

SPORT

NARALING HALL - 100 YEARS

Overview

Sport has long been a defining feature of community life in the Naraling area, dating back to the town's establishment as a rail siding in 1910 through to its role as a founding club of one of the district's earliest football competitions. Although the Naraling townsite itself is now abandoned, local recollections — including those of long-time resident Les Stokes, who documented the district as he remembered it between 1928 and 1950 — provide a detailed picture of how cricket, football and tennis were woven into the fabric of everyday life at Naraling, and how that sporting tradition fed into the modern Chapman Valley Football Club and the Great Northern Football League (GNFL), both still active in the district today.

Naraling's Sporting Ground and Facilities

The Naraling Reserve was the heart of the townsite, containing the school, hall, store, post office and railway station together in one precinct, with the local sporting oval situated just to the east of the school. According to Les Stokes' 1998 written recollections of the district, cricket and football teams from Naraling competed on this oval as part of the Upper Chapman–Northampton football and cricket association, playing against sides from neighbouring farming communities. The Naraling Hall, built in 1926 and still standing today on the road verge, doubled as the district's main social venue, hosting country dances that were closely tied to the local sporting calendar in addition to its religious functions.



Tennis at Naraling had its own dedicated following: the courts were noted for hosting a New Year's Day men's and ladies' doubles handicap tournament, which drew competitors from across the wider district rather than just the immediate Naraling community. This made the tennis courts, situated near the Church Hall, one of the more significant recreational drawcards in the Upper Chapman area during the mid-twentieth century, alongside similar tennis facilities at Nanson and Nabawa.

Football: From the Naraling Team to Disbandment in 1939

Naraling fielded its own football team as part of the Upper Chapman Football Association, founded in 1912, alongside Nanson and Nabawa, with Protheroe and Yetna joining when they had sufficient players. Early local matches were colourfully contested between teams nicknamed the "Navvies" and the "Cockies," reflecting the mix of railway workers and farmers who populated the rail-siding district. At its peak, the wider Chapman Valley area fielded four separate football teams — Nanson, Nabawa, Naraling and East Chapman — illustrating how deeply football was embedded even in the smallest settlements.

Local recollections confirm that the Naraling football team disbanded in 1939, as the district's declining population made it increasingly difficult to field a full side, though the same oval continued hosting cricket matches well into the 1960s. This meant cricket significantly outlasted football as an organised sport at Naraling itself, continuing for more than two decades after the football club folded and even after the Naraling School closed in 1944.

Upper Chapman Inter-School Sports Day

Beyond club-level competition, sport at Naraling also had an important place in school life. One of the major annual events for children in the district was the Upper Chapman inter-school sports day, at which pupils from all the district's small schools — including Naraling, Nanson and Nabawa — competed against one another in athletic events. These carnivals were held on rotation at Nanson and Nabawa, drawing together children who otherwise attended small, isolated one-room schools scattered across the farming blocks north-east of Naraling, and functioned as one of the few opportunities for cross-district social contact for rural children of the era.

Consolidation into the Chapman Valley Football Club

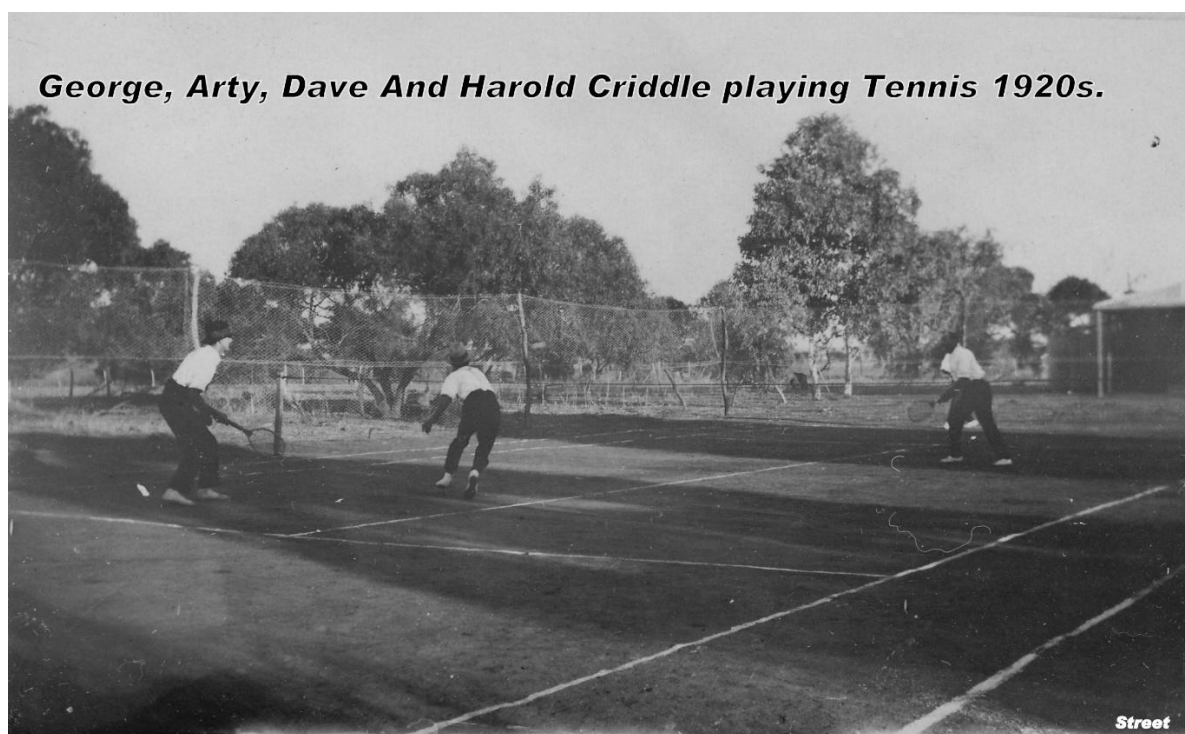
As with the district's schools and grain-handling sidings, sporting clubs in the Upper Chapman district gradually consolidated as smaller settlements like Naraling declined and population concentrated around larger towns. After World War II, the Northampton-Upper Chapman Football Association formed, bringing in teams from Northampton and Yuna. The current Chapman Valley Football Club was formed in 1961 through a merger of the Nabawa and Yuna football clubs, becoming a founding member of the newly created Great Northern Football League (originally the Great Northern National Football League) that same year. The club, nicknamed the Royals, still competes in the GNFL today, playing home games at Mazzuchelli Oval in Nabawa and having won league premierships in 1972, 1973, 1974, 1992 and, most recently, 2024.

Notable Players from the District

The Chapman Valley Football Club has produced several standout players connected to the district's football tradition, including AFL players Kasey Green and Brad Dick, both drawn from the local competition that traces its roots back to the Naraling-era Upper Chapman Football Association. Kevin Mazzuchelli, (the family) after whom the club's home ground is named, won the club's fairest-and-best award in 1974, 1975 and 1979 and is remembered as one of the finest players to come through the district. The club's strongest sustained period came in the early 1970s under coach Owen Simkin, who led Chapman Valley to consecutive premierships in 1972, 1973 and 1974.

Table: Evolution of Football and Cricket in the Naraling District

Era	Development	Notes
1912	Upper Chapman Football Association formed	Naraling, Nanson, Nabawa fielded teams; Protheroe, Yetna joined intermittently
Early 1900s	"Navvies vs Cockies" matches	Informal games between railway workers and farmers
1926	Naraling Hall built	Became the district's social hub for dances tied to the sporting calendar
1939	Naraling football team disbanded	Declining population made fielding a team unsustainable
1939–1960s	Cricket continues at Naraling oval	Cricket outlasted football at the local ground by over two decades
Post-WWII	Northampton-Upper Chapman Football Association	Expanded competition to include Northampton and Yuna
1961	Chapman Valley Football Club formed	Merger of Nabawa and Yuna clubs; founding GNFL
1961–present	Great Northern Football League	Chapman Valley (Royals) won premierships 1972, 1973, 1974, 1992, 2024



Criddle's playing tennis in the 1920's

Personal recollections such as those recorded by Les Stokes in 1998 — accompanied by a hand-drawn map of Naraling farm lots from 1928 to 1950 — remain one of the richest surviving sources on the district's sporting and social life, since almost no physical infrastructure survives at the old townsite today. These accounts describe not just the football and cricket teams themselves but the families who filled their ranks, including the Criddle, Gray, Calder, Stokes and Barclay families, several of whose descendants continued farming in the district for generations. The Shire of Chapman Valley has continued to draw on this kind of oral and written memory as part of its heritage preservation efforts, having called for photographs, stories and memorabilia relating to sporting and social events at Naraling as part of the Naraling Hall's 100-Year Celebrations.



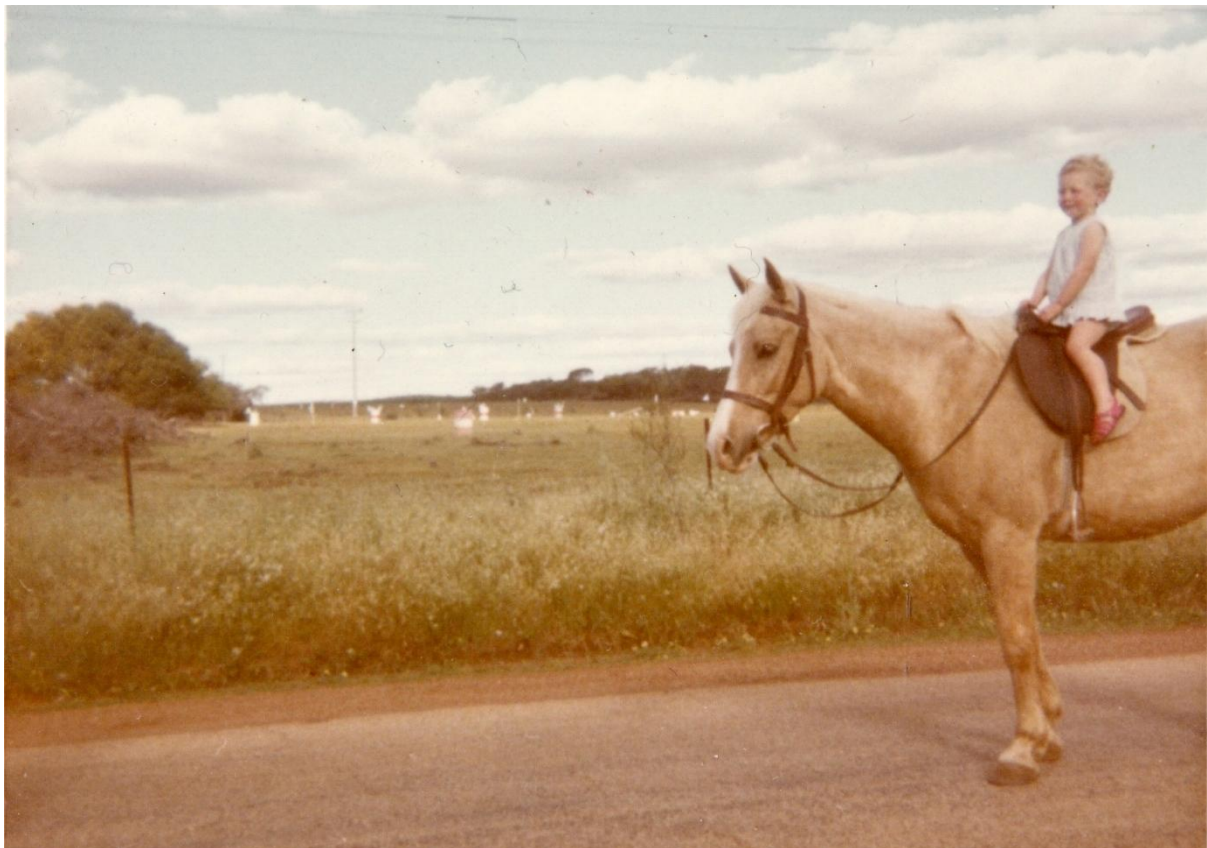
Naraling Cricket wicket

Cricket, Tennis and Broader District Sport Today

Cricket and tennis both formed part of Naraling's dual-sport recreational tradition, common to Wheatbelt rail settlements of the era, complementing similar facilities at neighbouring Nanson, which had its own football and cricket oval and a sports ground with a grandstand and horse race track. Today, sporting life for residents across the former Naraling district is concentrated at consolidated facilities within the Shire of Chapman Valley, which offers cricket, tennis, golf, football, equestrian activities and a rifle range, primarily centred on the Nabawa Community Sportsground, Nabawa Stadium and tennis courts. Beyond the surviving Church Hall, no physical trace of Naraling's own tennis courts, oval or football ground remains, making oral history, family recollections and archival research the primary means of documenting this aspect of the district's sporting heritage.



Chapman Valley Rifle Club



Christine Stokes on Tricia Bell's horse with Pony Club in the background

Note: All information sourced from available records, anecdotal information and may be subject to minor change.