

BLAST FROM THE PAST

By John Wood

John Wood is a sporting historian best known for his work on SA Football. He has however a very diverse sporting background and each in home match issue this season looks at a particular aspect of Baseball in this State.

SURVEY BASEBALL CLUB SHAPES UP

As the early 1889 Baseball season progressed there were nine clubs in Adelaide, just a few months after Spalding's visit. Matches were in hand for the League to draw up a proper program.

In early April Goodwood played Engineer-in-Chief, the former winning by 12 runs.

The first intercolonial match took place at this time with the Minstrels from Melbourne playing here twice. On the first occasion the wet conditions made sliding for base very exciting and the second game took place on the Balhannah Oval. Some sixty spectators travelled on the special train from Adelaide to see the game. In all, hundreds turned up from surrounding districts. Our second nine managed to beat the Intercolonial team (Americans) 17 runs to 13.

By his time there were the following teams: Survey, North Adelaide, Port Adelaide, Padlocks, Post and Telegraph, Engineer-in-Chief, and Goodwood. At least they attended the meeting of the SA Baseball League in the Prince Alfred Hotel (now part of the Adelaide Town Hall) in mid-April. The patron was the Governor and the President was the Mayor of Adelaide. It was decided that the season would begin on September 1 and end on May 31 each year.

THE GREAT "RUE" EWERS

The name Ewers, though not perhaps well-known today, was synonymous with the first Fifty or so years of the game in South Australia.

There were five brothers who all made a name for themselves but Rudolph ("Rue") was the greatest. The Ewers boys were so good however, that they had to be made to play for separate teams so that no one club would be unbeatable.

"Rue" was first a brilliant pitcher and later a catcher. He regularly threw a cricket ball or baseball well over a hundred yards, his best being 129 yards six inches in April 1890.

A MULTI-TALENTED SPORTSMAN

"Rue" was a rather wiry, natural athlete. A champion runner, his athletics record was 102 starts for 17 Firsts, 9 seconds, 8 thirds and 2 fourths. In 31 of those 102 starts he was off scratch. He was equally adept at sprinting, hurdling and long-distance running, as well as swimming. Because of his build and athleticism he was a fast "sideman" (winger) playing football for both Norwood and Port. Timing is at the heart of success in most sports and because "Rue" had this, he once won a drop-kicking competition.

As mentioned, he was a brilliant swimmer and later in life was made a life member of the Gilberton Swimming Club (which was on the Torrens River), the SA Swimming Association and the Rota! Lie Saving Society.

Primarily, however, he and his brothers were best remembered as the heart and soul of Baseball in SA in the years before World War One. Indeed, "Rue" played senior Baseball for 35 years, little wonder that he was a life member of several Baseball Clubs and also the Baseball League.

In his heyday the local champion received many tempting offers to play in America but he preferred to stay with his own people. Although he could play every position on the diamond, pitching was his strong point. **He** had a variety of curves but preferred fast rather than variable pitching. Three of Ewers brothers were still, playing for 5A in 1910. At that time Fred and Ted were the pitchers and "Rue" was catcher. Indeed, that year the press said of him, "Rue Ewers, who twenty years ago was one of the Finest players in Australia, is the catcher of the State team, and his work has been first class. He can still send 'em along to second better than a great many of our younger marksman.

Amazingly, the man played in all intercolonial and interstate matches from 1889 to 1913. The first Australian Carnival was on in Sydney in August 1914 when World War One began. There were no further carnivals for the duration. When the war ended he was fifty-two years old and his competitive years clearly coming to an end.

"Rue" was in fact part of an Ewers' dynasty, his son Claude being equally brilliant. Pitching for East Torrens against Millswood, Claude struck out 26 of the possible 27 opposition batters in a game early in 1929. Tragically, Claude was killed when crushed by a falling transformer he was helping install at Nuriootpa.

"Rue" retired after 52 years working with the Lands Department and received an illuminated address (a special ornate scroll) from them for his long service. He had been a member of the first Baseball team, Survey, because of the fact that he was working for the Surveyor - General's Department at the time of Spalding's visit in 1888-90.

Aged 65 "Rue" gave talks on Baseball in SA in the 1880's and 1 890's, talks invaluable in preserving the games history.

Rudolph Ewers died in November 1940 and is buried in North Road Cemetery at Medindie. "Rue" Ewers was our first Baseball legend.