

Good afternoon.

To the late Brian Stopford's family, organisers of this memorial service in particular Geoff Mayes and Bluey Forsyth, Principal, staff and students, both former and present of Cairns State High School; thank you for giving me this opportunity, on behalf of the Stratford Dolphins Football Club, to acknowledge Brian's life. Brian's life of service to Stratford and to soccer generally, is already well recognised by all in attendance. All gathered here today would be aware of his ability and excellence as an athlete.

It was his athletic ability that led to him being one of the youngest players ever to play for the Stratford senior side on a continual basis. I well remember Brian when he first donned the Stratford, Plavi Jadran, playing strip for the 1972 season. I was in Mareeba State High Grade 11 and Brian was the fresh-faced kid from Grade 12 Cairns High. His electrifying speed, wherever on the field, made him a playing sensation.

There were moments, as Brian told me many times over the years, that soccer in those days was certainly never boring.

I was present at a match at the Stratford grounds in 1972 when Stratford was playing Tablelands Croatia and an almighty brawl occurred on the field. Brian was chased by a rather prominent opposing player on the field and then the chase shifted to around the cars parked on the eastern side of the field along Arnold Street. Needless to say, the opposing player did not catch Brian on the field nor around the cars. Brian and I laughed on many occasions since about this incident. He would say that while the style and systems to play soccer have changed, he always maintained that soccer was never boring back in the days.

Brian went on to win many trophies with Stratford. He departed Stratford to then pursue what turned out to be a lifetime teaching career. He returned to this part of the world to commence his teaching career. He again resumed playing with Stratford and then played with Mareeba on their first foray into

the State League in the late 70's where he pitted his skills and athleticism against the very best in Queensland.

Brian was appointed as Stratford's Senior Coach for the 2002 season and remained in the position for 4 years. As Club President during that period, there were many, many occasions where Brian and I would meet, on and off the field, to discuss emerging issues. There was never a dull nor dry moment when meeting with Brian; it would either end in laughter, agree to disagree, or an argument. But that was Brian.

But it wasn't just Stratford for Brian. Brian was interested in bringing the beauty of soccer; the skills as well as the blood, sweat and tears of the physical battle; to all who would listen; thereby playing a vital role in serving and promoting the code throughout the North.

Cairns State High folk remember Brian as a teacher and therefore a figure of authority. But he also had a life at Cairns State High as a student, where he had a different reputation.

Brian wasn't always a State High student. He was originally a St Augustine's boy. He spent his teenage years in what became known as the Swinging Sixties, a time of rock-and-roll, youth rebellion and long hair. But St Augustine's in the sixties certainly wasn't a place to display these emerging trends. So when Brian turned up, possibly in Grade 10, with glorious, flamboyant, long blonde hair, I believe St Augustine's did not approve and sent him home.

But Brian and his family stood their ground and Brian kept his hair. The following year Brian moved to Cairns State High where he was made very welcome.

So there you have it. The teacher thousands of students have known as "Mr Stopford" was one of the original long-haired rebels of the sixties when he first came to this school.

And it was this principled insistence on doing things his own way that made Brian such a fantastic footballer, athlete and teacher.

Upon departing Stratford as the senior coach, Brian attended many Stratford homes games, as he did with other clubs. He even attended a few this season. At Stratford he would always stand at the northern fence line, fold his arms and study the game. I do believe Stratford was dear to his heart. He would comment many times that playing on that field to the backdrop of the hills at the southern end of the field, was like playing on no other ground. On many occasions his loyal friend Bluey Forsyth would also be in attendance where they would discuss the game and ultimately air on local radio.

Whilst Brian's passing came as a shock to his family, his friends and to the soccer community generally, his passing certainly rocked the Stratford soccer community. Stratford is in the final stages of preparing for their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary to be held at the Pullman Hotel on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June. Several of his former playing colleagues from 1972 side and later, had already booked to attend this event. They were shocked and saddened when I informed them of Brian's passing.

Today we have an opportunity to recognise Brian as an individual and the role model he has been for such a long time to so many. As his clubmate from 1972 and on behalf of the Stratford Dolphins and the wider soccer community, I am grateful for being given the opportunity to make this speech and pay tribute to him. RIP Brian.

Thank you.