

THE PIONEER

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Buderim's Indian Connection – the Iscak Family

by Bill Lavarack

The beautiful avenue of weeping fig trees at Wirreanda Park is, in many ways, a tribute to one of Buderim's more unusual pioneers. They were planted in 1903 by Mohammed Iscak and lined the drive to Captain Smyth's house..



Mohammed Iscak¹ was born in Delhi about 1836. No one is certain of his birth year – his obituary states that he died in 1951: 'at the remarkable age (calculated) at 115 years'.² He was born in the Province of Delhi, and was known in the 1950s as the oldest surviving Indian in Queensland, if not in Australia.

Weeping figs (*Ficus benjamina*) in Wirreanda Park on Buderim.

He worked as a fireman and engine greaser on P&O steamships trading between India and the British Commonwealth ports. He was one of eight employees selected for the gift of a silver-case watch from Queen Victoria for his distinguished service. It seems likely that this watch was given in 1887 on the occasion of Queen Victoria's golden jubilee. It was also P&O's golden anniversary. The silver case watch is now part of the BHS collection, having been donated by Denise, Mohammed's grand-daughter, in June 2024.

¹ The name 'Mohammed' is spelled in a variety of ways – e.g. Mohamed, Mohammed and Mahomet. Buderim historian Stuart Weir used 'Mahomet'.

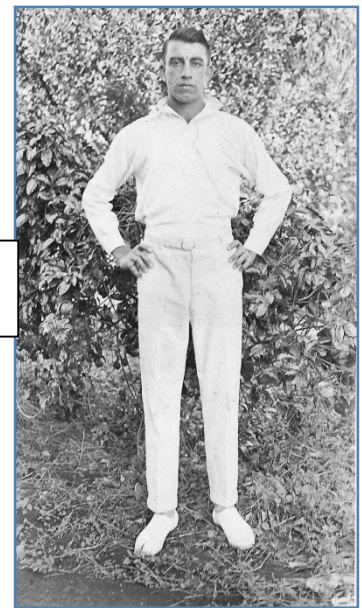
² *Nambour Chronicle*, 23 February, 1951, page 8, Death at 115, Mr Mohammed Iscak.

Mohammed probably came to Australia in the mid to late 1880s. In about 1891 he arrived at Buderim and worked at the Dixon and Fielding sugar mill, looking after the boiler. Buderim Historian, the late Stuart Weir, said that he was known at the mill as 'Charley' and told of an incident where things went wrong and everything, including Charley, was covered with molasses and Dixon subsequently docked his pay. After the sugar mill closed in 1896 he worked in Brisbane for a few years as a hawker, then returned to Buderim doing any sort of job available. For a few years he lived in a humpy near Martin's Creek where the Scout hut is now. Having accumulated some funds, he purchased 40 acres of land where the former sugar mill had been and operated a farm. He married Florence Tye (1886-1938). They had two sons – Charles Henry Mohammed Abraham (1908 - 1993), commonly known as 'Henry' and Shadrack William Mohammed (1910–1967), commonly known as 'Billy'. While Mohammed was probably of the Muslim faith, his sons, Henry and Billy, were brought up in the Methodist Church. Mohammed was buried in the Woombye Cemetery.



Mohammed Iscak complete with pipe. The only known photo. Photo: Denise Iscak

Henry Iscak. I first met Henry when I was a young cricketer playing in the lower grades in the Maroochy competition. Later, when living on Buderim in the 1960s, I got to know Henry well. In 1940 he purchased a farm from Bert Fielding at the end of Fielding Street and was a familiar sight in the 1940s and 1950s taking his produce to the Depot along Gloucester Road in a cart pulled by his horse 'Tarzan'.



Right: A young Henry looking immaculate and every inch the cricketer. Probably about 1928. Photo: Bev Lavarack collection.

But it was for sport, and cricket in particular, that Henry was best known. Henry first played in the 1927/28 season and was a contemporary of Buderim's great batsman Len Sorensen. He used to tell a story that summed up the cricket abilities of the two, recalling an opening partnership with Len of 104 runs, of which Henry says he 'made the four'. Len's feats are the stuff of legend, but it was Henry's dedication that kept cricket going at Buderim over several decades, even after he had ceased playing.



Buderim cricket team 1932. Back row: Jack Neil, Jim Sargood, George Neil, Doug Dickman, Fred Carnie, Neil Sorensen, Percy Crack. Second row: Tarlie Hancock, Charlie Cox, Sam Anderson, Henry Iscak, Jack Neil (snr.) Front row: Colin Milne, Bernie Adamson. Photo: BHS

To be honest, Henry was not a talented batsman. He usually opened the batting in B Grade and often was out for one or two although, on his day, he could hold up the bowlers with some stonewalling. However he was a useful slow bowler often getting two, three or even four wickets in an innings. But Henry was the one who looked after the gear and organised the team each week. His dedication to Buderim cricket was limitless.

He was also a good community man, serving on committees and volunteering for many tasks such as helping level the School Oval after the War, with the assistance of 'Tarzan'. He was also one of the volunteers who helped develop the bowling green in Elizabeth Street.



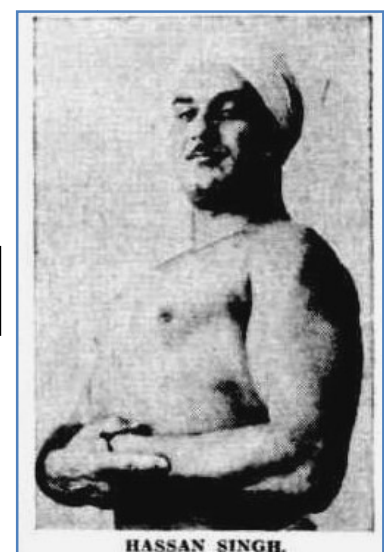
Buderim Rugby League team 1928/29. Henry Iscak extreme right, middle row. They played on Foote's paddock.
 Back row: Tom Thompson, Tom Irwin, Jeff Wills, George Cherry, Bart Hyde.
 Middle row: Alf Crack, Jim Kuskopf (?), Dick Wendt, Ern Duncan, Alf Kuskopf, Arthur Parkyn, Jeff Prosser, Henry Iscak.
 Front row: Frank Nelson, Bert Reed, Jack Gregg, Bob Carruthers (captain), Jim Thompson, Vince Gadsby, Jack Neil. *Photo: BHS*

Henry married Gladys Dorothy Dixon (1914-1992) in 1938. He passed away in 1993 and was buried alongside Gladys in the Buderim Cemetery.

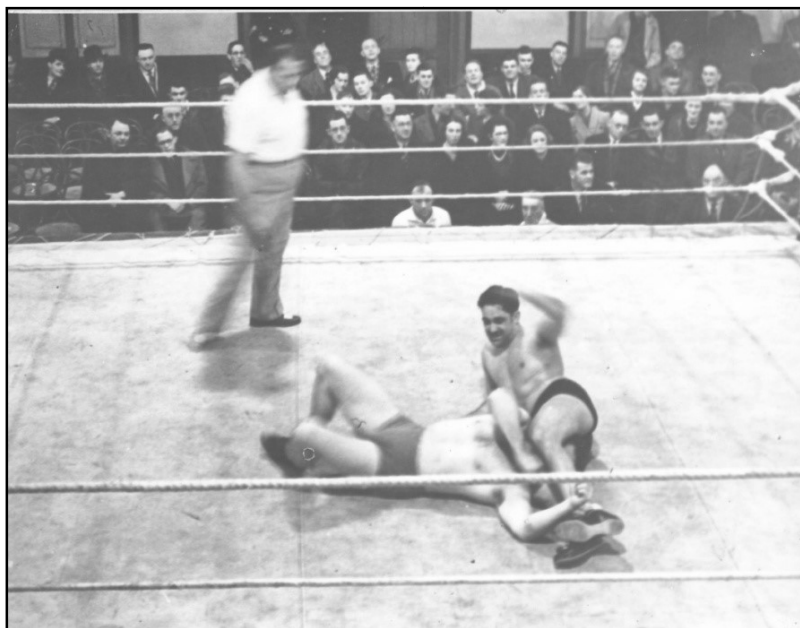
Billy Iscak. A photograph on the wall in Pioneer Cottage shows a forgotten hero of Buderim. Billy Iscak gained fame as a wrestler in the 1930s, wrestling professionally mainly in Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria. He made the most of his Indian heritage by fighting under the name 'Hassan Singh'.

Newspaper photograph of 'Hassan Singh'.
West Australian, 20 January 1939, page 10.

Billy played some cricket as a useful fast bowler and some rugby league for Buderim, but made his name as a professional wrestler. He was heavy weight wrestling champion of Australia (or close to it) in the late 1930s, but few local people have heard of him. An online 'Trove' search in Australian newspapers of the period came up with no fewer than 236 references, but the local *Nambour Chronicle*



contained no mention of William Iscak or Hassan Singh. Perhaps they considered professional wrestling in the southern states, with it's over the top publicity, not worthy of column space.



His brother Henry recalled that, as a young teenager, Billy was of rather slender build but, after some teasing, he started a course of exercises to build himself up. Apparently he was very successful. In 1938 he was 28 years old and was a good looking, muscular man who weighed 15½ stone (98 kilograms). Billy Iscak was most active on the national wrestling scene from 1935 to 1940, particularly in 1938/9.

Billy Iscak ('Hassan Singh') in action about 1938. Is this the 'flying leg scissors'? Photo: BHS.

He was often lighter than his opponents but was described as 'fast, scientific, cunning, clever and tricky'. Another report described his favourite hold as being the 'Indian whip lock' hold, and that the 'lithe Punjabi' usually relied on speed and all round wrestling ability to gain his decisions. Other newspaper reports suggest he was usually the crowd favourite with his opponents often cast as villains. He was noted for his flying leg scissors, Indian death lock and his sleeper hold. His publicity always referred to his Indian heritage, dubbing him 'the versatile Indian' and 'the 'Hindu Terror' among many other titles.

In later years after the War, Jimmy Sharman's travelling boxing troupe regularly came to the Nambour Show and usually had a wrestler with them. Billy Iscak would always accept the challenge and for many years he was not defeated.



In the 1940s Billy lived in Ferguson Lane on Buderim and worked on Laurie Bell's farm until Laurie sold to Sir Reginald Groom. Billy then worked for Groom on a farm at Eudlo and later for the Roy family on their Palmwoods citrus farm. Billy Iscak married Gloria Elenor Dannie (1925-1983) in 1947. He died as the result of an accident on the farm in 1967.

Billy and Elenor are buried in the Woombye Cemetery.



Locals meeting at Fielding's 'Top Shop' on Buderim in 1935.
From left: Ben Ede, Eddie Bell, Len Sorensen, Laurie Bell, Tom Atkinson (standing), Rick Sorensen, Billy Iscak, Henry Iscak. *Photo: Bev Lavarack collection.*

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Denise Iscak (Henry's daughter) for help in compiling this paper, in particular for providing the photograph on page 2 and the two photographs below.

S.P. Weir, 1991, *Mahomet Iscak, Pioneers* (series of printed A4 sheets), held by Buderim Historical Society Inc.

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Right: The Iscak brothers probably early 1930s. Billy in singlet, Henry in striped shirt. Above - Henry seems to be in some trouble. *Photos courtesy of Denise Iscak.*

A random selection of Hassan Singh newspaper stories. (All from the late 1930s).

WRESTLING.

Indian's First Appearance.

The Indian wrestler, Hassan Singh, will make his first appearance in Perth on Friday night, when he will oppose Leo Demetral at the W.A.C.A. ground. The match should be interesting, for Singh, who is said to be a clean, scientific exponent of the game, will meet an opponent who proved himself exceptionally rough in his bout with Bob King last Friday night, when King was forced to retire owing to an injury. Singh exploits the Indian deathlock, which he maintains he can apply from 13 different positions, and also uses the Indian leg trip and drop kick. He has a number of victories to his name and claims to be the only person to have beaten Von Kramer, who, up till that time, was undefeated in Australia.

King, who received medical attention after last Friday's bout, should be fit for engagements in about a fortnight.

Wrestling

DEMETRAL v. SINGH

WRESTLING fans are due for a fast and scientific contest when Leo Demetral (Australian heavy-weight champion) and Hassan Singh, the clever Indian wrestler, try conclusions at the City Hall on Monday night. No one has been more entertained than when Singh and Demetral surged their way through an epic contest early in the wrestling season, and all will be keen to see the pair take up the battle where they left it off on Monday. If Singh defeats Demetral, he will earn the right to demand a title contest for the Australian title. On the same programme is a return boxing contest between Ron Negus, the Victorian, and Doug Elmer, the Launceston boy, both of whom thrilled those who witnessed their engagement in the City Hall a few weeks back. This is a particularly fine double-event programme, and those who attend are certain to receive more than their money's worth.

WRESTLER STILL SUFFERS

Hassan Singh, the Indian wrestler, is still suffering today from injuries received in his bout with Bob King at the Hollywood Stadium last night.

After having secured a fall against King in the fourth round, Singh was dumped heavily in the seventh round. King charged across the ring, butting Singh heavily in the small of the back.

He followed it up by applying the Boston Crab, which gained him the equalising fall.

Singh was picked up and taken to the corner, but was unable to continue the bout.

Today it was learned that Singh was still suffering from a strained back and leg, and could get around only with difficulty.

SINGH ON POINTS

HOBART, Monday. — Hassan Singh, the Indian wrestler, defeated Leo Demetral on points in a 10 rounds wrestling contest at the City Hall to-night. Both men obtained a submission fall.

NEXT FRIDAY'S WRESTLING

King And Hassan Singh Matched

At the Hollywood stadium next Friday night, a tip-top bill of wrestling and boxing will be presented by promoter George Gardiner.

Principal attraction will be eight rounds of catch-as-catch-can wrestling between New Zealander, Bob King (the Human Bomb) and the clever Indian, Hassan Singh. Both are top-line wrestlers, and should provide a clever match. Good boxing preliminaries will precede the main bout. Box plan is at Gleeson's, Barrack-street.

WRESTLING.

Singh v. Elliott Tonight.

Tonight, at the Hollywood stadium, King Elliott and Hassan Singh will wrestle over eight rounds. Singh, in his previous match against Bob King, was wrestling with great pace and cleverness when he injured his back, and Elliott, last Friday night, displayed speed and good technique against Leo Demetral, over whom he gained a decision when Demetral was disqualified. The bout tonight should be really fast, as Elliott and Singh both have a great variety of holds, and each is an attacking wrestler. Each has a favourite hold, and it should be interesting to see if efficient counter moves have been evolved. Singh favours a "deathlock," and Elliott a "drop-kick," both rather spectacular holds.

There will be three supporting four-round boxing bouts between "Bluey" Shea and Eddie Piper, "Curly" Jones and Joe Blake and George Gilmour and "Young" Fernie.