

The CSU Regional Archives is extending its opening hours to include the first Saturday of every month. On these days, the archives will be open from 10am to 3pm. The next Saturday opening will be on March 2.

what you need to know

■ The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building on South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue. Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 02 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au, or visit our website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.

References:
The Daily Advertiser, July 14 1881, July 26 1881, July 30 1881, August 2 1881, August 9 1881, August 11 1881, August 16 1881; Sherry Morris – *Wagga Wagga: A History*, pp.96-97; Keith Swan – *A History of Wagga Wagga*, p.154; Gary Green – *A Century of Australian Football in the Riverina* (1881-1981); Rodney Gillett – *Where the Big Men Fly: An Early History of Australian Football in the Riverina*.



The Federals Football Club c.1900 (CSU Regional Archives – RW5/23/557).

a brief history of ...

Football in Wagga

at the archives
 Wayne Doubleday



As we prepare to pack away the cricket gear and pull out the football boots for another season, I thought it would be interesting to look at the origins of football in Wagga, and to see where it all began.

While it is probable some very early "scratch" matches of Victorian rules football (as it was known then) were played in Wagga in the late 1870s, the very first recorded official game of football in Wagga between clubs took place on August 1, 1881.

There is some evidence to suggest this may have been the first football game played in the Riverina, but this title would depend on your definition of the boundaries of the region.

What we know for certain is that by July 1881, the Wagga Football Club was already training and practising on a regular basis.

The *Advertiser* of July 14, 1881 also made mention of the fact a newly formed football club in Narrandera was preparing to send a team to Wagga in the near future for a challenge match.

Yet despite this, the match held on August 1, 1881 was between Wagga and Albury.

On the Saturday before the big match, the Wagga team (comprising of only the 15 players selected) played a match against 22 "all-comers" at the Wagga Racecourse, the former winning three goals to one.

Interestingly, August 1, 1881 was actually a Monday, although it was a bank holiday, and this

coupled with the novelty of being the first official game of football in the township ensured a good attendance at the match.

A crowd in excess of 500 people attended the match at the racecourse.

The Albury team caught the train to Wagga and was then driven to the ground.

Not surprisingly, the more experienced Albury club won the match convincingly – 4.16 (40) to 1.11 (17).

The players who represented the Wagga team were:

Centre: Ambrose (captain), McDonald, Redman.

Followers: Archer, Meldrum, Spiece.

Forwards: Lowe, A. Tompson, Mair.

Backs: Baylis, T Cox, J Cox, Moran.

Goalsneak (Full-forward): Wren.

Goalkeeper (Full-back): Black.

Wagga's uniform at the time consisted of a blue guernsey, white sash and blue stockings.

The *Advertiser* of August 2 gives an excellent description of the match and the day's events:

"During the first half of the game, it was evenly contested, but after the interval the Wagga players lost all discipline and played in a very scrambling fashion, leaving their places and tumbling over each other in all directions. Where all played well, it would be difficult to single out anyone on either side. Considering that it was Wagga's first match, and that two months ago many of the team had never kicked a ball, they played a great game against the matured players of five seasons. The main faults of the Wagga team are selfish play in making too-long runs and neglecting little marks and in leaving their places. One goal was kicked by Albury through the absence of the acting Wagga goalkeeper."

However, the report in the newspaper was less favourable in the description of the players' behaviour:

"It is a great pity that Wagga men do not pay greater attention to their visitors than is usual, but boys will be boys, and as most of the local

players are – well, say young men – perhaps it is impossible to put old heads on young shoulders. The Albury team appeared to have enjoyed their game, and exulted in their victory, hence, no doubt, the 'rollicking-ram' business, which was played out on the top of the coach as they drove through the town. However, as this is the first football match played in Wagga, we trust that both visitors and visited in the future will better understand the amenities of civilisation than they appear to have understood them yesterday."

Despite the mixed reviews of both play and behaviour, it appears as though football was an instant success in Wagga.

The following Saturday, August 6, Wagga hosted the Albury Mechanics Club at the racecourse – losing 4.13 (37) to 2.3 (15) – and then a week later made the trip to Albury to again play the Albury team – again losing 5.25 (55) to 0.5 (5).

The Wagga team's day of atonement would not come until the following year, when on June 10, 1882, they defeated the Albury Mechanics Club 2.7 (19) to 1.7 (13).

In the same year, a Wagga Mechanics Club was also established, which comprised mostly of tradesmen and store assistants.

Within five years, another two clubs had been formed – the Federals and the Commercials.

By 1889, the Wagga Football Association had been created.

Football at this time was viewed more as a leisure pursuit than a serious form of competition.

Matches were normally played on a Saturday afternoon, but often had no fixed starting time (often when the train arrived) and teams consisted of anywhere from 15 to 25 players per side.

It is worth noting the first game of rugby union was also played in Wagga only a year later in 1882. Matches were played on the Wagga Cricket Association ground, but initially the game did not have the popularity or following that Australian rules received in Wagga.