

## KIERAN WRIGHT 200 GAMES – A CHAMPION PERFORMANCE

This weekend we celebrate Kieran “Kizza” Wright’s 200<sup>th</sup> open-age club game with the Pennant Hills Demons. 2016 is Kieran’s 11<sup>th</sup> consecutive season with the Senior Club. He will play his 200<sup>th</sup> game on 4 June 2016 in the Round 9 Premier Division match against Sydney University. This is a significant milestone that ranks him as one of the highest games record-holders at the Club. Not only will the Demons be desperate for a win, but the boys will be determined to put on a strong showing to ensure the moment is one that Kieran will look back on with pride and fond memories. Kieran, who has been a great servant of this Club over a long period, deserves success on this important occasion. So, here’s wishing Kieran and the team all the best and we all look forward to a barnstorming performance.



Kieran’s football story is a remarkable tale. Switching codes from soccer at the age of 23, he readily adapted to Australian Rules and incredibly has gone on to reach the pinnacle of achievement in the Sydney AFL competition. He finished his soccer career at the West Pennant Hills Cherrybrook Football Club, the Lions, playing in the Premier Division side. Sensing he had ‘peaked’ and achieved all that he wanted in soccer, and in need of a new challenge, Kieran “had a few mates playing Recesses at the time” who encouraged him to come down for a pre-season with the Demons in 2006. It’s not clear if he ever played in the same team as those mates, as Kieran’s obvious talent and football potential saw him selected straight into the Premier Division Seniors side for his debut game.

Two-time Premiership Senior Coach Michael “Cuzzy” Cousens says that he “first met Kieran when he walked into the Club at the start of the 2006 pre-season which was [also] my first year as coach. He went on to be a member of the 2006 Premiership side despite having never played the game before ... a pretty incredible effort!”

Kieran’s debut was in Round 1 in 2006 against Western Suburbs under lights at Henson Park. As most contests against the Magpies are typically physical and bruising affairs, this would have been some initiation for Kieran. He was selected on the half back flank, Penno won by 34 points and Kieran’s footy career was off to a winning start.

	Western Suburbs			Pennant Hills		
Quarter One	4	0	24	5	2	32
Half Time	6	4	40	8	4	52
Quarter Three	6	5	41	11	6	72
Full Time	6	10	46	12	8	80

Kieran’s debut match against Western Suburbs, Round 1, 2006 at Henson Park (Data supplied by Michael Cousens)

Kieran kicks with his right foot and most of us now think of him as a pure backman. According to Michael Cousens, in his earlier days, Kieran thought of himself as something of a “*natural forward*” and we think this is where one of his nicknames, “Kablett”, is derived ... ala Gary Ablett Snr ... that’s a huge claim! Although to be fair, it’s not certain whether this moniker was self-proclaimed or whether his coach had a hand in it? Whatever its origin, it seems to have stuck.

So in 2008, Cuzzy used Kablett as a “*pinch hitter*” on the forward line and he kicked 25 goals that year. The Club was well endowed with gun forwards at that time, with Nick Campbell, Laine Spencer and Clint Setford kicking 133 goals between them. However, the following season, Laine retired, Clint moved to Melbourne and Nick had a long term injury. And Cuzzy, ironically was forced in 2009 to play Kieran at FF/CHF as he was really our only tall target. “*To his credit Kablett took on the role and was our leading goal scorer for the season*” with 49. In recognition of this outstanding performance, Kieran was named as a half forward in the 2009 AFL Sydney Team of the Year, the first of a long run of TotY selections, but the only time as a forward.



Kieran wins Phelan Medal 2011

However, in spite of this early dalliance with goal-kicking, he has in later times made his mark and reputation as a key position player at centre half-back, where over a long period he has rarely been beaten. According to Michael Cousens, Kieran’s “*ability to read the ball defensively is by far his greatest strength. His number of intercept marks per game (if ever measured) ... would be his most telling statistic. Equal to this would be his ability to kick the ball long and to typically hit targets in the process.*”

Kieran has averaged around 19 games per season throughout his career, testimony to his fitness, resilience and good fortune not to have suffered much in the way of serious injury. Ironically, it was in 2011, when he only

managed 13 games, that he achieved the highest honour in the Sydney AFL, voted Phelan Medallist, the League’s best and fairest.

At the time of the award it was noted that “*despite missing the last five matches of the season after tearing his pectoral muscle off the bone, Wright’s 20 votes were enough to win the league’s highest individual award. The 29-year-old polled three votes ahead of East Coast’s Rowan Bilkey and four votes ahead of the Eagles’ Jamie Vlatko.*”

Wright said “*It was unexpected [to win the award] because I knew I missed the last quarter of the season due to injury. It was a bit of a waiting game in the end looking at the leader board and just expecting one of the stars from East Coast, Balmain or Sydney University to overtake me. Luckily I held on which was very unexpected.*”

The media release went on to say: “*The medal is a fitting reward for the consistency and leadership this talented player has shown ... in the AFL Sydney competition after coming third (on 16 votes) in last season’s Phelan Medal count. The achievement is even more remarkable considering Wright was playing soccer five years ago and had only kicked a Sherrin on the odd occasion.*”

Also, in that year he was Pennant Hills Footballer of the Year, Seniors' Best & Fairest and Player's Player, was centre half back in the AFL Sydney Team of the Year and was an AFL Sydney representative player. What a stunning resume!

But it didn't really start or stop there. Over his time in footy he has achieved the following as player and team-mate:

- Three time Premiership player, all against East Coast Eagles, 2006, 2008 and 2015;
- In addition to winning the Phelan Medal in 2011, he finished in the top four vote-getters on three other occasions, 2010, 2012 and 2013. In 2012 he was runner-up to Dane Rampe who was drafted by the Sydney Swans in 2013;
- Seven times named in the Sydney AFL Team of the Year, 2009 – 2015;
- Sydney AFL representative player, 2008 – 2012;
- Twice Pennant Hills Footballer of the Year, Best & Fairest and Player's Player, 2010/11;
- Twice R/U Best & Fairest, Best Back Player, 2012/13 and Best Finals Player, 2009 & 2012;
- Won Coaches Award (with Matt Carey) in 2006.



Kieran and Premiership No 3, 2015

Kieran played his 100<sup>th</sup> game during the 2011 season and reached the 150 mark in 2013, qualifying for player Life Membership of the Club. Of Kieran's achievements, Michael Cousens says, *"there's not much else he could have achieved at the Sydney AFL level"* and talks glowingly of his football ability and his character:

*He is a "loyal man and a loyal player; a genuine mate who I always enjoy catching up with for frothies whenever we can. Contrary to his public demeanour (☺) he has a ripping sense*



*of humour... as is testament to the fact that he's never missed a footy trip!! (I don't think). He's a standout example of what makes Sydney footy great in that it has this tendency to attract people from other codes who are courageous enough to try something different from what they know well ... and in Kieran's case ... to excel, by every measure!"*



**Kizz & Cuz 2015**

Kieran reckons current team-mate Ranga "Reggie" Ediriwickrama is the best player he's ever played with. As for opposition, Matt Withers from Western Suburbs has been his toughest opponent ... "big, strong and ran all over the ground. Great kick for goal too." Apart from the obvious highlight of three premierships, Kieran reckons that surviving the annual Footy Trip, what with the shenanigans that the likes of Jason Clarke and Clint Setford get up to, is also a remarkable achievement!

Cuzzy also noted an injury scare that Kizza experienced in 2007 ... "he did suffer a pretty major shoulder injury in the preliminary final in 2007 against North Shore. He was hospitalised for quite some time requiring warfarin to prevent clot formation, etc. In fact from memory, there was some doubt as to whether he'd be able to play again due to the potential dangers of a recurrence? History obviously shows though that he carried on. In terms of injuries outside of that, thank Loz for giving him personalised physio one-on-one for most of his career. If she was to ever charge the club for the time spent on treating him we'd be broke 😊"

Despite generally steering clear of major injury (the 2011 season being an exception), Kieran still found ample opportunities to hop up on the physio's table for the occasional rub-down under the care and ministrations of skilled Club physiotherapist Lauren Cain. Through all the strapping, ice packs, sweat, grime and pain, a relationship was forged and Loz eventually became Lauren Wright and then daughter Arlia came along. Given Loz's unique position from which to watch Kieran's footy career we asked her for her impressions:



**Loz**

*"Playing 200 games for the mighty Demons ... Wow, what an achievement! Looking back to when I first met Kieran over 10 years ago through this amazing club, I never thought he would continue playing for so long [and at such] a high level to reach this milestone. It truly is a testament to his passion and dedication to this club that we have come to call our family. AFL is Kieran's life and I am sure he will pass on this passion to our daughter, Arlia.*

*We would all be lost without our weekends of football! Congratulations Kieran on reaching 200 games. Arlia and I want you to know that we are here to support you through to 300!"*

Kieran comes across as a laconic, laid back kind of guy, however, those that know him best (Loz for example) say that "Kieran's passion [for the game] is very well disguised under his cool and calm persona he shows [to the outside world]." However, few can doubt that there is a hot fire that burns beneath that inspires and drives Kieran's competitive spirit and his will to succeed. It's not possible to enjoy the success that Kieran has had, without a deep and abiding passion and energy for the contest.

Kieran is undoubtedly a champion footballer and ranks amongst the best to have graced the footy parks in the Sydney competition. As an individual, he has reached the pinnacle of achievement, a

Phelan Medal. And as a team player, he has achieved the ultimate success, a Premier Division Flag, not just once, but on three occasions, indisputably ranking him as one of the most successful footballers in Sydney. He is one of only four players at the Club to have the distinction of being a triple first grade premiership player for the Demons, along with current team-mate Matt Carey, winning in 2006, 2008 and 2015, as well as Jason Clarke and Alistair Richardson who both won in 2000, 2006 and 2008. Kieran's has been a rare and distinguished career and it is with pride, honour and awe that we celebrate the 200 game milestone of this great Demon champion.

Congratulations Kieran on an illustrious career and on reaching this fantastic milestone.

Go Penno!



## KIZZA BY THE STATS

### Kieran WRIGHT Senior Football Career (Player 2006 – 2016)

<b>Year joined</b>	:	2006, Premier Division Seniors
<b>No of seasons</b>	:	11 seasons, 2006 – 2016
<b>Senior games</b>	:	Total Open-age: - 199 (Premier Division – 196, Reserves – 3)
<b>Awards</b>	:	Phelan Medal (2011) R/U Phelan Medal (2012) Pennant Hills Footballer of the Year (2010/11) Seniors Best & Fairest & Players Player (2010/11) R/U Seniors Best & Fairest and Best Back Player (2012/13) Best Finals Player (2009 & 2012) Coaches Award (2006)
<b>Premiership seasons</b>	:	<b>Premiers:</b> Premier Division, 2006, 2008 and 2015 <b>Runners Up:</b> Premier Division, 2013/14
<b>Representative honours</b>	:	AFL Sydney, 2008 – 12 AFL Sydney Team of the Year, 2009 – 15 (HFF 2009, CHB 2010/11, HBF 2012/15)
<b>Leading Snr Goalkicker</b>	:	47 goals (2009)

### Kieran Wright - Phelan Medal Voting

Year	Votes	Place
2008	10	-
2009	10	-
2010	16	4 <sup>th</sup>
2011	20	Winner 1 <sup>st</sup>
2012	20	Runner Up 2 <sup>nd</sup>
2013	14	Equal 3 <sup>rd</sup>
2014	6	-
2015	5	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	

#### Matches Highlighted

1. Premier Division debut: **Pennant Hills 12.8-80** def Western Suburbs 6.10-46
2. Premier Division Grand Final 2006: **Pennant Hills 5.20-50** def East Coast Eagles 7.6-48
3. Premier Division Grand Final 2008: **Pennant Hills 20.12-132** def East Coast Eagles 3.10-28
4. Premier Division Grand Final 2015: **Pennant Hills 14.5-89** def East Coast Eagles 7.12-54