

TRIUMPH OVER TRAGEDY - SEBASTIAN PARKER 200 GAMES

On Saturday, 30 July 2016 we celebrate Sebastian “Seb” Parker’s 200th open-age club game with the Pennant Hills Demons. 2016 is Seb’s 17th season playing with the Senior Club. Although he technically played his 200th in his last game a fortnight ago against UTS Bats, the occasion of the Club’s annual “Back to the Ern Day”, is a fitting time and venue to acknowledge this significant achievement.

This weekend, he will play in the Round 15 Division One match against Balmain Tigers at Pennant Hills’ traditional home, Ern Holmes Oval. This is a significant milestone that ranks him as one of the highest games record-holders at the Club. Not only will the Demons be desperate for a win, but the boys will be determined to put on a strong showing to ensure the moment is one that Seb will look back on with pride and fond memories.

Seb, who has been a great servant of this great Club over a long period, deserves success on this important occasion. So, here’s wishing Seb and his team all the best and we look forward to an inspired performance as the team strives to produce its best form, as finals loom large on the horizon.



JUNIOR FOOTY

Seb, now 34, first played footy as a six year old for Howrah Junior Football Club in 1988. Howrah is a beachside suburb of greater Hobart with views across the Derwent River to Hobart City. It’s a stone’s throw from Blundstone Arena (formerly Bellerive Oval). He played the better part of three seasons at Howrah before his family moved to Sydney, settling in the Hills district. According to his dad, Seb played 40 games in the Under 8s and 9s with Howrah and kicked 102 goals.

At this point I must stop to say something about Seb’s father. Seb’s dad is another Demons Club Icon, Ian ‘Chicken’ Parker. Now for anyone acquainted with him, they know Chicken to be an absolute footy fanatic, passionate about

the code, the Club and his footballing son. He is also an administrator extraordinaire with a great eye for detail and a passion for process and systems. Although now retired, he still brings great energy and innovation to most things he does in life. Pennant Hills owes him a great debt for his long service and the systems and processes that he has instilled over a long period as an administrator of the footy club. Such is Ian’s obsession with this great game, that he has a record of every game ... I mean EVERY GAME ... Seb has played and every game, yes, I mean EVERY GAME, that Seb has missed through injury, as well as EVERY award and EVERY goal he has ever scored! For the majority of Seb’s footy statistics detailed in this story, I have Chicken to thank as the source.

So yes, before he’d reached 10 years of age, we already know that Seb averaged 2.6 goals per game playing for Howrah Juniors! His potential as a quality footballer was already on display as he won awards in each season including Best & Fairest and the Association’s Most Consistent.

Arriving in Sydney in 1990, he joined Westbrook Juniors mid-season, the first of eight seasons, 1990 to 1997, playing from Under 9s through to Under 16s. With Westbrook, Seb won three premierships in 1992 (Under



Westbrook Juniors

11), 1993 (Under 13) and 1996 (Under 16). He was a junior representative player from the Under 11s on, and a state representative in Under 13s, 14s and 16s, culminating with a game in the Under 16 NSW/ACT Rams in 1997. He played 139 club games for Westbrook and kicked 235 goals, although his goal average had dropped to below 2 per game by this stage. Not surprisingly, he was a highly decorated junior player winning the Club's Under 16 Best & Fairest Award in his final season and was also Northside Association runner up. In a big finish to his junior career, Seb was also Players Player and Best in Grand Final that year. He was runner up Best & Fairest on two other occasions (1994 Under 13 and 1996 Under 16). There is little doubt that Seb was a footballer of great talent and potential at this point in his footy career.



In his final year of juniors, 1997, Seb was invited to play Under 18 football with Pennant Hills. The team finished 6th with 10 wins and 8 losses. Reflecting on the season, Coach Gary Brown reckoned it was a *"commendable result"* considering that *"7 of our regular players were under 16 players who backed up playing 2 games each week and 14 of the players were first year under 18's."* Seb was one of those 15 year olds and he played 10 games with the Under 18s that season, kicking 7 goals at 0.7 goals per game!

SENIOR FOOTY

Graduating from Westbrook Juniors at the end of 1997, Seb then played two further seasons of Under 18 footy. He was Co-Captain (with Leigh Mortimer) in 1999 and was voted Best & Fairest in both seasons, 1998 and 1999. In 1998, the Under 18s finished 4th and were well beaten by St George in the first semi-final. The following year, the Under 18s were Minor Premiers and went on to win the flag, avenging the previous season's finals loss to St George.

At this point, Seb was starting to forge a formidable record as a young footballer and, as the saying goes, "the sky was the limit" insofar as his potential beckoned. Then, out of the blue, tragedy struck.

After attending teammate, Lachlan Howarth's, 18th birthday celebration in Thornleigh, Seb was struck by a motor vehicle, mangling the elbow of his right arm and delivering him a bad knock to his head. Of this incident, Ian Parker recalls that *"the elbow was a complete reconstruction – just before they took him to theatre at about 2.30am they called me in to advise 'they will do their best'!!!"* to save Seb's shattered elbow and there was a very real prospect that the arm may have been amputated.



"Following the surgery he was in intensive care for nearly 3 weeks (bruising of the brain) and when released the elbow was in a special brace for probably 3-4 months. The brace had adjustments that needed to be moved every day whilst he was in hospital – "up or down" to ensure movement would be maintained. The physio sessions were very intense over a long period and initially 2 or 3 days a week at Royal North Shore. The elbow had "wires etc" in it that needed to be removed probably 12 months later, and after that [Seb] always wore the blue elbow protector" which has been a familiar trademark at Pennant Hills for many years.

This could conceivably have been the end of Seb's footy career, one that had shown so much promise, but thanks to the skill and professionalism of the surgeons treating him, he was eventually to make a full recovery. However, the incident set him back two whole seasons of footy where he played zero games, kicked no goals and had a goal average of 0.0! It was two years of intensive rehabilitation. And, it wasn't just his elbow that was a problem. The knock to the head had also been damaging and Seb

had to defer his university studies ... apparently, even thinking was likely to cause strain to his brain!

Keen to get back on the playing field, Seb was the team runner for First Grade in 2001. Finishing 3rd, the seniors lost the 1st Semi Final to St George who came from 4th to win the Flag that year. He was at last able to resume his playing career in 2002, presumably playing up through the Reserves he returned to the first grade side, playing 8 games in each grade as well as two matches for the Sydney Redbacks (Swans Reserves), including a game on the SCG when he kicked 6 goals. Whilst it was a long time coming, he was awarded the Ken MacRae Shield for the Best First Year Local Player in 2002, six years after playing his first game in the senior club. Thereafter, for the next fourteen years, Seb has played mainly Premier Division football and of his 200 open-age games, 170 are in first grade. He travelled overseas during the footy season in 2009, however, was able to keep his hand in, playing 6 matches with the London Lions, kicking 8 goals at an average of 1.3 per game.



Captain & Coach 2008

Whilst today's match represents Seb's 201st, which is a fantastic achievement on its own, Ian Parker has catalogued more than 100 games that Seb has missed through injury. Over his long career Seb has broken, sprained or torn just about every appendage in his body including THAT elbow (2 seasons, 41 games missed), fractured fourth finger (6 games), hyper-extended knee (8 games), broken jaw (11 games) and a broken wrist (9 games) in 2015 which meant he missed out playing in last season's miraculous Grand Final victory over East Coast Eagles.

This year, perhaps a sign of his ... err ... advancing years, he has struggled with a

nuisance hamstring that has delayed the milestone by at least 4 weeks. And an incident in Round 12, which we won't talk about, delayed the milestone by another two weeks. Returning from last year's injury, and hampered by the niggling hammy, he is yet to regain his spot in Premier Division but hope remains eternal that he may still get there before season's end. With a more favourable run with injuries, arguably Seb could have shortly been approaching 300 games, rather than this lesser milestone, had things turned out differently?

Regardless of the number of games he has missed through injury, Seb's football career with Pennant Hills has been amongst the best on record. He was Co-Captain (with Michael Talbot) of the 2006 Premiership side and was again at the helm for the 2008 Flag. Add to this his 1999 Under 18 premiership, and that makes three flags as captain ... a rare distinction at Pennant Hills!

Senior Coach during those halcyon days was Michael Cousens, who has this to say about Seb:

I first met Seb in 2004 when I walked into the club to try my hand at Pregs. We were at Loretto College on a Sunday morning and during the skills session, I immediately noted his skills and voice during the drills. From memory he went on to have a pretty unlucky year on the injury front [groin, 4 weeks] resulting in us not playing together all that often but by the time I took on the coaching role in 2006, there was no doubt that he had to be a key member of our leadership group. He was named vice captain but, following a long term injury to club captain Maxy Talbot following round one, Sebby immediately assumed the role of club captain. Max returned from injury on the eve of finals resulting in both he and Seb becoming co-captains for the latter part of the year ... co-premiership captains as history [shows]. Sebby was then our sole captain from 2007 to 2008 inclusive of the [2008] premiership. The short story is that he was my captain in the two premierships I coached meaning he holds a pretty special place in my heart in terms of my thoughts of him as a player and leader.

As a player, he's incredibly smart, [has] exceptional passing skills, dour defensively and courageous ... almost dangerously so at times. His instructional voice around the ground was where he was a great leader. He didn't just

encourage but he directed players where they needed to be. Every good side needs such players and Sebby was that for us.

An incredible clubman, along with the whole Parker family of course, all of whom I have a great deal of time for and am incredibly grateful for their support and friendship over the years.

One small anecdote was the morning after the flag in 2006. The group were in a pub in Balmain following on from a pretty big night of festivities. It was the calm before the 'pleasant Sunday sip' storm and Seb and I were having a quiet but reflective chat. On recalling the events from the day before we turned to each other and acknowledged that we would've both died happy men that day ... this stood as a shared but genuine insight into what the result meant to both of us ... [not only] as individuals, but (I'd also like to think) as a captain and coach combined. He mightn't remember it but I never will [forget it] not that I remembered much after the chat! ☺"

Seb is a right foot kick and has played most of his football in jumper No 2. He was an on-ball player in juniors and Under 18s but notes that as he has got older "the further and further away from the centre I find myself." For much of his senior career he's found his best position in the backs, where his dour defensive skills come to the fore. His first grade debut was in Round 2, 1999 when he was still only 17 years old. That day Pennant Hills beat Balmain, however, it would be more than two years before he would play his next first grade match in 2002. Let's hope the result of his debut serves as a good omen for today's match – also against Balmain.



The best players he's encountered are all Penno greats ... Tim Nunan, Barnaby Howarth and Alex Goodall. And, unsurprisingly, his most memorable football moments are the senior premierships. Capping off a most successful season in 2006, Seb was joint runner-up Best & Fairest in Premier Division, shared with Alistair Richardson and bridesmaid to Shaun Jones, respectively.



Premiership team-mate and Club Captain, Matt Carey, speaks glowingly of Seb. He describes him as a 'general' in the back-half. He sets a great example through his hard work and cool and calm disposition even when under extreme pressure. He says that Seb "knows a lot about the game – both on-field and off; I respect what he has to say and he's worth listening to."

Before I finish, a final word on Seb's football record. Based on the stats compiled by his father, Seb has, across his whole football career, played 523 games (including 236 with the senior club) and has kicked 478 goals at an average of 0.914 per game. He has missed 102 games through injury and 2 from suspension (Oops ... we weren't going to mention that?) This is all simply awe inspiring!

Seb has achieved most of the milestones possible at a community football club and has left a significant legacy as one of the Club's on-field leaders ... he's a three time premiership captain. Undoubtedly, there are many team-mates over a long period of time who have marvelled at Seb's ability, professionalism and passion for football. He is a popular player at the Club, if not considered a little quirky, and affectionately known simply as 'Sebby' or just 'Seb'. On-field he is immediately recognisable, not just for his footy prowess, but for the blue elbow guard which he has worn as a badge of honour since returning to the game he loves in 2002.

On the day of his 201st game, we pay tribute to a great career and a role-model with few peers, one that has triumphed over tragedy, and serves as an exemplar of what can be achieved through perseverance, passion and the will to succeed.

Congratulations Seb on a stellar football career and on reaching this fantastic milestone. Go Penno!

SEBBY BY THE STATS

Sebastian PARKER Senior Football Career (Player 1997 – 2016)

Year joined	: 1997
No of seasons	: 18 seasons 1997 – 2016 (ex 2000 & 2009) - Player – 17 seasons - Team runner - 1 season (2001)
Senior games	: Total Open-age: - 200 games (Premier Division – 170, Reserves – 30) Under 18: - 36 games
Awards	: Club Captain (2006 – 08 & 2010) (U/18 1999) R/U Seniors Best & Fairest (2006) R/U Reserves Best & Fairest & Players Player (2002) Best First Year Local Player (2002) Coaches Award (2014) U18 Best & Fairest (1998/99)
Premiership seasons	: Premier Division - 2006 and 2008 Under 18 – 1999

Matches Highlighted

1. Premier Division debut: **Pennant Hills 12.12-80** def Balmain 10.11-71
2. Premier Division Grand Final 2006: **Pennant Hills 5.20-50** def East Coast Eagles 7.6-48
3. Premier Division Grand Final 2008: **Pennant Hills 20.12-132** def East Coast Eagles 3.10-28
4. Under 18 Grand Final 1999: **Pennant Hills 13.11-89** def St George 8.5-53