

## **Australian Lebanese Historical Society Inc. Newsletter**

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### **Eddie Scarf – Olympic Wrestler**

Eddie Scarf of Narrabeen was first noticed in the Australian wrestling scene in 1926 when he was runner-up for the NSW heavyweight title at the age of 17. He proved his status as a champion in 1927 by winning the NSW heavyweight title and being runner-up for the Australian heavyweight wrestling title.

In 1928 Eddie won both the NSW middleweight and heavyweight titles and also won the middleweight Olympic test event. However when the Australian team to the 1928 Olympics was selected, the Australian Olympic Committee was in parlous financial straits and needed to select a small team and overlooked Scarf.

Australia, at that stage, had a combined boxing and wrestling association. Wrestling matches were held in boxing rings rather than on mats and followed rules of British origin rather than International rules. The same athletes often participated in wrestling and boxing matches. Australian wrestlers tended to be at a disadvantage in being unfamiliar with international conditions, and the three Australian wrestlers competing in the 1928 Olympics were badly outclassed.

Eddie Scarf, however, was a pure wrestler. Not to be deterred, Eddie Scarf continued his winning ways, taking out the Australian heavyweight and middleweight titles in 1929, the NSW heavyweight title in 1929, 1930, 1931 and 1932. He also won the Australian heavyweight title in 1932, so he had a strong claim for inclusion in the Australian team to the 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

The effects of the economic Depression dominated the events surrounding the selection of the team to the 1932 Olympics. The Australian Olympic Federation was nearly broke and also lacked financial assistance from the Federal Government, as had been the case in the selection of the three previous Olympic teams. Athletes from around Australia, who contributed 6 pence a week over two years, financed the 1932 effort. The team numbered only 12 members, the smallest number since 1906, and great care had to be exercised in the selection of the athletes.

Eddie Scarf's selection proved to be justified by his results. He won the bronze medal in the light heavyweight freestyle event (under 87 kilograms) behind American Peter Mehringer and Thure Sjostedt of Sweden. Australia had first entered wrestlers in the 1924 Olympics, but this was the first Olympic wrestling medal won by an Australian.

Considering the size of the 1932 team, it was relatively successful because in addition to Scarf's wrestling medal, it also achieved three gold medals: (Edgar Dunc Gray 1000m time trial cycling, Henry "Bobby" Pearce Single sculls rowing, Clare Dennis Women's 200m breaststroke swimming) and a silver medal (Philomena "Bonnie" Mealing Women's 100m backstroke swimming).

The only other occasion when Australian won Olympic wrestling medals was in 1948 when Dick Garrard won a silver medal in the lightweight and Jim Anderson a bronze in the heavyweight freestyle divisions.

Eddie Scarf, along with Dick Garrard and John O'Hara represented Australia again in wrestling at the controversial 1936 Berlin Olympics where the Australian team was received coolly by the crowd at the opening ceremony for being one of the teams that refused to give the Nazi salute when passing Hitler's grandstand box. Despite impressive performances, the three Australian wrestlers were hampered by unfamiliarity with international rules and dubious decisions by judges. One story tells of the Australians celebrating in their hotel with enough gusto at the conclusion of the wrestling competition that they managed to disturb high Nazi officials staying in the same hotel. A band of S.A. storm troopers was dispatched with the aim of silencing the Australians. However they didn't count on the enthusiasm of the defence led by Scarf and his fellow wrestlers, and the SA was seen off fairly easily and quickly – some in the team seeing

the skirmish as a consolation prize for the unfair loss of a wrestling gold medal.

Eddie Scarf represented Australia at the 1938 Empire Games held in Sydney, winning the light heavyweight division. By the late 1930's, Scarf had turned professional and was taking part in professional wrestling matches.

Eddie Scarf was born in Quirindi NSW in 1908. His parents were Michael G. and Amelia Scarf. The Federation Index of Births, Deaths and Marriages identify three brothers (Carl, b. 1902, Clyde b. 1904 and Theodore G. b. 1912) and two sisters (Edith, b. 1906 and Ruby b. 1910), all born in Armidale.

Eddie Scarf was a butcher and operated a butcher shop in Pittwater Road Narrabeen during his professional life (he also lived in Narrabeen). He had another shop at 513 Willoughby Road Willoughby during the 1930's. In 1958, his shop is described in the telephone directory as being on the corner of Fisher and May Roads Dee Why. He last appears in the Sydney Telephone directory in 1969.

Scarf was a well known figure in the Narrabeen area and it was reported in 1939 in a local newspaper: The 'butchers relay' race over 440 yards was organised between two rival Narrabeen butcher shops to settle the friendly dispute of "*Who had the most customers*". The shops were those of ex-Olympic wrestler, Mr Eddie Scarf and that of Mr Billy Pilon of North Narrabeen SLSC fame.

Four employees from each shop "doffed aprons and downed cleavers" to run the race at the Narrabeen Recreation Ground. The prize, a 5 gallon keg of beer, was won by the team representing Eddie Scarf's shop, by enjoyed finally by both teams and a crowd of barrackers.

Eddie Scarf enlisted in the RAAF on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1941. According to the Australian War Memorial's database, he was a Sergeant stationed at the Paratroop Training Unit at Tocumwal when he was discharged in February 1945. Although he was employed as a stores keeper, at some stage he helped to stage demonstration wrestling matches to entertain Australian troops on active service during World War II. In his autobiography, surgeon Harry Windsor notes meeting Eddie Scarf on a flight with a bare knuckle takeoff from at Higgins Field at the tip of Cape York:

*Aircraftman Eddie Scarf: Poster from a War Time match Donald Cameron, RAAF Director of Recruiting had brought a team of boxers and wrestlers to the Islands. They challenged all-comers, invariably won and won quickly. Amongst them was ... Eddie Scarf.*

Eddie married Edna Gale at Chatswood in 1942. He briefly resumed wrestling after the war, but then concentrated on his butchering business and community affairs on the north shore area of Sydney. He died on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1980 at Camperdown and was buried at Mona Vale Cemetery; his wife, daughter and two sons survived him.

## References

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