

VFL greats will see ton-up Bill

By ROGER MUSPRATT

BILL Ryan, the best Australian Rules footballer to come to the Gold Coast, will play his 100th game for premiers Southport against Coolangatta at Peak Oval, Kirra, on Sunday.

Among the crowd will be one of the greatest goalkickers to have played in the Victorian Football League, Peter Hudson, and a former Geelong clubmate of Ryan, John Devine.

Ryan came to Queensland at the end of a 170-match career with Geelong. He was recognised as one of the best high marks in the VFL.

After playing for two seasons with Coorparoo in Brisbane, he started playing with Southport in 1975.

Ryan is the only player in the Southport line-up to have played in each of the five successive grand finals the Magpies have contested since then.

He has seen a dramatic improvement in the standard of Rules on the Coast since he arrived.

"The standard in the Brisbane competition is higher than down here, but Southport did win a few games against Brisbane club sides in their pre-season competition," he said.

in action

"We made it to the semi-final. There is no way that could have happened the first year I arrived."

Ryan plays two important roles in the running of the club.

He is captain coach and secretary-manager of their \$80,000 clubhouse, the only one of its type on the Coast.

The clubhouse was completed last year and Ryan has made it a financial success, according to Southport president Alan MacKenzie.

Dual role

Despite his illustrious playing career, this season is the first time he has coached Southport.

Ryan is non-committal about his future in the game.

He would not say whether he intended to continue playing.

He announced his retirement after Southport won the grand final last season, which was one of the best years he has had since coming to the Coast.

He lost the Todd best and fairest Medal to Lismore's Peter Growney on a countback and won Southport's best and fairest.

"We lost eight or nine players from the grand final side for the start of this season," Ryan said.

"It looked as though we were going to be a bit light on for good players, so I decided to play another season."

Big impact

MacKenzie said Ryan made a huge impact on football when he arrived on the Coast.

"There is no doubt that Ryan is the best footballer to have come to Queensland," he said.

"In 1972, he was still at the peak of his career in VFL, playing for the Victorian team. Then, in 1973, he came to Queensland.

"His presence at Southport has always been a big drawcard, not only for extra people at the games but also for players who arrive on the Coast looking for a game," MacKenzie said.



Bill Ryan lines up for another goal.

Gold Coast Bulletin: June 5 1980, p70

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