

Medindie Football Club – A Brief History

by Nick Haines

- Established - 1881
- Joined South Australian Junior Football Association – 1885
- Joined Adelaide and Suburban Association – 1886
- Joined South Australian Football Association – 1888
- Changed name to North Adelaide – 1893

North Adelaide's long history can be traced directly back to the formation of the Medindie Football Club. Medindie was formed back in 1881 when a group of nearby College students (from Prince Alfred College and the now defunct Whinham College) formed a team to play some football matches in the nearby parklands. It's believed they originally played on the parklands north-east of North Adelaide (between North Adelaide and Medindie), before later playing closer to the city (near the site of the current Adelaide University Oval). They took their colours from Prince Alfred College and wore a strip not dissimilar to the one that Prince's football team wore.

Medindie spent the first four years of its existence playing against other 'outside' clubs (i.e. clubs that weren't involved in an organised competition). Amongst these clubs were Prince Alfred College, St Peter's College, Commercial College, Walkerville, Triton, North Parks, Creswick and Semaphore.

In March 1885 the South Australian Junior Football Association was formed, with Medindie as one of the founding members. They played matches against Coromandel Valley, Prospect, Creswick, Medindie, Hindmarsh, Kingston, Lefevre's Peninsula, Semaphore, Albert Park and Fitzroy. They were reasonably successful in their first season, finishing fourth of nine teams (after Semaphore had dropped out during the season).

Players from those days included the Wadham brothers, the Kings, Teale, Wedler, H.Daniels, J.Steer, W.Carter, Collins, Mugg and their first captain, Charles Nitschke, who was to go on and have a lifetime association with the club. John Reedman who was to be one of the greatest names in South Australian football at the turn of last century (and a future dual premierships captain at North Adelaide) began playing for Medindie in 1885.

In 1886 Medindie was promoted to the Adelaide and Suburban Association, and spent the next two seasons playing in that competition.

In 1887 Medindie's captain was Jim Besley who would join 'senior club' South Adelaide during the season. He later returned to Medindie in 1890, and became North Adelaide's first captain (when the name changed in 1893) and first

intercolonial representative (in 1894). His vice-captain Arthur Brown took the reins of captaincy for the rest of the season, and also became vice-captain of North in 1893 (under Besley).

At the end of the 1887 season football in South Australia was in the midst of a crisis. The clubs competing in the competition were (in order of finish that year) Norwood, Port, Adelaide, South, Hotham, and Gawler, with the newly established West finishing last. Due to an ongoing dispute about the use of grounds (amongst other things) the association was split into two groups.

Norwood, Gawler and North Adelaide (who had changed their name from Hotham) formed one group whilst South Adelaide, Adelaide (who had swallowed up the weaker West after only one season) and Port Adelaide formed the other. Medindie (despite its junior status), was invited to join the latter group, with the plan being to have four teams competing against each other.

Medindie's sudden elevation is something of a mystery as it wasn't the strongest club in the Adelaide and Suburban Association, having failed to make the final in both seasons. It is believed that Port Adelaide was behind their being invited to join their group of the Association split.

At the eleventh hour, just prior to the start of the 1888 season, a meeting was held in an attempt to reconcile the opposing parties. This meeting took place in the Town Hall Exchange-room on the evening of Saturday the 5th of May, the day that the football season would normally have commenced.

Such was the seriousness of the situation concerning the split that Medindie (being the 'junior' club) had even offered to resign from the association if it would bring about a solution. However, due to the efforts of a Mr A.J Roberts of the Norwood F.C, liaising with delegates from Port and South, an amicable arrangement was agreed upon by evening's end with Norwood, Gawler and North Adelaide being invited to join the 'new' association. Thus Medindie's generous offer did not need to be accepted.

The following Wednesday night (May 9th) a meeting was held once again at the Town Hall Exchange-room, where it was officially announced that Port, South, Adelaide and Medindie had accepted the applications of the Norwood, North and Gawler clubs to compete alongside them in the 'new' association.

In the lead up to the 1888 season, with the dispute still going on, Medindie had played practice games against its partners in the 'split' association.

On Saturday the 21st of April they played against South Adelaide in the South Park Lands. The game ended in a draw with both sides kicking 2 goals and 9 behinds (not that behinds counted anyway). Medindie did field 25 players however.

The next Saturday they played Port Adelaide at Alberton. Using 23 players this week all they could manage was a 5 goal loss (PA 6-17 d M 1-4).

On Saturday May 5th Medindie played against the South Adelaide Juniors (who played in the Adelaide and Suburban Football Association). The game was seemingly a battle of defences with neither team being able to score goals, and it ended in a draw (M 0-10 dw SA 0-5).

When the 1888 league season finally got started a week later than usual on Saturday 12th May Medindie was scheduled something of a baptism of fire having to play Port Adelaide on their home ground of Alberton Oval first up. In that morning's 'The Register' newspaper, the writer 'Goalpost' saw Medindie's hopes as follows:

“Not much is known of the Medindies. They are essentially a junior team. Some of the men are good, notably the two Browns, Fallon, Flight, Murray, Mosel, Stent and others. They may not win matches at first, but let them take courage and train on. They will do better next season.”

Inclement weather and the fact that Medindie were an unknown quantity combined to attract a poor attendance estimated at just over 100 patrons. Both teams took the field with 19 players each (instead of the usual 20), and for reasons not known neither of the association goal umpires turned up and two members of the crowd were conscripted into carrying out their duties. It should be pointed out that this was after much difficulty, presumably as both men would end up getting soaked from the driving rain.

Arthur Brown captained that first Medindie side and won the toss, and chose to kick toward the railway end of Alberton as that was the way the breeze was blowing. Medindie attacked time and time again during the first quarter, but couldn't get a score on the board. The rain was relentless and didn't look stopping. In fact it was so bad that, to quote the match report from 'The Advertiser':

“A couple of players enshrouded themselves in their overcoats and sought refuge in the pavilion”

Port Adelaide (not surprisingly, being the 'senior' club) won the day with the final score seeing Port 3 goals 8 behinds defeat Medindie 3 behinds. Sellars and Arthur Brown were named Medindie's best.

In their opening games of 1888 both Medindie and North Adelaide (who had gone down to Adelaide) had taken the field in red-and-white uniforms.

On the Thursday night after their debut game (May 17th) at a meeting of the Association the issue of the similarity of colours between the two clubs was raised. As they would be playing each other on May 26th a solution was needed to avoid the clashing of colours. It was decided that Medindie would keep their guernseys and hose (socks) as red and white only, while North Adelaide would add a blue hoop to their red and white guernseys and wear blue and white hose.

The match between the two northern clubs took place on Saturday 26th May on Kensington Oval. Like the previous match about 100 people attended, but unlike in the previous match the weather was perfect. The final result stood at North 5 goals 14 behinds to Medindie's four behinds.

It wasn't to be until the following week against South Adelaide that Medindie were to score a goal (through S.Mole) but that had little bearing on the result with South winning 9 goals 31(!) behinds to Medindie 1 goal 3 behinds.

Medindie's only win in their debut season came late on (22nd September 1888) when they defeated the by then struggling Norths 3 goals 5 behinds to 1 behind.

Medindie finished last in 1888 and prior to the start of the 1889 season it was widely believed that North Adelaide (who had seemingly self destructed as 1888 had gone on) would merge with them.

At North Adelaide's Annual General Meeting on March 13th 1889 it was announced that officials from the club would meet with officials from Medindie to discuss a proposed amalgamation. As they say a week is a long time in football and on March 25th 1889 the daily papers reported an amalgamation of the Adelaide and North Adelaide clubs.

Medindie went onto lose all 15 senior matches in 1889 and naturally finished last (sixth out of six teams). They did however enjoy success during the season in matches against non-league teams such as Prospect, Rovers, Salisbury, The Combined Colleges and The Point Macleay Aborigines, all of whom they managed to defeat.

In 1890 Medindie struggled through another season losing all their matches to the senior teams but they did manage two wins and a draw against the weakening Gawler team.

One of these included a remarkable 11 goals, 17 behinds to 8 behinds victory on the Adelaide Oval on September 1st, as the first match in the holiday double-header. This was to be the only time Medindie was to crack the double figure of goals in a match. This also saved them from the 'spoon' that season with that 'honour' going to Gawler. Gawler were to bow out of the SAFA before the start of the next season.

With five teams competing in the SAFA in 1891 (South, Port, Norwood, Adelaide and Medindie), each team played each other 4 times. Medindie won all four matches against Adelaide but still couldn't crack a win against a leading side.

The 1892 season proved to be a case of something similar for Medindie, with three wins and one draw to their credit, and all against Adelaide. At the end of the season there was talk of changing the name of the club to North Adelaide in the hope that this might bring about a change of fortune, and garner more support from the area. Some (including a high profile but unnamed supporter) objected to this, feeling that a "loss of identity" could result from dropping the name of the suburb and replacing it with that of the area. Also, the fact that the two previous North Adelaide clubs to have competed in the SAFA had disappeared rather quickly wouldn't have helped.

The name change, however, was agreed, and was officially announced at the General Meeting held at the Temperance Hall on Tynte St, North Adelaide on Thursday March 23rd 1893. It was formally accepted by the SAFA at their meeting on Wednesday April 5th 1893. And thus the Medindie Football Club ceased to be, and the North Adelaide Football Club, which still plays today, came into being.

It is worth noting also that during Medindie's time competition in the SAFA it was often referred to by the nickname 'The Dingoes'. However once North Adelaide came into being no more references to this nickname are made.