

GROUNDS

Since football started in 1916 three main ovals have been used as the league's major venue for matches. The Esplanade or Town Oval was used from 1916 to 1954, the Gardens Oval from 1954 to 1991, and Football Park Marrara from 1991. All three ovals had their own characteristics, which make interesting talking points with players and spectators alike.

The Town Oval became known as the 'gravel rash' oval, as many players who happened to make contact with the ground invariably ended up with gravel rash on whatever part of the body scraped the surface of the ground. The ground was sparsely grassed but was littered with fine particles of gravel. It was quite picturesque, with a small grandstand backing on to Darwin Harbour and facing the Esplanade directly opposite the Darwin Hotel

which still stands on its original site. One of the disadvantages of its location was the number of footballs, which were lost when kicked into the harbour area. The oval was supplemented by the Parap Oval, which was located on the site now occupied by the Parap Swimming Pool.

The move to Gardens Oval in 1954 was welcomed by all footballers and spectators, as the ground had good grass cover, shady trees and lovely scenery of the Botanical Gardens palm trees display. Two grandstands were built by the Darwin City Council, but these and other facilities such as change rooms and toilets proved to be inadequate to cope with football's growing following. There was definitely

more atmosphere at matches played at Gardens Oval mainly because of the closeness of spectators to the game. This was more noticeable at Darwin/St Marys games, with the Darwin supporters congregated behind the goal posts at the Darwin High School end of the ground, and the St Marys supporters at the Town end of the ground. As could well be imagined, there was never any peace for the poor Goal Umpires who copped plenty from both armies of supporters. Football was also played at the home grounds of Waratahs from 1962, Nightcliff from 1972, and Southern Districts (Fred's Pass Reserve) from 1987.

Football Park Marrara is one of Darwin's finest sporting arenas. The grandstand and grassed areas will accommodate a total of 22 000 people in comfort whilst offering a variety of viewing angles of the oval. The overall scenery will be further enhanced when the many trees planted in 1991 mature and provide more shade area for patrons who prefer watching matches from the built-up areas around both No. 1 and No. 2 ovals. Football Park Marrara is versatile; it is not only a superb football venue, but a panoramic venue for potential concerts, carnivals and special events. The facilities are superb with four large changerooms/shower toilet rooms for footballers, a functions room, restaurant, bar facilities and sufficient public toilets. The installation of ground lights in December 1994 has made Football Park Marrara the true showpiece of sports centres in Darwin and the Northern Territory.

Southern sporting identifies who attended the 1991 National Teal Cup series, 1991 National Superules Championship, and Australia Day Representative matches in 1992, '93, '94 and '95 have applauded the magnificent facilities of Football Park Marrara. The opening ceremonies of the Pacific Schools Games in 1992 and the Arafura Games in 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001 were held at Football Park, and the facilities received rare reviews from the participating states and countries.