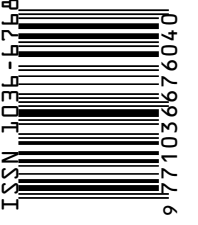


SPORT



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ALL THE SOCCER DRAWS



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RUGBY UNION

'Poppa' is oldie and a goldie



SEE if you can spot 79-year-old Bruce "Poppa" Gallaher when he takes to Stan Payne Oval at Evans Head for a rugby match on Saturday.

At the annual Evans Head Sperm Whales Westpac Rescue Helicopter fundraiser, a group of Golden Oldies teams, including Poppa's team the Ballina Battered Prawns, will take the field after the Evans Head Killer Whales have played the Yamba Buccaneers in the President's Cup (previously known as the Far North Coast village comp).

Because of illness, Poppa is only a 50/50 chance of playing on Saturday but if he makes the game, expect to see him hovering around the five-eighth position and passing the ball on quickly.

"Catch and pass, that's my philosophy," he said.

"If I pass the ball quickly I don't have any trouble. Mind you, at my age, I find it very hard to catch other players."

Golden Oldies is a modified-rules version of rugby union for men over 35, and Poppa, who played 105 first-grade games for Northern Suburbs in Sydney and is the Golden Oldies competition's oldest player, said it enabled him to relive his glory days.

"A lot of us have been competitive before and it gives us a chance to reignite the flame in our belly," he said.

Evans Head Rugby Club treasurer Jim Perry said players from all walks of life had been attracted to Golden Oldies rugby.

"It's not just for old rugby union players; we get ex-footballers and sportspeople who just want to keep fit and socially active," he said.

On Saturday, Golden Oldies teams from Casino, Ballina, Lennox Head, Evans Head, Murwillumbah and other towns will play while an auction and raffles raise money for the Westpac Rescue Helicopter.

- Paul Appelkamp

LEAGUE OF HIS OWN



LEAGUE LEADER: Kadina High School teacher Mark Ippolito has been recognised by the Australian Rugby League.

RUGBY LEAGUE

ARL reveals Kadina school teacher in line for major award

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THE Australian Rugby League Commission has formally recognised Kadina High School teacher Mark Ippolito for building a strong footy culture at his school and keeping at-risk indigenous kids on track.

The league enthusiast and head English teacher was recently named a finalist in the ARL Commission National Teacher of the Year Award, one of eight categories in the 2012 One Community Awards.

During the past three

years Ippolito has worked tirelessly to get indigenous students and their parents engaged in the game through the Country Rugby League and Kadina Engagement Program.

"For the most part, it's an at-risk indigenous program for boys and girls," he said.

"We go well and truly out of our way to contact anyone who's remotely interested in coming to the school about football, anyone who'll play us in football and anybody who'll support us in football."

The program has been a

"I just thought it was my mates pulling my leg"

- Kadina High School teacher Mark Ippolito

success on many levels.

Thirty of the school's students are now accredited coaches and referees who regularly teach workshops at other local schools.

Kadina High School now also has five competitive rugby league teams, one of

which finished second in a recent knockout competition against other local schools.

However, Ippolito said the program's biggest benefit had been improvements in student behaviour.

"The sheer decline in discipline issues is ridiculous," he said.

"There are at least four kids who have been expelled from other schools but we have no problem with them.

"The secret to engagement here has been rugby league."

Ippolito recently secured

a \$20,000 grant from the Department of Education to continue the program and was hopeful about gaining more funding from the National Australia Bank later this year.

When the ARL Commission phoned to tell him he was a finalist in the upcoming awards, Ippolito didn't believe them.

"I just thought it was my mates pulling my leg," he said.

"It's nice to get recognition."

The winners will be announced at Sydney Town Hall on Monday, September 24.