

# I hope Brisbane bears witness to Gabba roar

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**B**ig matches, big moments, big crowds. Unforgettable memories.

This has been the Gabba for more than 120 years.

We're hoping more memories are made on Saturday night when the Brisbane Lions host GWS in the quest to stay alive in their first AFL finals campaign in a decade.

Let's hope it joins that list of great Gabba moments: cricket's tied Test between Australia and the West Indies in 1960; the Queensland Bulls' breakthrough Sheffield Shield in 1994-95; and the Olympic Games of 2000.

There have also been those superb Brisbane Lions memories – when we won 18 straight at “the Gabbatoir” from 2001 to 2002.

I was lucky enough to be part of that run when the Lions ruled the AFL with three consecutive premierships.

Great sporting grounds never leave you – they create moments that you “collect” throughout your life.

Those Gabba moments rekindled emotions as I revisited the ground recently when Lions coach Chris Fagan asked a few former players to talk to the current squad about finals football.

It was a long way from my first visit to the Gabba as a kid when my Dad drove me up from our Gold Coast home to see what greyhound racing was all about.

Remember those Thursday nights when the Gabba was the home of the “yappers” on a track that encircled our beloved cricket ground?

It was more an “oval” back then, rather than a “stadium”, more “rustic” than an “architectural masterpiece” but it still seemed



FIRE UP: Daniel McStay after kicking a goal at the Gabba.

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awesome to a knee-high kid. Little did I know back then that years later the ground would become my “home away from home” for the next 10 years.

The dog track had been gone for a few years and the playing field was now officially the size of the MCG when I returned as a young bloke cutting my AFL teeth under John Northey with the Brisbane Bears in 1996.

By the time we became the Lions the following year after the Brisbane-Fitzroy merger, the stadium was well on its way to becoming an “all-seated” stadium as part of a 15-year masterplan.

We said goodbye to the old Queensland Cricketers Club, the hill,

its scoreboard and the Clem Jones Stand.

The “hump” in the middle of the ground was laser-levelled out in time for hosting the 2000 Olympics soccer pool matches.

I had some of my most treasured memories, and a few I'd rather forget at the Gabba: our premiership run from 2001-2003, the 2004 “four-peat” tilt and my swansong in Round 22 against St Kilda, September 2, 2006.

The Gabba will always be my favourite ground because of those shared experiences with my teammates, my family and the direct connection with Brisbane fans, their cheers and ovation.

As the stadium has evolved, so too

has the surrounding area. I remember when Logan Rd was cluttered with second-hand shops and the best culinary offering was Lunch on Logan where we used to duck in for a quiche after Lions training.

Top-class dining and entertainment options have sprung up which is why the next chapter in Gabba's history along with the Cross River Rail underground station which will link commuters with the city in three minutes is so important for the future of the ground.

The Gabba's 21st century masterplan includes a grand entrance to the stadium, landscaped public gardens with big screens and pedestrian walkways, making the area a year-round public space and bringing with it another wave of residential, retail and entertainment development.

It's a wave that is rippling out through the entire city, from the new Howard Smith Wharves, the catalytic Queen's Wharf development and the proposed Brisbane Live, the mind boggles at how Brisbane will be transformed by 2025.

Having been raised on the Gold Coast I was always drawn to the water and I have come to love how Brisbane embraces the river into its lifestyle.

Moving here as a young footballer in the 1990s, to meeting my wife Catherine, our first home together on the river at New Farm, raising our three girls, I feel I have grown in tandem with the River City we now call our home and feel such a part of.

I was interested to learn that the name Wolloongabba comes from an Aboriginal word, although there are a couple of theories as to its meaning. One is “place of water”, the other is “fighting place”. That certainly has a ring to it as the Lions fight for their 2019 season survival against GWS this Saturday. Go Lions.

CLARK KEATING PLAYED FOR THE BRISBANE LIONS FROM 1996-2006