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'Nigger' stand to go but name persists

- Andrew Fraser
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THE E.S. "Nigger" Brown stand at the Toowoomba Sports Ground is to be demolished but the controversial name, deemed offensive by the UN, may live on in a plaque on a statue at the ground.

Toowoomba Sports Ground Trust chairman John McDonald said yesterday the trust was looking at building a statue of Mr Brown, the city's first international rugby league player when he was selected for Australia against Great Britain in 1921.

Mr McDonald's comments came after the trust heard last week that a consultants' report had found the 50-year-old stand to be unsafe, prompting its immediate closure ahead of demolition later this year.

"Nigger Brown was the first footballer from the Darling Downs to play for Australia, he was an alderman on the council, he was a businessman, he put money himself into the development of the ground," Mr McDonald said.

"His name will live on - and his name is Nigger Brown."

Indigenous activist Stephen Hagan has been trying to get the "Nigger" part of the name on the stand dropped since 1998, but Mr McDonald, who is also chairman of the Queensland Rugby League and a former international rugby league player, said he saw nothing wrong with keeping the name on a plaque.

"When I first played for Australia in the 60s, he congratulated me and I said 'thanks very much, Mr Brown', and he said 'call me Nigger, that's my name'," Mr McDonald said.

Mr Hagan, who took the matter to the UN after the High Court found that the term did not breach the Racial Discrimination Act, said he would be lobbying the state Government not to allow the naming of a "Nigger" statue.

He said that while the Toowoomba Sports Ground Trust was responsible for the administration of the ground, the state Government owned the land.

"They're the ones who are responsible, and Peter Beattie needs to realise that it's not acceptable these days to have 'Nigger' on a public building," he said.

There is doubt over just how Mr Brown got his nickname: one version is that he was a white Australian who was so blond and blue-eyed that his older brothers gave him the nickname as a joke.

The other version has Mr Brown as a dapper dresser whose shoes shone due to a shoe polish called "Nigger Brown".