



ALEKOS KATSIFARAS  
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In the last two months I have noticed a lot of activity with news and transfers on the Facebook page of the football club PAOK East Altona. So, I thought that in today's column some things should be written about this club from the western suburbs.

The TEAM may in recent years compete in the Second Division of the State League, but old football fans will know that PAOK was a big club as for a period it played in the major football league of Victoria, even having a leading role.

JUST LIKE every team has its own history, PAOK also started its activities in March 1979, with founders Adam Iosifidis, Yiannis Boukidis, Haris Politidis, Yiannis Papadopoulos, George Loutakis, Nikos Eleftheriou, Theodoros Evgeniadis (all of them from from the Prefecture of Kozani) and also Giannis Pavlidis from Edessa, Dimitris Xydias from Kalamata, Giannis Karagiannis from Arcadia and Thomas Haita from the Prefecture of Florina.

MUCH of the information was gathered from my research into the football history of Greeks in Australia at EKEME. At that time, I had a conversation with the founding members of PAOK, Adam Iosifidis, Yiannis Bukidis and Yiannis Pavlidis, and it is very interesting to refer to some main parts of what they had told me almost 20 years ago.

It ALL seems to have started with Adam Iosifidis, who, as I learned, passed away a few years ago. "In 1979, I brought my son Nikos to enroll at Altona Magic, which at the time was officially called Altona Vardar. With the then president we knew each other as we worked in the same place since 1963, but without having special relations. They treated me like trash as I heard him say in their language "drive this rebel out". This made me stubborn and that's how I made the decision to found our own football team. So, it happened...In fact, things turned out the way I thought, that one day we will play with our own team in these stadiums" he told me in the interview that took place in the clubhouse of the stadium in Paisley Park.

Adam's CHILDREN, Stavros (Steve) and Nikos, played for PAOK, with the former excelling at a high level, competing in the NSL with Alexandros (for a very short time) and then for Hellas Melbourne with 169 caps, winning two Australian championships and the great experience of being at the intercontinental in Brazil in 2000. Nikos, in addition to being a football player, was a coach and at one point president.

THIS was the starting point for the founding of PAOK, my friends, and the first meeting took place in March 1979 in the banquet hall of the church in Altona North "Koimisis tis Theotokou", with the people who had filled the hall giving from \$5 to cover the first Needs.

PAOK was then unable to officially join the then VSF (Victoria Soccer Federation) and so it starts from the amateur categories (Amateur Soccer Federation), with only two children's football divisions (12 and 15 years).

COMPETITIVE duties begin next year based at Altona North Primary School and with the Australian colors, green and yellow, to change to the classic black and white, like the glorious PAOK Thessaloniki, two years later.

AS one of the founders, Yiannis Pavlidis, had told me at the time, the mind of the group was Iraklis Andreadis. An important role in the origin of the name was played by the fact that the origin of most of them was from Northern Greece.

FOR the younger ones to learn, but also for the older ones to remember, let's now look at the most important achievements of PAOK East Altona.

IN 1983 it will be permanently installed at its current stadium, Paisley Park, which is located right next to the headquarters of Altona Magic, with the two clubs - regardless of that ugly incident, which gave the reason for the foundation of PAOK - having here and many years of more than excellent relations.

IN 1984, the 15-year-olds became teenagers and the Club began its competitive duties with a men's team with purely its own blood, while at the same time the number of juniors increased steeply.

JUST before the completion of ten years of history, PAOK - which was then officially renamed Altona East Phoenix SC - officially becomes a member of the Victoria Soccer Federation, after the purchase of the club St Kilda SC. His action begins in the 3rd Division of the Provisional League.

FROM that year and within a period of ten years, PAOK won a total of seven categories to reach in 1998, coached by Takis Svigos, in the state's top league, the Victorian Premier League.

IN 2000, in a season that did not have play offs, the coach, Peter Ollerton, leads the "Phoenix" to the 3rd place of the Victorian championship, three points behind the champion Green Gully and only two from Bentleigh Greens. At the federation's Gold Medal Night, Ollerton is named the top coach of the year and the team's footballers, Steve Bartol and Sam Fragos (goalkeeper), take second place in the voting.

The RESTORATION of the finals gives the Greek club the right to participate in the Premier League finals, when another Englishman, well known to all of us, the current Oakleigh manager, Chris Taylor, takes over the technical leadership. PAOK overcomes Bentleigh Greens in the quarter-final stage, but is out of the final after losing to Bulleen.

HOWEVER, the 49-year-old today, Steve Iosifidis, is the biggest personality who passed through PAOK Melbourne, but Nikos Tsaltas also followed a long path, with his presence in the NSL with the Morwell Falcons.

ALSO, the baptism of fire in the men's team for Steve Pantelidis took place at PAOK in the period 2001-2002, while Michalis Panopoulos, who later excelled in the Greek championship with Aris and in England with Portsmouth.

FOR many years now, PAOK has been stuck in the small categories of the State League. Last year he came close to promotion but finished fourth, but something tells me that next season will be his year.

AT the helm of the technical leadership will once again be an old form of the club, Terry Antoniadis, with Nikos Efthymiou as his assistant and Mikis Douros as Head of Development.

Among those who renewed their contracts is the full of experience, Theo Markelis, but also Anthony Giannopoulos, who is currently competing in the All Nations tournament for Greece.

The captain and last season's Best & Fairest, Mish Ceh, will also be there, as well as 22-year-old John Limperis, who since he was five years old has not worn any jersey other than that of PAOK.

Chris Kikidis, Peter Koufidis, Lucas Tsiflidis, Luke Cable, Oner Kucuk, Deakan Napier, Josh Kelic, Matthew Sesay and goalkeepers Chris Kripintiris and Franc Favata will also wear the black and white jersey for one more season.

ALTHOUGH it's early, PAOK has made three transfers since the beginning of the month. They acquired Jose Berrios from the Moreland Zebras, Jose Portillo, who comes from Upfield, while he previously played successfully for Leonidas, and James Stefanou, who previously played at South Melbourne, and recently tried his hand at American Football.

HOWEVER, unfortunately, there is also a sad news and PAOK is in deep mourning. The 9-year-old Abdul Razack who was tragically killed a few days ago when he got trapped in an electric garage door, was a player in the Club's U11. The secretary of PAOK for more than 15 years, Dimitris Georgakakis, told me that he was a child who had a smile on his face and that the news has shocked everyone, let alone his teammates who are still in shock from this loss.

As an epilogue, I will keep what one of the founders of PAOK, Giannis Pavlidis, told me in 2004 in his interview. "The social contribution of the team was great for the Greeks and non-Greeks of the area. Hundreds of children passed through the Association and this activity united them in groups. Some met girls and got married and some others became best men through close friendship. The role of our football club was also educational as we only spoke Greek, and in many cases so did our children".

GOOD success in management, I wish you good strength and good matches in 2023. PAOK Melbourne, although newly established compared to other clubs, has recorded its own long journey and is also a golden heritage of Greek immigrants in Australia.

CLOSING, I would like to thank Dimitris Georgakakis for his help, who, although Panathinaikos, his heart in Melbourne is at PAOK. Also, to send my greetings to a "worker" of PAOK, Kostas Litsa, with whom we once had very regular communication...

YOU PAOK fans, who are even more numerous than the new stream of immigrants who arrived in Melbourne in recent years, get together and support the club that bears the name of the team you love...



The bbq's in those years were always an important resource for raising money. Founders, board members and friends of PAOK did everything to support the effort to keep the association alive until today.



Early 80s. The kids of PAOK in the early years when they played in yellow and green. Standing from left, Peter Zafaropoulos, Markos Michalidis, Paul Bednar, Chris Garonidis, Sam Meletis, Haris Michalidis, Nikos Iosifidis and a coach (name unknown). Seated from left, Kostas Pavlidis, Alex Politidis, Kostas Loutakis, Michalis Tsigeridis and Theo Tipasidis.



Early 2000s: The footballers Peter Groidis, Nikos Papadopoulos, Paul Donnelly, Teri Antoniadis, Yiannis Dimitrelos, Scott Hynds and Daniel Geonovesi in the golden era of PAOK East Altona.



Early 90s: The boy in the photo holding the PAOK flag is Yiannis Xydias and next to him is the then president, Vangelis Giannakoulis.