

THE FIRST INTERCOLONIAL RUGBY TOUR IN 1882

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Colonists from England brought their sporting interests and knowledge with them. It is highly probable that among those early colonists were some graduates of Rugby School where the distinctive sport of rugby was born and popularised. Although the exact date of the first playing of the rugby code in Australia is not known definitely it is generally accepted that it was played in the 1840's.¹ The first rugby "team" appears to have been at Sydney University after 1864², although it must be acknowledged that the word "team" is used quite loosely.

However, we know for certain that in 1870, following a newspaper advertisement in that year, the Wallaroo club was formed, and the brothers R.A. and Monty Arnold were two of the principal organisers.³ By 1880 there were some 100 clubs in the town and the country.⁴

Although the game became popular rapidly, there was much criticism of rugby because of its brutality. It was this brutality that allowed, in the 1870's, Australian Rules, the Melbourne or Victorian game, to get a firm foothold in the major cities. It is interesting that one of the pioneers of the Australian Game, Tom Wills, was a graduate of Rugby School, and one of the primary aims of the variant game that began in Australia was to create a sport to keep cricketers fit without fear of injury in the off season.⁵

In the 1870's in Sydney and Brisbane there was a battle for supremacy between the two codes, that is, Australian Rules and Rugby Union. The fight for supremacy between the two codes was more precarious in Brisbane than Sydney, although without doubt the premier code in Brisbane was the Melbourne code in 1882. Rugby games were originally played without a referee, with the two opposing captains settling disputes on the field. Eventually an umpire was

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brought in, only if a dispute occurred. On June 22, 1874, the Southern Rugby Union (now N.S.W.R.U.) was formed.⁶ The Queensland Rugby Union, or as it was called originally the Northern Rugby Union, was officially incorporated on 2 November 1883,⁷ although in the official records the year 1882 is stated for its initiation.⁸

A few rules need to be discussed in order to put the game in perspective in the time period. By 1877 Rugby had shifted from a 20 aside game to 15 aside.⁹ The 1871 Rules stated that:

“7. A match shall be decided only by a majority of goals

 46. A side having touched the ball down in their opponents’
 goal, shall “try at goal” either by a place kick or by a “punt
 out.”¹⁰

Up to 1871, kicking was a major aspect of rugby; indeed, it was more important than the running in for a try. As late as 1874-75 the Rugby Union laid down that “the captains of the respective sides shall be the sole arbiters of all disputes”.¹¹ Following a special general meeting in November, 1876, it was decided that “in future, matches should be decided by a majority of goals but, if no goals be kicked, by a majority of tries”.¹²

It was not, however, until 1882-83 that a “free kick” was introduced as a penalty for off-side. The kick had to be either a drop-kick or punt and no goal could be scored from it. A goal from a penalty kick began in 1891.¹³

The movement towards the modern game and modern system of scoring by points did not occur until 1886, and thereby the power of the kick was slowly eroded, though it was still very important. The law read:

A match shall be decided by points; a goal shall equal 3 points and a try 1 point; if the number of points is equal or no goal be kicked or try obtained, the match shall be drawn: when a goal is kicked from a try the goal only is scored.¹⁴

The main point of this preliminary discussion is to reinforce the fact that the game was still emerging up to the late 1880’s in terms of scoring and as to how the game should be played. In the main, most rugby writers and researchers have utilized the modern scoring system to describe and report the scores of games in the past century. In the views of the authors of this paper such comparisons are not valid. Thus, the game of 1886 should be scored according to the 1886 law. However, even this law changed five years later in 1891-2, with a try counting 2 points, a penalty goal 3, a goal from a try (the try then

not counting) 5 points, and any other goal equalling 4 points.¹⁵ In the most authoritative analysis of the history of Australian rugby it is stated that: "In the 1870's, a try earned one point and a converted try earned 4 points."¹⁶ However, this statement does not appear to be correct, as Australian sources of the time certainly did not utilise points and such a practice would have been in conflict with the laws of the Rugby Union.

Queensland Rugby did not have its inception in 1882; but, it was in that year that the first state game, between a team from Brisbane and a N.S.W. team, in Sydney was played. The earliest stated record of rugby being played in Queensland is 1876,¹⁷ although this date needs verification by more extensive research. The present paper will examine the events surrounding that first interstate game between a team from New South Wales and a team from Brisbane. Four newspapers have been researched, namely the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Brisbane Courier*, *The Queenslander* and *The Bulletin*.

Before the cricket season had formally ground to a halt, footballers were already bestirring in Brisbane in late April of 1882. For example, the annual general meeting of the Excelsior Club, which had been formed in 1878, was held.¹⁸ The Brisbane Football Club¹⁹ also held its sixteenth annual meeting, therefore putting the formation of that club in 1867, although the code played was not necessarily that of Rugby. The Wallaroo Club²⁰ was the next to hold its annual meeting, and its report must be unique in honesty and forthrightness.

Your committee, in bringing forward their annual report on the affairs of the club for the past season, regret that they are unable to congratulate you upon your success. In fact, they deplore having to announce that out of ten matches played by the Wallaroos you have secured only a single victory . . . The causes of your failures have evidently been these: - First, absence of men chosen to play in matches; secondly, want of strict discipline in the field; thirdly, unfitness of condition and want of practice.²¹

Football, indeed, was in the minds of many young Brisbane men as the season approached. The teams for 1882 were Brisbane, Wallaroo, Excelsior and Ipswich. Other teams in existence in Queensland were at Toowoomba, Maryborough, Rockhampton and Gympie. However, the game that captivated the imagination in the main, was that of Australian Rules.²²

The football games for the season as announced in the *Courier* were but three Rugby games, nineteen Australian Rules games, and a Sports Day to conclude the season.²³ Two of the teams, the Brisbane

Football club and the Wallaroos, played Rugby as well as Australian Rules. The opening match of the season was “a scratch match between teams chosen from the players of the various clubs in the city”.²⁴ The venue for the Brisbane matches was Queen’s Park, the present Botanic Gardens.

The kick-off for the opening match “did not take place until some time after 3 o’clock”,²⁵ and the sides were captained by Messrs. T. Welsby and F. Ransome, who were also the secretaries of the Brisbane and Wallaroo clubs respectively. ²⁶ “Towards the close of the game a suggestion to indulge in ‘little Rugby’ was accepted, and, here the game closed, one or two good ‘stretches’ were made by T. Welsby, Roberts, and Stoakes.”²⁷

When the games were played at Ipswich, the players and officials would catch the 12.30 train from Brisbane, would invariably have “a short repast at Whitehouse’s”²⁸ on arrival and would get to the ground about 3 o’clock. All players were not supportive of such travel time and distance to be covered in order to play a match of football.

I regret to learn that several members of the Excelsior Club picked for last Saturday’s match failed to accompany the team to Ipswich, and though some of them, no doubt, greatly enjoyed the excellent match played at Queen’s Park, they should have been much more concerned in upholding the honour of their club at Ipswich.²⁹

It has to be realised that at the time, in 1882, the various football codes were vying for supremacy. *The Bulletin*, however, was against football of any kind.

Much discussion has been caused, and many opprobrious epithets used of late over the respective merits of the Rugby and N.S.W. styles of playing the “undertaker’s friend”, or football. And yet the whole thing lies in a nutshell. If a player wishes to be trampled into hash on the shortest possible notice, all he has to do is to take one tussle with a crowd of Rugbies; but, if he wishes to die to slow music, as it were - that is, to lose an ear to-day, an arm to-morrow, and the roof of his head the day after, the colonial game is the very pill he’s looking after. Both modes, however, lead to the same result — a small “lot” in the nearest bone-yard.³⁰

The players’ “unpunctuality” was not the only concern, as the spectators lacked discipline as well.

The rugby enthusiast, with tongue-in-cheek, would attribute the failings of players and spectators to the affiliation of both to the Australian Rules game, reflecting that such departures would not occur among pure Rugby players and supporters.³¹

The first opportunity for the Rugby-ites to display their abilities, apart from the few minutes of the scratch match to open the season, occurred on 8 July 1862. It was decided by the football powers to play a rugby game and call it the "hospital Saturday" football match, and to donate the gate receipts to the Brisbane Hospital.³²

Selwyn Smith captained the Wallaroos and W. Lea the Brisbanites, and Mr. Hague Smith umpired the contest which was won by the Wallaroos by a touchdown to nil.

Before this match took place negotiations had already been underway for an intercolonial football match.³³ Correspondence had been undertaken without result in 1881 "between Mr. Roberts, of the Brisbane Football Club, and some prominent footballers in Sydney",³⁴ and the issue was reopened in 1882 between Messrs. Roberts and Welsby on behalf of the Brisbane and Ipswich clubs.³⁵ Negotiations were not without some problems.

"The great difficulty in the way of such a desirable result being achieved is the extraordinary rivalry which exists in the queen city of the south, between the exponents of the Rugby Union and what is known as the Melbourne laws of the game. This rivalry is carried so far that the members of clubs forming the Southern Rugby Union are forbidden to play the Melbourne game."³⁶

The original plan was for the Brisbane team to go to Sydney and play a game of Australian Rules football as well as Rugby. Two offers for games were received in Brisbane in 1882; one from the Rugby Union in Sydney offering to pay all expenses of a team from Brisbane providing that only Rugby was played; and the other from the Australian Rules authorities offering to pay half the expenses if the team played Australian Rules. The Brisbane group did not concede easily, as they really wanted to play both codes, and an offer on those terms was decided upon at a Brisbane meeting at which Messrs. P. Roberts, T. Welsby, F. Ransome, J.A. Blake, and W.F. O'Carroll were present.³⁷

The Southern Rugby Union did not accede to the Brisbane request, and a special meeting of the committees of the different football clubs of the city was informed that Mr. Roberts finally agreed to the eventual generous Rugby offer to pay all expenses provided Rugby only was played. The meeting approved the action of Roberts, but at the same time arguing that "negotiations be again opened with the union and the association for the purpose of arranging matches under the Rugby and the Association rules."³⁸ It was, at this meeting, agreed that two delegates from each club were to form the selection committee for the team to visit Sydney.

In later correspondence, the Southern Rugby Union held to its decision, which was thereafter agreed upon by the Brisbane clubs. Preliminary arrangements were that the team would leave on the 7th or 8th of August. *The Brisbane Courier* reporter, Centreforward, concurred with the decision to go to Sydney to play Rugby, feeling that the Brisbane players "should give a fair account of its doings in Sydney."³⁹

Those desirous of being considered were asked to attend practice regularly. The Selection Committee was finally decided to be: Messrs. F.C. Lea, P. Roberts (Brisbane), S. Smith, H. St. Paul (Wallaroo), J. Blake, W.T. O'Carroll (Excelsior). A trial match was played on July 22, and on Monday 24 July the team was selected: Messrs. F. Baynes, J. Blake, T. Bond, J. Burrell, F. Hardgrave, A.J. Hickson, E. Markwell, Moore, H. Pritchard, F. Ransome, P. Roberts, S. Smith, H. Stokes, J. Townson, and T. Welsby. In case of emergency, it was announced, two would be selected from J.C. Boyd, D.R. Cutfield, H. Macintosh, Sheridan, T. Slattery, and St. Paul.⁴⁰ Ultimately Messrs. Moore, Ransome and Smith were unable to go, and Mr. Feez, Dr. Cutfield and Tully were selected to the first fifteen with Messrs. Boyd and Macintosh as reserves.

It is of interest that four of those players cited were selectors. That times have changed may be ascertained by the fact that the players met on July 26 at the Globe Hotel to select the captain and manager. A.J. Hickson and T. Welsby were so appointed.

Not everyone agreed with the decision to send a team to Sydney. James M. Stafford, in particular, used the column of *The Brisbane Courier* to voice his displeasure.⁴¹ It was noted that there were 48 active clubs in Sydney, and that the Brisbane team would be overmatched. His main point, however, was that a team representing the colony should be Australian Rules players, as it was the main game in the colony and that the people selecting the team were mainly interested in the free trip and excursions offered by the Union. It was also inferred that the original negotiations in Sydney were solely done by biased Rugby people. This accusation appears to be valid, as Pring Roberts, who did much of the preliminary work, was a real Rugby proponent. What seems obvious is that in so far as the first inter-state game is concerned the prime instigator was Pring Roberts. Originally he was simply after a match with his sister club, the Sydney Wallaroos. However because of the expense and the opportunity for an intercolonial game, the southern Rugby Union asked for a tour by a combined team.

A reply negated Stafford's point in the main, acidly pointing out that Stafford's letters were written after he was denied selection on the team.⁴²

A final practice was engaged in on 5 August, with eleven of the selected team playing against eighteen of the other players. The team left by the *Leichhardt* on Monday, August 7. It was delayed by adverse winds, and did not arrive in Sydney until 9 August at 7 p.m., to be welcomed at the wharf by prominent members of the Rugby Union. The historic encounter, the first intercolonial match, was on the Association Grounds on Saturday 12 August 1882.

The 1882 Team to play New South Wales was:-

A.H. Pritchard (three-quarter), A.J. Hickson (three-quarter (Captain), P. Roberts (full-back), J. Burrell (forward), T.A. Bond (forward), T. Welsby (half-back, (Manager)), F.L. Hardgrave (forward), H. Stokes (forward), J. Blake (forward), J.C. Boyd (forward), F. Baynes (forward), A.H. Feez (three-quarter), Dr. D.R. Cutfield (forward), E. Markwell (half-back), H. Macintosh (forward), J. Townson (forward), C. Tully (forward).



THE START OF IT ALL: The 1882 Queensland team that went to Sydney to play New South Wales, inaugurating the now prestigious interstate series, one of the top sporting events in Australia.

Standing: T.A. Bond, A.H. Pritchard, A.J. Hickson (Captain), P. Roberts, J. Burrell.

Second Row: T.H. Welsby (half-back and manager), F.L. Hardgrave, H. Stokes, J. Blake, J.C. Boyd.

Bottom Row: F.E. Baynes, A.H. Feez, M. Cutfield, E. Markwell, A.H. McIntosh, J.E.W. Thompson

Note the below-the-knee baseball type trouser uniform, compared with the present day shorts.

The reception the Brisbane team got in Sydney was of the highest order, but there was little time for pleasure excursions. Team talks were the order of the day in the 1880's as well, for after breakfast on Saturday, the day of this historic game, "our places in the field were told us, and each was urged to do all in his strength to prevent a 'dirty licking'."⁴³

Brisbane won the toss and elected to kick off in front of 3000-4000 spectators. The Queensland colours were red and black, not the maroon of the present day, and the New South Wales team was in blue. Newspaper reports do not record which fifteen of the seventeen tourists played in the first game, or which two did not. However the following individuals played for certain, as their names were mentioned in the match accounts:- Feez, Roberts, Markwell, Pritchard, Hixon (sic.), Stokes, Burrell, Tully, Baynes.

The N.S.W. team was announced on 9 August as Brodie, back; Creer, Phillips, Walker, half-backs; Bennett, Flynn, Readford, quarter-backs; Clements, Lindeman, Pell, Raper, Richmond, Tange, R. Thallon, Thallon, forwards; 16th M. McManamey.

The final team would appear to have been Bennett, Brodie, Clements, Creer, Flynn, Lindeman, McLean, McManamey, R. Pell, Phillips, Raper, Readford, Tange, R. Thallon, Walker, with F. Butler 16th man.

QUEENSLAND v N.S.W.

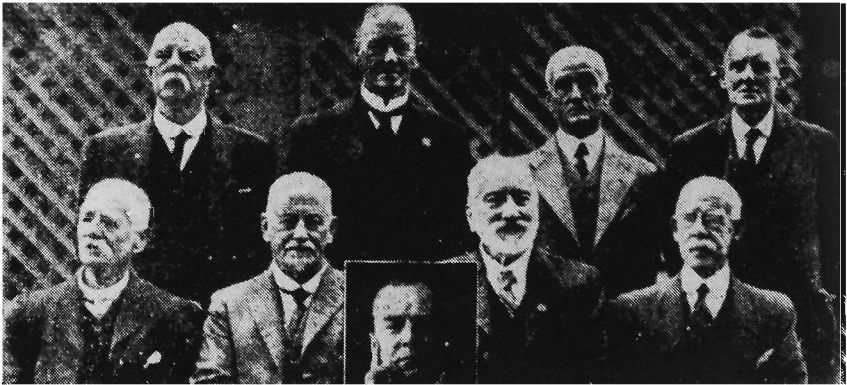
The score of the first match is by no means as clear-cut as historians would have us believe. Most reports state that Queensland lost by four goals and four tries to a goal.⁴⁴ Another states that it was five tries and four goals to one goal.⁴⁵ Careful analysis of all newspaper reports leads these writers to conclude that we cannot, at this time, say conclusively what the score was. The major problem has to do with the development of the game at that time, and the knowledge of the game by the spectators and reporters which was not extensive. The most comprehensive report is in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and if one accepts that, the actual final score given - four goals and four tries to one field goal - does not tally with their own description, which reveals six tries and four goals, two of which were field goals, to one field goal.

If the main newspaper account can be accepted, then there is evidence, by today's standards, of tries by Walker, Raper (4), Flynn, Raper (drop goal), Pell (drop goal), Flynn (conversion), McLean (conversion) for N.S.W., and Feez scored a drop-goal for Queensland. By today's scoring system it would have been 34-3, by pre-World War II scoring 30-4, by 1871 and 1876 scoring four goals to one, by 1886 scoring 12 to 3. The reader is entitled to take his choice. The

previous scoring is based on the assumption that the principal newspaper account is correct, and indeed it may not be, as the score generally acknowledged is 4 goals and 4 tries to one goal. This, therefore, would make a score of 26-3 by today's scoring - assuming 2 field-goals by N.S.W. and one by Queensland, 24-4 by pre-World War II standards, by 1871 and 1876 scoring four goals to one, by 1886 scoring 18 to 3. The generally acknowledged score of the first game is 28-4,⁴⁶ which does not coincide with *any one* of the scores cited. In the opinion of the writers, the score should be cited four goals and four tries to one goal, as this is the method of scoring at the time and is the score most common mentioned in the various literature.

Raper, Tange, Lindeman, Creer, Thallon, Walker, Readford and Bennett reportedly played well for New South Wales, and Roberts, Markwell, Feez, Burrell, Pritchard, Hicks and Stokes for Queensland. The visitors acquitted themselves very well in their first game.

The itinerary of six games in ten days⁴⁷ was obviously too much for the tourists, who had been showing marked improvement. They, however, had asked for the additional game.⁴⁸ The second inter-colonial match took place on the Association ground in front of about 500 spectators on 22 August, and Queensland went down to defeat by two goals and four tries to zero. It is understandable that during the first half "the visitors did not play with their usual spirit, and made little or no headway against their opponents".⁴⁹



THE ORIGINALS, FIFTY YEARS ON: Survivors of the 1882 Queensland team that played the first interstate (then called intercolonial) match with New South Wales in Sydney had a reunion dinner at the National Hotel on Friday, August 12, 1932.

*Standing: F.L. Hardgrave, T.A. Bond, Hugh McIntosh, J.C. Boyd
Sitting: J.E.W. Townsend, T.H. Welsby (half-back and team manager, later long-serving President of the Q.R.U.), F.C. Lea (Selector), F.E. Baynes.*

Inset: A.H. Feez

Results of the matches played on the tour were:-

Date	Venue	Team Played	Score
Saturday August 12 1.	Association Grounds	New South Wales	Lost by one goal to four goals and four tries.
Tuesday August 15	Association	University Club	Lost by one try to four.
Wednesday August 16	Parramatta	County of Cumberland	Won by one goal (con- verted try) to one try.
Thursday August 17	Association Grounds	Combined Suburbs Team	Lost by one try to nil.
Saturday August 19		Waller Roos	Won by one goal, 2 tries to nil.
Tuesday August 22 1.		New South Wales	Lost by two goals and four tries to nil.
Tuesday August 22	Departure on Ranelagh for Brisbane		(several went to Melbourne, 1 stayed in Sydney)
	Overall record		Won 2 Lost 4

This was a Sydney reporter's description of the closing scene of the visit:-

As soon as the final game was over, the Queensland team were driven in a four-horse bus from the ground to the Circular Quay, where the majority of the players embarked on board the *Ranelagh*, which left about 6 o'clock for Brisbane. A large number of friends were present to see them off, and as the steamer moved from the wharf three hearty cheers were given by the spectators, the compliment being warmly responded to by the Queenslanders. Several of the Queensland team will proceed to Melbourne, and one remains for the present in Sydney.

The boat's departure had actually been postponed for hour to allow the second New South Wales v. Queensland match to take place.⁵⁰

The first intercolonial rugby tour can only be judged an outstanding success. The schedule was horrendous by present-day standards, particularly considering that only 17 players were sent. That two games could be won in such circumstances and with such an

inexperienced complement is a credit to the players' dedication and courage. The social side was also of the highest order, the Southern Rugby Union doing everything possible to establish the importance of the visit. It is easy to understand, considering the lack of Rugby expertise among the Brisbane-ites, that they were somewhat astonished at the excellent reception they got. The experience was one that did much to establish the Rugby Union game in Brisbane.

A banquet was held to welcome the team back, at the Cafe de Paris, on Friday 25 August. Some 60 to 70 people attended.

Hickson, the captain, summed up the sentiment in reply to a toast, when he said he hoped an opportunity would be given, by a southern team's visit to Brisbane, to return the compliment of their warm welcome in Sydney.

The old Sydney University player who spoke, Sheridan, rightly observed that if a southern team ever came north "they would find men worthy of their steel". History has demonstrated how prophetic that statement was. A great sporting tradition had begun as a result of the first intercolonial visit in 1882.

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15. *Ibid*, p. 258.
16. Shepherd, *op.cit.*, p. 155.
17. W.H. Bickley (editor). *op.cit.*, p. 12.
18. *Brisbane Courier*, 27 April, 1882.
19. *Brisbane Courier*, 28 April 1882.
20. *Brisbane Courier*, 6 May 1882.
21. *Ibid*.
22. *Brisbane Courier*, 27 May and 29 May 1882.
23. *Brisbane Courier*, 27 May 1882.
24. *Ibid*.
25. *Brisbane Courier*, 29 May 1882.
26. *Ibid*.
27. *Ibid*.
28. *Brisbane Courier*, 5 June 1882.
29. *Ibid*.
30. *The Bulletin*, 2 Sept. 1882, p. 13.
31. *Ibid*. Earlier on 5 June 1882 it was suggested that Inspector Lewis should depute constables "to gently yet forcibly repress the excitement of the spectators".
32. *Brisbane Courier*, 26 June 1882.
33. *the Queenslander*, 1 July 1882, p. 14.
34. *Ibid*.

35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Brisbane Courier*, 5 July 1882. See also *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 July 1882, p. 6 which notes that the telegram of agreement has been received from Roberts.
39. *Brisbane Courier*, Monday 17 July 1882.
40. *Brisbane Courier*, 25 July 1882. See also *The Queenslander*, 29 July 1882, p. 143.
41. *Brisbane Courier*, 1 August 1882 and 7 August 1882. A reply was published under the pseudonym The Chairman, also on 7 August 1882.
42. *Brisbane Courier*, 7 August 1882.
43. *The Queenslander*, 26 August 1882.
44. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 August 1882; *The Queenslander*, 26 August 1882, p. 269-270; *Brisbane Courier*, 14 August 1882 (by Electric Telegraph); *Brisbane Courier*, 18 August 1882.
45. *The Bulletin*, 19 August 1882, p. 13.
46. W.H. Bickley, *Maroon*. p. 158.
47. Thomas Welsby. Diary, in possession of The Royal Historical Society of Queensland. Welsby, the manager and half-back of the first intercolonial team, had an illustrious career. He wiled his library to the Historical Society, of which he was once President. Born in Ipswich in 1858, he completed his education at Ipswich Grammar School. His family moved to Brisbane and he became a bank clerk and ledger keeper, and ultimately a public accountant. He was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1909 and served until 1915. He died in 1941 at the age of 82. He wrote *Early Moreton Bay*, *Schnappinger*, *History of the Royal Queensland Yacht club*, *Memories of Amity*, *Sport and Pastime in Moreton Bay*, and *Bribie the Basket Maker*. As well as a historian, he was a banker, businessman, and yachtsman. He was a founder of the Amateur Boxing Association, the Brisbane Gymnasium, was Commodore of the Royal Queensland Yacht Club, and was first secretary of the Queensland Rugby Union. The Welsby Cup is named after him.
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49. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 August 1882, p. 6.
50. *Ibid.*