Between 1907 and 1926 there was also a 'thirds' competition for boys, however this was never regulated. South and Gawler Central occasionally fielded a combined junior side in this competition between 1908 and 1912. It was not until 1958 when – in the wake of the new SANFL club Central District forming – the Salisbury, Elizabeth & Gawler District Colts Football League was created to foster junior footballers in the area, ultimately spawning the Senior Colts and Junior Colts competitions of today.

During 1914 South withdrew from the Gawler Football Association following a dispute with the administration over the clearance of L. S. Dawe from Central, citing a clash of Rules 8 and 26 – with South refusing to repeat "an exercise of futility" as it was recorded. There was talk of applying to either the Adelaide Plains or Barossa and Light Leagues and even suggestion that a recruiting South could even apply to enter the SA Football Association, however it was too late in the year to join any other competition.

Despite not having an organised competition to contest any premiership in, South arranged fixtures anyway, playing 'alternative' matches at the Evanston Racecourse, regularly drawing bigger crowds than the GFA were at Gawler Oval. The makeshift season consisted of fixtures against Riverside, Brompton Methodist, West Gawler, Lyndoch, Gawler Blocks, and the Rovers met Kapunda.

South's first team then became so dominant in the 1920s that after seven consecutive premierships, the Gawler Football Association disbanded in 1926. Debate about the old time Gawler Football Club reforming and applying to resume the South Australian Football Association had occasionally surfaced since the evolution of the senior Gawler Football Association, but talk soon turned again to South simply applying to play in Adelaide itself.

Committee meetings of the day pondered the creation of a composite side derived from South alone, a so-called Valhalla Football Club. Coined as such to be distinct from the original Gawler identity and playing down the connection to South so that the better rival footballers might be enticed to join – however the bid never eventuated.

Disinterest with South's lack of competition and general unconfidence in the administration saw the Gawler Football Association dissolve. The B Grade continued however, and thrived, drawing football-starved public. South applied to play an A Grade side in the Barossa and Light Football Association, but the application was rejected. There was also an idea to make up a combined Gawler team from the three clubs and apply to the Barossa and Light. But that too was rejected, as the Barossa and Light considered such a composite team would be too strong for their competition.

A resilient B Grade competition saw South oppose Gawler Methodist, Church of England, Roseworthy College, Willaston and Gawler Central, at the Evanston Racecourse. One consolation from 1926 was a number of young players given a more sounder experience as the B Grade became a much more serious and intense game, increased in pressure before the big crowds and public attention. During this time of the Great Depression, many players also played in a Wednesday Unemployed Football Association as a social participation.

Ironically, in an apparent attempt to even up the competition, the GFA encouraged the South seconds – who had become so strong since 1908, to break away from South and form an entirely separate club. The formation of this new A Grade club now just called Rovers in 1927, was engineered to end South's total domination of the competition.

Nevertheless, South continued on to win four more flags from the next seven finals campaigns – but then ultimately would not win another premiership at any level between 1934 and 1951. Dissatisfaction with the administration of the GFA did not dissipate for some time, as the Gawler Football Association momentarily dissolved again at the end of 1930 but was reformed early in 1931.

During the 1940s there was also a Sunday league amongst the local pubs and South players represented teams from the South End, Criterion and Old Spot Hotels. Post World War Two, the failure of the Lower North and Barossa and Light leagues saw an influx of new players to the GFA. South benefited particularly, after enduring our least successful time in history.

By 1947, the GFA had completely re-established itself and in an effort to create an even competition by distributing the playing talent fairly, the Gawler Football Association elected to impose recruitment zones. Gawler South was zoned to select players only in the southern districts and South Para area, so many new players came to South. It was in this era that the Club became officially known as the "Gawler South District Football Club" because of the district dividing being introduced.

The Rovers Football Club finally folded in 1947, but left a small legacy back at South where it had first begun in the form of a Rovers Social Club, made up of ex Rovers within the Gawler South Football Club.

In 1951 the B Grade and A Grade competitions were finally amalgamated under the one GFA umbrella, and then in 1953 the Gawler Football Association changed its name to the Gawler and District Football League. The local competition was now entering a golden era, comprising the original three Gawler clubs, Salisbury, Roseworthy, Two Wells, Lyndoch, Roseworthy College and Virginia. Williamstown, Hamley Bridge, Elizabeth, Elizabeth North and Salisbury North joining soon after in the following years. From the 1950s to the 1970s the GDFL would emerge as a premier football league in country South Australia.

The swelling GDFL in 1955 was divided into three competitions, "League", "A" and "B" Grades. South's first team were in the League competition, and the seconds were in the B Grade. Clubs such as Lyndoch and Roseworthy who only had the one senior team, were placed in the A Grade. The idea was that such clubs had teams too good for seconds but then not good enough to compete with the A Grades of South, Willaston and so on. The great number of teams enabled a third intermediate competition.

This era arguably marks the beginning of the modern South Gawler Football Club – known as the Lions. It was in August of 1955 that the Gawler South Football Club first adopted its emblem of the

Rampant Lion. From this time on South became officially known as the Lions. The Rampant Lion comes from Gothic heraldry, it was a symbol of power and courage as coats of arms adorning the shields of mediaeval knights.

The original monogram designed by John Gleeson was a depiction of a Rampant Lion in gold on a blue and white striped background with a gold football on top, and 'Gawler South Football Club' written underneath in white. Furthermore, in February 1957, the name of the Club was officially no longer 'Gawler South' as in the suburb, but altered to 'South Gawler' to describe the area. The monicker SGFC remains today.

By now at its greatest extent, the Gawler and District Football League was again considering applying to play a team in the SANFL – bidding along with the entry of Woodville Football Club. Interestingly, South voted to oppose the move, and informed the league that we were not in favour of a Gawler and District League Football team just yet.

In 1958 a committee was appointed to foster a Junior and Senior Colts team to play in a Sunday competition in the Salisbury-Elizabeth area. The Salisbury, Elizabeth and Gawler Districts Colts Football League was formed, so advertising went out for any boys or parents interested in South's Under 13 and Under 16 sides. The SGFC Colts Football Club was founded with Herb Adams as Chairman and coached by great player Stan Edmonds. Shortly thereafter the colts age limits were altered to Under 13 and Under 17. Later, on the eve of 1960, the GDFL decided to disband the Junior and Senior Colts competitions, merging the two grades into a single Colts competition until 1975.

However, football life in Gawler was about to experience turmoil again. In 1961, the Gawler and District League presented a 'gift' of 300 pounds to the newly formed Central Districts Football Club, even though the League was struggling financially at the time – while questions regarding the management of funds created tension as the League levied all clubs for twenty pounds to help their ailing finances. In addition, the formation of the Central Districts Football Association saw Salisbury, Salisbury North, Elizabeth, Elizabeth North and Virginia all leave the Gawler League. The new CDFA originally designed to foster players for Central Districts Football Club.

Many of our members, along with other Gawlerites, were concerned about the new league team being at Elizabeth and not Gawler, which had always been an established and respected football centre. In fact some people were convinced it should have even been South to be the new league team.

With the now faltering Gawler League, the distinct possibility that two teams could not field B Grade sides thus ending that competition, and the elevation of two other teams from B Grade in 1960 to A Grade in 1961, was of great concern to many Souths. We had gone through undefeated in both A and B Grades the previous year and had sixty players out on the training track.

So a special meeting was called, and in an overwhelming majority, the membership voted for South to leave the GDFL to the Adelaide Plains Football League for season 1961. A controversial move, while the other foundation clubs Gawler Central and Willaston remained to rebuild the Gawler and District Football League, which at times had become home for every wandering club north of Adelaide. Although members were deplored by the misguided publicity accorded the Club, South was enticed back to the GDFL in 1963. Fortunately, we then continued to enjoy consistent success throughout the 1960s and 70s.

In 1976, South Gawler finally acquired its own premises outright at the Eldred Riggs Reserve, Evanston. And after five years renovating the clubrooms and converting the accompanying rugby pitch into an oval suitable for Australian Rules, the Lions played their first game at home there in 1981. Due to the numbers of players available in the town, a C Grade competition was formed and played on Sundays. South fielded such a third side from 1981 to 1984.

By 1985, the GDFL was again in decline with Two Wells threatening to leave. So a Special General Meeting was held in the Club on February 6 1986, instructing the committee to pursue all available avenues regarding the Club's future – the consensus that we not negotiate, whether it be as a single Club or with the GDFL, with the Central Districts Football Association. In hindsight this proved to be a good decision, as the CDFA inevitably was to fold in 1994 after changing its name to the Northern Metropolitan Football Association in 1988. It was further moved that we continue with the GDFL for the 1987 season, pending dialogue with the Barossa and Light Football Association.

After lengthy discussion and debate, it was always the intention that the SGFC remain with the GDFL if there were to be a minimum of 6 senior sides in the competition. However, Two Wells Football Club was adamant that they no longer wished to remain with the semi-professional Gawler teams. Ironically, Two Wells who had dominated throughout the late 1970s with imported players, were complaining about the cost of remaining competitive.

Two Wells notified the GDFL that they were going to the APFL in 1987, placing the Gawler League into turmoil, so South responded by announcing that they intended to join the BLFA – either alone at first or through the amalgamation of the leagues, and would not participate in a 5 team competition.

Following the Lions' lead, the three foundation clubs banded together and eventually joined a new amalgamated league named the Barossa, Light and Gawler Football Association. As Robertstown exited the old BLFA to the Mid-Murray Football Association, the new 'super league' was to consist of South Gawler, Willaston, Gawler Central, Tanunda, Nuriootpa Rovers, Kapunda, Eudunda, Freeling, Riverton Saddleworth Marrabel United and Angaston. Barossa District Football Club temporarily was forced to join the Hills Football Association before finally being accepted into the BLGFA in 1989. Virginia, who were at first rejected admission by the Adelaide Plains Football League, returned to the CDFA from where they had come in 1980 during the interim.

Soon enough, the wealthy BLGFA of the late 1980s was enjoying a strong rivalry between the Barossa Valley and Gawler town clubs. During the early 1990s the standard of competition had risen to be considered close to the best in country South Australia, comparable to the great leagues of the Riverland and South East, at a semi-professional level with many ex-league and imported footballers relishing the close proximity from Adelaide. South tasted some success during this era, winning its 36th A Grade premiership in 1993. The more rural clubs such as Eudunda and RSMU struggled however, soon defecting to the North Eastern Football League, resulting in contentious import restrictions imposed by an alarmed BLGFA administration.

South were to suffer from such draconian measures in 1995, when the club was fined \$1000 and our A Grade was stripped of twelve premiership points after the league found senior player John Robins to be in breach of the import rule. The league judged that South were "playing an A Grade player whilst his residential address was outside a defined 'local player' boundary", deregistering Robins for the remainder of the 1995 season.

President Roger Hutchins publicly appealed the decision, declaring that South never intended to deceive the BLGFA and that reasonable adjustment for the spirit of the law had not been considered in this exceptional case. He cited that the player in question had rented in the area in 1994, and only temporarily moved in with family at Surrey Downs while building a new house in Gawler – a situation which the BLGFA were duly notified of.

However, the league determined to make an example of South, unrelenting on such a harsh and unrealistic penalty. A great statesman for the club, Hutchins decided that it would be in the best interests of the game and the competition for South not to take any further action – and cop the outcome. So in July, South's first team slipped from third position to second-to-bottom with just four points. Nevertheless, ultimately the A Grade were courageous enough to re-assert themselves upon the competition – only to just miss out on the finals that year, and finishing runners-up in the next season – 1996, our most recent A Grade Grand Final.

Over more than hundred and twenty odd years, South Gawler has produced some champion footballers, many who have played league and state football as well as locally. Names such as Winky Price, Eddie Mahoney, Howard Abbott, Laurie Rusby, John Nottle, Robin Mulholland, Steven Officer and Eddie Schwerdt lead us right up to 2002, when former O'Reilly Trophy recipient and runner-up best and fairest in the Junior Colts, Sam Butler, was selected for the prestigious Australian Institute of Sport's AFL scholarship – later becoming our first professional footballer with the West Coast Eagles in 2004 and member of their 2006 AFL Premiership.

Junior development continues to be a priority at our famous club, most evident in the success of the AFL Auskick clinics conducted at the Den in recent years. This has immediately translated into our most recent premierships in the Junior Colts – undefeated back to back in 2005 and 2006, and even more recently the celebrated drafting of Alan Obst to the North Melbourne Kangaroos. Our second professional footballer and third individual to make the big time.

In 2007, after working towards its own Little League and Modified teams for a number of years, the Barossa, Light and Gawler Football Association finally took over administration of a primary school age footy competition following the demise of the Gawler and District Mini League. South now fields a Modifieds and Little League team in this new era.

And although it has been a number of years since the last A Grade flag, the Lions still hold the record for the most senior premierships in South Australia, and outright is ranked equal fourth in the world. There is a proud tradition and long history about this football club like no other. As our marvellous history becomes more reknown, maybe when the new organisation of the local footy hierachies are in place, we will regain that winning culture of our long history.

Hopefully the wait will not be too long before another chapter is added to this history again.