

Cover
feature

Thistles



Senior club president
Chris Tangye



Helensburgh has a rich history of hard work and a deep community-wide passion for sport, with netball and rugby league certainly deserving a mention – but there's a special place in the annals of history for the 130-year-old Helensburgh Thistles football club.

Now calling for registrations ahead of its 131st season, the Thistles club is one of the oldest continuing soccer clubs in Australia.

Senior club president Chris Tangye is determined to honour and maintain that tradition.

"We're a tiny little town south of Sydney ... and we are literally one of the top few clubs in Australia, oldest clubs in Australia," Chris told the Flame.

"And when you think about the legacy of that, to have that kind of continuity for 130 years. It's kind of amazing.

"So I do think it's important for the members of the club and the players of the club to be cognisant of the history and the legacy that they're part of"

"Ambitious plans" to celebrate the Thistles' 125th anniversary had been scheduled for 2020 but Covid-related restrictions at the time scuppered those. Ultimately, the Thistles made up for lost time in 2025 with events to mark the club's 130th birthday, including a past players' day.

"It was a nice opportunity to get all the old players from the club watching the first grade side."

Chris said he wanted club members to value the club's legacy.

"I do want it to be front of mind," he said. "I think it's a selling point for the club as well.

Imagining being part of the club with the history that we have is really amazing and so I think we're very lucky. I want to make sure that we don't forget our history, we don't forget the legacy.

"And so I think it's certainly something that I'm very aware of. And I want people who play for the club to be aware of it because it's a really special thing.

FOR ALL AGES

By Marcus Craft



Above: Junior and Senior club presidents Gill Lehn and Chris Tangye cutting the 130th birthday cake last year. Photo: Thistles



“And I don’t think you’re going to have an opportunity to be part of something like this anywhere else in Australia.”

Chris knows the value of grassroots tradition, having played soccer at an amateur level here in Australia and in the UK.

“I really want people to think about that when they’re putting on that shirt, just how many players have put on that shirt before you. And it’s quite amazing to think about the depth of tradition. History, the future.”

Chris, who took over from Jason Bell as Thistles club president in 2024, arrived at the position via a rather international route: he was born in New York, lived in the UK as a child and attended school in Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Sydney (his British father worked in international shipping so the family moved a lot).

Chris later met now-wife Mollie (“Balmain born and bred”) at an audition for a commercial – Mollie

was “working in casting” – and they started dating about a year later when they reconnected at a party.

The couple, armed with British passports, arrived in London in June 2007 and stayed in the UK until 2015.

“We reached a point that Australians reach when they are living in the UK: we had to decide whether we were going to stay in the UK or whether we were going to move back to Australia. And we had our daughter who was born in Manchester, and my wife felt very strongly that if we didn’t move back to Australia, then we probably would never move back.”

In 2015, the young family arrived back in Australia, and Chris has since worked for Stan and now SBS Australia, where he is head of product for streaming and digital products.

No matter where he’s lived, Chris said soccer has always been a constant in his life.

The family bought a house in Helensburgh in



Helen Taylor, Helen Taylor, June Mudge, Ethel Hill, Thelma Wardle, Roma Powell, Glen Hall, Flora Lucas, Penny Wardle, Mary Smith.



July 2017, then moved in September – and the rest is history.

“The proximity [of Helensburgh to Sydney] is a big selling point. And the first thing I did was look at the football club. I then started to play in the summer soccer competition and that was a good entry point into basically playing for the winter teams, so I started playing for Helensburgh from the following season.

“And I do think – when I look at our friendship circles here – that it’s largely thanks to the soccer club or thanks to our kids.”

The couple’s two children – Delen (11) and Griffin (7) – have played for the Thistles, with Delen returning this year – this time in the U11s – and Griffin still a chance to play in the U8s.

Chris was elected president in late 2024, when Jason Bell, who had been in the role for about five years, vacated the seat after a very positive time in the position, which included helping to get Thistles into the Illawarra Premier League.

Part of Chris’s role now is to consolidate the club’s position in the league – the club has 10 teams playing seniors, including two women’s teams, an all-age team, and two over-35 teams, two over 45 teams, and their Premier League squad – and to manage “that kind of transition into new people coming through, new ideas”.

The Thistles plan to build on their success this season, Chris said.

“It’s largely much of the same in terms of what happens on the field: our junior clubs and our junior teams are still growing, which is fantastic.

“We have some of the best facilities in the Football South Coast area.

“One of the big things I want to try and improve is the lighting [for the oval], switch our lighting to LED lighting, which is obviously a big job. That’s one of the things I’d really like to do, which is just to make the conditions [better] for our night games.

“There’s also a little bit of light work we can do around accessibility, which we want to improve. And that’s providing accessible access from the car park to the clubhouse and shed and down to the soccer fields and stuff.

“But, ultimately, the culture that we try to promote within the club is one I want it to be – we have players from three down to 60 or 70. And we are a club which can support players who want to play and transition into the top level, but equally we want to be a club that supports a player who just wants to come and have a kick-about with their mates.

“What we try and do is provide a place that is supportive and inclusive for everybody. Your level of skill doesn’t matter. And I think we do that and I see that as part of my role.”

Registration for all Football South Coast players opened on January 5, 2026. 🌟