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**Bros. COLIN JAMES AND KEITH STANLEY WINDON**

### **RUGBY UNION GREATS**

This paper about two of Australia's rugby union greats is based on an obituary for Colin Windon by Julie Blomberg published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Wednesday, 3 December 2003.

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Col Windon, who died five days short of his 82nd birthday, was described as the greatest attacking breakaway in Australia's long rugby history.

They called him "Breeze", and he ran like the wind. Max Howell, rugby historian and author, said there was nothing Windon couldn't do with the ball in hand, and when in full flight he had a distinctive style as the defence closed in on him. Ball held tightly in one arm, bent over for contact, eyes on the defender, hand spread ready for a palm, he was action personified.

He was Australia's leading try scorer for more than thirty years until Brendon Moon bettered his efforts, but he still holds the record for the most tries scored by a breakaway.

Colin Windon was born to Stan and Maude Windon in the Sydney suburb of Randwick. After moving to Coogee, he lived almost all his life in the Randwick local government area.

His father, Stan, was a pioneer of surf lifesaving and a foundation member of the Coogee Surf Club in 1906. He was also involved in other sports clubs across the Randwick/Coogee area, including the Randwick Rugby Union Club, for which he played breakaway.

He must have passed something on to Col and his older brother Keith, as Keith also played breakaway for Australia, from 1936 to 1939 when his career was cut short by the Second World War. Regarded at the time as one of the best forwards in the world, Keith had a tremendous influence on Colin.

Colin attended Randwick Public School for his primary education and then went to Sydney Grammar in 1933, as his mother, Maude, thought Grammar would be good for his wayward tendencies. His father encouraged him to be involved in sport and in his first year at Grammar he was selected for a combined schoolboy's cricket team and was taken on tour with Bro. Donald Bradman as coach. This experience with the outstanding but also demanding Bradman made him give up cricket very quickly.

An article by Stan Baxter, found in an old paper, reveals that in rugby, too, he was a poor beginner, struggling to get out of the lower grades when he played in the Greater Public Schools competition in 1935 - 37.

Colin always said that it was on a particular day when he saw his brother playing for Australia in 1937 that he decided that if Keith could play for Australia, he could do the same. He sat next to his dad at the Sydney Cricket Ground and as Stan and his friends were singing the praises of Keith, young Col announced that he, too, was going to play for Australia. At that, Stan and his friends apparently laughed, and he said to this young upstart who couldn't get out of second grade at school, "Son, I don't think you will ever play for Australia."

So with determination, he left school a year early, and went to Coogee oval to join Randwick Rugby Union Club in 1938. At 17 he played fourth grade and by 18, he was finally playing first grade with the 'Galloping Greens.'

Colin Windon went on to play 98 games with Randwick, 27 games for NSW, and represented Australia in 100 games including 20 Test matches from 1939 to 1952.

He was not only a rugged, hard-tackling breakaway, he was also a speedy, elusive runner with a gift for scoring tries. During his career, he toured Britain, France, Canada, the United States of America, South Africa and New Zealand and, in 1946, was picked as one of the five best players of the year by the *New Zealand Rugby Almanac*. He was vice-captain in 1949 when Australia won the Bledisloe Cup which had been donated by Most Wor. Bro. Bledisloe, Governor-General and Grand Master of New Zealand. He then captained Australia in 1951.

As a young man, Windon was a member of many sports clubs. He swam in the Randwick Coogee Amateur Swimming Club for many years and was a foundation member of the Coogee Penguins Winter Swim Club, but one of his passions was the surf, and like his father, he became a very active member of the Coogee Surf Club.

He was quick on the sand and his explosive speed won him national flag races. The pillow fights, too, were a speciality, and Eddie Kann reported that in these two events he was unbeatable on Sydney's beaches.

Windon often told the story, how in 1941, he was on patrol on Coogee beach one day and the next day, having enlisted for the Second World War, was training at Dubbo with a rifle and grenade. In 1942, at the age of 20, he was called to join troops to be sent to Singapore. Fortunately he missed the train, which may well have saved his life. He was transferred to the 2/3 Infantry Battalion of the 6th Division of the AIF and found himself on the Owen Stanley Track in New Guinea. He had his 21st birthday there but didn't know it until he came out for relief - he contracted malaria and was sent home to the Atherton Tablelands.

Once recovered, he returned to New Guinea in 1944 for hard jungle encounters in the Aitape-to-Wewak campaign during 1945. Windon was a company runner, and he commented how the Japanese took a few shots at him but his rugby style fast zig-zagging was just too good.



Col Windon, below in his Wallaby cap, and on the paddock in 1951, was Australia's leading try scorer for many years.



Once home, he tried to switch off from his experience in the war and direct his energy into his rugby career. His days in the army built him up to be tough and strong, and gave him no fear for the rugby field. His mantra, inherited from his mentor, Cyril Towers, was "Position, possession, pace" but if asked how he did it all, he would say he had "no fear."

His mother ignited another of Windon's passions - horse racing.

When he was a boy, Maude would send him to the butcher each Saturday with the bets and strict instructions - "Don't tell your father." In later years he became a lucky owner. His friend, Ross Cribb got him involved in a syndicate and he had some outstanding wins in the 80's with horses named 'Heat of the Moment' and 'Dolcezza.'

In 1954, Colin Windon married Judy Macdonald and, by 1962, they had three daughters, Julie, Fiona and Kate, each of whom survive him.

He gave up coaching for Randwick Rugby Club and took an active role in the swimming careers of the girls.

In the later years, he enjoyed the company of his grandchildren, Maddi, Andrew, Kate and James and was very proud of their achievements at school and at sport. Andrew plays rugby for the Clovelly Eagles, a junior village club of Randwick, and Windon was patron of the club. Over the past few years, rugby's rise in public attention brought him, and many of his teammates, belated, but well-deserved accolades. In 1999, he was named in rugby's team of the century. In 2000, he was made a life member of the Sydney Cricket and Sports Ground Trust and his name appears on a plaque in the Walk of Honour. He was elected to Randwick City Council Sporting Hall of Fame and awarded an Australian Sports Medal for his sporting achievement. He consistently features in top rugby player lists as still the best breakaway in Australia's rugby history.

During 2003, Windon received his Wallaby cap, No. 337, and fulfilled his wish to go to New Zealand with the Australian Rugby Union's captain's tour for the 100th anniversary of trans-Tasman rugby. He showed tremendous strength and determination while fighting cancer to attend these functions.

Recently, he said he was on the bench, waiting to join his brother, Keith, and his mates who had gone before him. He was looking forward to resuming his career in the game they play in heaven, especially he said, as there were some very good players already there.

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Bro. Keith Stanley Windon was made a mason in Lodge Randwick No. 388 United Grand Lodge of New South Wales on 19 May 1948. He was passed Fellowcraft on 8 July and raised Master Mason on 12 August 1948. He called off on 17 May 1967.

Bro. Colin James Windon was made a mason also in Lodge Randwick No. 388 on 21 July 1948. He was passed Fellowcraft on 20 October and raised a Master Mason on 9 December 1948. He called off Lodge Randwick on 16 March 1955, having become a foundation member of Lodge Rugby No. 875 on 4 January 1954. He called off from this lodge on 19 February 1964.

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F.G. Northern

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