

BACK TO BELMORE

Back to the Future, Back to Basics....

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A Message from Luke...

After much contemplation and careful consideration, I have decided to stand down as President of the Back to Belmore Inc. executive committee. Last night, the executive committee selected a new President, Luke Cevolani, and Vice President, Steven Cataldi. Without a doubt, these distinguished gentlemen (both founding committee members) are two of the most passionate advocates for local sport on this planet and will carve out a brave new direction for Back to Belmore. I congratulate Luke and Steve on their well-deserved appointments and I am truly honoured by being named by the executive committee as President Emeritus.

I am profoundly grateful to the executive committee for giving me the privilege to serve as President for nine years, to work for the Canterbury-Bankstown community in playing a small but pivotal role in advocating the restoration and preservation of Belmore Sports Ground as a top-class sporting facility. Luke Cevolani, Steven Cataldi, Joey Moses, Tony Karam, Joe Karam, Oltan Akdogan and Angus Jabour are by far the finest champions of Belmore's restoration and my appreciation to these selfless gentlemen for their enduring and steadfast support over the years is beyond measure.

I have led a grassroots organisation that started in the depths of winter in 2005 with a simple petition that managed to garner over 10,000 signatures. During that bitterly long and cold winter nine years ago, nobody wanted to take responsibility for the unacceptable state of Belmore Sports Ground which appeared to have a limited future. So seven local residents, including myself, stepped up to the plate at a time when most people believed the historic venue was destined for the scrapheap, depriving our district's future athletes of a venue they could call home. As Back to Belmore now enters its tenth year of service to the Canterbury-Bankstown community, our movement has clearly prevailed in ensuring that the historic venue is safeguarded for the next generation of sports players.

I would like to pay special tribute to Dr George Peponis OAM (Canterbury League Club Chairman), Mr Ray Dib (Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs Chairman), Mr Arthur Coorey (Canterbury League Club Deputy Chairman), Mr Todd Greenberg (former Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs Chief Executive), Mr Chris Tsioulos (Sydney Olympic FC President), the Hon. Tony Burke MP (Federal Member for Watson) and the Hon. Robert Furolo MP (State Member for Lakemba), whose collaborative and constructive efforts secured the necessary Government funding to restore Belmore Sports Ground. Without their unstinting efforts the physical transformation of Belmore Sports Ground from a facility largely unfit for community use to a state-of-the-art sporting complex would not have been possible.

I am very proud of what our organisation has achieved, which will endure for the long term. I am very proud of the social media advertising campaign we launched in 2010 that helped the issue of Belmore Sports Ground's much-needed redevelopment re-enter the public consciousness. In addition, I am very proud of the merchandise range we launched which allowed supporters of our movement to publicly show their passion and affection for Belmore Sports Ground and all profits from the merchandise have gone towards our initiatives to benefit future athletes. The merchandise range has serendipitously taken on a life of its own, fast emerging as a popular clothing brand for men in the 18 to 35 demographic.

I take great satisfaction in having commenced our player clinics and training sessions in the Canterbury-Bankstown district for football (soccer), rugby league, rugby union and gridiron. These clinics will be rolled out by 2015/2016 creating a pathway for aspiring athletes to achieve their chosen goals in sport, enriching the lives of the next generation of sports players and nurturing their talents by giving them an outlet to get active, play sport and have fun.

It is with great distinction to have strengthened our alliance with local sporting clubs while taking a major stride forward in our relationship with Belmore Sports Ground's primary occupants, the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs Rugby League Club and Sydney Olympic FC. I am confident that I leave the executive committee having cemented the relationship with all our major stakeholders. Embracing sports like gridiron and rugby union, not traditionally associated with Belmore Sports Ground, was a bold move and undoubtedly sent a fault line through certain sections of a community dominated by rugby league and soccer but in the fullness of time hindsight shall prove it was the correct course of action if the historic venue is to realistically secure future rounds of Government funding.

I'm also very honoured that the executive committee appointed our first indigenous goodwill ambassador, Arthur Little. A proud Wiradjuri man originally from Wagga Wagga, Arthur has played an instrumental role in initiating a number of programs for young indigenous athletes, a major focus for Back to Belmore, and building key relationships within the community. We are better off because of his enduring passion and contribution to local sport.

I also believe that the work we have done with the "Forward to Belmore" initiative is something to be proud of as a community organisation, providing financial assistance to the local community's future sports players towards achieving honours in their sporting field whilst also allowing them to pursue their goals and ambitions by supporting youth and their development as athletes.

Go back to 2005 for a moment. Think about the dilapidated and decrepit state of Belmore Sports Ground in 2005 and now. Think about the negative and pessimistic attitudes towards the venue's future in 2005 and now. The last nine years have been a time of dramatic transformation for Belmore Sports Ground, and you have risen to every new challenge. You have all helped make Belmore's social fabric stronger and future athletes who aspire to play there more prosperous.

So how does Belmore Sports Ground stand in present-day 2014? More thriving and sustainable than it was nine years ago. We started this organisation with high hopes for the future of Belmore Sports Ground at a time when most stakeholders believed the historic venue had no future whatsoever. I leave the executive committee with even higher hopes for the venue's future. Belmore Sports Ground is indeed a special place. It is the most beautiful sporting facility in the world. For almost a decade, Back to Belmore has played a key part in changing people's perceptions about the future of Belmore Sports Ground from unyielding cynicism and doubt to strong optimism and excitement for the future.

In all the work I have done since Back to Belmore's inception in 2005, every decision I have made, I've tried to give all aspiring sports players in the Canterbury-Bankstown district the tools to build the future of their dreams with a top-class facility to match their ambitions. The development of local sports players and the redevelopment of Belmore Sports Ground are inextricably linked and intertwined. I have steered my course by our enduring mission statement and vision. Opportunity for all. A community facility for all facets of the community.

I also want to thank our amazing volunteers and goodwill ambassadors, the foot soldiers and flag bearers of our movement, who passionately believe in the creed and values of Back to Belmore and just how important Back to Belmore has been to championing the cause for Belmore Sports Ground's revitalisation, overseeing a seismic shift in the community's attitudes about the future of the venue that is now the envy of other sporting facilities in Sydney. Without the unstinting and tireless efforts of our volunteers and goodwill ambassadors, Back to Belmore would simply not exist.

It has been an honour and privilege to serve the Canterbury-Bankstown community in advocating the preservation and restoration of Belmore Sports Ground and the development of local athletes. I give my thanks to you, our volunteers, our goodwill ambassadors, our benefactors, our supporters and our key stakeholders for the times I have succeeded, and my apologies to you for the times I may have failed to carry the ball over the finish line. Be assured that I did what I genuinely believed was right for Belmore Sports Ground, as I have always had the best interests of the venue at heart. I take credit for when the sun shines but I also accept blame for when the rain falls.

I'm very pleased to be able to hand over the reins of leadership to a new President of the executive committee, with Back to Belmore Inc. in such a strong position to meet the challenges of the future. I would like to wish my successor Luke Cevolani well in meeting these challenges and in ensuring that Belmore Sports Ground reaches its optimum potential as a multi-purpose sporting facility.

It has been nine years since Back to Belmore Inc. was established. I said then that my greatest wish was that at the end of my tenure, I shall have contributed towards making Belmore Sports Ground a better place, despite almost everybody saying that the venue was consigned to the dustbin. I leave now knowing that I have fulfilled my wish and that I played a small part in making Belmore Sports Ground a better place for future generations.

I firmly believe that Belmore Sports Ground's best years now lie ahead of her. It is imperative, however, that all stakeholders continue to work collaboratively towards the same common goal of securing the venue's future as a viable central component of the Canterbury-Bankstown district's identity.

Yours in Belmore,



LUKE R. BRAILEY
President Emeritus
Back to Belmore Inc.