



# **2020 Annual Report**

## **Chair's Report**

It is probably trite to say that 2020 was a year like no other. COVID-19 was the dominant feature of the year, impacting all aspects of society. Junior rugby in the Sydney metropolitan area was affected significantly and yet our game and our community have survived and performed better than many may have initially expected.

This report covers the period 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020. At the start of that period SJRU was able to run a new 2019 Spring 7s competition for Boys 7s teams, running viable competitions for U11s, U15s and U17s/Opens on Sunday afternoon at TG Milner Field. They provided an enjoyable 7s format for many players, including girls who joined some teams. The 2020 Spring 7s (run after the period of this report) were able to build significantly on the start made in 2019 and it was very pleasing to see the significant growth in 7s.

Our Girls competitions continued to grow in strength. In 2020 we offered girls Sizzling 7s, Frosty 7s and then also Girls Spring 7s for the first time. SJRU appointed and paid for an administrator, Tina Campbell, to work two days per week organising the Girls competitions. Having Tina in place helped make these competitions run smoothly and took a lot of pressure off volunteers. Unfortunately because of COVID-19 the Sizzling 7s competition was truncated and we were unable to run the planned Girls XVs competition but we already have plans in place to provide girls with many options in 2021, including Spring 7s, Sizzling 7s, XVs and Frosty 7s. Girls rugby is clearly now an established and important part of SJRU.

The SJRU Sunday XVs and Friday XVs competitions were significantly impacted by COVID-19, running over the winter period. Government restrictions to protect the community all started being implemented at the time we would commence our season. One of the consequences of this was we had planned to run the first two rounds of these competitions as gala rounds, where we would have all teams in an age group play multiple short matches at a

central venue, and we would use these matches to assess teams for grading and players for age dispensation.

All of those plans were scrapped because of COVID-19 and for a time it wasn't certain that we would be able to play any rugby in 2020. However as the government's understanding of how best to manage the disease developed it became possible for us to run a shortened competition. There were significant changes though. We made the focus of these competitions about participation and enjoyment. They were runs as 9-round competitions with no Finals and no Trophies. Most of our grades were also restructured to minimise travelling across the Sydney basin, so there was much more emphasis on local derbies.

Looking back over the year, there was a definite period of major uncertainty about our ability to run any type of competition. Unfortunately we were not able to run the Girls XV's and Saturday competitions we had planned but they are very much back on the agenda for 2020. One of the key reasons we were able to respond to changed circumstances was the Board and Administrators had developed a detailed Operational Plan, listing key dates and commitments for all nine competitions we intended to run. Even though the world changed in 2020, we were able to use this base for updated planning and communication. That process of preparing a detailed plan has been repeated for the 2021 season and is to be commended to future Boards.

There are many people to acknowledge and thank for their contribution this year:

- All the players and their parents for staying with their club and being willing to participate in our game for the sheer enjoyment of it.
- The volunteers at all of our clubs who coached, managed, organised, flipped sausages and maintained the true spirit of community rugby, in the interest of getting kids playing the game
- Our clubs and districts for their unwavering support of junior rugby and a strong willingness to adapt in the best interest of having kids play rugby.
- The referees who supported our game and were there when needed. In particular it was wonderful to see a number of new young referees at our 7s and other competitions, wisely guided by a few old heads! Special thanks also to Alex Richards from NSWRU for his assistance with organising and developing referees.
- The SJRU Judiciary and Citing Officers who, sadly, were busy at times this year. There were some complex matters that had to be resolved and they dealt with these issues carefully and appropriately.
- The operational teams we had in place at our Girls 7s and Boys 7s competitions, including especially Bippy Power, Mike Doyle, Michelle Nisbett, Josh Mitchell, Claudia Bell and an army of scorekeepers, first aiders and many others. You all made each event run smoothly so everyone could focus on the rugby!

- Mark Green, Paul Doorn and the whole team at NSWRU who had many of their own challenges this year but consistently supported the value of community rugby to the best of their ability.
- Ben Gregory and the committee of NSWJRU for their continued support of junior rugby.
- The SJRU Operations Team of John Glen, Andrew Hutton and Tina Campbell: In a year that was unprecedented you adapted, evolved, pivoted and twisted, sometimes all in one day. Your ability to handle whatever was thrown at you and still run engaging competitions was outstanding.
- The SJRU Board: Our Board this year was a mix of new and experienced Directors and Secretary. Somehow, through a lot of Zoom Meetings, you were able to support and sustain the good governance of our organisation and some 10,000 kids playing rugby across Sydney. Take a bow!

Anthony Hunt  
Chair  
Sydney Junior Rugby Union

## **Finance Report**

I am pleased to report that despite the challenges faced this year, the Association had a strong financial result in 2020 with almost \$44,000 in profit recorded for the year compared to a profit of \$41,000 in 2019. While revenue decreased by \$28,000 on last year, expenses also decreased by \$31,000 for the period. This was mainly attributed to:

- With no representative season in 2020, representative income decreased by \$28,000, however this was offset by a \$36,000 decrease in representative expenses
- A \$20,000 decrease in sponsorship income from \$52,000 to \$32,000
- A \$6,000 decrease in competition fees on the prior year, due to uncertainty over COVID-19 restrictions and commencement of the playing season
- The receipt of a \$3,000 government grant and a \$15,000 cashflow boost available to not-for-profits that employed staff
- Girl's rugby income increased by \$10,000 in 2020 due to larger participation numbers, however this was offset by a \$13,000 increase in girl's rugby expenses
- No donations or bad debts written off for the period, compared to \$6,000 in the 2019 year
- A \$5,000 combined reduction in development costs and office expenses

On the balance sheet the Association's net assets and liquidity are very strong. Our cash at bank is \$52,000 ahead of last year's position, reflecting the surplus accrued during the year, including the receipt of a cash flow boost support payment from the Government.

Looking ahead, SJRU has formulated an Operating Plan for 2021 that involves a number of new commitments. The Association is in a strong financial position to be able to meet the commitments set out in that plan. We have already committed funding toward retaining two development officers that can support our SJRU clubs and will seek to have other similar resources in place during the year ahead.

Scott Durbidge  
Director, Finance

### **Marketing & Sponsorship Report**

In 2020, the focus initially was to continue to expand and grow the sponsors for 2020, increase the communication via newsletter to all members and maintain a strong social media presence for all the competitions both girls and boys.

We worked with NSW Rugby at the start of the year and produced marketing tools kits for clubs to use to drive membership and new players. This included producing a video with the assistance of NSW Rugby and a photo shoot. The video and marketing collateral were shared with all clubs prior to the season and we made these items all editable so clubs could add their logo and call to action.

SJRU also paid for marketing across social media platforms and display adds to increase the awareness of Rugby across the Sydney region and drive more players into clubs.

All these items were initially worked on and started well until COVID hit.

We then did communicate to all members mainly by email and these communications were widely read, had increased readers rates and also feedback from the community was that the parents, clubs and volunteers all appreciated the efforts to get Rugby back underway.

For the sponsors of 2020, we had to offer to roll their sponsorships in 2021, due to the lack of exposure and other activities they received. Therefore, the following sponsors are to be rolled into 2021.

- Gilbert- Apparel sponsor
- Summer Lawyers- Balls for Sunday competition and sleeve of Rep Training T-shirt
- ISCA- preferred higher education provider
- Rental Specialists – Front of Rep Training T-shirt
- Cure Cancer – Back of Rep Training T-shirt
- IQ3- General Sponsor
- Made 590- Girls General Sponsor

Sponsors were updated on the website for 2020 season and included on social posts and a few newsletters throughout the season. With no representative season all the representative

team sponsors were not able to attend the presentation night, or get exposure to these teams, hence why we rolled this over to 2021.

Newsletters did continue during the reduced season and we also assisted Rugby Australia by sending out ticketing offers to our databases once games were once again played. These were all sent out through Mailchimp and databases were updated.

Posts and stories were regular placed on both Instagram and Facebook pages and the following is now at:

Facebook 6,053 followers

Instagram 1,588 followers

Additional images were taken this year and have been added to our drop box for future use of both Girls competitions and boys.

Hopefully 2021, will bring the opportunities to further promote junior rugby once the full competition is being played.

### **Competition Manager's Report**

### **Girls Rugby**

### **Northern Zone Report**

2020 –The year that started and then stopped.

I was honoured to be voted onto the board in late 2019, and then appointed the Northern Zone Director.

Most of the Northern Zone Clubs kicked off their season in February with Pre-season trainings, Try Rugby days, and evenings, registrations were strong and steady in our zone, March saw Trials begin and unfortunately by mid-March COVID19 restrictions came into effect and rugby along with all community sports came to a halt with no certainty of when or if rugby could resume.

Clubs became creative with Social media during 'lockdown' offering different challenges and training tools for players at home. Meanwhile, Club Administrators took to Zoom and other meeting apps to discuss and wade through guidelines that would eventually allow for the return of community sport.

It was pleasing to see not just in the Northern Zone, but across the greater Sydney area, Clubs supporting the recommendations and guidelines that John our SJRU Competition Manager along with NSW Rugby communicated.

With a COVID Safety plan, COVID Marshalls on ground duty, and social distancing in place the 2020 season started on the 24th July, modified and with no finals.

An unfortunate casualty of COVID were the minis gala days and representative rugby. Districts pondered the idea of running 'invitational' carnivals, but this proved difficult with restrictions on numbers. There were invitational 7's carnivals held at Narrabeen Academy for the U13's, Camden for the U15's and Penrith for the U17's. NSW Rugby did manage to hold some Gen blue training camps at Daceyville for U15-U18's in October, the Northern Zone was well represented at these camps.

The U17's State 7's championships were played in Bowral on the 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> December, with the Northern Zone well represented with all Northern Districts entering a team in the Boys competition and the girls also well represented.

It wouldn't be a season without some game day challenges along the way, I applaud the Parents and Players for adhering to the 'New normal' of COVID, for the most part game days were calm and efficient, there were some hiccups, and again we see some rules questioned.

Size for Age and Imports are topics we will continue to look at and will ask for feedback on from Clubs.

Spring 7's has been very successful in the Northern Zone, with the majority of boy's teams coming from the Northern Zone along with a number of girls teams.

I have enjoyed getting to know all the hard working volunteers in Club-land, from District and Club Presidents, to committee members, to parents coaching and volunteering, I hope to increase the communication between SJRU and Clubs in the Northern Zone as we head into 2021 which will hopefully prove to be a longer and more productive season for players.



Michele Biet

Northern Zone Director



## **Southern Zone Report 2020**

Well what can we say about 2020. Not a single aspect of our lives was not touched by COVID-19 and all well laid plans were interrupted. However, a few key lessons were learnt as a result. I am so proud of all for their ability to bounce back, resilience and perseverance. The fact that as a Zone I don't believe we lost a single team due to COVID and in fact numbers in the Opens grew once again and Spring 7's has also increased. Congratulations to all in the Southern Zone for their hard work in simply getting players on the field.

I look forward to seeing the Girls XV competition to increase in 2021. Focus should also be put on the mini's competition as our source for future Rugby players. Overall, I continue to see across the Zone increased communication with Senior Clubs, an increase in District based development officers and an increase in skill development in the 13-18 age groups. The whole Zone is focused on increasing numbers, increasing retention numbers and increasing skills across the board and I couldn't be prouder.

Keep up all the good work and I look forward to the hard work put into 2020 turning into a brilliant 2021 on and off the field. Well done all.

For the Love of Rugby  
Nicole Roberts

## **Western Zone Report**

Through disruption comes opportunity and although this season was like no other, the Western Zone rugby community broadly embraced the downtime to revitalize committees and strengthen volunteer numbers.

The enthusiasm and flexibility shown by all the clubs to salvage and resurrect what resulted in an awesome rugby season of was simply fantastic.

Without the State championships to worry about, the District committees had the opportunity to reset and concentrate on the health of their member clubs. This enforced break provided some welcome relief to district committee members who also play a significant part in the organizational structure of their village clubs. Fingers crossed that season 2021 will go to plan and our representative competitions for all ages returns better than ever.

Season 2020 saw the return the Liverpool City Cougars to great success with two outstanding teams entered in the 14s and 17s plus a heartwarming Minis program with the assistance of Dundas Valley. The Cougars also entered two teams in the girls Springs 7s competition which is a great indication the club is headed in the right direction. The M4 to M5 corridor is underrepresented in our competition despite the enthusiasm locally for our great game. We're incredibly lucky that Western Sydney's heathy selective sport high schools champion rugby development programs and the Cougars have benefited greatly from that connection.



The female participation rate is again very strong in Western Zone and the focus of 7's competition is now exceeding the male 15's competitions at some clubs. The amount of elite female touch and Oz tag players transitioning to sample our code during all or part of the wave system is simply outstanding. The momentum is getting bigger and is the envy of other codes trying to attract participation on Saturday evenings. We'll soon be surprised how significant these 7s competitions have become to the growth of the game.

The importance of the Penrith Emus' return to the Shute Shield should also not go unnoticed. It's crucial that Rugby's true heartland is recognized at the highest level of club rugby and every Raptor, RSL or Blue tongue junior player can aspire to enter elite pathways close to home.

Even though 2020 was a non-finals year, there was still many disappointing behavioral incidents in and around our junior competition in the West. It's a sport that thrives on great enthusiasm, which enriches passion, which can result in frustration. There is no sugar coating the fact this frustration can lead to an extremely negative experience for our players and their families. All adults involved in our sport need to work harder at tackling this frustration and embracing the Respect Rugby culture. I sincerely thank the competition management team for their support during these difficult circumstances and I'm confident that the environment will improve considerably next year.

My congratulations and ongoing respect go to the crew at Sydney West Rugby Referees association. No doubt, the hardest working and widely travelled team in the zone. The amount of development, time and education into our junior referees cannot be overlooked.

I'm happy to see season 2020 kicked into touch. Bring on 2021.

John Polley  
Western Zone Director.