

The Keith Free OAM story.

Keith Weedon Free, was born 24 March 1929 currently resides in Phillip Street Cabarita.

As a young fellow, Keith was a keen and active sportsman playing rugby league, rugby union, cricket and tennis. Keith attended the selective high school Sydney Technical High School from 1943 to 1947. He represented the school in many different ways: Rugby Union 1st grade 1945/6/7, Cricket 1st grade 1945/6/7, Athletics running 880 yards, Debating Hume Barbour as the whip 1947.

Another talent Keith possesses is his vocalist ability. In 1946, Keith was selected to sing solo when the schools 1000 voice choir sang at the Sydney Town Hall.

There are three major awards voted on at tech. Pupils votes count 50%, teachers votes count 50%.

The awards are:

1. The Wykeham prize at the end of 3rd year 1945.
2. School Captain elected at the end of 4th year (1946) to take over in 5th year (1947).
3. Turner prize elected at the end of 5th year 1947.

Keith won all three.

In Keith's early twenties, he proposed to Patricia Margaret Quinn and on the 19th April 2012, Pat and Keith will celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary. Sixty years of wedded bliss.

Keith always had an interest in racing and in 1952 at the age of 23, he visited the Office of NSW Bookmakers to enquire how he could become a licensed bookmaker. Staff at the NSW Bookmakers quizzed Keith on his financial situation, and he proudly replied, I have 500 pounds. They asked Keith, do you have any property or other assets? No, he replied! They advised Keith he would need assets of at least 2,000 pounds to gain membership. Keith said, I'll be back. True to his word, he returned and was granted membership and eventually became Chairman of the NSW Bookmakers in 1968.

To commence his bookmaking career, he visited the Grey Hound Racing Control Board, deposited 250 Pounds and was granted a bookmaker's licence.

His first official venture was the regular Wyong greyhounds which raced every Saturday afternoon.

In his new career, the going was tough, and Keith had given his wife Patricia, 20 pounds to buy an overcoat and every Saturday, Pat would give the 20 pounds back to Keith to boost his small bank for the day. The weather was getting bitterly cold and Keith said to Pat, go and buy the coat, I don't want to see you getting cold and me going broke at the same time.

In 1974, he founded the NSW Bookmakers Superannuation Fund and was the sole investments person from 1976 to 1999. During this period, he achieved an average return of 12.29% PA and received commentary from experts in this field that this was a world class performance. Keith did not receive any remuneration or expenses for all his efforts.

Keith started playing bowls in 1962 at the National Coursing Bowling Club at Moxham Road Punchbowl and started the funding of the National Foundation of Touring Bowlers by organising the sale of debentures.

Keith's bowling successes commenced in 1963 winning the minor singles in his first year then runner-up in the major singles the following year. He also won the pairs and fours before transferring to Greenlees Park in 1965.

Keith had now built his home and resided at Rhonda Place, only a 2-minute walk across Greenlees Park to our great club.

During his bowling career at Greenlees Park (GP), he has won no less than 7 major singles, 10 major pairs with Rod Riley OAM (deceased) our former greenkeeper including 7 consecutive years from 1970 to 1976. He has won the triples 7 times, the club fours 9 times and mixed pairs twice. Other victories include, James Hall triples in 1970, 89, 91 and 92, The St George Strudwick open fours in 1974, the Petersham open triples in 1975, and the Ryde City fours in 1997.

Keith has been a team member of 15 winning pennant sides of which 9 of these have been in grade one.

Probably his best performance was in the prestigious Capita Singles in 1990. This event drew 10,000 entries from all over Australia. 10 NSW players made it through to the last 32 in the country and KWF was one of these players. Keith was drawn in the same section as the late and great Ken Williams who had won this event in 1988, who also had played for NSW and Australia, and South Australia's Ian Taylor who had also won this tournament previously. Keith's luck in this event ran out when the umpire was called to adjudicate on the last bowl of the last end and unfortunately awarded the shot to his opponent. Receiving prize money for the 13th place getter out of 10,000 players, he was also the best performed over 60-year-old in the entire event. What a great effort.

On the 29 December 1990 Keith went to work at Warwick Farm for the last time.

In the year 2000, the Board of Directors of GP honoured Keith by introducing and naming a prestigious bowls tournament with prize money more than \$10,000 "The Keith Free Pairs"

Keith was the organiser of this event which lasted for 5 years. When Keith advised the board, he could no longer organise the event, its demise was evident and folded in 2005.

I would suggest the most prominent highlight of Keith's career was in 2003 when Keith was awarded the Order of Australia medal for his services to the racing industry in particular and to community services generally.

In more recent years, Keith was the driving force gaining patronage and participation of the City Tatts Bowling Combination using our fabulous greens as their home club.

In 2006, Keith was nominated and invested with the distinctive honour of Patron of the Men's Bowling Club, a position he still occupies.

In recognition of Keith's achievements and commitment to the Bowling Club, he was awarded Life Membership.

Added to Life Membership, the most recent event in his illustrious bowling career was the naming of our number 2 green the "Keith Free OAM Green" the showpiece of our club. This is the pinnacle reward members can bestow upon an individual.

At the AGM in the first year of our amalgamation with Briars, again Keith was nominated and invested as a co-patron of Briars at Greenlees Ltd along with David Walker from the former Briars club.

I can remember on many occasions being in Keith's company and suggesting he rise to his feet and offer a rendition or two of some of his favourite songs like Winter Wonderland, Born Free, on a Clear

Day, The Girl that I Marry, and the list goes on. At Christmas parties and presentation nights, he's so versatile.

Brian Huttly - 2018