

Sans Souci Reserve Grade Make Finals for Tenth Consecutive Year

By D N

There is the old cliché about a champion team being better than a team of champions. Well no truer word has been spoken when we talk about Sans Souci's Reserve Grade Team over the past decade.

As a sports fan I have always wondered how the hell St George won 11 consecutive Rugby League Premierships, how USA held the America's Cup for over 100 years and more recently the Brisbane Lions AFL team winning three flags in a row which is almost unheard of these days.

OK so we are only talking about the weekend warriors that grace our dusty, water craving pitches but in anyone's language continued success is very difficult to achieve.

May I wind the clock back to August 2000. The so called Millennium Bug had passed us by without so much as a whimper, the Syd-er-nee Olympics were just around the corner and it was back in the days when washing the car on a hard surface wasn't frowned upon by the neighbours. Then imagine a Saturday afternoon at the once palatial St George Stadium where Sans Souci Reserve Grade made their first journey into the Grand Final for many years.

The 1999 season saw Sans Souci go within one game of relegation but 2000 saw a new first grade coach and some new players to the club which was to bring immediate success. Both teams were to make the finals that year and it would be the start of a fantastic run of finals football in both grades over the next 10 years. As history will show it was Reserve grade who would go on to win the grand final in 2000 with victory over Penshurst West and first grade would fall in the preliminary final.

If I can digress for one minute and give you my story of how I came to join the Sans Souci family. Season 2000 was the year before I started as a permanent player at Sans Souci so I missed that first victory. But for the record and some of the guys may remember, I actually trained and even played a couple of trials that year but work commitments meant that I would disappear into that infamous "whatever happened to that guy" group.

I followed the teams fortunes over the year by reading the 2cm x 2cm results in the local paper for it was long before web sites and Compman became common place. I mean we are not talking that long ago and the internet was mainly dial up, Foxtel was cheap and Tom Cruise was still normal. The only thing I couldn't figure out from the paper was.....who or what was ASOW?

Being a newbie to the St George area after moving from the Western Suburbs I had little idea about any of the local football teams let alone who I wanted to play for. My claim to fame back in Granville District was that I had played and lost three Premier League grand finals in a row including the last grand final where my team lost on corners.....I'll just let that linger for a minute. Yes you read correctly, corners - but that story is for another day.

So the ad in The Leader at the start of 2000 listed all teams in the St George area and their registration days. So what was I looking for in a team? Well proximity was one key point, I wasn't about to commute to Penshurst or Arncliffe (wherever they were) for a kick, nor was I about to play for this so called ASOW. So with three quarters of the teams eliminated the short list was down to Carlton, Connells Point and Sans Souci.

So the next important point was location, location, location. So with a sunny Saturday afternoon ahead I thought I'd go and run a recon mission to each of the home grounds to capture the "vibe" so to speak. Would the ground call to me or send me a sign?

First stop Claydon Reserve, UBD map 64 somewhere down past Red Rooster on the way to the beach. I set off with a farewell to my beloved and with her words ringing in my ears on the way out the door – “make sure you bring home some bread, milk and bourbon!” *Yeah yeah Bourbon got it.*

So here I am sitting outside the clubhouse at Claydon Reserve.....hmmm the clubhouse has seen better days.....needs a coat of paint.....gee they should build a pergola on the end there.....hmmmm and gee they must lose some balls in the water. What’s with the old flood lights, well I guess they can’t exactly get hit by a car.....Golf course on one side, boat ramp on the other side, water views, BBQ and a short stagger to the local pub. My god the ground IS talking to me! BINGO! SOLD.

I was like Tim “The Toolman” Taylor on episode 135 of Home Improvement circa 1995. Surely you remember that noise he made when talking about **GUY** stuff – he’d say to his sons.....“boys I put a 350 chevy engine in this baby grr oh oh oo ohhhwwwwwwww”. You remember.....don’t you?

So with Claydon Reserve speaking to me the decision was that Sans Souci would be my team.

So a year later and it’s now 2001. I have registered in Premier League and reported to the Reserve grade coach called John Psarros with a silent S or a silent P or something. I met some guys with odd nicknames and only really remembered a couple, most of the guys were known as “hey you” for the first month but the one thing I noticed was my new wife and I were both welcomed with open arms.

Memories from that season were a bit of a mixed bag. I missed the first game of the season after going on my honeymoon (that is a good memory by the way). I played striker in my debut Reserve grade game against Oatley RSL and missed a penalty. We won the minor premiership in a canter, didn’t lose a game, smashed ASOW in the semi only to lose to them 1-0 in the Grand Final in the final minutes. Apart from the tragedy of losing that first year I didn’t want to be anywhere else. I loved it! One thing I finally learnt was that I now knew ASOW was All Saints Oatley West.

Unfortunately we would lose again the following year but then had huge successes in 2004, 2005 and 2006 where we won three grand finals in a row. A lot of the guys still to this day talk about the 6-0 Grand Final victory of 2004 where we beat our nemesis the dreaded ASOW. In addition 2004 and 2005 had special significance as we won both grades in 04 and the NSW Champion of Champions in 05. Some of us may not realise that it is the 5 year anniversary from when we won that magical double in 2004. The message in the concrete outside the sheds is still for all to see.

Another cliché is the one about there being nothing like semi final football. Some of my fond memories are more about the semi final victories rather than even the Grand Finals. Just having that gala day atmosphere where there are four games through the day all right next to one another and there are always plenty of spectators. You have one eye on your game and then you hear the roar of the crowd at the other game.

I still remember that knock out semi against Arncliffe in 2007 where we went down early 0-1 then fought back in a flawless 30 minutes to lead 3-1 at half time. Arncliffe scored three second half goals to lead 4-3 only for yours truly to hit the net in stoppage time to send the game into extra time at 4-4. The roar of the crowd when I scored that day I will never forget. History will show we lost the game in extra time but there was controversy, send offs and goals galore in what was one of those memorable days.

But what makes this ten year achievement even more special is the fact that in Reserve Grade finals Sans Souci have often come up against opponents intent on defeating us by stacking teams with their first grade players come finals time. This is especially apparent when teams do not qualify for first grade semis but Sans Souci have never taken that approach and have always let the Reserve grade team who made the finals play the finals and although many a team has tried they have often failed against us.

So fast forward to 2009 and a lot of water has passed under the bridge. The clubhouse got its paint job and pergola. There are two flood lights missing. *One got hit by a car apparently.....*and the Reserve grade guys are semi final bound again after another successful year.

Sadly a lot of those guys from those successful times have moved on altogether or are now gracing the pitch in first grade. But part of us will always have that red and green Reserve grade blood and we will all be sitting on the sidelines with the rest of the fans come finals time supporting our team. Any opponent will need to play their best to beat our guys and also have the added challenge of arguably the most passionate supporters in the competition.

This year also saw first grade spend most of the season struggling at the bottom and middle of the table. It was new territory for most of us but we have won our own battles even though we won't contest the finals for the first time in about 6 years. The positives being that we turned the halfway point of the season in second last spot only a point from relegation to then come within one game of making the finals again in both grades. But it was not to be our year and we will have learnt plenty from the experience.

No-one really knows what next year will bring. Some guys will leave for love or money, some will wander off into the sunset that is the over 35's and some will be back to do it all over again just like the last ten years. Although those ten years have come and gone so quickly, the memories and friendships will last forever.

On behalf of the Sans Souci players who have proudly worn the green, red and white over the last 10 ten years, we must thank our committee, supporters, friends, family and WAGS who come and watch us rain, hail or shine each week and have shared in our success and failures.

To the current and past players of Sans Souci - thank you for the memories.

PREMIER LEAGUE RESERVE GRADE HONOUR ROLL 2000-2009

Year	League Position	Finals Result
2000	Second	Grand Champion
2001	First	Runners Up
2002	Second	Runners Up
2003	Third	Finalists
2004	First	Grand Champion
2005	First	Grand Champion
2006*	Second	Challenge Cup Winners
2007	Fourth	Semi Finalists
2008	Fourth	Finalists
2009	Second	<i>Runners Up</i>

**In 2006 and 2007 St George Association awarded title to the Minor Premiers and finals series was called the Challenge Cup.*