

OAKES Look out, factions, here comes Rudd the Reformer - and this time he means business [P38]

YOUR SAY Will Rudd be able to rally the troops? I think not, as the rifts are wider than Bass Strait [P36]

SATURDAY



ULTIMATE WARRIOR

From his teenage footy teammates to hardened soldiers in Afghanistan, Cameron Baird stood out to all, writes Aaron Langmaid

It was in the final tense moments of a match between the Calder Cannons and the Oakley Chargers 15 years ago that a wide-shouldered full-forward made an impression teammates would never forget.

The Cannons had fought back from a six-goal deficit at halftime in the TAC Cup match and were down by five points. In a frantic last passage of play, rising star Paul Chapman emerged from centre-half-back, booting clear to a young midfielder, Jude Bolton, on the boundary.

From there he spotted the towering teammate everybody knew they could rely on. Cameron



Baird stood like a pillar 40m from goal and marked the ball with ease.

As the final siren sounded, the wide-framed teen twisted briefly on his feet, wrapped his wide hands around the leather and firmed his focus. Exhausted

players stood breathless, spectators silent.

"We hadn't looked like winning all day and had done so much hard work," Chapman said. "It all came down to this last kick. But we knew once Baird had the ball in his hands, he could nail the goal."

Baird sent the pill hurtling between the posts from a 45-degree angle.

"He was so pumped," Chapman said. "We all were. I will never forget it."

This was a match-winning moment from a young man who would be hailed as the next Wayne Carey. He possessed the qualities every AFL club looked for.

Continued next page

Courage that can't be taught



CALDER CANNONS FOOTBALL CLUB TAC CUP FINALISTS - 1999

Row: Sara MULKEARNS (Fitness Director), Sean NEESON, Fabian SERRATORE, Chris MITCHELL, Adam JOHNSON, Daniel HOLDSWORTH, Luke SUTTON, Iec BALE (Physiotherapist)

Row: Doug McCASKER (Property Steward), Brent DRYDEN, Brendan HOLLOW, Rhodes COUSLAND, David CACCAMO, Ben AVERY, Ezra BRAY, Joel BUTTS, Andrew MAGGIORE, Ben WILKINSON, Luke MAY, Paul CHAPMAN, Leigh COLEMAN, Max McLAREN (Runner)

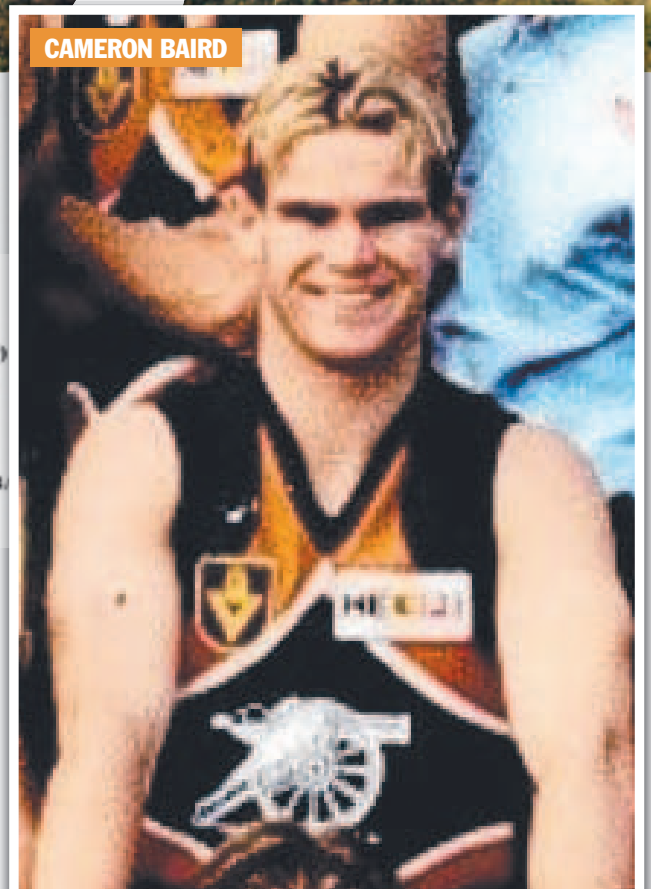
Row: Phil RIDI (Trainer), Phil DUNK (Trainer), Brad HEADLAM (Weights Coach), Andrew WELSH, David JOHNSON, Matt POW, Dale PIGGOTT, James WILSON, Sean DeMORTON, Greg MATTHEWS, Stuart HOYSTED, Travis GLUSCHENKO, Brad WIGHT, Paul KOULOURIOTIS, Sandro BISCARO (Rehab. Co-ordinator), John CARLISLE (Physiotherapist), Fiona ICELY (Trainer)

Row: Rick THOMSON (Team Manager), Ryan O'KEEFE, Steve VERNON, Nathan GRIBBIN, Andrew SAVILL, Adriano MASTRAPASQUA, Ross MONAGHAN (Regional Manager), Robert HYDE (Head Coach), Darryl SUTTON (Assistant Coach), Tim LITTLE, Jeff HEATH, Cameron B.

Row: Adam WINTER, Adam PICKERING, Shane SEXTON (Development Manager)

Row: Jason D'ORAZIO, David RODAN, Frances VIZZINI, Brad ELSE, Simon MAYLOR, Matt FITZGERALD, Ashley CRAIG, Daniel BURROWES.

CAMERON BAIRD



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Standing an imposing six feet, he consistently controlled the forward line. He could get around his opponents and be in the open when needed most.

But, for whatever reason, Baird was never drafted by an AFL team.

Instead he would carve a career far from the footy field, where bruises fade and aggressive shoves are eventually forgotten. He would find purpose half a world away in the dusty heart of Afghanistan.

Here, Corporal Cameron Stewart Baird, 32, would be recognised for the innate and rare ability to put others first, even under enemy fire.

He was a man who seemed fearless as Taliban bullets ricocheted off mud brick walls and around crumpled bodies.

2nd Commando Regiment, earning the Medal for Gallantry in 2007 after he pulled a dying mate to safety and led a squadron door to door through an enemy strong hold.

It was also where this selfless young man would make the ultimate sacrifice.

Last week Cpl Baird became the 40th Australian soldier to die in the conflict.

HE was killed in a firefight at Khod Valley in the Oruzgan Province, dying as he lived — forging a path for others to follow. A leader of men.

During a press conference announcing his death, Chief of Defence General David Hurley said Cpl Baird had been the man to watch and was never happier than when the situation demanded decisive action and courage.

For those who never knew him, the soldier would be only briefly mourned as his face was cast across a

television screen late last Monday night. Another man lost to the madness of war.

But for his former footy mates, it was a heart-wrenching reality check and meant so much more.

Chapman and Bolton were among a string of past and present AFL stars, including Geelong's David Johnson and Sydney's Ryan O'Keefe, who once played beside him.

That Cpl Baird missed out on being drafted still puzzled them.

That he rose to become one of Australia's most decorated soldiers didn't.

Former Calder Cannons club manager Ross Monaghan said as a junior footballer Cpl Baird had been as much a leader off the field as he was on it.

"That was one of his gifts, he was a leader in each of his age groups," Monaghan said. "It came as no surprise to me that as a soldier he would eventually be held in such high esteem."

He said the young Baird

regularly drew comparisons with some of footy's champions from anybody watching him but that his appeal extended far beyond his playing ability.

"He was immaculate in the way he went about preparing and playing," Monaghan said.

"You could count on him, on the way he presented himself, and he developed a lot of respect from everybody around him."

He was quiet but could hold a conversation and often made others laugh with his endearing sense of humour.

One late afternoon before training, David Johnson noticed Baird had seemed unusually distant. He asked if he was okay.

"Johnno," Baird said. "One day I will bring out a perfume called Sherrin." The young player then took a long sniff of the football he'd been spinning in his hands. "If a woman smelt like a Sherrin, I wouldn't be able to keep my hands off

her." Johnson said the amusing exchange was etched in his memory.

"This huge smile came across his face," he said. "I loved it."

"It highlighted his sense of humour and still makes me laugh."

For anybody who has heard the story since, more than a funny anecdote, it demonstrated the kind of passion a kid could have.

Cpl Baird saw potential in everything. Even a tired old footy.

"Our lives went in

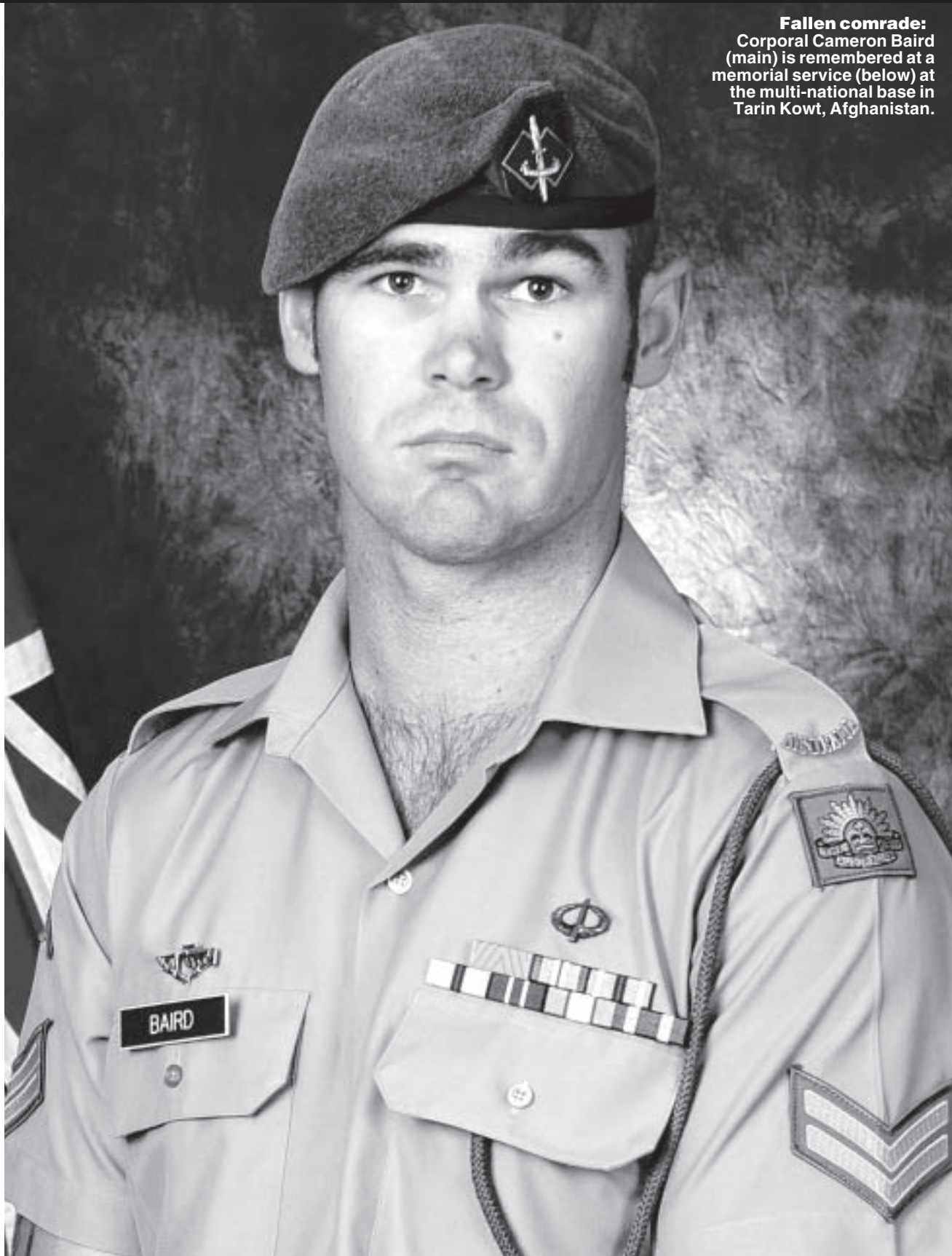
different directions after junior football," Johnson said. "But he has left some very strong memories with me and I feel great sadness toward the loss."

Chapman said Cpl Baird's early determination in games was a reflection of things to come.

He displayed the kind of courage that can't be taught. "You either have it or you don't," Chapman said. "He showed it from a young age."

"Everybody knew that those kind of hard-built and talented big men were hard

HE WASN'T THERE FOR HIMSELF" PAUL CHAPMAN



Fallen comrade: Corporal Cameron Baird (main) is remembered at a memorial service (below) at the multi-national base in Tarin Kowt, Afghanistan.



to come by. He worked hard at his game, he lived and breathed it.

"He was definitely a team player. That was one of the things we loved about him. You could just tell he wasn't there for himself."

JUDE Bolton was one of the last of Cpl Baird's former footy teammates to see him alive.

They caught up before Christmas because the veteran soldier was fundraising for injured

Diggers and wanted to get a signed Swans jumper for auction.

"Mate, you can imagine that some of these guys are really battling," Cpl Baird told him. "It is such a struggle for so many of them."

The Swans player said their last conversation would stand as an example of his sincerity. That a bloke who, after all the accolades and acts of gallantry, cared far more for those around him.

"You often hear of people being killed in action serving

overseas but it never hits home until it's somebody you know," Bolton said.

"It's still hard to believe." On Wednesday, those soldiers who Cpl Baird had served to protect, carried his body on their shoulders for the last time.

Like a footy team before a grand final, members of the Special Operations Task Group and ISAF Partners stood side by side.

Troops carried his coffin, draped in the Australian flag, through a guard of honour from Australians,

members of Afghan partner units, Americans, Slovaks, and civilian colleagues on to a Royal Australian Air Force C-130 Hercules.

This week, his family and closest friends will remember him for everything he was long before he put on a uniform. His footy mates will recall his high-flying marks and cling to fading team photos.

There "Bairdy" will remain, cross-armed in camaraderie, with a wide smile beaming back at them.

Forty not that hard to bare for Gwyneth

Maggie Ryan

REACHING the big 4-0 has been an issue for generations of Hollywood's leading ladies, but not Gwyneth Paltrow.

The Oscar-winning actor has shown she has no issues with hitting her 40s by revealing almost all in her raunchiest role yet.

Pictures of Gwyneth in skimpy lingerie in *Thanks For Sharing* (right) are already making headlines two months before the sexy comedy is released.

The film sees the superstar playing a woman who falls in love with recovering sex addict Adam (Mark Ruffalo).

Paltrow credits her happy home life with Coldplay frontman husband Chris Martin and their children Apple, 8, and Moses, 6, for giving her the confidence to take on new challenges.

And she is determined to dispel the myth that Hollywood's leading ladies can only be on a downwards slope when they hit 40. "I know a lot of people worry about it but I like being older."

"I know who I am, I have a wonderful family, I am settled and very, very happy. I feel better in myself and I think that shows on the outside too. I feel better in my body than I did in my 20s."

But age does seem to be playing a part in some of her decisions, with the star seemingly uncertain if she can keep up with Iron Man in another comic book blockbuster.

"I don't know, I'm getting too old for this s---, y'know what I mean?" she laughed.

Paltrow, who raised the ire of working mums last year when saying women who wanted to have children should seriously consider being stay-at-home mums, said she agreed to take on her role as Phoebe in *Thanks for Sharing* after learning she could take Apple and Moses along.

"They called me up and sent me the script. I read it and it was really, really good. So I met the director, Stuart Blumberg, and he was a smart guy and seemed like he knew what he was doing. It was just a couple of weeks in New York in the fall and I could bring my kids so I was like 'OK, let's do this'."

She also had her children on set on *Avengers* and *Iron Man*, but admitted "I prefer it when I do the *Iron Man* and *Avengers* movies rather than sex addiction movies".

Paltrow is excited to go from movies with special effects and



action to something so "human and small and funny".

Renowned for preaching about healthy eating and exercise, Paltrow brought out a new book this year called *It's All Good*, with Julia Turshen. It is a spin-off from her often-maligned spiritual and lifestyle website, Goop.

It has already been a big year for Paltrow, taking out the title of most beautiful woman in US magazine *People*. She also had the dubious honour of being named *Star* magazine's most hated celebrity.

Paltrow said *Thanks for Sharing* was a great learning experience for her. "There is a line in the movie where someone says 'Is sex addiction an excuse that men use when they get caught cheating?'"

"But actually it is a real pathology and it was interesting to learn about it and to see what the behaviour is and what causes it."

Her role as Phoebe was apt given Paltrow recently joked about how a friend told her her butt wasn't bad for a 22-year-old stripper.

She laughs that staying in great shape after having children is as simple as "blush and a girdle".

But she admits she also exercises a lot. "It's tough but I really throw myself into it."

While saying she has always been into fashion and is drawn to the beauties of the 1940s, Paltrow admits she doesn't always have the time to look glamorous.

"It just takes too much time to put that much effort into how you look. Like, if I'm going around the block with my kids, or we're going to the supermarket, it's just impossible. But I'm very drawn to that era."

