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OUR SPORTING GREATS

MURRI AND AILAN ATHLETES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

UNCLE CHARLIE KING

PRESIDENT OF THE BRISBANE ALL BLACKS
REMEMBERED BY HIS DAUGHTER AUNTY SANDRA KING

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UNCLE CHARLIE KING

The Boathouse Dances are a significant part of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history of Brisbane, from a time where movements were policed under the Director of Native Affairs (1939 to 1966).

Quandamooka man Uncle Charlie (Chas) King became president of Brisbane All Blacks Rugby League Club from 1955, previously playing rugby league himself. Uncle Charlie King met with the secretary of the state league to gain approval to join the league, where he advocated for the name Brisbane Blacks, demonstrating pride in identity for a group that was the first Aboriginal rugby league football team in a state league.

The Boathouse Dances were established in 1956 to raise money for the community to fund the rugby league football team and Aboriginal women's vigoro team. Vigoro was a women's sport combining elements of cricket and tennis, popular from the 1930s to 60s. In the midst of rock 'n' roll fever in Brisbane, the dances were held every Saturday night between 1957 and 1962 at the O'Connor Boathouse



Aunt Sandra King, daughter of Uncle Charlie (Chas) King, with his Brisbane All Blacks papers from the 1950s, 2018. Photo by Joe Ruckli.

at the end of Turbot Street on the northern side of the Brisbane River. The second floor of the venue featured a large hall and a veranda which brought in a river breeze. These social dances represented something to look forward to for many Queensland Indigenous people from local and regional communities, and many had to seek permission to travel in from places such as Ipswich, Redland Bay and Beaudesert. Uncle Charlie King's organisation and drive ensured these events persevered under restrictive circumstances, keeping community spirit alive.

Income gained from these nights contributed to jerseys, an injury fund, registration fees, linesmen and playing fees., going some way to professionalise the careers of the athletes., This was part of the beginning of a strong Indigenous rugby league heritage in Queensland, and the likely predecessor for events such as the Queensland Murri Rugby League Carnival.

The vibrancy of the Boathouse dances echoes in the present day through Aunty Sandra King's (Uncle Charlie's daughter) Bold Black & Beautiful event. Her organisation manages, co-ordinates and presents Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fashion parades, events, personal development courses and workshops, motivational talks and leadership programs, empowering Indigenous women. This year marks 10 years since Aunty Sandra established the Bold Black & Beautiful Indigenous Women's annual luncheons in Brisbane. Money raised from the event goes into Indigenous youth and women's programs.