



# Media Release



## New exhibition celebrates 50 years of the 'original Indigenous round'

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Over 30,000 players and spectators are expected to descend on the South Coast this October long weekend for the biggest gathering of First Nations people in Australia — the 50th Koori Knockout.

"It's the original Indigenous round, but on a much bigger scale", says Ronald Briggs, Gamilaroi (Moree), curator of the State Library of NSW's new exhibition, *Koori Knockout: 50 Years*, which opens to the public on 24 September 2022.

It's 50 years since six young First Nations men gathered at the Clifton, Redfern and came up with an idea to bring together Aboriginal players and highlight their football abilities so talent scouts could see what they had been overlooking.

*Koori Knockout: 50 Years* follows the competition from its early days played at Camdenville Oval, St Peters with just seven men's teams in the first Knockout, to becoming an important fixture in the First Nations calendar and the biggest rugby league knockout carnival anywhere in the world. It has kickstarted the professional careers of numerous NRL and NRLW league players, including former greats Greg Inglis and Dean Widders, and current stars such as Latrell Mitchell (South Sydney Rabbitohs) and Josh Addo-Carr (Canterbury-Bankstown).

"It's not just about the footy," says Ronald, who fondly remembers watching his dad play for the Moree Boomerangs in the 1970s and early 80s. "The Knockout has been called a 'modern day corroboree'; it's a happy time for First Nations families to come together, catch-up and celebrate the achievements of our brothers and sisters."

The exhibition features over 50 historic and contemporary photographs that capture the excitement of the Knockout over the years, including photo series by Murri woman Barbara O'Grady, Gomeroi-Gamilaraay, and Jamie James that have been acquired for the State Library's collection.

Co-founder Uncle Victor Wright has kindly loaned his personal memorabilia for display, including the first-ever Knockout trophy and heritage jerseys. His memories of the game are featured among the stories, oral histories and recordings of past and present players who have helped shape the competition over the years.

"My youngest son [Jonathan] came through the Knockout and his first signing was Parramatta" says Uncle Victor. "It's there in the blood; cut my leg and a couple of little footballs may fall out."

**KOORI KNOCKOUT** 50 YEARS

IMAGE: KOORI KNOCKOUT WINNERS, CEC PATTEN-RON MERRITT MEMORIAL REDFERN ALL BLACKS, LIFT CAPTAIN GRAEME MERRITT, REDFERN OVAL, 2004 (DETAIL), PHOTO BY JAMIE JAMES



# KOORI KNOCKOUT

## 50 YEARS

IMAGE: KOORI KNOCKOUT WINNERS, CEC PATTEN-RON MERRITT MEMORIAL REDFERN ALL BLACKS, LIFT CAPTAIN GRAEME MERRITT, REDFERN OVAL, 2004 (DETAIL), PHOTO BY JAMIE JAMES

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The exhibition has been developed in consultation with a First Nations reference group and key contributors including Knockout commentator Brad Cooke, Bidigal (La Perouse), who will call his 14th grand final for National Indigenous Television (NITV), after an agonising two-year hiatus.

What stands out for Brad is the large number of NRL and NRLW women players that compete each year, “such is their love for their mobs and respective communities... never passing up the chance to go back and play with their brothers, sisters, cousins, and in some cases, mothers and fathers.”

*Koori Knockout: 50 Years* is a free exhibition at the State Library of NSW until 27 August 2023. [sl.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/koori-knockout-50-years](https://sl.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/koori-knockout-50-years)

### **MEDIA CONTACT:**

Vanessa Bond, Media & Communications Manager, State Library of NSW  
0411 259 898, [vanessa.bond@sl.nsw.gov.au](mailto:vanessa.bond@sl.nsw.gov.au)