

BYRON CUP FORM GUIDE INSIDE - Sports Monday



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## Woodlawn celebrates 75 years

P12



## SOCCEROOS ON A MISSION

Sports Monday

16-page liftout inside



# ‘Tommy, you’ve wronged our family’

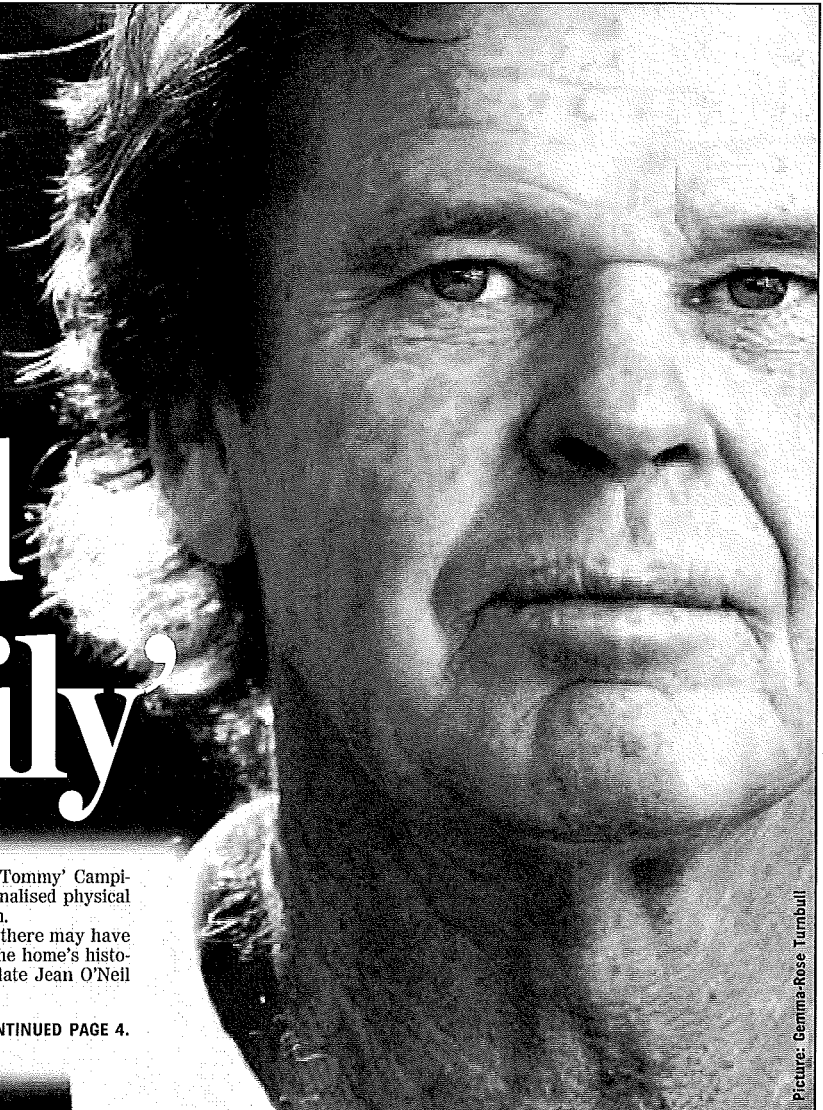
By WILL JACKSON  
will.jackson@northernstar.com.au

A CONFRONTATION is brewing between those who praise the Lismore Childrens Home and those who damn it. Ballina's Phil Witchard (pictured) and many other former residents of the home, say its reputation has been unfairly sul-

lied following Richard 'Tommy' Campion's claims of institutionalised physical and sexual victimisation.

They say that while there may have been a dark period in the home's history, it ceased when the late Jean O'Neil took over in 1960.

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Picture: Gemma-Rose Turnbull

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# Supporters defend 'sullied' kids' home

Former resident says those joining legal action against the home are part of a 'money grab'

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In November last year, Mr Campion claimed he had been beaten bloody and molested while he was a resident between 1949 and 1962.

Mr Campion's story has since appeared in numerous publications across the country, and the word 'notorious' has been attached to the home's name — stirring anger in those whose time there was not nearly so unpleasant.

However, Mr Campion said he had contacted dozens of other former residents who had similar experiences and many were now planning legal action against the Anglican Church, which they say was responsible.

Although Mr Campion has publicly said he never personally suffered any harm during Miss O'Neil's era and praised her management of the home in the last years he was there, a furious Witchard last week said that wasn't enough.

He said the home's reputation had been unfairly tarnished because apart from a small article in *The Northern Star*, differences in practices during different eras at the home had not been made clear.

"Richard has destroyed the image of the home. He's destroyed our lives," the Rous Public School teacher said.

"All my workmates and friends now think I was brought up being physically and sexually abused."

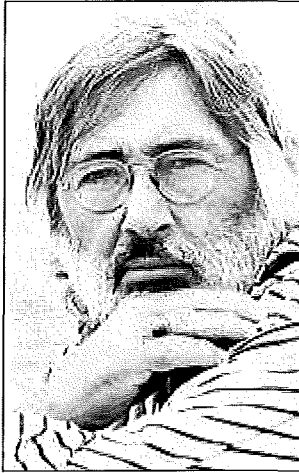
He accused the people joining Mr Campion's legal action of conducting a 'money grab'.

He passionately defended the place, saying the whole story had not been told.

Mr Witchard said he was orphaned at two years old and entered the home in 1960, just as it entered a new era with a new matron, Miss O'Neil.

He said the *Women's Weekly* wrote an article praising her, and Reg Stitt called her biography Mother of 301 after the number of children who went through the place.

He regarded the woman as his



Tommy Campion's mistreatment claims have drawn flak.

Picture: PAUL RILEY

mother and claims to have had a better childhood than most, with plenty to eat, fun-filled holidays and respectful discipline.

What happened to Mr Campion wasn't the church or institution's fault, but purely that of the matron who was running the home at the time of the abuse, he said.

He said the distinction had to be made between the time before and after Miss O'Neil took over the home.

Far from being neglected during her watch, he said the kids were better off than those in 'normal' families. He said he and more than 30 former residents would go to court to stand as witnesses in defence of the church.

Mr Campion last week said he couldn't comment on anything that went on in the home after he left.

"If they haven't suffered the abuse that I did, then that's a beautiful thing," he said.

#### ■ What do you think?

Phone the Star Feedback Line on 6624 3266 or email [opinions@northernstar.com.au](mailto:opinions@northernstar.com.au).

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