

OBITUARY: JOHN WOOD

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The tragic death of John Wood in August at the early age of 51 has robbed Australian sports history of one of its most energetic practitioners.

Wood was a member of ASSH for a brief time and attended two Sporting Traditions Conferences (Melbourne 1983 and Adelaide 1985) but was involved in a large number of other professional associations.

A dynamic and much loved teacher, Wood was senior history master at Adelaide Boys High School for eighteen years before bureaucratic manipulating by the South Australian Education Department ruptured his career. He left teaching three years ago to pursue a full time career as a freelance sports historian.

Wood first began writing about sport around 1980 and, as editor of the *South Australian Football Budget*, published several of his pieces. He continued as a regular contributor to that publication.

A passionate Port Adelaide football supporter it is not surprising that most of Wood's writing should revolve around the club. In 1982 he wrote a warm biography of John Cahill ('*Gentlemen Jack*'), in 1991 a modern history of the club (*Bound for Glory*), and was just putting the finishing touches on a three volume club history in preparation for Port's likely entry into the Australian Football League. He was also the instigator and editor of Port's club magazine, *Magpie News*.

Two of Wood's other football books (*SA Greats: The History of the Mugarey Medal*) and his *Centenary History of the 'North Adelaide Football Club* showed he was prepared to move further afield while concentrating on a South Australian focus. At the time of his death he had done a good deal of work on a commissioned history of the Grange Golf Club, and was managing a history of the Sturt Football Club. He spoke widely on sport to small clubs and societies.

A remarkable feature of John Wood was his exuberance. Partly this was revealed in his work as an author. Most of his books he published himself and marketed strongly. He had a genuine sense of good public relations in that he was clear sighted in his views and direct in expressing

them. I believe he would have made an outstanding contribution as a paid administrator in such a sphere at either league or club level.

As an historian I have one small criticism and he knows I would make it. As a writer I don't believe we always heard Wood's own voice clearly enough. A meticulous historical researcher, prolific in output, Wood wanted just a little bit of editorial direction to make his books stronger than they already were.

In some ways Wood was something of a showman. He had his own sense of style from the vehicles he drove—from a Daimler, to motor bike and side-car, to a Morris Minor van with 'JOHN WOOD—SPORTS HISTORIAN' emblazoned on the side to the colourful clothes he often wore football guernseys, sports track suits, and the Grange Golf Club pullover.