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Phelan Kantilla, Shania Puruntatameri, Dellarosa Puruntatameri, Dianne Moore, Caitlyn Moreen and Alex Guy at the Tiwi Ashes.
Picture: ISABELLA MOORE



ASHES TO ASHES

Forget England, the Tiwis are where it's at >> **P44-45**



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EVENTFUL NIGHT
FOR SPRINT KING**



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ALDAM THE
NEW TOP DOG**

Old-timer Edwards eager to see \$20m upgrade to ground



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THE proposed \$20 million upgrade to Richardson Park has divided the Darwin rugby league community with local rugby league and Nightcliff Dragons legend Stem Edwards now weighing in on the debate. Edwards is one of a group of passionate rugby league old-timers who last year lobbied Treasurer Dave Tollner about fixing up Richardson Park, which was abandoned by the NRL NT in 2014 due to mounting maintenance costs.

Having played for Nightcliff from 1965 through to 1980, Edwards dreams of an NT rugby league returned to its glory days, when he believes the game was as popular in the Top End as Aussie rules.

For Edwards, returning the game to Richardson Park is a must, despite the widespread opposition to the move.

"That's the only thing that can save Darwin rugby league really is getting back there," Edwards said.

"There is a big majority of people who don't go to football

anymore because it's not at Richardson Park. They don't want to travel.

"It was packed all the time Richardson Park. Now no one wants to go."

In days of old, crowds of 5000 would regularly pack out Richardson Park for home and away games. The NRL NT estimates between 1750 and 2000 currently come through the gate across all the rugby league venues over the weekend.

But Edwards' comments are in the minority, with rugby league clubs such as South Darwin and Palmerston in favour of permanently moving rugby league to the suburbs.

Even MacKillop Sharks coach and local rugby league identity Eddie Motlop believes the game has suffered at the venue.

"I'm dead against it and all ways have been," he said.

"I reckon it's probably a bit of sentimental value to some old people that used to run rugby league in Darwin but my belief was 20 years ago that we should have moved out to the suburbs, to the people.

"I believe rugby league has died because we haven't made that move out to the suburbs."

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