

[Home](#) » [Sport](#) » [AFL](#) » Article

## How spirit of Kokoda has put mongrel into Swans



Pluck and luck ... Wally Moras, grandfather of Swans star Brett Kirk, says the Kokoda spirit has typified the Sydney Swans' performances in recent times.

Photo: *Goldsmith/Murray*

David Sygall  
September 24, 2006

THE INSPIRATION for the Swans' charge towards the grand final can be traced back to the southern NSW town of Albury. That's where Sydney co-captain Brett Kirk's grandfather Wally Moras lives with Vera, his wife of more than 60 years.

During World War II, Moras spent a total of five years in combat in the south-west Pacific, mostly in New Guinea, where he fought on the infamous Kokoda Trail.

When Kirk was younger, he showed little interest in his grandfather's history. But that changed dramatically in 2000 when he went to the trail with some teammates.

The experience was a pivotal moment in the lives of several Swans players, including Leo Barry, Ryan O'Keefe and later Amon Buchanan and Adam Goodes, entrenching the quality of determination that has inspired the Swans since.

"It made a man of him," Moras said of his grandson yesterday. "It gave him more determination on the field, the attitude of never give in.

"I said to him, 'Keep the Kokoda spirit up and you'll win everything'.

"Leo Barry, Ryan O'Keefe, Adam Goodes, all those boys . . . I used to go into the rooms and have a yarn to them and they told me they couldn't believe it, the trail.

"I think they learnt from it that you always carry on, you never give in.

"Brett told me he couldn't believe how hard it was. He's become a better footballer since that trip.

"He didn't go through what we went through - there was no one chasing them or bullets and guns to carry - but he still had to have determination to not give in.

"That's how the Swans are these days. It's why they keep winning."

Kirk said yesterday he was "pretty naive" as a kid and didn't ask about his grandfather's experiences.

"I learnt a bit about the war at school and I'd watch him march every Anzac Day," he said.

"But it wasn't till I actually trekked over the track and came back and spent five or six days with him that Christmas that I truly understood it.

"We sat around and had a really good chat about things and it's something that will live with me forever.

"It taught me a lot about mental and physical strength and what the human body's able to endure, to push your way through. But also about what other people have sacrificed for us to be able to live the way we do."

Moras said he and Vera often babysat Kirk when he was growing up. "Brett was just six and always kicking the football with his brother," he said.

"I remember he came up to his nana and said 'Nana, I'm going to play VFL'. He stuck to his guns."

Moras said a big thrill was being asked to toss the coin for the match against Brisbane on the 60th anniversary of VP Day last August.

"The umpires introduced themselves and one bloke asked, 'What's the big occasion?'

"I said, '60 years ago today I was on my way to war for the third time. But VP was signed and I didn't have to go'.

"I said, 'The other reason is because my grandson's the captain'.

"The ump said, 'I'll have to look after him, won't I?'

"I said, 'Well, do your best'.

"That day was against the Brisbane Lions and I wanted to meet Mal Michael and Nigel Lappin. I played against Lappin's grandfather.

"Mal Michael as well, his grandfather was one of the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels. We had a good chat."

Moras watched his grandson put in another great performance on Friday night against the Dockers and he believes the Swans will win the flag next weekend.

He wasn't able to make it to the grand final last year but says he would love to this year, though time may have got the better of him.

"It's too big a day for me now," he said. "I've got older. I'd like to go but it takes too much out of me. I'm going on 85 now. I had tickets for last year but I couldn't make it.

"The boys came up here with the cup so I got to hold the cup, which was very special. It was great."

Moras will show his support in other ways. "I've got to start decorating this week, put up flags and balloons and ribbons. All the family will wish him the best.

"We have a big family - 14 grandkids, 16 great grandkids. We're a very lucky family. And Brett's wife Hayley is about to have twins. I rang him on Friday and told him, 'Don't let it happen next week'. He laughed.

"Oh, and when you see Brett, tell him to keep off the grog till after the game next week, would you?"

Kirk said no matter what the result on Saturday he would speak with his grandfather soon after the game.

"Nan and Pop will be sitting on the couch probably having a cold beer, hoping for a good result," he said.

"They've been fantastic for me growing up and I love them dearly."

*Source: The Sun-Herald*

**When news happens:** send photos, videos & tip-offs to 0424 SMS SMH (+61 424 767 764), or email us.

[SAVE 33% on home delivery of the Herald - subscribe today](#)

Copyright © 2006. The Sydney Morning Herald.