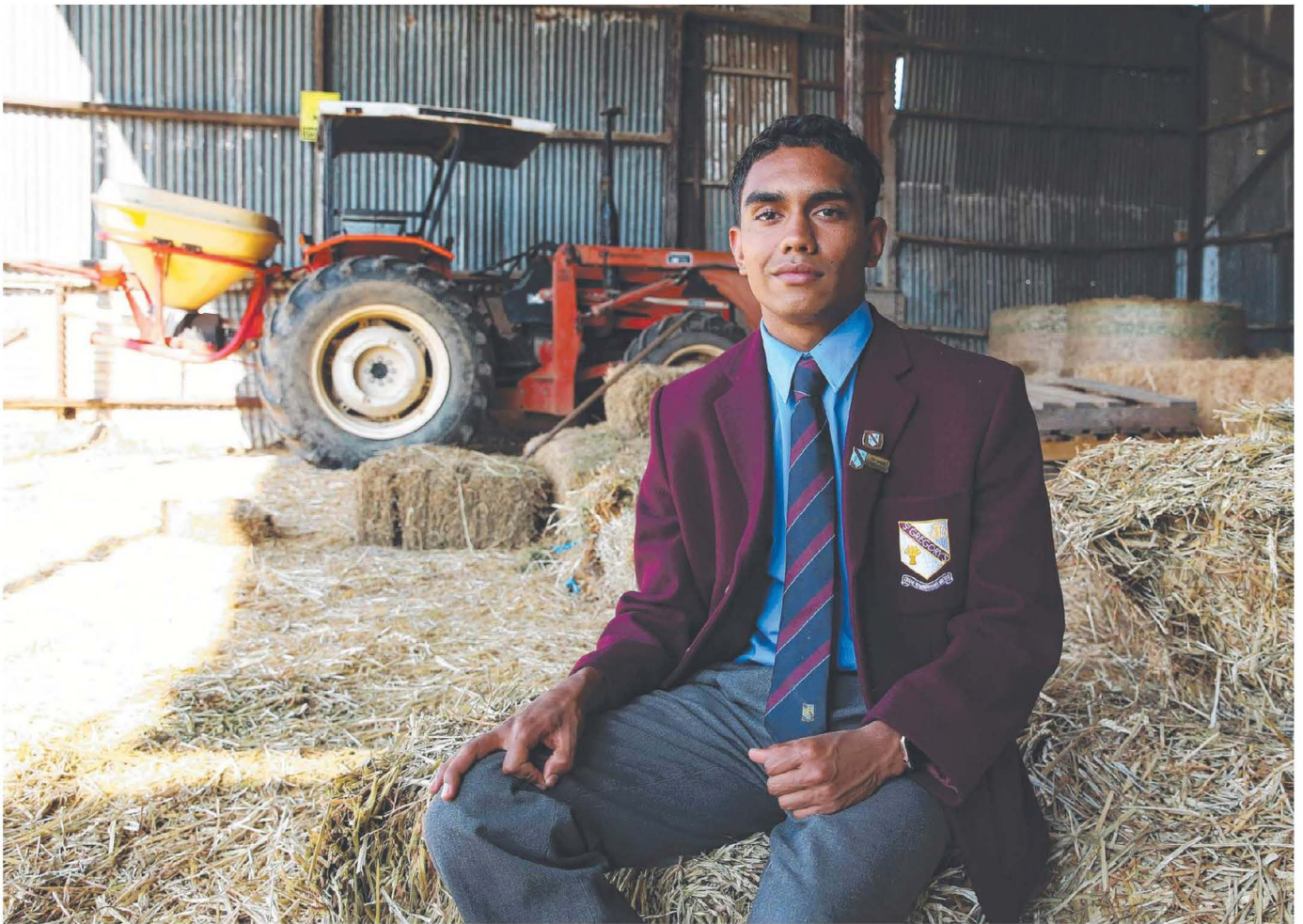


SEPTEMBER 27-28, 2025 THE AUSTRALIAN

THE NATION 7

Indigenous captain Jacobi makes history



BRITTA CAMPION

Jacobi Fernando, 17, has made history at St Gregory's College Campbelltown by being elected the first Indigenous school captain

JACK NIVISON

A young man from regional NSW has made history at his western Sydney boarding school as the prestigious institution's first-ever Indigenous school captain.

Jacobi Fernando, 17, a proud Gomeri young man from the small town of Moree in northern NSW, has made the historic achievement as St Gregory's College Campbelltown prepares to enter its centenary year.

The year 11 student joined the St Greg's community in 2023 thanks to a scholarship from the Australian Indigenous Education Fund, which gives opportunities to Indigenous students who



otherwise wouldn't be able to attend schools such as St Greg's due to disproportionate economic hardship.

Jacobi said the initial transition was jarring but his "negative attitude" quickly dissipated as he received an overwhelming level of support from his peers.

"I thought to myself that I didn't really want to make friends here. I just wanted to stick with my friends at home, but by the third

day everyone knew my name and I found myself laughing and smiling with everyone ... it did work out," he said. "Everyone was shaking my hand, introducing themselves ... I felt like this was where I was supposed to be."

Jacobi draws inspiration from many people in his life, and says his defining characteristics – a love for community and a willingness to engage with the people around him – come predominantly from his uncle, who passed away in 2020.

"My uncle, he was a big community guy. Everywhere he went, everyone was saying hello to him, and I think that reflected on to me as well ... that's what makes me the community guy that I am," Jacobi

said. "He knew everybody, he couldn't go anywhere without him saying hello to somebody ... that's what I really admired about him. Everybody respected him."

"Losing him was rough, but I think I'm doing a good job of continuing his legacy."

Jacobi says he wants to create an environment of "connections and family like no other" during his time as St Greg's captain throughout the 2026 school year.

"I want to build a family and a community that everyone is in awe of. I want everybody to walk down the street and be able to tell that those are Greg's boys by the way they talk to each other, the way they shake hands, the way they look you in the eyes," he said.

After school, Jacobi is hoping to take the skills he develops through his education and deploy them in the medical field; ideally in his home town.

"For me, it's about giving back to the community that raised me. All I've ever wanted to do was help the people around me, and I think if I can go into the medical field I can really complete that goal," he said. "I'll probably most likely go back to Moree. They're building a hospital there, so hopefully by the time I finish university they'll be looking for some young, fresh recruits."

AIEF executive director Andrew Penfold said the organisation was "so proud" of Jacobi's achievement.