

## Palm Beach Soccer Club – The History

It all started in 1964 with a man who wanted his son to play soccer. His name reportedly was Eddie Wardell and little did he know that he started what is now one of the strongest and most successful soccer clubs on the Gold Coast.

He gathered together a team and played in a loose competition consisting of three clubs which included Kingscliff and Twin Towns. The very first home game was held at the Salk Oval but this venue only lasted a short while before moving to what was a rough council paddock close to mangroves and scrub near the old Palm Beach Bowls Club, and now under the GC highway at the traffic lights adjacent to Palm Beach parklands. The boys played in a make-do green T shirt.

The local Gold Coast Association chairman Jack Woodward wanted soccer to be represented in Palm Beach and to be part of the

Association. He encouraged a few parents whose boys were playing elsewhere to take their boys there. This helped to form and consolidate the fledgling club and the parents between them acquired goalposts, did line marking and mowing and all the necessary things for the kids to play, including selling drinks and lollies out of their cars. Neville Cripps, Doug Jeffries and Ernie Westlake were among the first parents to contribute enormously to establish the club in its early years. Ernie went on to become a President and Chairman of the Association (now Football Gold Coast). The first playing strip was a T shirt embossed with a single blue stripe on the front and was made up by some of the mothers.



By 1966 the club had grown to the three teams U/8, U/10 and U/12 however some players had to double up, - under eights into under tens and under tens into under twelves etc. Sign-on and meetings were held under the trees at a picnic table. It was decided at this time to formalise the unofficial club and it had its inaugural meeting in the Currumbin RSL. Prominent fathers who attended included: Neville Cripps, Ian Gordon, Doug Jeffries, Alan

Lawton, Duncan McKenna Snr, Eddie Wardell and Ernie Westlake. Neville Cripps became the first elected President and his wife Nean the Secretary.



Duncan McKenna Snr who had represented Australia at soccer stayed supporting the club for the rest of his life. Club names like Palm Beach Hotspurs and Palm Beach Pilchards were put forward at this meeting but Palm Beach Currumbin Soccer Club won the day. The playing strip was now a white shirt emblazoned with a large blue vee, still being made by the mothers.

In 1971 the playing field near the old Palm Beach Bowls Club was reclaimed unannounced by the

Main Roads Department and only discovered when the club went to mark out the field for the new season and found survey pegs everywhere marking the new and now existing highway.

The first game of the season was postponed until a suitable ground was found. Urgent

calls to council for help led to an unused field behind the Tugun Bowls Club. This was a better field but the bowls club didn't appreciate soccer balls going onto the greens and kids in boots trying to retrieve them. Still with only three teams, the club now incorporated Tugun into its name to become Palm Beach Currumbin Tugun Soccer Club.



In 1972 John Neumann and his company were developing Palm Beach and suggested we approach council for a couple of playing fields on a recreational area west of Mallowa Drive. The then President Mal Sutherland had many lengthy meetings with council which ultimately led to us being given two fields at our present location, both being in an east/west configuration. Access was past the hockey club along a dirt road as 19<sup>th</sup> Ave past Mallowa Drive was not established at the time. There were no

showers or change rooms only a chamfer board shed toilet but the grounds were a significant step forward for the club. It was at this time that Palm Beach Currumbin Lions Club donated the striped blue and white strip which



*All the club players in the first year at Mallowa Drive 1972*

had an embroidered lion emblem on the front. Club meetings were held at the Currumbin Nippers clubhouse thanks to the involvement of John and Shirley Neumann. Fundraising was always an issue and the nippers club was used for social

nights etc. Duncan McKenna and Kon Lipins also ran raffles at the Miami hotel helped out at times by club members who were on a roster.

Senior soccer was introduced by the Association in 1975 and Palm Beach entered its first senior team in 1976. The club had continued to grow and senior football was a natural progression, as the enthusiasm was there and the club had no trouble fielding a team.

The need for a building was long overdue by this time as drinks and refreshments were still being sold out of a car trailer and subsequently from a small wooden shed which had been put together by a few of the members and it was very popular for a while but not with council! Fundraising was continuous, and after much planning and discussion a building was designed by an architect in Coolangatta and construction of our club building commenced in September. The foundations were poured on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1977.

Fundraising also brought us our first floodlights in 1977. We were the first club to install them, just two timber power poles with one floodlight on each on field two. The club was proud to achieve this step forward making night time training available for the first time.

At a meeting held in a now built council amenity block, which at the time was one single room, the committee decided to become a Limited Liability Company (LLC) under the Companies Act and the present constitution was adopted on 12<sup>th</sup> Oct 1979. This was a far sighted move in the way the club was administered, both protecting members and making us a non profit organisation. We were the first soccer club on the coast to be made in to a limited company.

1979 saw the club building progress to lock up stage with voluntary tradesmen and members giving many hours of time and labour. There was still much work to be done but the building was functional. Where meetings previously had to be held at Currumbin nippers club or the amenity block, we could now be in our own building. We were the first soccer club on the coast to have its own clubhouse. A proud achievement!

It was still 1979 and with no adequate competition for u/16 players on the coast the club decided to enter the Brisbane South competition, however Brisbane would not accept Palm Beach as we were a registered Gold Coast club so we called the team Pacific Colts. It was yet another first and an excellent move by the club with the team attracting quality players from other clubs on the coast.

In 1980, after much deliberation and regret the Board of Directors disbanded the senior soccer team for bringing the club and game in to disrepute. It was quite a courageous decision with the issue making national headlines in some papers. The Association decided to allow the dismissed team to continue in the competition which led to the birth of Burleigh Heads Soccer Club. Some players were invited to return, which they did the following year in a reformed team. The rivalry still exists between the two clubs to this day.

In 1983 after years of fundraising and planning and with great assistance from the then Ald Trevor Coomber, a fully lit floodlit field was switched on. It was the first

floodlit soccer field on the coast to be lit to a standard for night matches. This was also the year we introduced the shark as our emblem and became Palm Beach Sharks.

It is now 1984, twenty years from the start and the club reached a then record of 365 juniors, two senior teams and a ladies team. There was also an over 30s team formed.

The second stage of floodlighting came in 1985 when field two was lit to a standard sufficient for night games. We were now able to stage two games at night simultaneously.

In 1987 the club decided to celebrate twenty years of existence and hired the Currumbin Primary School hall for its anniversary. It was a proud and happy time for the club with past Presidents and dignitaries attending the night including Doug Jeffries and wife Lynda who cut the celebratory cake.

Field one, our main field previously ran east/west along side field two and in 1989 it was decided to reconfigure it to run parallel with the clubhouse with a view to having future club buildings approximately on the half way line. This involved rearranging floodlight poles to their present position and adding more lighting poles to field two. Field one was then graded and completely renovated with new grass.

The club had been suggesting to the local Alderman that an earth bank be built around field one to make it in to a kind of theatre giving it atmosphere. It was an ambitious request, partly achieved, which in 1990 led to what is now known as the hill.

The first extension to the clubhouse was in 1991 when a front covered patio area was enclosed giving the club a children's room, a kitchen, and enclosed dining room. The side of the building was also extended giving the club an office and what is now the loading bay. This was an enormous step forward and was in preparation for a full licence.

Dealing with Council, the Licensing Commission and a couple of vocal resident objectors was an arduous task, but in June 1992 the club obtained a full licence. The first fully licensed soccer club on the Gold Coast. Application to install poker machines was made at the same time, as they had not long been introduced to Queensland. This was also the year we celebrated with a twenty fifth anniversary, this time at the Twin Towns RSL on 15<sup>th</sup> Aug in the Anzac Room.

Further celebrations came in 1997 when we once again had an anniversary, - this time our thirtieth on 5th of July at Currumbin RSL in the upstairs function room.

The year 2000 saw the club take a giant step forward by entering the State League, the highest level of football in the clubs history. It was a competition by invitation only and we entered the competition taking over the side of Gold Coast City formally the Gamblers which was the Federation's representative side. We still maintained two senior teams in the Gold Coast League. In 2003 State league reverted to Brisbane Premier League where we now used our name of Palm Beach. This saw us supporting three teams in Brisbane including youth and three teams on the Gold Coast including women. Six senior teams in all.

Altogether our honours in Brisbane were:

2004 Winners U/21 summer cup, Youth team runners up to Brisbane Lions in Premiership. 2005 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Premiers and Grand Final runners up. Winners SEQ



Cup. Reserve Grade Premiers and Grand Final Winners. We also were Brisbane Premier League Club Champions. This was fantastic achievement!  
Sadly, after much deliberation and regret, the club withdrew its three teams from Brisbane Premier League in 2008 due to financial constraints.

2007 was a year of celebration once again with our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on 17<sup>th</sup> November. Many ex players and supporters of years gone by attended, making it a truly great night. This time we had the luxury of celebrating in our own building which was in the throes of being expanded yet again to include an enlarged kitchen and dining room and covered walkway to the entrance. The building now extended across the service road, which used to run immediately in front of the club, bringing it closer to the field.

By 2011 the success and progress of the club had been acknowledged by Gold Coast Soccer Federation by making us Club Champions for the ninth time!  
(1991,92,93,94,97,98,99,2010,2011.)

The club and its history will continue but to think from a handful of kids it has grown to eighty junior teams with seven hundred and seventy one kids which includes 109 girls, plus seven senior and three women's teams.....quite a journey which includes many firsts. All this of course would not have been possible without the help of the volunteer coaches, managers, committee members and sponsors over the years and should they read this will know who they are. Thank you.

In 2012 we were invited by Queensland Football to be in the newly formed National Premier League (NPL) and were granted a five year license, once again a first for the club and the Gold Coast. We became both Premiers and Champions of Queensland at this level in 2014.

Regretfully after five years we did not renew our NPL licence due to financial constraints and field requirements. This was the second time the club withdrew from a higher level of football for financial reasons.

Palm Beach has produced from our juniors, many great players, several of whom have gone on to play in the Gold Coast League, the Brisbane Premier League, State League and the A League and for Australia.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am deeply indebted to all the people I have spoken to about the club (about thirty so far) and in particular ex- President Mal Sutherland who set me on my way. Blair Cripps the son of the first President who sent me invaluable information on the very early years together with Doug and Lynda Jeffries, Ernie Westlake and Steve Ravenscroft. Without you this would not have been possible and I thank you most sincerely.

***Tony Rapallo***  
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