



# ΚΟΣΜΟΣ

ΣΑΣ ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΟΥΜΕ  
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ΣΕ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΙΜΟΤΗΤΑ

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## Jimmy Nikopoulos

With the sad passing of Jimmy Nikopoulos (1937-2015) last week, Sydney school teacher and historian, Vasilis Vasilas, pays tribute to a Pan-Hellenic player of the early years (1960-64), and passionate Sydney Olympic supporter, by publishing an old interview with him.

Previous Clubs in Greece: Doxa Patras.  
Pireaiki- Patraiki (the Company's team)  
Panahaiki Football Club, Patras  
Paneliakos

**Upon my** arrival in Sydney in 1960, I looked forward to becoming involved in its football scene. My sisters, Xanthi and Anna, had written to me about Pan-Hellenic and I was excited about the prospect of having trials with them. I was introduced to the Club through my close friend, Yiannis Polydor (Polydoropoulos), who had been on Panahaiki's committee and had also migrated to Sydney, who had spoken to the Committee. After one or two weeks in Sydney, I was invited to training.

**I was** introduced to Pan-Hellenic' President, George Zantiotis- who also became a manager at the Hellenic Club. He was a great man who helped out all his players, whether it was paying a player's rent or even giving him a needed loan. Pan-Hellenic brought everyone together; if you encountered bad luck, you needed someone to express them. If you saw someone at Wentworth Park, and then saw them somewhere else, you would open a conversation with him. Many friendships were established via Pan-Hellenic; back then, I became close friends with our forward, Kostas Gennaris and we have been like brothers for over forty years. In my first few matches, I was tried in the halves, before being moved left wing, until I was settled in defence. I would regard myself as a hard tackler- and I always went for the ball. In all my matches, I was never sent- off. **Throughout the** 1961 season, I maintained my position 1st Grade. Despite our first season in 1st Division, we made the finals- a great achievement! I attribute this success to our great team- work; on the field, we continually talked to each other and knew each other's style, and whenever someone slipped up with an error, we covered them. We had very good individual players but we simply played as a team. It did not matter who you were playing- Prague, South Coast, APIA, or Yugal, they were all quality sides and tough contests. We matched and even beat the better quality teams. When we played Prague, we were highly motivated to beat them; after all, they had eleven players on the field, so did we! We admired and respected players like Leo Baumgartner, Erwin and Herbet Ninaus, Manfred Schaefer and Walter Tamandl, but we did not fear them. If we conceded these teams were much better and they would beat us, it would be the end of us. Marking Baumgartner was always a tough tussle but I followed him around the field as if we had just gotten engaged(laugh)! Another great player I had to mark was

the Israeli international, Levi; the aim was to cut off any pass reaching him because he was so skilful with the ball. I never gave them too much space; if you gave such quality players three metres distance, they had the pace to leave you behind. The football has no friends; as a defender, you cannot hesitate or go into a tackle half-heartedly- you had to put your foot into the fire!

**Matches with** APIA were like reliving the Greek- Italian War of 1940; our passionate rivalry was so intense. Comino Omeros, Patrinos and Angelo Moutsouhos knew how to speak Italian a little and they would stir up the Italian players. APIA's players, such as Philippo Bottalico and Giacomo Giacometi would swear at us in Greek. They have been tough matches but there was so much fun too. Although we always lift our performances against the better teams, we were not consistent enough with the weaker teams. In a match with Auburn, we dominated the entire match- we played them in their half and had uncountable shots at goal. However, the ball would just not go in! Yet, they had one goal-scoring opportunity and they scored.

**All of** Sydney's football clubs experienced financial



problems; although we had great crowds and big gate-takings, this could not be translated into a trophy. The Committee may have had a wealth of experience on how to run the Club but they had no idea how to run a team. They made the mistake of chasing and bringing ready-made players to the team- often paying above their value. Pan-Hellenic wanted to match APIA, Hakoah or Prague, but everything was short-term-buy more players. In 1960, Patrinos and Toussis and the three Hakoah players, John Adair, Frank Hearn and Bob Burgoyne were only the beginning; this policy of buying more players was implemented every season. Promoting players from 2nd Grade was a rarity- there were only a few opportunities. Vangelis

Romanos, Nick and Angelo Comino were strong 2nd Grade players who were not really given a chance. When I was coming back from injury, I played 2nd Grade; it did not worry me if I took a couple of games for me to get my 1st Grade position back.

**However, many** of these newly-signed players provided Pan-Hellenic with great service and performances. Imported Greek players increased gate-takings; Angelos Mavropoulos was Pan-Hellenic's most effective playmaker who may have only played two seasons but left a great impression on Sydney football. He was not a dirty player- never swore on the field or talked back at the referee. Whenever he conceded a free- kick, he would leave the ball and turn away. He was also a gifted player- his turns and moves were very agile and he organised the entire midfield. However, there were Australian players who also won the hearts of our supporters too. Our captain, Charlie Perkins, was another free-flowing team-player who always looked around to see who was next to him. He was unselfish, always searching for that free player. When Brian Smith arrived at the Club, he was an instant hit; he was another clean player who did his job very well without causing any problems and our supporters appreciated and respected him.

**When the** problems arose in the Club's administration and several of our prominent members left to buy Canterbury, I was disappointed with the developments. As players, we remained at our task- performing to the best of our ability on the field- but we did not like these developments. It did not matter how small the percentage of our supporters that followed them to Canterbury was- it still hurt Pan-Hellenic. We were only observers, but it hurt us too. Players say it did not affect the team's performances but I believe it did. I remember seeing Charlie Karavousanos and asking him, "What's going on, Charlie?" He had looked after me for three years and I appreciated his support; suddenly, he was on the other side. It was very confusing. For so many years after these unfortunate events I wondered what influenced him- and his followers- to make such a move. Karavousanos was one of the Club's earliest financial supporters.

**By 1964,** the dramatic changes at the top of the Club inevitably found their way into the team. An influx of non-Greek players replaced the strong Greek element in the team. By now, I was no longer a regular in 1st Grade squad; many players were brushed aside for the big changes in the team. I did not see out the season. After I began missing a couple of training sessions, I told the Committee I was leaving the team. My time was up. My mind was also elsewhere. By this time, I had begun working as a cabinet maker; this was much heavier work and I was much more tired. My cousin, Arthur

Poulitsas, invited me up to Queensland for work on tobacco farms and I stayed there until 1970. While we were in Queensland, Arthur and I actually set up a local football team, B.G. Beerwah; we were in the middle of Queensland's countryside and the only way to bring people together was football.

**Pan-Hellenic had** this passion to unite people. In the early sixties, there were over one thousand Greeks arriving in Sydney every month; these migrants felt the abrupt loneliness of living abroad and they search for something to fill this void. Pan-Hellenic brought them together. Our hopes were represented by Pan-Hellenic; it was truly something special.

**Vasilis Vasilas**