

who was one of Rugby League's most inspiring performers and a legend in his own time.

Richard Murray Tooth

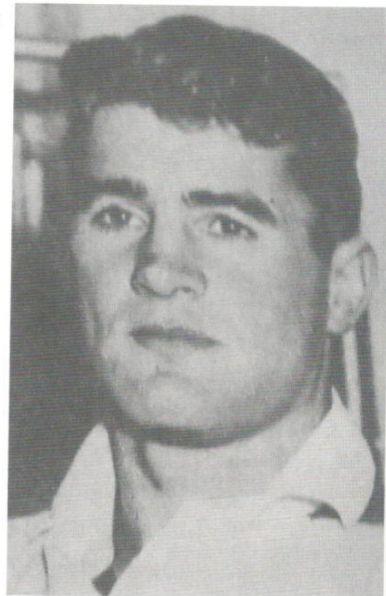
Dick Tooth was by far the most versatile back in Wallaby teams of the 1950s as a fly half, fullback and centre and he even filled in as a winger in minor representative matches for Australia. Between 1951 and 1957, he played ten tests for Australia and captained the team against the New Zealand All Blacks in 1957 during their Australian tour. A footballer of all-round ability, he could fill any backline position like a specialist. He never played a game in which he was not fully involved for the full eighty minutes and his defence was always rock solid.

In his youth before he headed for Sydney to study Medicine at university, he became an outstandingly promising surf lifesaver for Cook's Hill Surf Life Saving Club. For example, at a district carnival in January 1947 at Caves Beach, he won the highly competitive Northern Districts Junior Surf Belt championship for his Club.

In August 1948, he was awarded the E.N. Alexander Trophy for the best Senior Surf Point Score of the 1947–48 summer season, clearly indicating his prominence in interclub competition as well as immaculate attendance for training and weekend patrol.²¹ He was a keen resourceful member of the R&R team and proved an outstanding swimmer in surf races.

In a sparkling career as a famed rugby back, as well as playing for Sydney University, New South Wales and Australia, he played senior grade football with the Randwick Club for two seasons, in the United Kingdom for Rosslyn Park Rugby Football Club as captain, the North Ireland Rugby Football Club and the Wolfhounds (the Irish equivalent of the Barbarians). At County level, he represented Middlesex. He was also chosen to play for the 'J.M. Williams International Fifteen' in fixtures against the famed Penzance Pirates Rugby Union Football Club made up primarily of overseas international players living and playing in the United Kingdom. In 2004, Peter Jenkins rated him amongst the hundred greatest Wallabies ever to pull on a jersey. Jenkins emphasised his leadership qualities and ability, his tactical acumen and his overall on-field 80-minute engagement, especially as he could kick strongly off both feet, had sure hands and a great crash tackle that broke up many dangerous opposition attacking moves.

Dick Tooth, who was born on 21 September 1929 in the southern New South



Above:
Dick Tooth

²¹ CHSLSC Committee Minutes, 8 August 1948.

Wales town of Bombala, lived for his first six years on his grandfather's nearby sheep property close to the New South Wales/Victoria border. Then his family moved to the tiny village of Come by Chance near Walgett where his father had obtained a job as overseer of a local sheep station. But the Great Depression hit hard and Dick's father, who was a Gallipoli and Western Front veteran of the 6th Light Horse, found himself jobless. The family then moved to Newcastle where Dick's uncle, a doctor for BHP, had found his father a job at the steelworks. Dick started school there at the age of seven.

Dick played Rugby League throughout his secondary schooldays at Newcastle Boys High School²² and played in its First Grade Rugby League team for three years. On Saturdays, he played League for Central Newcastle in the Under 16 district competition. Being in the high school team, he was not supposed to play on Saturdays, so he appeared on the Central Newcastle Program under the name of 'A. N. Other'.

While he was playing with the Under 16s, Clive Churchill was playing in its Under 18s side. The first First Grade match Dick played for the school was against the Marist Brothers side that included Churchill as its star five-eighth. At Newcastle Boys High when Tooth reached the eligible age, he became a prominent member of Cook's Hill Surf Life Saving Club until he went to Sydney University after successfully completing the Leaving Certificate, matriculating and gaining a Commonwealth Scholarship in the first year it was offered.

Dick's achievements in sport in Newcastle were aptly summarised in "Sportspourri", the local newspaper's regular column:

Versatile Sportsman

R. "Dick" Tooth, prominent Newcastle surfer, has stronger claims, at the age of 17, to be ranked among the district's most versatile sportsmen. His performance in swimming, surfing, football and athletics compare favourably with those of the best of the seniors in any of the various [surf] clubs.

Last year, whilst a member of the Newcastle Boys' High School he was senior champion winning every event from 50 metres to 800 metres, including backstroke and diving, at the school's annual carnival.

Later in the year, he was prominent on the football field, and shone out again in the athletic carnival in the high jump and field events.

As a member of the Cook's Hill Surf Club he has represented the club and won the Northern District junior belt title last year, and was a member of the R&R team which did so well throughout the year.

22 Peter Jenkins, *The Top 100 Wallabies*, Random House Australia, Sydney, 2004, pp.336–8; Pollard, *Australian Rugby. The Game & the Players*, pp.616–7; Jack Pollard, *Australian Rugby Union. The Game & the Players*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1984, pp.819–22.

This season he has been the most consistent in winning the beach and surf events.

These comments illustrate Tooth's great sporting energy, all-round ability and his commitment to teammanship.

A photograph titled 'Surfmen Train at Bar Beach' appeared in the *Newcastle Morning Herald* on 23 January 1946. It showed an R&R team marching in training on Bar Beach with the Club's reel in preparation for the March Past event in a coming surf carnival. A slender, erect and handsome Dick Tooth is leading, left hand holding the reel with Peter Harrison on the left hand side. Others who were either junior or senior members that made up the practice team included R. Waterson, A. Swain, R. McIntosh and J. Stephenson. It is clear that Tooth had already become a prominent member of the Club while in the senior years at Newcastle Boys High School. On 22 December 1947, he was successfully nominated to full membership of the Cook's Hill Club, moving up from the junior ranks.²³

Dick Tooth entered Sydney University in 1948 and enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Forestry with the aim of switching to Medicine the following year. While at the University, he played inter-collegiate rugby for St Andrew's College where he stayed and joined the University Rugby Club. He soon became a stand-out player as a fullback, centre and fly half, after beginning briefly in fourth grade. He made his way up to the reserve grade and then on to first grade. He was extremely durable on the field and his tackling was devastating.

In one of his first representative games, Tooth played in the centres for Australian Universities against a NSW XV as a preliminary to the Australian Universities tour of New Zealand. He had an outstanding tour of New Zealand in 1949 with a strong representative Australian Universities side, having been picked from second grade in which he was coached by the astute Harold Masters, a 1922 All Black. For combined Australian Universities, Tooth played three 'tests' as inside centre against Combined New Zealand Universities who fielded a strong, hard-running side. His sterling performances in New Zealand won him a place in Sydney University's First XV in 1950 and he was soon on his way up, especially from 1951 when a new coach "Joe" Kraefft,²⁴ a former Wallaby, took over. The University First XV won the major premiership under Kraefft in 1951. Kraefft stressed the basics and moving the ball which admirably suited Tooth's rapidly developing style of play. Tooth won Rugby Union Blues for Sydney University in 1949 and 1950. In 1951, he represented Australian Universities again when New

23 Cook's Hill SLSC Committee Minutes, 22 December 1947.

24 Donald "Joe" Kraefft played six tests for Australia in the Second Row and five matches for NSW. His club was Sydney University. He was born in 1922.

Zealand Combined Universities toured Australia. He played in three University Premiership teams: 1951, 1954 and 1955.

In 1950, Tooth, who replaced the injured rugby great Trevor Allan, and his Club mate Jack Bromley were partnered in the centres for New South Wales against the British Isles. It was Tooth's first experience at playing outside centre. (He was used to playing five-eighth for University.) The British Lions, the best team to visit Australia up until that time, won 22 to 6, leaving Tooth and Bromley heavily bruised and battered, but much the wiser about the harder subtleties of backline play. As youthful new representatives, they had been up against the top five-eighth (Jackie Kyle) and centres combination (Bleddyn Williams and Jack Matthews then considered the world's best) that the Lions have ever fielded. But it was a worthwhile learning experience and Tooth and Bromley tackled their hearts out.

Dick Tooth's real breakthrough came in representative football the next year against the New Zealand All Blacks. By cleverly running the blind side on one occasion, Tooth set up rampaging forward Rex Mossop for New South Wales' only try. He then played for Australia in all three tests as five-eighth. The first test was his debut match for Australia. They lost narrowly, 8–0. In the second test, the Wallabies lost narrowly again, 17–11; the third test was also a loss, 16–6.

In the second test, Dick Tooth starred. He led many attacks and his 'magnificent defence was capped with a try'. Nick Shehadie, the great Wallaby forward, was the only other try scorer. During the match, Tooth in attack constantly challenged the New Zealand side that had a much heavier pack of forwards. In this test, the twenty-two-year-old Tooth scored his first try in international company.²⁵ Again he learnt many things from the experience as a scholar of the game that he was able to incorporate into his play. He was picked for the Wallaby tour of New Zealand, but had to withdraw. He had fourth year medical exams and the Australian Rugby Union would not let him travel a few days late. Neither would the Medical Board allow him to do the exams a few days earlier. In 1953, he was devastated to miss the tour of South Africa through injury. Scoring three tries in the grand final for University and winning the Sydney competition was at least some consolation.

In a premiership rugby match for Sydney University in early August 1953 at University Oval against Parramatta, Dick Tooth gave a masterly display as fly half in his team's win of 34 to 3. He scored three tries, 'handled the ball with such perfection that he never dropped a pass and in defence saved at least three tries'.²⁶ Earlier in the same year on 4 July, Tooth had scored three tries against Randwick, again as five-eighth. He 'made each try with powerful burst through tackles

²⁵ *Sunday Herald Sporting Section*, 8 July 1951.

²⁶ *Sporting Section*, 2 August 1953.

near the Randwick line'.²⁷ He handled perfectly, tackled and backed up well.

When the Fijians toured Australia for the second time in 1954, Tooth's epic battles with the giant Fijian winger Joseta "Jo" Levula over several games quickly became part of rugby folklore in Australia. Tooth played five times against Fiji, for South Harbour (the City side), New South Wales in two matches and for Australia in both tests. He played centre in

his first outing against Fiji and fullback in the remaining four. By this time, he was playing fullback regularly for University. His tackling at fullback frequently forced the crowd-pleasing Fijians into error.

In his first test, Australia against Fiji won by a narrow margin, 22 to 19. In reporting this test, the *Brisbane Telegraph* used Dick Tooth in their headline: 'Tooth, Tough Morsel, blunts Fiji "Fangs"'. They claimed that Tooth as fullback played a 'magnificent game', and starred in a close win by Australia. He was at his best whenever Fiji looked dangerous with 'splendid tackling' and fine line kicking. He gave the Australians 'many a respite' and thus helped to win the game before a huge Brisbane crowd.²⁸ Tooth's tough tackling at fullback stopped many promising Fijian attacking moves. Tooth did the same in the second test where Australia lost 18 to 16 on the full-time bell. The Fijian win would have been a much higher score without Tooth's brilliant defence at fullback. In one match, his two crash tackles against the great high-stepping, sixteen-stone winger Jo Levula became legendary stuff in Rugby Union circles. Eye-witnesses can never forget them! A New Zealand press clipping pointed out that 'Dick Tooth, a fullback for the Aussies' reduced the 'mighty Jo Levula to a pigmy with the fury of his tackling'. In the final test against Fiji, again Dick Tooth gave a magnificent display.²⁹ In the same year, Tooth captained University to a great grand final win.

In his only overseas tour for the Australian Wallabies — to New Zealand in 1955 — Dick Tooth fully displayed his versatility and adaptability. In the third test, he was playing as fly half, his third position in as many games.



Above:
Dick Tooth making a break for the Wasatuis (NSW) against Fiji

²⁷ *Sporting Section*, 5 July 1953.

²⁸ *Brisbane Telegraph*, 5 June 1954.

²⁹ *Sporting Section*, 27 June 1954.

At the beginning of 1956, Dick Tooth captained Australian University on their tour of Japan known as the 'goodwill tour' because it was the first tour of an Australian representative sporting team to Japan since the Second World War. The team had to be briefed by the foreign affairs department, but it was a great success. This tour was one of the highlights of Dick Tooth's life. The team was treated with great respect and enthusiasm by the Japanese Universities and the government. It was only the second time Australian Universities had toured Japan (the first had been in 1933). They won all but one match of the major games, including the three tests against Combined Japanese Universities. The tour opened up relationships with Japanese Universities that have continued to this day in competitive sport and in cultural and academic exchanges between the two countries.

After graduating in Medicine in mid-1956 and, in line with restrictions that made Tooth ineligible to play for University, he had to consider playing for another district club and he chose Randwick who he served well for two seasons, 1956 and 1957; he captained Randwick in 1957.

He was appointed to the Prince of Wales Hospital at Randwick so he decided it was logical to play for the local club making travel to training a simple matter. This was despite complaints from the Drummoyne Club as he lived with his wife in a unit at Petersham within the Drummoyne rugby club district boundaries. He found the Randwick Club different to his former one as it was more disciplined. The roll up to both training and Saturday games was particularly well organised. While the University Club was part of a much larger more complex organisation, Randwick was a rugby club and nothing else. Players came from all walks of life and Dick was to meet a whole new range of interesting people just as he had in his youth in the Cook's Hill SLS Club.

As a result of the ever-present examinations and the practical training in medicine, the number of tests he played for Australia was limited to ten. At times, he had to rule himself out; at other times, the Australian Rugby Union Board were unsympathetic about Dick having to join a tour a week or so later after sitting for a final examination.

During his playing career in Sydney district rugby and in representative football from that base, *Dick Tooth won many accolades, especially from the sporting media. Journalists predicting the outcomes of matches for the following Saturday frequently described him as the danger man the opposition needed to contain if they were to have any chance. One assessment by sports commentator Alan Hulls in his newspaper column in a metropolitan paper ran along such lines:*

Adaptability. There aren't many better Rugby footballers in this country than Union's Dick Tooth. Earlier in the season [1954] we saw him play high class and courageous football as State and Australian

fullback against the Fijians. These displays ranked him amongst the all time RU greats in the position.

Now because University needs him more in the position, he is proving himself the best of his code as five-eighth. And, as far as we are concerned he would leave any of the League's five-eighths for the season for dead too.

Last Saturday Tooth played a major part in University's decisive win against Eastwood.

He stood up to the fierce spotting of the opposition without it affecting his cool efficiency, and picked his time and opportunity to play a decisive part in a couple of tries that sealed the game for his team.

He had reached that high peak of a star footballer's form when he seems to do the right thing instinctively — and always.

This insightful assessment was not alone in the sporting journalistic world. In September 1954, the popular *Sporting Life* published by Associated News Limited in Sydney congratulated Tooth on winning one of their well-regarded 'All Australian Team' trophies for that year as RU's best fullback.³⁰ In the same competition, Clive Churchill won the 'All Australian Team trophy for Rugby League, also as fullback. Both Tooth (RU) and Churchill (RL) were on the top of the separate lists as 'The Best Footballers of 1954' in *Sporting Life* at the end of that year's football season.

Ex-international Trevor Allan, as a sports journalist, mentioned that Tooth played several times against Churchill while at school. Churchill played for Marist Brothers 1st grade while Tooth played for Newcastle Boys High 1st grade Rugby League at overlapping times. They both became junior members of Cook's Hill SLS Club and both lived in Merewether not far from Bar Beach. In the games against Fiji, Allan described his vivid memories of Tooth's 'all-round coolness when under pressure and his flawless kicking for touch'. He continued:

Levula (Fiji's star winger) is an even-time runner of magnificent physique with abundant weight that could shift anything in his path. What a shock Levula must have received when he was stopped time and time again by Tooth who though well built, cannot be classed as a big man.

The impact of these two boys when they clashed head-on made everyone shudder, both in the stands and on the hills. But on each occasion Levula was stopped dead in his tracks by the unperturbed Tooth. Only Dick himself knows just how difficult those driving runs of Levula's were to stop.

... Tooth gained the admiration of many Rugby followers by his

³⁰ S.C. King, Editor, *Sporting Life*, 60–70 Elizabeth St Sydney to R.M. Tooth, 30 September 1954, Dick Tooth's Scrapbook collection.

fearless tackling to save some rather desperate moments.³¹

In 1956 while playing for Randwick, Dick Tooth had the honour of being chosen to play for the New Zealand Barbarians in Auckland on 6 October as five-eighth. The other Australians chosen were the then Australian captain Alan Cameron (second row), Eddie Stapleton (winger) and Brian Cox (halfback). The match was played against Auckland Province at Eden Park. It was the first time any Australian players had been invited to play for the Barbarians outside Australia. By then, the Barbarians, first formed in England, had clubs in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia and had the privilege to invite players from any rugby country, usually those with representative credentials and an international reputation.

In 1955, Tooth again won one of *Sporting Life's* trophies — this time as a RU five-eighth. Clive Churchill won the RL trophy again that year as fullback — the only position he played after leaving school. Soon after, Dick went on his famous tour of Japan as Australian Universities' captain. This was a triumphant end to his University career as a Union player. It was then on to Randwick and captaincy of Australia in 1957 against the All Blacks.

As skipper for Australia, Dick Tooth, now playing for Randwick, played two tests against New Zealand as five-eighth with an excellent backline. But they were starved for the ball as the All Blacks had a much superior and heavier forward pack. Australia lost both tests, 25–11 and 22–9. In this short home series, despite a splendid performance as captain and five-eighth under difficult conditions, Dick Tooth was the shock omission from the end-of-year Wallaby tour of the United Kingdom and never played another test despite his brilliance, leadership ability and versatility. His overall ability as a utility player, in a curious way, probably hampered his test career. And yet he never gave a bad performance in the test arena. His credentials were faultless. The Wallabies had a disastrous 1957–58 tour without Dick Tooth, losing every test match: against Wales, Ireland, England, Scotland and France. Tooth's ability as an astute tactician and his maturity were sadly missed. His omission from the tour side made no sense to the international Rugby world. As many astute rugby devotees saw it, the decision was even ludicrous. The English press were astounded with the Australian selectors' decision.

The fault lay in the hands of one of the Australian selectors who had had a dispute with Tooth after the Queensland test. These were the petty politics of the Australian Rugby Union of the time.

Despite this absurd omission from the Wallabies, Dick Tooth continued to play senior rugby and enjoy it. As the door of Australian representation closed, other doors immediately opened. If he had been chosen for the tour of Britain, France and North America, he had planned to stay on in England afterwards as

31 Trevor Allan, 'Dick Tooth. Star Rugby Union Player of 1954!', *Sport*, October 1954, p.65.

young doctors were in high demand there and he wished to enrol in postgraduate studies in London. Having missed selection, he left for England anyway at the end of 1957 with his wife Marianne and baby daughter Robyn and concentrated on his medical career for the next three years. Before leaving, he had received letters from four English rugby clubs inviting him to play with them. The family travelled to London on the Swedish ship *Nimbus* that carried twelve passengers. Dick worked on it as the ship's doctor for the seven-week journey. They left Australia on Saturday, 25 November. Dr Tooth was to start his studies early the following year at the Royal College of Surgeons.

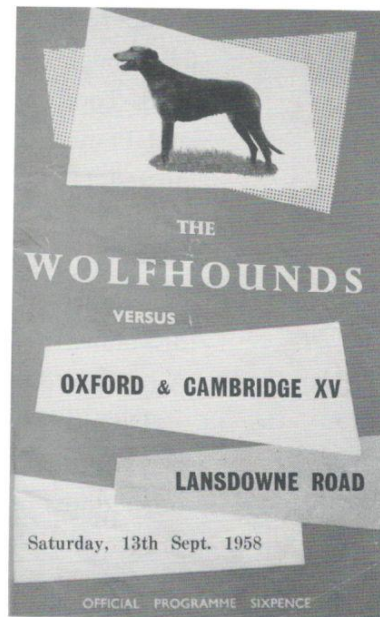
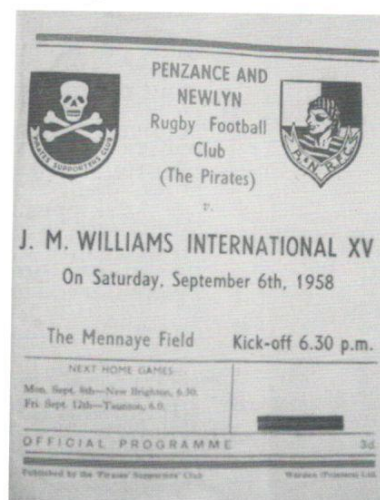
Before his ship docked, however, three representatives of the Rosslyn Park Rugby Football Club met it in a small fast motor boat, came aboard near Greenwich and implored Tooth to play for their club in the senior competition. They offered him a bed-sit flat for his family in Chelsea. He realised he was able to find time to play rugby again and enjoyed his involvement with Rosslyn Park and representing Middlesex in various fixtures. He then went to Belfast in Northern Ireland for a year and played for the North of Ireland Club and the Irish Wolfhounds. He enjoyed playing in fixtures under the British system — quite different to the intense weekly competitions of the Sydney winter season. And the grounds in the UK were much softer. In his three years in England and Northern Ireland, Tooth played mainly as a fullback, rather than five-eighth. He did more attacking than the usual more defensive UK fullback and was credited with introducing the Australian method of making the extra man in surprise backline manoeuvres. His defence remained as immaculate and brilliant as ever.

One of his last representative games was for the Irish Wolfhounds against the combined Oxford and Cambridge XV at Lansdowne Road Dublin on Saturday, 13 September 1958. A week earlier, he appeared for J.M. Williams International XV against the Penzance and Newlyn Rugby Football Club (The Pirates) at the Mennaye Field, Penzance. In both fixtures, he played fullback. In the Penzance program, he was described as representing Australia. He also represented Middlesex in the rugby county championships. He was preferred by the selectors to the current English fullback John Scott. Dick Tooth was thus able to complete his rugby playing career on a high note.

Tooth returned to Australia at the end of 1959. In 1961, the University Club approached him to coach their senior side. After some hesitation, he accepted and led the club to a Sydney district

Below:

Two important fixtures Dick Tooth played in in Great Britain.



first grade premiership in 1961 and 1962, the centenary year for Sydney University, the oldest club in the Sydney district competition.

Ronald W. “Twinkletoes” Meadows

In the rugby season after Dick Tooth’s international career had been unfairly terminated, Ronald “Twinkletoes” Meadows began to emerge as a highly-promising international prospect. Meadows was a Cook’s Hill Surf Life Saving Club member and prominent Newcastle hooker who played locally for the Wanderers Club.

As a surf lifesaver, Meadows was an excellent oarsman in surfboat competition. In 1955, he was a member of the Bilgola SLS Club that came second to the Nobby’s team in the Australian Championships at North Steyne. When working for the Department of Main Roads, he joined Cook’s Hill and was in the crew that came second in the State Championships in 1958. His fellow crew members were Dave Wylie (sweep), Dudley Sills, Barry Williamson and Frank d’Arcy. Meadows also rowed with the same crew in the 1959 Marathon between North Bondi and North Wollongong over two days, stopping overnight at Stanwell Park. Out of thirty-four starters, the Cook’s Hill crew came a meritorious fourth.³²

Ron Meadows came to the eye of the Wallaby selectors when he put in a lusty game for the Newcastle District representative side against the touring New Zealand Maoris at Newcastle Sports Ground on 7 June 1958. Meadows found himself in the Wallaby side against the tourists the following weekend, replacing Wallaby hooker Jim Brown who had retired after the final test against the All Blacks on 1 June 1957, ironically under Dick Tooth’s captaincy in his final international in Australia.

Meadows was first blooded internationally against the New Zealand All Blacks for Newcastle at the Newcastle Sports Ground on 8 June 1957 when the tourists won by 20 to 9. He was part of an all-Wanderers front row that performed strongly throughout the game. A crowd of ten thousand turned up to witness a disappointing All Blacks display. At half-time, Newcastle were leading 9–8. Home-grown referee optometrist John Miner put on an excellent display and controlled the game well. The All Blacks players and management agreed that it was their hardest tour game to date (they had already played seven). Their great fullback Don Clarke had kicked them out of danger of losing in the second half.

In June 1958, “Twinkletoes” repeated his vigorous performance for Newcastle, this time against the touring Maoris, and the Wallaby selectors snapped him up for the test side as hooker. He held this position for the rest of the 1958 season despite a strong challenge by Randwick’s Peter Johnson who later became Australia’s most capped player until the professional era began. Meadows, however, played



Above:
Ron Meadows

³² Information supplied by Frank d’Arcy.