

RAH - RAH

IN THE

NEVER - NEVER



A SHORT HISTORY OF SENIOR RUGBY UNION FOOTBALL IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Norm (Hawk) Cramp A.S.M., M.I.M., BA (Hons).

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**Message from the Honourable Chris Lugg. MLA.
Minister for Youth Sport and Recreation.**

Message not received at time of publication

Message from the President of the Australian Rugby Football Union.

Message not received at time of publishing.

Message from Mr Dennis Bree ASM

President of the Northern Territory Rugby Football Union.

As someone who has been fortunate enough to have been involved in rugby from the start, I am amazed at the detail that Norm Cramp has been able to collect. It would be fair to say that the NTRU has not of itself been a great record keeper, but thankfully many participants over the years have been, and they have been kind enough to share their memories with us.

The 25th anniversary has been a catalyst for us to look back at our achievements and to learn from our mistakes. There is no doubt the growth of the game from six teams in 1976 to about 2000 registered players today both in seniors and juniors and in Katherine and Alice Springs as well as Darwin can be deemed a success. The change from playing on a Council oval in Alawa to having our own complex at Optus Rugby Park must also be seen as a step forward. Along with this growth has come the need for a more professional administration, paid staff and a larger budget. We now have seven full time employees and a budget that will hit almost \$1 million next year. So it is a far cry from those first days of Sunday morning meetings (often with a heart starter!) and meat tray raffles to get the game kicked off.

But what we have today has been built on the efforts of those who have gone before us. I can personally vouch for the fact that we have had a continuous stream of people on the Executive committee and in the clubs who have dedicated themselves to the game and its growth. This booklet is a recognition of their efforts and a signpost for those who come after us to continue the work of promoting this great game of ours and providing young people with the opportunity to play it and enjoy the lifelong friendships that grow out of their involvement.

Finally I would like to thank Norm Cramp for this booklet which is so much more than we had hoped for. It is indeed a work of scholarship and has been presented with care and sensitivity. It will form a strong foundation on which future works on our game in the Territory will be built.

D Bree

Message from Mr Bill Davies

General Manager of the Northern Territory Rugby Football Union.

Season 2001/02 sees the twenty-fifth anniversary of Rugby Union in the Northern Territory. Although it is true that Rugby was played in Darwin during the year previous to the 'official' competition commencing, and that numerous matches had been played within the military prior to 1976.

Rugby and the NTRU have come a long way in twenty-five years, from the struggling game born in the ruins of Darwin post-Cyclone Tracy to the game it is today. A game that stands on its own merit, and one which has achieved enviable successes along the way. The highs and lows, along with the 'legends' and characters, are all part and partial of the history of the game in the NT, and what a history it is.

It is my privilege, pleasure and honour to have been a small part of that history, and to be a part of ensuring the future of the game is as safe and secure as we can possibly make it. As General Manager of the NTRU, it is my role to take the game forward, to develop, expand and make stronger the game that so many before me have contributed so much to.

My personal congratulations to the Board of the NTRU, all players, coaches, administrators, supporters and sponsors, both past and present, for a job well and something to be proud of. My personal thanks also to Norm Cramp for this history of Rugby in the NT. It needed to be done and so has been.

To the future participants, I urge you to revisit the past laid out in this booklet, and strive to ensure the future. This great game of Rugby is our game! Only we can make it better and stronger and thereby ensure its future.

Bill Davies

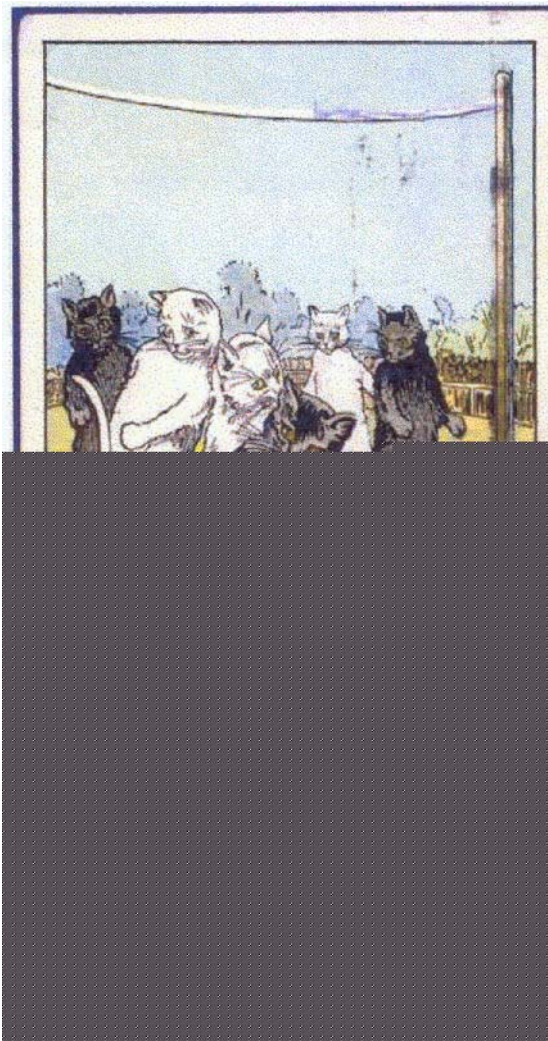
Author's note

This booklet was designed to be a short history of the senior grades of Rugby Union in the Northern Territory, rather than a comprehensive history of the game per se. To this end, the history of Schools and Junior Rugby Union has been visited but briefly, as I, and the management of the NTRU, believe the history of the junior competition is worthy of a history in its own right.

This document will cover the development of the game in a broad sense, and will record the history of the game in a Territory-wide perspective. It was not designed to present a detailed history of the individual clubs (past and present) and/or regular competition games, nor focus on individuals at the club level.

In presenting a work such as this, there is always a danger that someone who has contributed significantly to the game, and its development, will be overlooked. Should that be the case, I can but apologise and make the point that any such omission was unintentional on my, or the NTRU management's, behalf.

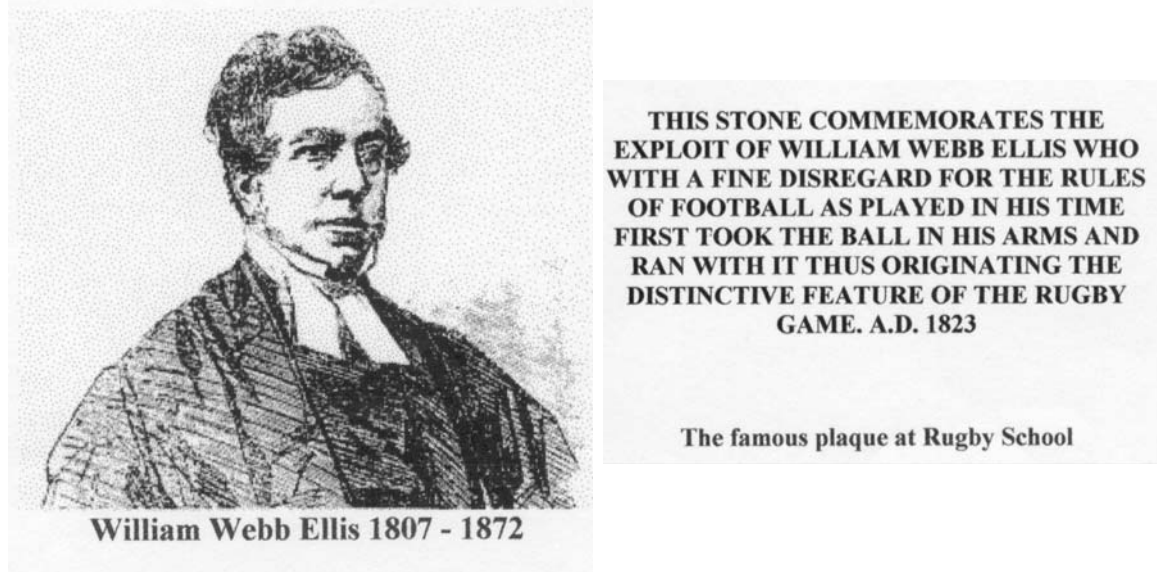
I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of those people, both internal and external to NT Rugby Union, that have assisted me to compile this history. Whilst working on the project has been enjoyable, it possibly would not have been completed without that assistance.



Introduction

Legend has it, that on a cold day in 1823 at Rugby School in England, a group of boys were playing association football (known today as soccer) on the school oval. Suddenly, a student named William Webb Ellis¹ scooped up the ball and made a headlong dash for the opposing side's goal line. Webb was soon halted in his progress by a full-bodied tackle by his opposition chums, and the game of Rugby Union had its very beginning. For the record, the first inter-school match was played in 1896 between Rugby and Cheltenham, with Cheltenham running out winners 13 points to nil².

Forty-one years later in 1864, barely three years after Burke and Wills had perished on their ill-fated journey of exploration³, and while civil war raged in the United States of America⁴, the first official Rugby Union club in Australia was formed in Sydney, New South Wales⁵. The club was the Sydney University Club which is still competitive in the Sydney Rugby Union competition.



Whilst it is known that Rugby Union was first played in Australia in 1829⁶, it is difficult to establish exactly when the first game was played, due to the very limited coverage of football in the press at that time. However, it is known that Rugby was played in an organised, albeit 'unofficial', form for a few seasons before the first official clubs were formed⁷. In the 1860s, games were played mainly between members of the Sydney University Club with occasional contests between undergraduate students and visiting British military personnel⁸.

In 1869, after the abandonment of the Escape Cliffs settlement, the fourth unsuccessful attempt at settling the wild north of Australia, Surveyor Goyder arrived in Darwin harbour on board the coastal barque *Moonta*,⁹ to survey and lay out a new and permanent settlement. The harbour had been named by John Lort Stokes in 1839¹⁰, and the new settlement was to be named Palmerston, after twice British Prime Minister Viscount Palmerston¹¹. In the fullness of time, the settlement, and the city that grew from it, would be renamed Darwin, after Charles Darwin, the

¹ Web site: <http://www.rugbytown.co.uk/legends/webellislegend.htm> William Webb Ellis was born in Manchester, England in 1807 and attended Rugby School from 1816 to 1825. He is credited with creating the game of Rugby Union by blatantly breaking the rules of soccer in 1823 by picking up the ball and running to the opposing goal line. Ellis later studied at Oxford University and became a priest. He served in various London and Essex parishes throughout his life until he died in 1872. He is buried at Menton, France.

In 1880, one of Ellis' school mates, Matthew Bloxam, identified Ellis as the boy that created the distinctive feature of Rugby football. That Ellis was in deed the originator of the game has been challenged on numerous occasions. Also see <http://www.gladref.org/www.htm>

² Ibid

³ Clark, Manning., *A Short History of Australia*. pp 120-121.

⁴ Caton, Bruce., *Never Call Retreat*. pp. 317-329.

⁵ Bray, Gordon., *The Spirit of Rugby*. p. 22.

⁶ Australian Institute of Sport., *Rugby Union: Facts On line*. Website: <http://www.ausport.gov.au/aisrug.html>

⁷ Ibid. p. 22.

⁸ Ibid. p. 22.

⁹ Powell, Alan., *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory*. pp 75-77.

¹⁰ Powell, Alan., *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory*. p 80.

¹¹ Cook, Chris and John Stevenson., *The Longman Handbook of Modern British History 1714 -1980*. p 48. Viscount Palmerston served as British Prime Minister from February 1855 to February 1858 and again from June 1859 to October 1865.

young naturalist who had sailed around the world on HMS *Beagle* between 1831 and 1836¹².

One hundred and seven years later, in 1976, the first official competition game of Rugby Union was played in the Northern Territory (NT). The match was contested between South Darwin (Souths) 'Rabbitohs' and the RSL 'Dragons' at 4:15 pm on the 2nd October, 1976 at Alawa Oval in Darwin's northern suburbs¹³. Souths ran out winners that day and were to finish the first season as minor premiers. On the 3rd March 1977, the first grand final was contested at Richardson Park (Darwin's Rugby League headquarters now known as Harvey Norman Park), between the Waratahs Club (later to be known as Bayside) and the South Darwin Club. On that historic occasion, the Waratahs outfit ran out winners 33 to 10¹⁴.

Rah-rah'¹⁵ had arrived in the 'Never-Never'¹⁶.

Since that time, Rugby Union has grown considerably in the NT, with senior clubs in Darwin, Katherine, Jabiru and Alice Springs. Darwin also hosts Women's and Junior's competitions. Teams have also been established in far away places such as Nhulunbuy (Gove), Groote Eylandt and Yulara (Ayers Rock), in order to contest competitions in neighbouring major centres. The NTRU also hosts Men's Over Thirty-Five (Golden Oldies) Rugby across the Territory, and has succeeded from the very beginning in placing the NT on the international representative itinerary, and more recently on the national agenda.

This booklet presents a brief overview of the twenty-five year history of Rugby Union in the NT from its humble beginnings to present day position as the second largest football sport (in terms of participant numbers) in the NT. It is in no means designed to be an exhaustive history of the game, its clubs and/or participants or the various facets of the sport. Rather, it is meant to be a short sojourn to the past, and a journey through time to the present day, in order to record some of the game's history in the NT.

In this way, not only is the colourful and valuable history of Rugby Union in the NT recorded, acknowledgement is also given to the enthusiastic and dedicated few that brought 'rah-rah to the never-never'. The 'few' that nurtured it, developed it, defended it and promoted it and in so doing made Rugby Union in the NT what it is today.



¹² Carment, David., Looking at Darwin's Past, p 2.

¹³ 'Palmerston Just Last', Northern Territory News, 29 September, 1976.

¹⁴ 'Clear win to Tahs' Northern Territory News, 2 March, 1977. NTRU records put the result at 31-10?

¹⁵ The term 'rah-rah' has its origins in the English Public School (private schools in Australia) system which was the birth place and the domain of Rugby Union. The upper class, snobbish and crusty students of the Public Schools would cheer for their school or favourite 'Rugger' teams with a hearty 'hurrah, hurrah'. Over time the cheer was abbreviated to rah, rah!! These days the term 'rah-rah' is used in reference to the game and/or its supporters in a generic, and often derogatory, manner by mostly non-Rugby Union supporters.

¹⁶ Author and pioneer Jeannie Gunn referred to the wild and remote Northern Territory as the 'Never-Never' land in her classic book on life in the Northern Territory, We of the Never-Never. The reference was made with respect to her view that once the place was experienced, one would never, never forget it!

The Early Days: Rah-Rah Arrives in the Never-Never.

Fading memories and legend have it that on a hot and humid day in or around September 1975, barely nine months after Cyclone Tracy had devastated Darwin, new found friends and Rugby enthusiasts Bernard (Bernie) Bree, Christopher (Chris) Marlow, David (Coops) Cooper, Warren Snowdon and Dennis Bree (elder brother of Bernie) were having a quiet ale at their favourite watering hole, Lim's Hotel, in the Darwin suburb of Rapid Creek. The hotel, which had largely escaped the ravages of Cyclone Tracy at Christmas 1974, was a well known and favourite meeting place and 'watering hole' situated on the beachfront at Rapid Creek and was famous for many and varied reasons in post-Cyclone Tracy Darwin. Those reasons included crab tying contests, mud wrestling, motor-cycle and tattoo exhibitions and contests, the weekend 'prawn and porn' (striptease) shows, and the famous Sunday afternoon 'rage in the cage'.

The legend fits the culture and style of the Territory and 'Territorians', in that it would seem quite plausible that the conceptual birthplace of Rugby in the NT would be in the front bar of a local and popular pub. But alas, the legend is just that! A legend! Through researching source documents such as newspapers, club newsletters and personal interviews with those actually involved, it can be recorded that on this occasion legend has the story wrong!

Rugby Union had its beginnings in Darwin in mid to late 1975 (no-one involved can be more precise than that!) following Cyclone Tracy, by way of Richard (Dick) Norris and his friends Matti Urvett and Don McGregor organising a Darwin based team to play any locals or military and naval personnel then based in, or travelling through, Darwin as part of the reconstruction process. Norris named the team the 'Old Plebians', due to the players being 'old' and 'plebian' in nature. That is of the common people, the lower class, uncultured, coarse, ignoble and perhaps a little dumb (as most would consider plebian types to be) for doing what they were doing at their age!¹⁷ Norris and his friends arranged games on an ad hoc basis, basically when someone was available or interested to play, with most games being played at then named Richardson Park, Darwin's Rugby League headquarters.

At that time in Darwin, there were a large number of New Zealanders working on the reconstruction program and one of them, a fellow by the name of David Cooper, decided it was worth trying to organise a formal Rugby Union competition. Cooper placed an advertisement in the local paper as well as placing a sign against a pole outside his then place of residence on Bagot Road, Ludmilla¹⁸. Both the advertisement and sign called for people interested in playing Rugby and starting a competition, to meet at the remains of the house. Like many houses and other structures in Darwin at that time, only the floorboards remained of the original house structure.

Dennis and Bernie Bree along with their friend Chris Marlow decided to attend the meeting, as did Nick Dondas, Warren Snowdon, John Sommerville, Kevin Blacker, Jim Kent and Richard (Dick) Norris among others¹⁹. At that first meeting it was decided to put a Committee together and to organise a competition to commence in 1976, although games were played in an 'unofficial' competition in late 1975 and early 1976²⁰. Twenty-five years later, Dennis Bree, Bernie Bree, Richard Norris, Nick Dondas and Warren Snowdon, among others, are still involved in Rugby, and in year 2000 all were awarded the Australian Sports Medal (ASM) for their services to that sport. However, in 1975 Bernie Bree, like Richard Norris was playing Rugby League, and his involvement in Rugby Union hinged on the outcome of a wager with his 'mate' Chris Marlow. Bernie cannot recall the nature of the bet, but does recall he lost and hence went to Rugby!!

Nick Dondas was President of the Nightcliff Rugby League Club at around that time and was approached by the late Harry Giese to become involved in Rugby, which happened to be Dondas' preferred game. He did just that, and today suggests his involvement in the game put him in good stead to win the seat of Casuarina in the election for the NT's Legislative Assembly²¹. Dondas, along with Rugby co-founder and political opponent Warren Snowdon, was to have a political career spanning twenty years in the NT, and was to be a great supporter of NT Rugby Union.

Bernie Bree, Dennis Bree, Dick Norris, Chris Marlow, Dave Cooper, Warren Snowdon, Nick Dondas and Kevin Blacker had all played Rugby in their home states before moving to the Territory. All were in some form of withdrawal given no opportunity then existed for them to play the game, however, the majority of them did not know each other. The common denominator was Rugby and the desire to play in a competition, albeit a four team competition if that was the best that could be arranged. The focus in the first instance was to attract people that would have a game, and from there organise clubs and recruit players and supporters, while the organisers would focus on recruiting Referees and Linesmen, and arrange the playing venues.

¹⁷ Norris, Richard., Personal interview. 3rd December, 2000.

¹⁸ Snowdon, Warren, Personal interview. December 2000. Also personal interview with Dennis and Bernard Bree 11th December, 2000

¹⁹ Bree, Dennis and Bernard., Personal interview. 11th December, 2000.

²⁰ Dondas, Nick., Personal interview. 28 December, 2000.

²¹ Ibid.

The Bree's, Marlow and Snowdon, an ex-Canberra East's player, organised a side they named the Darwin Rugby Club, later to become the Palmerston Club²². Ex-Sydney Eastern Suburbs Rugby Club player Dick Norris, who was at that time playing Rugby League for the Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) Club in Darwin,²³ set out to organise a side that was named the RSL Dragons. The name of the team and club was due to the support from the Darwin RSL, and to acknowledge the playing support given by then current Nightcliff Rugby League Club players such as Brian (Stem) Edwards, Bluey Walters, Leonard Castillion and others, whose emblem was the dragon²⁴.

Nick Dondas represented the Tracy Village team, while Kevin Blacker and Graham Oats represented and organised the Waratahs team. Jim Kent, Kingi TeAho and Ian (Bense) Hedger organised a South Darwin side and Mick Kelly, an Army Captain stationed at the Larrakeyah Barracks, put together a side made up of military personnel.

John Sommerville was 'elected' the first President mainly due, according to the memories of those present, to the fact that he had an office, and access to management and administrative supplies. Sommerville was at that time the Manager of Darwin branch of the Commercial Bank of Australia and the early meetings of the Union were held in the offices of that building on the corner of Smith and Bennett Streets, Darwin. Sommerville was to serve as President for approximately three to four months in late 1975 and early 1976 before being transferred with his work. Nick Dondas took over the reins, and was to serve as President for the next seven years.

The first 'social' games leading up to the competition proper were played at various ovals around Darwin, including Nakara and the Alawa Ovals which were then Hockey ovals. Dick Norris relates the story of one game at Alawa Oval when the ball was kicked into the mangroves. A 'Kiwi' fellow (whose name Norris cannot recall) dashed into the mangroves to retrieve the ball to keep the game flowing. He returned moments later, ashen faced and stammering out the words "there's a f.....g croc in there!"²⁵. He had however recovered the ball and the game went on! Norris also recalled a fun and fund-raising game the Old Plebians played against a RAAF team at Alawa in April 1975. Drinks were available from the esky on a honour basis and after much post-game singing and many cartons of beer being consumed, the total profit was six cents! As usual Norris was philosophical and said 'at least we didn't lose money'²⁶.



Alawa Oval No 3 (in 2001) looking toward main oval and the NT University. (Author's collection)

After some negotiations and embarrassment, games were also staged at the Larrakeyah Army Barracks. Nick Dondas recalls he and John Hogan meeting with the then Officer Commanding (OC) Larrakeyah Barracks, Lt-Col Trevor Wilkinson for lunch at one of Darwin's classier restaurants to discuss the NTRU utilising the Army oval for games. The lunch was 'shouted' by the NTRU, and all went well with Lt-Col Wilkinson dining on barramundi and

²² Bree, Bernie., Personal interview. November, 2000

²³ Norris, Richard., Personal interview., 15th November, 2000

²⁴ Norris, Richard., Personal interview. 17th November, 2000

²⁵ Norris, Richard., Personal interview. 24th January, 2001

²⁶ Ibid.

savouring every mouthful until the last! Disaster struck as Wilkinson unearthed a live cockroach 'hiding' under the last fork full of food!! Both Dondas and Hogan thought all was lost, but Lt-Col Wilkinson, a soldier of some experience and worldliness, shrugged the matter off and gave his approval for the use of the military base for 'civilian' activities²⁷. Word of the new competition spread quickly.

At that time, organised sport in Darwin was only just emerging from the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy, and the city was in essence a huge construction camp. The population consisted mainly of young men, many of whom were New Zealanders, who had come to Darwin to work on the city's reconstruction, and who had brought with them a passion for their particular sport. As such, the 'new' sport attracted a large amount of interest. The various teams were formed, or at least were in the process of forming, and as such the decision was taken to commence a formal competition in 1976. As informal games were currently being contested, it was decided to offer a trophy in that inaugural, albeit, 'unofficial' year. According to Nick Dondas, John Sommerville donated a trophy, a glass bowl, on behalf of the Commercial Bank of Australia which was presented early in 1976²⁸. The trophy was to be perpetual in nature, however, it disappeared from the scene by the end of the first 'official' season and has not been seen since.

It was decided by the NTRU Committee to conduct a six team competition, with the season running from October to March in order to avoid a conflict with the more established code of Rugby League, and to provide the opportunity for interstate club players to participate during their off season. The tactic must have been successful in the minds of Rugby administrators, as twenty-five years on, the competition is still contested between October to April ie; in the summer months during the 'wet season'. Although in year 2001 the NTRU is considering moving its competition to the dry season!

Although there were very few, if any, qualified Referees in Darwin or the NT at that time, a Referee's Association was formed initially by Dick Barber with Tony Watson-Browne, a local Solicitor, as the first President. RAAF Dentist Johnny Walker and Doctor Alistair Heatley, a senior lecturer at the then Darwin Institute of Technology (DIT) 'joined up' and as the first season progressed more refereeing recruits were enlisted. However, numbers were low and as such players also refereed in order to keep the games going during the early seasons. Some of the players like David (Digby) Hart who played for Waratahs and Jeff Fraser from the Souths club went onto to become leading Referees in the NT.

After advertising quite extensively in the local press, clubs, pubs and various workplaces around Darwin, as well as placing the famous sign against the tree on Bagot Road, Ludmilla, the organisers of the fledgling competition had five confirmed starters with one week remaining before the historic kick-off. At the eleventh hour, a call was received from military personnel based at Larrakeyah Army Barracks advising they had formed a team and were keen to compete. The stage was set for a six team competition made up of (in alphabetical order) Larrakeyah, Palmerston, RSL, South Darwin, Tracy Village and Waratahs.

It was decided to host a pre-season knock-out competition prior to the season proper, and Nick Dondas kindly provided the trophy, the Nick Dondas Cup, as a perpetual trophy. The first games of the knockout competition were played on September 18th 1976 at Alawa Ovals 1 and 2. The first round draw saw Larrakeyah and Palmerston clash at 4:30pm, Casuarina taking on RSL at 5:30pm, while South Darwin (Souths) and Waratahs would also clash at 5:30pm. The following day, the winners of Saturday's games played the losers, following which a ladder was established with the top two teams scheduled to meet in the Grand Final the following Saturday²⁹.

The Grand Final of the pre-season competition was played on Saturday 25th September, again at Alawa Oval between Palmerston and Souths. Palmerston overpowered and outlasted Souths to claim the Nick Dondas trophy, and to go down in history as the first team to win any 'official' NT Rugby Union competition. The Northern Territory (NT) News recorded the final score as 17-15 in 'a game notable for its solid forward tussles and flow-on back line moves'³⁰. The NT News report went onto to say that with the half time score at 13-3 Palmerston's way, it appeared the contest was over. However, 'Souths came out with a different attitude in the second half and their forwards, led by Ersie (sic) Wanka³¹, put the opposition through some punishing work'³².

Souths scored two quick tries to close the gap, and the scene was set for an exciting finish. Although Souths kept the pressure on, Warren Snowdon crossed the try line for Palmerston, but still Souths kept coming back, desperately throwing the ball around while the Palmerston players tried equally desperately to shut the game

²⁷ Dondas, Nick., Personal interview. December, 2000

²⁸ Ibid. Dondas is the only person to be interviewed that has referred to the Commercial Bank trophy. Searches of newspaper records for that period have brought nothing to light regarding the trophy, its winner or its whereabouts.

²⁹ 'Rugby knockout' *Northern Territory News* 14 September, 1976.

³⁰ 'Palmerston Just Last', *Northern Territory News*, 29th September, 1976.

³¹ Author's note: The name should have read Ernie Wanka. Wanka was a former Parramatta Rugby League player who moved to Darwin and played all of his Rugby League in the NT with the South Darwin Club. He played several seasons of Rugby Union with Souths prior to his retiring as a player

³² 'Palmerston Just Last', *Northern Territory News*, 14th September, 1976

down. The game in the forwards was becoming 'very fiery'³³, and Souths persistence paid off in the closing minutes when they scored a try³⁴. The chance at conversion was missed, the game was over and the history book commenced.

Following the knock-out competition, the first 'official' competition round was played on Saturday 2nd October 1976. The draw for that round had South Darwin meeting RSL at 4:00pm on Alawa Oval One, Palmerston and Larrakeyah at 5:15pm on Alawa Oval One and Waratahs taking on Casuarina at 5:15pm on Alawa Oval Two³⁵. David (Digby) Hart played for Waratahs that day and whilst struggling to remember the final score, his memory was quite clear about two events in that match. One was that he scored a try down the wing, and the other that he was smashed by a Casuarina forward, which left him (Digby) more than a little dazed and with a very sore head. It was the first of many such injuries 'Digby' was to suffer before retiring from playing and becoming one of the NTRU's leading Referees³⁶.



Rugby action at Alawa Oval 23-2-77 South's v RSL. A Kelly No14 (South's) on the ground to left, B Phillips (South's) with ball, J Cooper (South's) behind, S Taylor and B Darben (RSL) tackling, G White (RSL) on ground to the right. (D Hart collection)

The first First Grade Grand Final was played on 26th February 1977 at Richardson Park, Ludmilla with Waratahs and Souths facing each other on that historic day³⁷. Although Souths were minor premiers and 'red hot favourites' to win, Waratahs ran out victors with a score line of 33 - 10 according to the NT News report³⁸. There is some controversy regarding the final score as the official NTRU records have the score at 31-10. Regardless, Waratahs were victorious with former Rugby League 'stars' Mick Hore, Bob Cope, Graham Oats, Paul Morris and Williams all scoring tries for the 'Tahs', while Ian (Bense) Hedger scored the lone try for Souths³⁹. The NT News reported on the 2nd March 1977, that the 'standard of football was high and the 500 spectators were entertained well'⁴⁰. Following their 'shock' loss, the South Darwin players made claim that their late 'training session' at their headquarters, the Marrara Hotel (now called the Airport Hotel), had a considerable bearing on their focus, fitness and endurance!⁴¹

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Hart, David (Digby)., Personal interview. November, 2000.

³⁷ 'Clear win to Tahs'. , Northern Territory News, 2 March, 1977.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Huaki, Bill., A Brief History of South Darwin. Also see the 1989 South Darwin Global 7's program.



Rugby Union at Richardson Park: Second grade fixture between South Darwin and Larrakeyah 1977-78 season. David 'Digby' Hart refereeing his first game (D Hart Collection) .

Underdogs Waratahs were to repeat the Grand Final performance three seasons later, albeit under a different name and wearing a different playing strip, when they again beat the hot favourites to take out the premiership. Following a name change in 1978, the Waratahs Club became the Bayside Rugby Union Club and went onto contest the 1978/79 Grand Final, losing to Larrakeyah on that occasion 18 to nil. In 1980, Bayside once again ran out to contest the Grand Final. This time they met the 'big-name, big-game' Casuarina team⁴², previously known as Tracy Village, who were 'odds on' to take out the premiership. In an absolute upset, Bayside took the flag with a final score of 12-7 after a power-house performance in the forwards.

The NT News report on the game stated that 'Nowhere was Bayside's will to win more evident than in the forward clashes – it was here that the game was virtually decided'. The report went onto to say Bayside's smaller and less experienced pack tore into Casuarina with gusto from the first whistle and never gave them a chance to assert their authority⁴³. It was sadly to be Bayside's last Grand Final.

The first ever season was a roaring success, and the competition and club administrators began planning the next competition and the next campaign. One year later, the Casuarina Club, with the support of the NTRU and many southern Clubs, introduced the Casuarina Invitation XV versus Darwin Mosquitoes annual competition. The competition was based upon the Casuarina Cougars hosting interstate invitation players to take on the might of Darwin's best. Although the very beginnings of the contest were not so clearly known to the contestants – well, not all of them anyway!

It all started in 1977 when the Casuarina Club were not winning too many games. According to Peter Tiffen, a couple of Casuarina players approached members of the top of the ladder South Darwin team to arrange a game to be played on Australia Day, with a 'small' wager placed on the outcome – the only rule being winner take all. The South Darwin 'Rabbitohs' players took the bet thinking Casuarina couldn't beat them even with a couple of representative players in their ranks. Little did the Souths camp know that Casuarina did indeed have Australian players in the shape of Tony Shaw and Australia's record-breaking Paul McLean in the ranks. The game was played, Souths lost both game and the bet and the Casuarina Invitation fixture was firmly placed on the NT Rugby Union calendar⁴⁴.



Title block from the 1980 Casuarina Invitation versus Northern Territory match program. Note the game was played at Richardson Park and the program cost 50c. (A. Ratahi Collection)

⁴² McCue, Fred., 'Hawks Fly – Casuarina hit hard up front'. Northern Territory News. 25 February, 1980.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Tiffen, Peter., 'Great game born from Cougar bet'. Northern Territory News. Page 19, 22 January, 1987.

Over the following years, other legendary Australian and New Zealand Rugby players made the trip to Darwin to play in the invitation match. Players such as Chris Handy, the Ella brothers Glen, Gary and Mark, David Campese, Roger Gould, Duncan Hall, Chris Roche and Brendon Hall all made the long trip north to compete and have a good time. In 1981, the NTRU decided to balance the competition a little and invited New Zealand stars Frank Oliver and Stu Wilson to play for the Darwin team. In 1985 Grant Fox, Mark Shaw, Rod McCall, Mick Carter and Simon Poidevin all appeared in the invitation match⁴⁵. The competition was to be held every season until 1993/94 when the enterprise was abandoned due to the difficulty in securing quality (ie; Australian or State) players.

In 1978, the NTRU embarked upon its first representative tour by sending a team to contest the Queensland Country Rugby Union Carnival. The carnival was staged at Rugby Park, Mt Isa from Saturday 29th April to Monday 1st May and attracted teams from Mt Isa, Queensland Central Highlands, Central Queensland, the Darling Downs, the Gold Coast, Mackay and District, Townsville and the NT. The NT team consisted of W White, J Connolly, B Kiwi, P King, B Spencer, P Berrington, B Rogers, D Grieg, W Steward, M Manolas, B Darben, D Mortimer, B Stewart, B Phillips, D Beasley, B Joseph, M Taulelei, N White, T Gribbon and G Oats. Dave Cooper was the coach⁴⁶. The NT side performed well but the Darling Downs ran out winners that year with the Gold Coast being runners-up. It was the first of many interstate competitions the NTRU would be represented in over the years to come.

The 1979-80 season kicked off on the 15th September with the Pre-Season Nick Dondas Trophy. The draw for the knock-out competition was Casuarina against Larrakeyah, Palmerston and RSL, while Souths took on Bayside, who were called the Cowboys at that time. The season also included the President's Cup in the First Grade and the Secretary's Cup in the Reserve Grade.



NTRU Season Draw 1979/80 (J Fraser collection)

In the 1979-80 season Schoolboys Rugby Union was introduced with the first 'international' game of Rugby in the NT being held that year between the NT Schoolboys and the visiting Irish Schoolboys. Three years after the senior competition had commenced, the NTRU introduced the President's Cup to further develop and foster Rugby in the community. The format for the President's Cup is that the two leading teams at the end of the first round play for the trophy when they meet in round two. This trophy is still keenly contested in year 2001, although there was a break of several years in the early to mid 1990s. In 1980 the NTRU sent a representative side to Brisbane to participate in the XXXX Cup, Brisbane Division for the first time. It was to be the first of many interstate trips the NTRU's teams were to undertake over the years.

⁴⁵ Manning, Rollo., 'History of the Origin Match', International Territory 7s: Souvenir Program, January, 2001

⁴⁶ Mount Isa Rugby Union., 'Souvenir Program'. Queensland Country Rugby Union Carnival – 29th April- 1st May 1978.



NTRU Touring team to Qld & NSW 1980 (D Hart Collection)

In March 1981, the NTRU sent a team on a tour almost around Australia. The team played in Alice Springs, Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane and Mount (Mt) Isa on the way home! According to Alan Ratahi who played in team, the highlight was playing Queensland B as part of the XXXX Cup, Brisbane Division at Ballymore, Brisbane⁴⁷. The match was played at 4pm on Sunday 15th March, with Mr C Oxenford as Referee, and P Galloway and B Fienberg as his Touch Judges. NT players that day were; D Lee, R Richards, J Badowski, P D'Arcy, R Albion, T Arthur, P Littler, A Taulelei, T Fitzgerald, D Gaston, A Ratahi, P King, D Panapa, J Connolly, W White. Reserves were; N White, T Burns, N Hurawai, G Walker, B TeAho, and Harvey Brown. Dave Cooper coached the team with Mick Hedger as Team Manager⁴⁸. The result of the game was a convincing win to Queensland, but more experience and exposure at that level had been gained.



Cover of the 1981 XXXX Cup, Brisbane Division program showing the NTRU's Alan Ratahi closing in to tackle QRU's Paul Mills in the 1980 encounter. (A Ratahi Collection)

A week before the NT played in Brisbane, the same team played South Australia in Adelaide for the first time. The

⁴⁷ Ratahi, Alan., Personal interview. February, 2001.

⁴⁸ Queensland Rugby Union Inc., Rugby 81. Vol 6, No. 1. 14-22 March, 1981

match was played at Bailey Reserve on the 8th March⁴⁹ with the NT running out winners in a very close fought and physical encounter.

In August 1982 J. Kent, D Cooper, B Bree, P Potaka, R Southwell, D DeClifford, R Evans, J Fraser, P Baxter, R Broadley, J Hogan and A Ratahi attended the monthly NTRU Committee meeting. Apologies were received from N Dondas, T Burkett, P Morrison, A Floyd and D Bree. The Treasurer reported that the Union had \$178:52 in credit with the NT Home Building Society and an overdraft of \$1,422:41 with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.

Main agenda items at that time were the submission of plans to the NT Building Board for the construction a ticket box, the Secretary was to send a letter of apology to Katherine Rugby Union for the tardy response to their correspondence and the whereabouts of the Casuarina Club's 1981-82 grant application. Other matters raised at the meeting included Richardson Park being ruled out as a venue for the 1982-83 season, and that the NT Royal Show Society were to charge \$75:00 per day for the use of the Showground Oval. It was also noted that guttering for the headquarters building was to be purchased from Demar Pty Ltd and to be fitted by way of a working bee on 5th September, 1982⁵⁰. At the September Committee meeting the Darwin Showgrounds were 'generally accepted' as the venue for the 1982-83 season⁵¹. At that meeting, the Referees delegate Dr Alistair Heatley was fined one carton of beer for arriving late for the meeting!⁵²

At this meeting the delegates voted in favour of a \$250:00 affiliation fee per team for the forthcoming season, as well as making it mandatory for team sheets to be lodged immediately after each game – checked, marked and signed! They also voted in favour of a ruling that each club was to provide a delegate to the NT Schools and Junior Rugby Union Committee (NTS&JRUC) to assist in the development of the junior competition. It was also decided that no sponsors names were to appear on jerseys, only logos would be permitted. The suggestion that the North Australian Club Carnival being held in conjunction with the Casuarina Invitation XV game was put forward, as was the prospect of identifying a sponsor for the scoreboard. The last matter was left in abeyance while 'the secretary canvased (sic) for sponsors'⁵³.

The 1982-83 season fixture card (draw) identified the team as the Bayside 'Cowboys' in scarlet jerseys with white shorts, the Casuarina 'Cougars' in royal blue and white hoops with blue shorts, the Larrakeyah 'Buffaloes' in sky blue jerseys with white shorts, Palmerston 'Crocs' in red, white and blue hoops with white shorts, RSL 'Dragons' in the green and gold with green shorts, South Darwin 'Rabbitohs' in the 'Randwick' green with green shorts and Katherine 'Crocs' in gold with green shorts.



NTRU Season Draw 1982-83 (Note team names & colours). (J Fraser collection)

The season that year commenced on the 25th September with the knockout competition, followed by minor rounds

⁴⁹ South Australian Rugby Union Inc., Program: South Australia v Northern Territory, 8th March, 1981. Some questions have arisen over the actual date of this match as the program is not year dated. Alan Ratahi who played for the NT that day is of the view it was 1981 as the team then went onto play in Melbourne and Brisbane.

⁵⁰ Northern Territory Rugby Union Committee Meeting Minutes – 29 August, 1982.

⁵¹ Northern Territory Rugby Union Committee Meeting Minutes – 12 September, 1982

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

which commenced on the 16th October. Only three rounds were played that season, culminating with the Grand Final on 5th March, 1983. The NT then played a one-off game against Mt Isa.

In August 1982, at the Marrara Hotel in the Darwin suburb of Jingili, Richard (Dick) Norris, Matti Urvett, Ian (Bense) Hedger, Terry (Ferret) Annersley, Terry (Wheelbarrow) Baczkowski and Ron Coombs met with a view to organising the first NT 'Stubbies' Over Thirty-Five side to participate in the Golden Oldies Rugby Festival in Sydney, NSW in 1983. The Festival was at that time staged every two years at a different venue around the world, ranging from Toronto, Canada, to Perth Western Australia, to Los Angeles, USA and Toulouse, France in 2001.

Rugby had arrived in Darwin but it was some time before its popularity and following was to spread to other major Territory centres. The NTRU continued to host the season at Alawa Oval and Richardson Park, with occasional games at Nightcliff Oval and Darwin Showgrounds. On several occasions, such as the 1980 Grand Final⁵⁴, games were played at the St Mary's Oval, until the NTRU moved to their own grounds within the Marrara Sporting Complex.

The scene had been set for Rugby to grow and prosper in the NT, but there was a long hard road to hoe, and much hard work to be done to achieve the goals. Still, it had started, and started by the efforts of a handful of enthusiasts, ably assisted in the years to come by many others, who believed Rugby had a place in the sporting life of Territorians. Some of those 'Founding Fathers' are mentioned in the next section of the booklet, and 'Other Luminaries' later in the text.

⁵⁴ McCue, Fred., 'Hawks Fly High – Casuarina hit hard up front'. Northern Territory News. 25th February, 1980.

The Founding Fathers (in alphabetical order)

Bernard (Bernie) Bree ASM

Bernie Bree was born in Brisbane, Queensland in 1955, the second of four boys. He was raised and educated in the Brisbane suburb The Grange, and graduated from the University of Queensland with an Economics Degree in mid 1975.

Bernie moved to Darwin permanently in 1975, commencing work with the Commonwealth Government's Department of the NT in the Town Planning Branch in August of that year. He graduated from the Darwin Community College (forerunner to the NT University) with a Graduate Diploma in Education in 1978 and took up primary school age teaching the following year. His teaching career has taken him overseas, and has seen him promoted to his current position of Deputy Principal.

Bernie was instrumental in arranging the first Rugby competition in the NT and establishing the Palmerston Rugby Union Club. He played in the first game of the first season (as well as the knock out competition) for Palmerston and 25 years on, is still linked to that club.

He has represented the NT as both a coach and manager of various School Boys teams on several occasions. He has also represented the NT on one occasion in the Australia Day fixture Casuarina Invitation XV v Darwin Mosquitoes. He has played all of his career with the Palmerston Club of which he is a life member⁵⁵.

Bernie was made a life-member of the Palmerston Rugby Union club in 1997. In year 2000, he was awarded the Australian Sports Medal (A.S.M.) for his services to Rugby Union in the NT.

Dennis Bree ASM

Dennis Bree was born in Manchester England in 1951, the eldest of four boys to be born to the Bree family. He migrated with his Irish parents to Australia and was raised and educated in Brisbane's northern suburbs, where his parents had decided to settle.

Dennis graduated from the Queensland Institute of Technology (Q.I.T.) in 1973 with a Degree in Civil Engineering and moved to Darwin in 1974. He was employed at that time by the engineering firm Gutteridge, Haskins and Davey (GH&D), leaving them to take up a position with the Commonwealth Department of Works in 1977, as a Level One Engineer engaged in the rehabilitation of Darwin's water supply and sewerage systems. Since that time, Dennis has been promoted to his current position of Executive Director – Commercial, with the Power and Water Authority (PAWA) of the NT.

Dennis has had a long and distinguished involvement with Rugby Union in the NT, being a foundation member of Palmerston Rugby Club, having played in the inaugural season, and having been involved in the formation of the Darwin, Katherine and Central Australian Rugby Unions. He has also served on the NTRU Committee for twenty-five years, and served as NTRU President for eight years. He has been a member of the ARU Council for nine years. At the time of writing, Dennis was President of the NTRU and a serving members of the ARU Council. Dennis has played 25 seasons of Rugby in the NT, and in year 2000, he continues to play Rugby for his beloved Palmerston Club in the Second Grade⁵⁶.

Dennis was made a life-member of the Palmerston Crocs in 1997. In December 2000, he was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his services to Rugby Union in the NT and in March, 2001 he was elected to the Board of Directors of the Australian Rugby Union⁵⁷. Dennis' involvement in Rugby Union has been endless and never tiring, and the receiving of the Australian Sports Medal and his election to ARU Board is truly justified and richly deserved, as few have given some much to the game of Rugby in the NT.

David Cooper

David (Coops) Cooper was born and raised in New Zealand where he completed his secondary and technical education, qualifying as a Carpenter/Builder. He made his way to Australia in search of work and found himself in Darwin in 1975 following Cyclone Tracy.

'Coops' is widely credited as the person who placed the advertisement in the NT News calling for people

⁵⁵ Bree, Bernie., Personal interview. 12 November, 2000.

⁵⁶ Bree, Dennis., Personal interview. November, 2000.

⁵⁷ Maharaj, Rajiv., 'NTRU president elected to ARU'. Northen Territory News. Saturday, 10th March 2001.

interested in playing Rugby Union to meet at his abode on Bagot Road, Ludmilla. From that meeting decisions were taken that would be the foundations of Rugby Union in the NT.

'Coops' was to have a long career with the Palmerston Club as a player, coach and administrator as well as being involved in the NTRU Committee for many years. According to anecdotal feedback and interviews with others involved in those very early days, he was the man behind the actual building of the infant Rugby Park infrastructure. That is to say that he contributed his trade skills and experience to install the first building on the site and made the necessary repairs to make the building 'operational'.

Twenty-five years later David 'Coops' Cooper is still involved in Rugby in the NT having a position on the Judiciary and officiating in various roles at major events such as the Australia Day weekend 7s competition. 'Coops' spends the majority of his time working outside of Darwin and as such it was not possible to conduct a personal interview with him for this history, although it needs to be noted approaches were made on numerous occasions!

According to the other 'Founding Fathers', 'Coops' was one of **the** driving forces behind the establishment of Rugby in the NT and has a wealth of tales to tell. It is a shame his personal story can not be related in this work.

The Honourable Nicholas (Nick) Dondas A.M., A.S.M., J.P.

Nick Dondas was born in Perth, Western Australia 1939 and moved to Darwin the first time in 1940. In 1941 he was evacuated to Perth on the ship Koolinda as the threat of war approached.

Nick was educated at the Christian Brothers and the Perth Boys High School where he was Captain of the school's First XV for 3 consecutive years. He commenced his grade football career with the Western Suburbs club in Perth before returning to Darwin. Although he returned to Darwin in 1956, he returned to Perth to play Rugby, and was selected in the WA Colts team in 1958 - a last minute inclusion he recalls. He went onto to play grade Rugby in both Adelaide and Melbourne, and also played in Hong Kong between 1960 and 1963 whilst on a working holiday.

Nick was President of the Nightcliff Rugby League Club in the early 1970s. He was attracted to Rugby in the NT by the late Harry Giese and took up the challenge to organise a team. In order to do so he began door knocking to recruit players from the Tracy Village construction camp. In time, the Tracy Village team would become the Casuarina Cougars Rugby Club. He was to serve as the Casuarina Rugby Club President and was the second NTRU president, serving in that office for seven years. He donated the first trophy ever to be 'officially' contested in the NTRU, the Nick Dondas Knock-out Trophy, a precursor to the first official competition staged in 1976-77. In 2001 Nick remains involved in Rugby by way of his being Vice-Patron of the NTRU.

He entered NT politics in 1974 and served until 1994. During that period he was Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation and was instrumental in setting up the Marrara Sporting Complex and allocating land to the NTRU and other sports. As President of the NTRU, he hosted Committee meetings in his Parliamentary Office, a demountable building at the rear of the old Legislative Assembly building at the bottom of Mitchell Street, Darwin and helped set the future direction for the fledgling Union. Nick served one term in the Federal House of Representatives from 1996 to 1998.

Nick has had a twenty-five year association with Rugby in the NT and was instrumental in its establishment, growth and development. In year 2000 he was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his services to the game and the community.

Nick says he has not retired from politics, rather he is standing for election for the Federal Seat of Solomon in the 2001 federal elections. He currently operates a successful business in the Darwin suburb of Larrakeyah⁵⁸.

Richard (Dick) Norris A.S.M.

'Dick' Norris was born in London, England in 1940 and received his early education at the George Casgione Central school before going onto further studies at the South West Essex Technical College and the Battersea College of Advanced Technology (CAT).

He graduated from the Battersea 'CAT' with a Higher Diploma in Engineering and immigrated to Sydney, Australia in 1966. He took a position with the Commonwealth Department of Works in Sydney, and commenced playing for Sydney's Eastern Suburbs Rugby Club that same year. In 1971 he was transferred to Darwin with the Commonwealth Department of Works 'ComWorks'.

⁵⁸ Dondas, Nick., Personal interview. December, 2000.

Arriving in Darwin he discovered there was no Rugby Union competition so signed up with the RSL Rugby League team instead. In 1975, he and mates Matti Urvett and Don McGregor had organised a social Rugby Union team, the 'Old Plebians' to play military teams, visiting Navy personnel in Darwin for the reconstruction of the city or any others interested in a game. From there, Dick was instrumental in forming a team, the RSL Dragons, to contest an official competition⁵⁹. He was Captain/Coach of the Dragons for several of the first seasons.

Since that time, Dick has been involved in Rugby Union in the NT. He has served on the NTRU Executive Committee on several occasions, and currently holds the position of Vice President of the NTRU. He was a key player in the early seasons, and was one of the prime motivators in organising and developing the Over Thirty-Five's (Golden Oldies) competition. He is currently working with others to organise the next 'Darwin Stubbies' (the NT's 'representative' Over 35's team) tour to Toulouse, France in 2001.

Dick is a Senior Executive Officer with the NT Government's Department of Transport and Works. He is currently Project Manager for the Darwin East Arm Port project.

Although he may consider retiring from the workforce in 2001-02, there appears to be no hint that he has any intention of retiring from Rugby. Twenty-five years after his first game of Rugby in the NT, he continues to play the game, as well as actively participate in its management and development.

Dick was made a life-member of the Darwin Stubbies Club in 1992, and in 2000, was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his services to Rugby Union in the NT.

The Honourable Warren Snowdon M.P., A.S.M.

Warren Snowdon, Rugby player, Teacher and Politician was born in Canberra, ACT in 1950, the eldest of three children. He was educated at St Edmond's College, where he played for the First XV, before moving to Western Australia to complete his tertiary education at Murdoch University.

Warren commenced his 'grade' football career with the Ainslie Club in Canberra in 1970 before switching to Canberra's Easts Club for the 1971 and 1972 seasons. He enrolled at the Murdoch University in Perth, and played for the University's First XV in 1974 and 1975. In 1975 he graduated from the Murdoch University with a Diploma in Education and shortly thereafter took a teaching position at Nhulunbuy High School (commonly referred to as Gove)⁶⁰ with the Commonwealth Teaching Service.

Warren noticed an advertisement in the Northern Territory News seeking people interested in playing Rugby, and organising teams to commence a competition. He responded, and was 'elected' to the first Darwin Rugby Union Committee along with Dick Norris, Bernie Bree, Dennis Bree and Dave Cooper. Warren was instrumental in forming the Palmerston Club and was to be the Club's first coach. In 1981 he left Palmerston to coach the Bayside team. He was also active in developing Junior Rugby by organising and coaching teams from St John's College and Nightcliff High Schools.

Warren entered Federal politics in 1987, winning a seat in the House of Representatives. He held the seat until 1996 when he was defeated at the national election by Darwin and NT Rugby Union colleague Nick Dondas. In 1998, Warren regained the seat for the Australian Labor Party. At the time of writing, Warren continues to represent the ALP in the Federal House of Representatives and has nominated for pre-selection for the 2001 federal elections.

Warren currently remains involved in Territory Rugby as a Vice-Patron of the NTRU. In 2000 he was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his services to Rugby Union in the NT⁶¹.

⁵⁹ Norris, Richard., Personal interview, 15th November, 2000

⁶⁰ Author's note: The township of Nhulunbuy is situated on the western tip of the gulf of Carpentaria on the Gove Peninsular. The peninsular was named after RAAF Flight Lieutenant Gove who was killed in an aircraft accident during World War Two. Most 'Territorians' refer to Nhulunbuy as Gove.

⁶¹ Snowdon, Warren., Personal interview. 4th November, 2000.

NTRU FOUNDATION CLUBS - A BRIEF HISTORY

Club: Tracy Village (Casuarina Cougars)

Colours: Dark Blue and White Bars



The Casuarina Cougars, originally known as Tracy Village, were one of the foundation member clubs of the NTRU having been formed in 1976. The club was formed through the efforts of Rugby enthusiasts such as Nick Dondas, Paul Baxter, and Dennis (Slim) McLoughlin. The Tracy Village Rugby Club was 'born' at the Tracy Village Sport and Recreation Club in the Darwin suburb of Wanguri. Tracy Village was constructed as an accommodation/construction camp with a sport and recreation club for workers engaged in the reconstruction of post-Cyclone Tracy Darwin⁶². The 'Clubhouse' itself was a part of the sprawling construction 'village', hence the name Tracy Village, and the management of the Club supported a variety of sporting codes at that time - and still does in 2001.

Nick Dondas was the club's first President and was very active in recruiting for the club by door knocking in the village. Others that were heavily involved in the club's establishment were Graham Laing, Paul Baxter, Kevin Collins, and Danny Panapa, all of whom have been honoured by their club with a life-membership.

By the 1982-83 season the name had changed from Tracy Village to Casuarina Cougars, and the now familiar colours of dark blue and white bars were adopted. According to Graham Laing, the new Club colours were loosely based on the Brisbane Brothers colours⁶³, the team with whom several of Casuarina's earliest players and workers, Paul Baxter and Slim McLoughlin included, had had a long association with whilst living and playing in Brisbane. Another Brisbane Brothers stalwart who was to become one of Casuarina's favourite sons and celebrated player and coach, John Connolly, was to join the club in the early 80's, which added to, and continued, the Club connection. The Club adopted the motto 'Fortuna Favet Fortibus' which, according apparently means 'Fortune Favours the Brave', although the more popular definition is 'Winners are Grinners'.



Casuarina RUFC Minor Premiers and Grand Final winners 1981 (NTRU Rugby magazine)

Casuarina was the club of the eighties winning six First Grade Premierships in 1980/81, 1981/82, 1982/83, 1983/84, 1984/85 and again 1986/87. The Cougars were also Runners-up in 1979/80 and again in 1985/86 when

⁶² Author's note: The Tracy Village Sporting and Recreation Club (commonly referred to as simply Tracy Village) still operates from its original location in Tambling Terrace, Wanguri. In 2000, only a few traces of the original construction camp remained, but the Club has flourished.

⁶³ Laing, Graham., Personal interview. November, 2000.

they lost to the RSL Dragons by 25 points to 13. A remarkable and enviable record by anyone's measure! The Cougar outfit in the 1980's boasted some of the best players in the NT at that time, including Bruce Kennon, John Connelly (who was later to coach Queensland) , David Ellis and Danny Panapa.



1983-84 Cougars celebrate their premiership victory.

(l-r back row) J Badowski, A Howard, K Collins, B Lamme, J Connelly, D Panapa, P Heatley, B Kennon, obscured player unidentified, K Potter, K Thompson. (l-r front row) P Toohey, D Evans, K Smith, T Rostrom. (B. Kennon collection.)

Wallaby players Tony D'Arcy and Mark Nightingale among others had stints with the Club before going on to represent their country. Both D'Arcy and Nightingale were members of the 1977/78 Australian Schoolboys tour of Great Britain and France. That team was undefeated in sixteen matches and compiled an impressive for-and-against scoring record of 523 points for to 97 against⁶⁴.

All in all the Cougars have been very successful in attracting some very promising young players and their contribution was significant. Reflecting on prominent players that the Cougars had sponsored to Darwin in the early 1980s, Paul Baxter recalled that the Cougars had also brought New Zealand All Black Five-Eight, Nicky Allan to the NT and in 1983, they hosted one of Australia's most famous and capped Rugby players, David Campsie, to the Top End for a game and coaching clinics⁶⁵.

The Cougars contested the Singapore 7's competition from 1983 to 1992 with great success, winning the Singapore Cricket Club's Ablitt Cup in 1983 and being honoured with a standing annual invitation to this most prestigious event. In 1990, the Cougars accepted an invitation to tour Kenya in 1992. The invitation for the five game, three week tour came about as a result of Casuarina assisting the Kenyans during the Singapore Sevens in 1990, following which the friendship was born⁶⁶. Unfortunately, due to costs and a less than expected result from the fundraising activities, the tour did not go ahead, but the effort did demonstrate Casuarina's drive and momentum at the time.

The Cougars also hosted, and were predominant winners in, the Australia Day Casuarina Invitation XV versus Darwin Mosquitoes games from 1977 to 1993. The Casuarina Invitation XV won nine of the sixteen games played and they drew the 1983 fixture 32 all. Sadly the contest lapsed as a result of difficulties attracting quality players, but it had achieved what the Casuarina Club had set out to achieve. That was to bring quality players to Darwin in order to improve the playing skills in the NT.

The club has always had a strong focus on Junior Rugby development over the years, and has supported teams in the Under 18, 16, 14, 12, 10 and 8 years competition since the inception of the competitions.

In the early 1990s, Bruce Kennon formed the Casuarina Straycats to participate in the Over Thirty-fives

⁶⁴ Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc Rugby News, Vol1, Issue 1. October, 2000

⁶⁵ Baxter, Paul., Personal interview. 28 November, 2000.

⁶⁶ Green, John., 'Cougars Kenya-bound in 1992'. Northern Territory News, 23 September, 1990.

(Golden Oldies) competition. The Straycats play other Golden Oldies teams on a semi regular basis as well as contesting the Alice Springs Masters Festival which is held every second year.

The Casuarina Club has a long and proud tradition and record in NT Rugby and in season 2000-01 continue to be competitive in most grades. The Casuarina Cougars have won six First Grade premierships, five in a row between 1980 to 1985, and have been runners-up twice. The Second Graders have not been as successful as their senior side, having won two premierships and coming in second on five occasions. The Thirds have won only one premiership, the only one in which they have appeared since joining the competition in 1983.

Club: Palmerston 'Crocs'

Colours: Red, White and Blue Bands



The Palmerston Club is widely acknowledged as **the** foundation club and initiator of the first Darwin competition in 1976/77. The Palmerston club was formed in 1975 under the name of the Darwin Rugby Club, however, the name was soon changed to Palmerston. The change of name was due to the organisers' considering the name 'Darwin' to be a little pretentious given their view the game could only grow and prosper and as such, there would be Darwin representative teams in the future.

The club was formed mainly by Dave Cooper, Bernard (Bernie) and Dennis Bree, Chris Marlow and Warren Snowdon. The choice of club colours was based on the Canberra Eastern Suburbs' strip, as Easts, with whom Warren Snowdon had commenced his grade Rugby career, were generous enough to donate a set of jerseys to the fledgling Palmerston club for their first season. Palmerston and South Darwin made history by taking the field against each other in the first pre-season knock-out competition game on the 18th September, 1976. It was the first official competition match of Rugby Union to be contested in the NT. Palmerston ran out winners over South Darwin in the Grand Final of the same competition by 17 points to 15 on the 25th September 1976 at Alawa Oval.



Palmerston Reserve Grade Grand Final side circa 1984. Dennis Bree is first on left front row, Bernie Bree standing second last on the right back row and Chris Marlow standing last on right back row. (D Bree collection)

Palmerston has had considerable success over the years winning many club championships and premierships in all grades. However, it took the Palmerston First Grade side fifteen-years to secure their first premiership pennant when they defeated the RSL Dragons in 1990/91 by 6 points to 3 in a close fought and rugged encounter. The second graders were premiers in 1987/88 with the third graders, 'the thirsty thirds', running out winners in 1985/86, 1987/88, 1988/89 and again in 1992/93.



Palmerston players (l-r) C Snowden, C Leach, J Tadeo and S Hanna celebrate the club's first First Grade premiership win in the 1990-91 season. (NTRU Handbook 1991-92 Season)

In the 1993-94 season Palmerston entered a team in the inaugural Women's competition. The Palmerston Sweethearts took out the premiership that year by defeating the University Pirettes 10-7.



Palmerston's Shelly Zerafa (left) & Gail Barlow holding the Women's division Premiership Trophy in 1994, the first time the Division had been hosted. (G Barlow Collection)

In twenty-five years of contesting Rugby Union in Darwin, the Palmerston First Graders have won the First Grade premiership three times, the Second Grade trophy three times and the Third Grade premiership six times. The First Graders have been runners-up on seven occasions, the Second Graders on three occasions and the Third Graders five times unlucky!

The Palmerston Club has been the source of much administrative and coaching support to the NTRU with Dennis Bree having served as NTRU President for 9 years as well as having the honour of being the inaugural President of the Katherine Rugby Union. His younger brother, Noel, served as Central Australian Rugby Union (CARU) President for a year, Bernie Bree as the NTRU Schoolboys Coach and Patrick Bree as NTRU Coach, NTRU Development Officer and current Head Coach of Rugby Union at the NTIS. At the time of writing this history,

Dennis Bree has been and is currently on the Australian Rugby Union Council and has been since 1992. In March 2001, he was elected to the ARU Board of Directors.



The Brothers Bree minus one (l-r) Noel, Dennis and Bernie in their Palmerston playing strip at Optus Rugby Park January, 2001. (Author's Collection)

Palmerston's focus in the late 80s and early 90s was the development of its own clubhouse at Moulden Park, Palmerston and the establishment and development of its junior and mini Rugby teams. The clubhouse is currently operational and more focus is being applied to junior development in the area.

The major funding raising activity for the club in 2001 was the publishing a 'nude' calendar of the First Grade players. The financial outcomes are unknown at this time but the calendar has certainly depicted Rugby in the raw.



"Bottoms up" at Palmerston RUFC bar. (Reproduced from Palmerston RUFC calendar 2001)

Club: RSL 'Dragons'

Colours: Originally Green and Gold



The Returned Servicemen's League (RSL) Dragons was another of the foundation clubs in the Darwin competition. The Dragons took the field in the inaugural competition in 1976-77 and since that time the senior grades have won every major tournament hosted by the NTRU including, the President's Cup, the Westpac 7's, Minor Premierships and Grand Finals in all grades.

The forerunner to the club was formed in 1975 as a social Rugby team named the 'Old Plebians', the reference being to their advanced age and lack of sense according to Dick Norris⁶⁷. In that year Richard (Dick) Norris, along with friends Matti Urvett, and Don McGregor, among others, were approached by Bernie Bree and Dave Cooper of the Palmerston Club (then known as the Darwin Rugby Club) to play a social game or two. The game/s took place, which in due course led to Dick and friends being invited to organise a team to compete in an official Rugby competition to be staged in 1976⁶⁸.

Norris had played first grade Rugby in England and Sydney, for the Eastern Suburbs club, and was more than keen to become involved with the development of the fledgling Union, as well as to continue his playing career. As Dick was then playing Rugby League for RSL, he Matti and Don recruited interested, if not experienced, Rugby Union players such as Brian Colless, Brian 'Stem' Edwards, 'Jock' Paice, 'Bluey' Walters, Jerry Buckler, Bob Clarke and Paul Lofthouse from the ranks of the RSL Rugby League Club.

The new Rugby Club gained financial support from the Darwin RSL Sub Branch in order to field a side in the first official competition. They adopted the RSL club's green and gold colours and incorporated the 'Dragons' name and emblem into the club name to acknowledge the significant involvement and support of the Nightcliff Rugby League players that had signed up to play for the RSL Club⁶⁹.

The Dragons won their first A Grade pennant in 1985/86 defeating the Casuarina Cougars by 25 points to 13. The second grade side was successful in 1982/83, while the third graders brought home the premiership trophy on two occasions in 1984/85 and 1990/91.



1st Grade Premiers 1985-86 (Ratahi collection.)

⁶⁷ Norris, Richard, Personal interview. 15th November, 2000

⁶⁸ Ibid.

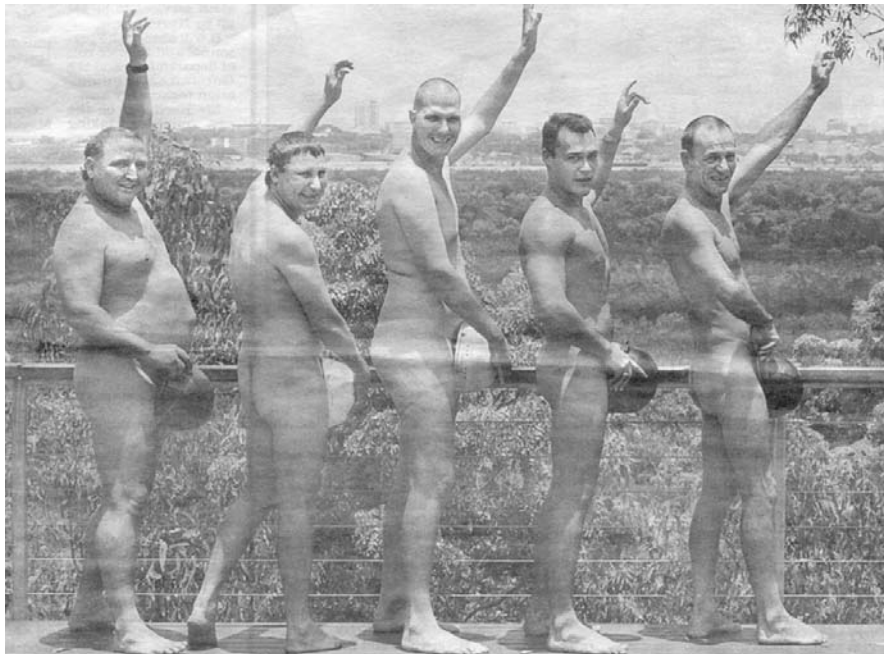
⁶⁹ Ibid.

The Club also had great success in the international arena, running out undefeated champions of the 1985/86 Singapore 7's, being runners-up in the 1986/87 and being placed third in the 7's tournament in 1983/84. Throughout their twenty-four year participation in the NTRU, the Dragons have recruited numerous international players to their ranks. Players such as Frano Botica (All Black player), Emosi Koloto, Chris Hull and Brett Iiti have donned the RSL Dragon's green and gold and in doing so have added another dimension to the development of the code in the 'Never- Never.'

The Dragons fielded a team in the Women's competition in 1994-95, and have been very competitive over the years. In the 1997-98 season they were runners-up to the University Pirettes being beaten 10 points to 7, but bounced back in 1999-00 to turn the tables by defeating University 12 points to 10.

In 1996, the RSL 'Dragons' ceased to be, due to a name change resulting from a new alliance and sponsorship deal with the Postal Institute on the Northern Territory (PINT) Club. Although the club colours had already been changed to gold and black, the PINTS Dragons retained the dragon emblem and relocated their headquarters to the PINT Club at Marrara in Darwin's northern suburbs. The club underwent another name change in the 2000-01 season now being known as the Darwin Dragons.

In 1998 the Club organised a major fund raising event which had some of the First Grade players showing off the 'strip' for the season. The boys performed the 'Full Monty' (an English term for full strip) at their headquarters the PINTS Club.



M Gribbon⁷⁰, P Gerhardy, S Piercy, S Hughes & R Wright (NT News 15/10/98)

Rod Wright said 'I've done some crazy bloody things in my life to raise money for this club, but this has got to take the cake'. Mick Gribbon (Gunn?), Steve Hughes, Scott Piercy and 'Puppet' Gerhardy took the stage alongside of Rod Wright to bare it all for the PINTS Rugby Club⁷¹. The night was a roaring success but all involved hoped that in the future Piercy would come up with other ideas to attract attention and achieve Club exposure!

One wonders how many of today's players realise the Dragons name and emblem so proudly worn and defended originated in the support of Rugby League players back in 1976? Since that time, the Dragons have won five First Grade premierships, and have been runners-up on five occasions. They have been equally successful in the Second Grade with five premierships to their credit and having received the runners-up trophy on two occasions. The 'thirsty thirds' have taken the premiers trophy back to their clubrooms after two Grand Finals, and have been runners-up five times in the club's twenty-five year history.

⁷⁰ Author's note: There is some debate in Rugby Union circles as to whether or not the person identified in the photograph as Mick Gribbon was indeed Gribbon. Some have it the persons correct name is Mick Gunn.

⁷¹ Billias, Maria., 'Dragons get it off for their club'. Northern Territory News, 215th October, 1998. P1.



**Darwin Dragon players, officials and supporters celebrate their first grade grand final win – 7th April, 2001.
(Northern Territory News 8th April, 2001)**

In 2001 the club contested eight of the nine grand finals played that season (2000-01). The Dragons won the first grade, second grade, Women's, Under 14s, Under 12s and Under 8s. It lost the Under 16s, and Under 10s.

Club: Waratahs **Colours: Red Guernsey with White Hoops around Chest and Arms**



The Waratahs Club was another foundation club that was formed in early 1976 and won the first premiership competition in the NT in the 1976-77 season. The club came into existence mainly through the enthusiasm and hard work of people such as Graham and Lana Oats and Kevin Blacker who are credited with starting the team off. It was the Oats' and Blacker that organised the jerseys and raised funds by selling meat tray raffles etc. Others involved in the process of establishing and developing the Club were; Ian and Donna Stark, Digby Hart, John Gilmore, Peter Stubbs, Dave Burwood, Alvin Lord and Steve Langford. Later stalwarts of the club were Chris and Gail Calogeras, Paul Morrison, Paul Albion, Rick and Brendon Brannelly, Paul Gibbs, Llyod and Jenny Maloney, Jack Harries, 'Cracka' Horn, 'Horse' Stanton and 'Polly' Schafe to mention but a few.

The Club was formed under the banner of the Waratahs Sporting Club and was accordingly named Waratahs. The Rugby Club adopted the red and white colours of Waratahs, which they continued to sport, albeit with some design changes, until its demise in 1995. Like many of the foundation member clubs, Bayside drew heavily on its parent club Waratahs, and its sister/opposition code (Rugby League) players and supporters. The organisers recruited League stars such as Graham Oats, Bob (Bobo) Dowey and Bob Cope to the Union ranks and fielded the strongest team in the inaugural competition year. In that year, Bayside captured the honour of being the first premiers in NT Rugby Union's history by defeating South Darwin 33 points to 10.

After two years of playing under the Waratahs name, a meeting was convened at the Parap Hotel and a decision taken to leave Waratahs and for the teams to become a Club in their own right. According to a sponsorship paper prepared by Bayside administrators in 1989, the decision was based on problems being experienced with training and entertainment facilities at Waratahs Sporting Club facilities at Fannie Bay⁷². The name 'Bayside' was chosen to highlight the club's geographical location (close to the sea at Fannie Bay) and the Seahawk was chosen as the emblem. The playing strip was retained mainly due to the fact that the Club could not afford a new set⁷³. A new training venue was negotiated with St John's College, Salonika where the Club based its headquarters until 1984. The Club relocated to Nightcliff High School for the 1985 season and retained that facility as its training base until 1987 when they returned to St John's College. Bayside retained St John's as its home base and headquarters until the club regrettably folded in 1995.

Bayside went on to win their second First Grade pennant in the 1979/80 season, and were runners-up in 1978/79. The Club's second grade side were runners-up to the Casuarina Cougars in 1979/80, but reversed the tables the following year by defeating the Cougars 15 to 4.



1980 First Grade Premiers

Back row (l-r): B Walmsley, P Morrison, B Rollo, C Pozzutti, M Brannelly, D Hart, G Oats, A Lord
Front row (l-r) I Stark, P Albion, D Burwood (Captain), D Choulai, R Albion, R Keeley, S Hill.

Missing : G McNamara, D Albion, C Baker, M Parnell.

⁷² Calogeras, Chris., *Bayside Rugby Union Sponsorship Proposal*, p. 2. 1989.

⁷³ Calogeras, Chris., Personal interview. November, 2000.

In 1981/82, the seesaw battle for premiership honours continued between Bayside and Casuarina with the Cougars taking the pennant with a score line of 21 points to 18⁷⁴. It was the last time the Bayside club was to take the field to contest a Grand Final. In the early 1980s, Bayside were the 'entertainers', due to their open, flowing style of Rugby that saw them feature prominently in the major competition, as well as taking out numerous 7's trophies.

Bayside ventured into the world of Junior Rugby by entering a team in the Under 17's in the 1986/87 season. The Bayside Juniors were premiers that season as they were the following season, however, interest declined in the competition and it was not until the 1989/90 season that the Bayside Juniors took to the paddock again.

The club also sponsored a team in the Over Thirty-Fives (Golden Oldies) 'competition' which was aptly named the 'Vintage Reds'. Many of the Vintage Reds such as Bob 'Bobo' Dowey, Graham Oates, the Albion brothers, Paul, Roy and Doug, Fred McCue and Bob Cope were stars of both Union and League in Darwin, and continued to demonstrate the skills and agility (albeit a little more slowly) well past the end of their competitive careers.

The club struggled in the early 1990s as a result of falling player numbers and various other reasons including the poaching of the better players by other clubs. As a result of the changing demographics which saw players moving from the inner suburbs, the aging of the core players, the reliance on many service personnel who were often unavailable due to military exercises etc and a tired and frustrated Committee, the club folded. By 1995, Bayside had dropped both the B and C grade teams and although the Club was cashed up, they were unable to field competitive sides for the forthcoming season⁷⁵.

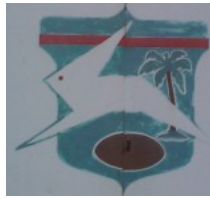
The history-making, highly respected and very competitive Bayside Club closed its doors and ceased to be during the off season. Sadly, a chapter in the history of NT Rugby Union had come to an end, but as one door closed, another opened for both the NTRU and the stalwart supporters of the Mighty Reds. Bayside had played a major role in the introduction and development of Rugby Union in the NT, with its own brand of open, running Rugby. In many ways its passing was an end of an era. However, many of the 'Reds' players went on to continue the good work, albeit in different colours. Many however, simply walked away from the game never to play or participate again. A sad loss to Rugby indeed.

Still, the indomitable spirit lives on within the aging ranks, as was witnessed in 1999 when over 120 former Bayside players, administrators and supporters came together for a reunion and a wake. They came from far away places such as the USA, NZ, Western Australia and Queensland to renew old friendships and to reflect and reminisce on a very important part of their lives and an equally important part of the history of Rugby Union in the NT.

⁷⁴ NTRU Official Records and Premiership Honours Board.

⁷⁵ Oates, Graham., Personal interview. November, 2000.

Club: South Darwin 'Rabbitohs' Colours: Originally Myrtle Green with White Collar



The South Darwin Club (Souths) is another foundation member of the NTRU having contested the first premiership competition in which they were runners-up to Waratahs (Bayside). The club came into being through the endeavours of people such as Jimmy Kent, Kingi TeAho, Ian and Mick Hedger, Graeme Gowe, Doug Gribben, and Fred Maha all of whom had played Rugby in their home states and countries before moving to the NT. These eight, along with two others whose names have not been recorded, became the club's foundation, and first life-members, and as such the founding fathers. Jim Kent was elected as the first President of the club, a position he was to hold for the first five years of the Club's history. According to Bill Huaki⁷⁶, Jim was ably assisted in his efforts to nurture and administer the club by players such as Kingi TeAho, Clive Clements, Ian and Mick Hedger and Peter (Bunji) Berrington to mention but a few.

South Darwin Rugby Union Club was formed in 1975/76⁷⁷ with an odd mix of players drawn from the Tracy Village Social Club and the front bar of the Mararra Hotel. According to South's 'historian' Bill Huaki, Dave Cooper from Palmerston issued an invitation to Souths to play a social game of touch football, which, after some serious lobbying from the Souths camp, turned into a Rugby match⁷⁸. As Bill Huaki put it in his *Brief History of South Darwin Rugby*; 'So with a somewhat motley collection of labourers, builders, teachers, public servants, plenty of Kiwis and an odd Aussie as well as a Pom', the initial South Darwin Rugby team and club was formed. According to Clive Clements, Souths' playing policy was 'to develop a free flowing, fast running game pleasing to both players and spectators'⁷⁹. Key players in that formative season included the late Fred Maha, Ian and Mick Hedger, Peter (Bunji) Berrington, John Cooper, Barry (Cussy) Rostance, Clive Clements and Alan Kelly to name but a few.

The headquarters of the club was established at the Mararra Hotel under the watchful eye of Manager and Licensee Ron Coombs, who was later to have a considerable impact on the development of Over Thirty-five's (Golden Oldies) Rugby in Darwin.

Souths Rugby Union Club became an affiliated member of the South Darwin Sporting league, and drew upon the playing fraternity of the well established South Darwin Rugby League team in order to field a side in the inaugural competition. South's adopted the colours of one of the most famous and successful of all Australian Rugby Union clubs - Randwick, and bearing the famous green jersey (complete with the South Darwin Sporting League rabbit emblem) referred to themselves as the 'Rabbitohs'.

As Ian Hedger had played for Randwick before moving to Darwin, he kindly loaned a number of his jerseys in the early days to outfit the team. Once the word was spread that a proper competition was to be held, Kingi TeAho spent his own money to purchase the first playing strip for the club. The decision was made, no doubt with a bit of lobby from the Hedger boys, to adopt the Randwick colours, and Souths ran out to contest the first Darwin competition in the Randwick green. In year 2000, the Souths Board of Management decided upon a change of strip, electing to leave the traditional Randwick green behind and opting for a harlequin pattern jersey of red and green squares. According to Clive Clements⁸⁰, the decision was brought about mainly as a psychological move to bring about change that may set Souths back on the premiership trail after their poor performance in the 1999/00 season.

South's played in their first grand final in 1976/77, on which occasion they went down to Waratahs (Bayside) 31-10. Bill Huaki records that many (if not all) of the South's grand final players had spent the previous night at the bar of the Mararra Hotel practising scrums against the pool table and talking tactics. Grand final morning saw more than a few sore heads and several players were noted to have partaken of a 'heart-starter' prior to the big game!⁸¹

However, they bounced back to achieve their first First Grade premiership victory in 1977/78 when they defeated

⁷⁶ Huaki, Bill., *South Darwin Global Rugby 7's: A Brief History of South Darwin Rugby*. Unpublished.

⁷⁷ Bill Huaki sets the date as 'late 1976' in his unofficial work, however, the common view is the club was formed in late 1975 to early 1976.

⁷⁸ Huaki, Bill., *A Brief History of South Darwin Rugby Club*. Unpublished and undated

⁷⁹ Clements, Clive., Personal interview. October, 2000.

⁸⁰ Clements, Clive., Personal interview. 10th December 2000

⁸¹ Ibid.

Palmerston by 19 points to 10 on a wet and slippery field at Richardson Park. The side was jointly coached by Peter (Bunji) Berrington and Canadian Jim Rorke and was arguably one of the best teams Souths have ever fielded. South's were to wait another nine years before they regained the premiership trophy, but like the Palmerston club, they featured in numerous Grand Finals. They were runners-up to Casuarina in 1980/81, 1981/82, 1982/83 and again in 1984/85. As the saying went, always the brides' maid, seldom the bride!

South's won their second First Grade premiership in 1987/88 by defeating Palmerston 23 to 9. The club has not been successful in the First Grade since then, but were runners-up to the University Pirates in 1988/89 and again in the 1991/92 season.



81-82 Grand Final finalist (J Fraser collection)

Back row; (l-r) A Kortekas, N White, T Roche, M Taulelei, P Birchell, A Taulelei, C Willcox.

Middle row: (l-r) S Day, B Youngsmith, S Thrupp, S Johnson, B TeAho, M Novelli, P Berrington.

Seated: (l-r) S Williams, Q Hewer, D Lee, L Hewer, S Brown, I Hedger, D Annersely.

The club's Second Grade sides have been very successful in the premiership stakes taking out the honours in 1983/84 and again in 1985/86, then a hat trick of pennants between 1988/89 and 1990/91. They were runners-up to Palmerston in 1987/88 and took out their last premiership in 1992/93.

The Greens 'thirsty thirds' have been less successful than their more senior grade club mates, having won only one premiership in the seventeen years they have contested the grade. On that memorable occasions, in 1993/94, they defeated University 11 points to 6. They were also runners-up on two occasions, going down to RSL in 1984/85 and to University by 18 points to 10 in 1991/92.

South's were also one of the foundation clubs with respect to the Women's competition, and have fielded a team in every competition since the grade's inception. The South's ladies have been successful on only one occasion during the eight years the grade has been contested. In 1998-99 season they were crowned Premiers after defeating the University Pirettes 13 points to 12.



South Darwin Women Premiers 1998-99.

Back Row L to R. S Gardiner, G Barlow, K Ainslie, J Winter, J Coughlin, S Hampton, T Yates, C Jensen, K Hodges.

Middle Row L to R. L Brown, P Noble, L Pearce, J Posgate, T Hammi-Jones, T Diprose, L Fejo.

Front Row L to R. S Wells (Coach), S Robertson, S Yates, Y Riddle. Absent: E Andrew. (C. Jensen collection.)

In 1985, Souths put out the call to 'old' players to form an Over Thirty-five's (Golden Oldies) side to be named the 'Faded Greens'. The measure met with limited success, probably due to the number of other clubs forming Golden Oldies team at that time, and the Faded Greens faded into oblivion reasonably quickly. A handful of Souths players went on to play for the Old Galahs, however that team also folded due to lack of numbers.

South's had great success with the introduction of the 'Seven-a-side' competition which they commenced in 1988. The competition is still conducted in year 2001 albeit under the auspices of the NTRU and attracts teams from all over the world.

Being an affiliated member of the South Darwin Sporting League, South's Rugby Union Club has its headquarters at Warren Park (the home of the Rabbits). The Warren Park complex is located within the Marrara Sporting Complex, and is ideally located alongside Rugby Park, which has recently been renamed Optus Rugby Park after the NTRU was successful in gaining the telecommunications giant Optus as its major sponsor.

The development of Warren Park and its infrastructure has been somewhat stop/start over the years, but club stalwarts such as Clive Clements, Jeff Fraser and Frank Steele continue to give generously of their time and expertise to improve the facilities, develop the game and to better ensure Souths' future.

Club: Larrakeyah 'Buffaloes'

Colours: Originally Sky Blue then Red, Dark Blue and Light Blue Hoops.

The Larrakeyah Club was formed in late 1976 by military personnel stationed at the Army's Larrakeyah Barracks in Darwin. Larrakeyah was the last team to nominate to participate in the inaugural season, and was welcomed with open arms by the organisers, as until the time the nomination was received it appeared the first season would be contested by five teams which obviously meant a bye situation. Something the organisers were keen to avoid in the first official competition!

One of the driving forces behind the Larrakeyah team/club was Mick Kelly, an Army Captain based at Larrakeyah, although the team was made up of members of all three arms of the Services. The Larrakeyah team took to the field in the Nick Dondas knock-out competition, facing up to Palmerston in their first match of the 'official season' at 4:30 pm on 17 September, 1976. Larrakeyah, like Waratahs, RSL and Tracy Village never made it through to the grand final of that very first competition, but they did make themselves known - and felt apparently.

Two years later, in 1978/79 season, Larrakeyah were to win their one and only Darwin First Grade Grand Final when they outclassed, and outlasted the Bayside contingent 18 points to nil. It was also to be the one and only First Grade Grand Final appearance for the military men, although they went on to contest Grand Finals in both the Second and Third Grades. In 1980 the club changed its name from Larrakeyah to Combined Services in order to attract funding from all three arms of the Defence Forces. In effect the original Larrakeyah side was really a Combined Services team as many players were serving members of one of the three arms of the Australian Defence Forces (ie; Army, Navy, Air Force), however, the mainstay in the early days were Army personnel based at Larrakeyah and the team was named accordingly⁸².

The original team colours worn by Larrakeyah were sky blue with white shorts and dark blue socks. Later, the Combined Services teams sported jerseys carrying red, dark blue and light blue hoops, with red shorts.



Combined Services (Red Dark Blue & Light Blue) and Palmerston (Red White & Blue) players contest a line-out in 3rd grade Grand Final 1984. (Photograph reproduced from Rugby Weekly April 1984.)

Combined Services dropped out of the NTRU in 1986 following a bleak season in which the First Grade side was

⁸² Heath, Mark., Personal interview. March, 2001.

not competitive and suffered some humiliating defeats. Mark Heath recalled one game in that season when the Combined Services First Grade side was defeated 113 – nil by Casuarina, with the Referee calling full-time fifteen minutes early!⁸³ The team suffered other defeats that season with scores in the high eighties and nineties, which prompted the Club's management to approach the NTRU with a request to be relegated to Second Grade. The request did not receive a favourable response with the NTRU demanding 'Services' field a First Grade side or leave the competition. As the club was finding it extremely difficult to attract players from outside the Services the result being a continuation of the non-competitive seasons, the club was disbanded. It is somewhat ironic that in September 1996 Major 'Pup' Elliot, then the Defence Forces Rugby Officer in the NT, wrote in reference to Combined Services' Seven's team 'Defence Rugby has entered a new era in 1996 and its future is looking very good'. He went on to say that 'already this year (1996) the Defence Team has shown it is a considerable power within the region'⁸⁴. It's a pity the organisation cannot support teams in the general competition.

For the record, the Larrakeyah/Combined Services Club played in three Grand Finals during its participation in the competition. The Club won one First Grade premiership, played one Second Grade Grand Final in 1982-83 which it lost to RSL 6 points to nil and one Third Grade Grand Final in 1983-84 which it won by beating Palmerston 9 points to 4.

Unfortunately little of the Larrakeyah Club's history remains, as the originators have moved on via posting to other stations around Australia. As far as could be determined Mark Heath is the sole remaining Larrakeyah player still residing in Darwin. Contact with the Defence Force Headquarters (Northern Command) – Larrakeyah Barracks Darwin proved fruitless in terms of records and/or photographs.

Perhaps someone reading this booklet may be able to provide more background and photographic record into this part of Rugby's NT history.



Grand final action 1979 - Bayside versus Larrakeyah. Digby Hart (Bayside) attacking with the ball. Larrakeyah player unknown. (D Hart Collection)

⁸³ Heath, Mark., Personal interview. March, 2001.

⁸⁴ Elliot, Major 'Pup', 'Combined Services Rugby'. Chinese Taipei vs. NT Taipans – Souvenir Program. 21-30 September, 1996. p10.

Rugby Finds a Home

In 1978, just two years after Rugby kicked-off in Darwin, The NT Government and the Darwin City Council signed an agreement whereby the NT Government would allocate land for the development of a centralised sporting complex⁸⁵. Nick Dondas as Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation had allocated land at Marrara, in Darwin's northern suburbs, to the Darwin City Council (DCC) for the establishment of a centralised sporting complex⁸⁶. As the DCC achieved little over a three to four year period, the land was re-acquired by the NT Government and Dondas, as then Minister for Lands, re-allocated the land to various sports, including Rugby. The allocation of land was accompanied by a grant in order to assist those sports to establish themselves within the new complex⁸⁷.

The establishment grant included the construction of an oval and provision to the NTRU of administrative and player 'accommodation' unit within the Marrara Sporting Complex. The accommodation came in the form of a demountable building which had previously had been one of the post-cyclone maternity wards at the original Darwin Hospital at Myilly Point⁸⁸. Given the history of the NTRU's first administrative possession, one can understand the comment that moving to Marrara and into the demountable, was truly the birth place of Rugby in the NT! Dondas lent his considerable political support for the allocation of the demountable building to the NTRU, and upon its allocation in 1983, Dave Cooper set to work to install it in as short a time as possible in order for it to be used as the NTRU's headquarters.

1983 was also the year that Alan Ratahi of the RSL Dragons Club in Darwin was selected by the NTRU Referee's Association as the Best and Fairest player. Beside being presented with a trophy Ratahi was also presented with a return interstate airfare by sponsors TNT Courier Systems. The letter of congratulations also advised Ratahi that he had been awarded a 'return airfare as an on-board courier' which 'may be taken at any time this year with the destination being negotiable'⁸⁹. The letter was signed by TNT Courier Systems Darwin Manager Mr Denis McLoughlin – the same man that had worked so hard for the Casuarina Club and had recruited Bruce Kennon to its ranks.

In 1984, Sir Nicholas Shehadie, then President of the Australian Rugby Union, officiated at the opening of Rugby Park and the NTRU moved onto the grounds, complete with its newly installed headquarters. In year 2000, the original building still stands at Rugby Optus Park, but is now a shadow of its former self!



Commemorative plaque at Rugby Park, Marrara. (Author's collection)

Sir Nicholas was in Darwin for the Grand Final that year and was present when NTRU President John Hogan launched a broadside at the ARFU. Hogan said he was 'appalled at the attitude displayed by the national body of this union'. The verbal attack was centred on the fact that the NTRU did not have voting rights at the national level at that time even though a NTRU delegate had attended every meeting of the ARFU. Hogan went on to blame a 'clique' in NSW who had formed an 'unholy alliance' with South Australia to defeat the NTRU's application for full ARFU status. Hogan asked Sir Nicholas and ARFU Executive Director John Dedrick 'what do we have to do to get

⁸⁵ Northern Territory Rugby Union., *Sponsorship Advertising Proposal*. 1997.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Dondas, Nick., Personal interview. December, 2000

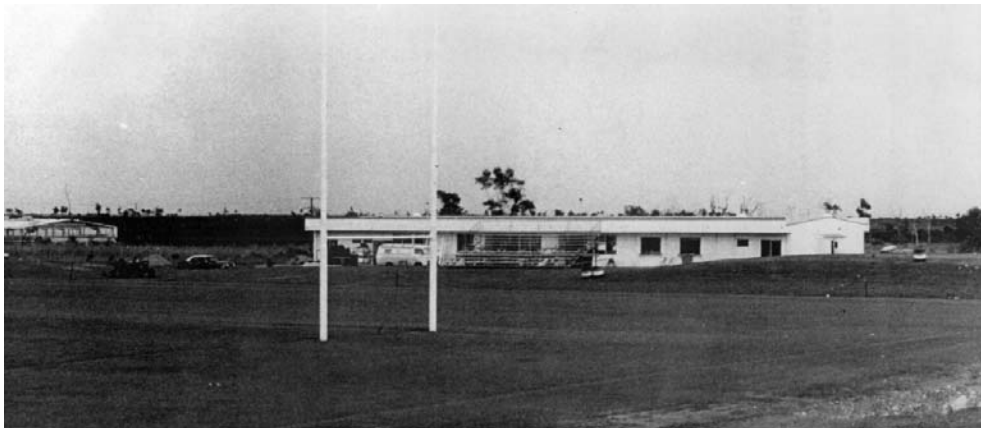
⁸⁹ Ratahi, Alan., Personal papers.

a vote?⁹⁰ What they had to do was to continue to participate in the ARFU and to lobby for equal rights. The efforts were finally rewarded when the NTRU was given full voting rights in 1989.



John Connolly leads his Casuarina Team onto rain soaked Rugby Park for the 1984 Grand Final against RSL. (Reproduced from Rugby Weekly April 1984)

Hogan's attack did not dampen the Grand Final atmosphere (nor did the torrential downpour prior to the game as witnessed above) nor did it detract from the achievements of the NTRU to that time. As a matter of fact Hogan's comments drew attention to the fledgling Union's achievements in terms of interstate tours and facilities development. He pointed out that although the 'accommodation' was basic, as is evidenced in the photograph below, the NTRU had found a home of its own, and had a supporter base which stamped it as a major code in Darwin.⁹¹



Rugby Park, Marrara, 1984. (NTRU Collection)

⁹⁰ Hedger, Mick., 'NT broadside ARFU'. Rugby Weekly. Vol 2, Number 4, 6th

April 1984. P 3.

⁹¹ Ibid. p3

From 1984 onward, the NTRU worked hard to improve the facilities for its players, spectators and administrators at Rugby Park, while at the same time developing the game within the NT and spreading the word that Rugby had arrived. In those early days, as is the case today, the growth and development of the code concentrated on;

- Creating and maintaining international links by way of fixtures against visiting international teams;
- Developing ties and expanding the exposure of Rugby in Asia;
- Raising playing standards within the NT through participation at the national level and supporting various events in the NT to attract quality players and
- Broadening the participation base within the NT

The implementation of the developmental (strategic) plan called for dedicated, enthusiastic and energetic people to devote enormous amounts of time and effort - and many answered the call. Those that did answer the call had a common goal, and worked toward the achievement of that goal. The results are self evident in that Optus Rugby Park, in year 2001, boasts two playing fields, a grandstand incorporating an administrative and function complex, playing lights, an in-ground irrigation system, spectator mounds, individual Club supporter shelters, a gymnasium in the original demountable building and numerous sponsors. Additional improvements are planned as the game continues to grow.

In the eleven-year period 1976 to 1987, John Somerville served as the first President of the Union, to be followed by Nick Dondas, John Hogan, and Dr Chris Wake who was elected President in 1987. Dr Wake was to hold that position until 1992 when he left Darwin to further his medical career. All three made a lasting impression on NT Rugby and were key 'players' in the nurturing and development of the game not only in Darwin, but across the NT. Dennis Bree took over the reins in 1992 and has been the NTRU President from that time to the present. Dennis Bree was also heavily involved in setting up the Union in both Katherine and Alice Springs, and has represented the NTRU on the ARU Council for more than nine years.

In 1981 the Katherine Rugby Union was established by a small band of the faithful, including Dennis Bree, Malcolm Letts, son of NT politician Goff Letts, and Tom Stockwell.⁹² Dennis Bree had been transferred to Katherine as the Department of Transport and Works Area Manager. He and his friends discussed the possibility of creating a competition and as Bree says, 'over a hundred bottles of red wine later', a plan had been made.⁹³ Once again, advertisements were placed in the local newspaper, seeking people interested in playing Rugby Union to attend a meeting. People did attend, although only enough to organise one team. In the first instance, given only one team existed in Katherine, games were organised with Darwin or military sides that were prepared to travel to Katherine for a game and arguably more importantly, a tad of socialising!

Games were played at the Katherine Works club of which Dennis Bree was the patron. The next step was to have Katherine admitted to the Darwin competition in the Second Grade, while additional teams were raised in Katherine that would then allow for a separate competition in Katherine. Katherine entered the Darwin Second Grade competition in 1983/84 season and went on to contest the semi finals in that division in that year, but went down to Casuarina 10 points to nil⁹⁴.



Katherine Works Club – 2001. (Author's Collection)

In 1988, a four team A Grade competition was arranged in Katherine and games continued to be played at the

⁹² Bree, Dennis., Personal interview, 11th December, 2000.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Hedger, Mick., 'Katherine a winner'. *Northern Territory News* 31st March, 1984.

Katherine Works Club oval on the Gorge Road. Marty Duggan was the first President of the Katherine Rugby Union and the Lions were premiers that season beating Pirates nine points to six. The Lions were to go on to win the next five premierships before being beaten eighteen points to three by the Brahmans in 1994-95. At the time of writing, Katherine continues to host its own four-team competition with a strong player, supporter and sponsor base. The construction of the RAAF Base Tindal, approximately 10 kilometres to the south of Katherine, and the arrival of RAAF personnel to the base, saw Rugby Union enter into a period of sustained growth.

In September 1983, seven years after the Darwin competition kicked off, a group of Rugby enthusiasts in Alice Springs, including that man Dennis Bree, decided the time was right to organise a competition in the heart of Australia. The very first game, which was organised by Peter Dean, Paul Brann and Laqui Papalii, was played at Anzac Oval, Alice Springs between Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. Don McKenzie refereed the match which Alice Springs won 20 to 13⁹⁵. In January 1984, Alice Springs sent its first representative team to Darwin to contest the NT Club Championships⁹⁶.

In October 1984, a 'Test' match series was held between Australian born players (with a few 'ring-ins' we're told) and expatriate New Zealanders. The games were trial matches for the Alice Springs representative team. October 1984 also saw the inaugural game to contest the Ansett Airlines 'Footrot Flats' trophy, with the games being played at the Alice Springs High School oval. What was supposed to have been a 'one off' game became the best of three, and then the best of five as the 'Aussies' had won the best of three and the 'Kiwis' were keen to win the trophy. Five 'Tests' later, the New Zealanders were acknowledged as series winners, with a three and two record of success⁹⁷. The Footrot Flats Trophy is still contested in Alice Springs, although there have been moves to change the name in favour of a new sponsor. To date the moves have been resisted, and the Trophy has pride of place in the CARU trophy cabinet!

Following the success of the 'Test series', the stalwarts decided to organise a four-team competition. It was from this humble start and the hard work, perseverance and perspiration by the likes of Roger Rudduck, Mike Green, Steve Gann, Laqui Papalii, John Cooper and Dennis Bree and Referees Jeff Tubbenhauer and Joe Schooner, that Rugby took its place as an established sport in the Alice.

The inaugural Central Australian Rugby Union (CARU) Clubs were the Red Devils (later to be called the Feds Devils as a result of their association with the Federal's Sporting Club), Tigers, Kiwis (later to be renamed the Kiwi Warriors) and the Misfits, who were also to be renamed after several seasons as the Old Alice Eagles. Laqui Papalii organised the Kiwis, Dennis Bree the Federal Devils, Mike Green and Steve Gann the Tigers, and John Cooper the Misfits. Roger Rudduck donated \$4000 of his casino winnings to purchase four sets of jerseys. The Kiwis were issued pale blue uniforms, the Devils were allocated red jumpers (hence the Red Devils and Feds Reds titles), the Tigers took the yellow strip and the Misfits the green. The red jerseys with Alice Springs logo temporarily attached, representing the red centre, were also used by Alice Springs representative sides for many years⁹⁸.

The CARU boasted only two Referees at that time, Jeff Tubbenhauer and Joe Schooner who controlled one game after another for several seasons, until more numbers were added to their ranks⁹⁹. Tubbenhauer had played Rugby in NSW and represented South Australia in a curtain-raiser to the Australia – South African Springboks game in 1972. In an interview in 2000, he recalled that day was truly a family day at the Rugby with father, an active Referee and member of the South Australian Rugby Union sitting in the grandstand, Jeff on the field representing his state and brother Graeme being a very active anti-Apartheid demonstrator. Three times brother Graeme leapt the fence to dash onto the field to interrupt play in the Test, only to be forcefully ejected on every occasion. Finally he and his friends were removed from the stadium and the Test was played out!¹⁰⁰

The first games under the CARU banner were played at Anzac Oval on the 1st November, 1986 with Tigers demolishing the Devils 52 to 6 and the Kiwis, with whom Warren Snowdon was playing, over-powering the Misfits 24 to 12¹⁰¹. The Tigers were the first premiers in the Alice Springs competition, defeating the Kiwis 19 points to 17 in a hard fought contest played on rock hard ground with little grass cover. This was Rugby in the red centre, and everyone involved loved it!

Over the years, the Kiwi Warriors have proven to be the predominant force in Alice Rugby, winning eight premierships and being runners-up on three other occasions. The Dingo Cubs Club joined the competition in 1993/94 making for a five-team competition for the first time. Unfortunately, the Tigers folded the next season due to lack of interest in organising the club and team, and the competition reverted to its original four-team format. However, the Tigers had made their mark in Rugby in the centre, by having contested seven Grand Finals in their eight year history and winning four of them! The Dingoes were to become a force to be reckoned with, contesting

⁹⁵ Rudduck, Roger., Personal interview. 5th December, 2000

⁹⁶ Rudduck, Roger., Personal interview. 5th November, 2000.

⁹⁷ Rudduck, Roger., Personal interview., 5th November, 2000.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Geoff, Tubbenhauer, Personal interview, 5th November, 2000.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Rudduck, Roger., Personal interview. 5th November, 2000.

six grand finals, all against the Kiwis and always runners-up!

Although the CARU was incorporated in 1986, it wasn't until 1990 that the first committee 'elect' was installed to administer and develop the code. In the interim, Roger Ruddock, a member of the NT Police force stationed in the Alice, had a firm hand on the tiller and successfully steered the game from strength to strength. Until the 1989/90 season, all games were played at the Verdi Oval which, it has been said, was 'a cow paddock and appeared to hold players back'¹⁰². Roger Ruddock invested his own money to have the playing field top dressed¹⁰³, but it was to have little effect and the decision was made to relocate to better fields.

The CARU moved its playing headquarters to Ross Park for the 1990/91 season, where a marked improvement in the playing standard was noticed almost immediately. Noel Bree, who was playing for the Verdi Devils at the time and was to become President of the Federal Devils RUFC, remembers the bad old days at the Verdi Oval, and is of the opinion that the improvement in the standard of play was directly attributable to the better playing surface at Ross Park¹⁰⁴. That Rugby was alive and well in the centre in the 1990s was evidenced by the CARU being runners-up to Darwin in the Outback Rugby Festival in the 1992/93 season. Thanks mainly to the efforts of Roger Ruddock and Joe Dixon, a Second Grade competition was introduced in that same year, and much focus was placed on further developing the Junior competition.

Roger Ruddock left Alice Springs in 1991 after being posted to Darwin with the NT Police force. He had stepped down as President of the CARU in 1990 and was replaced by Jeff Tubbenhauer. Tubbenhauer was to remain President until 1992 when he quit as both President and Referee due to his resentment of the manner in which he considered he and Joe Schooner were being treated by players and spectators. At the time of his resignation, he (Tubbenhauer) was quoted in the *Centralian Advocate* as saying 'Because of the hurtful comments made on the radio and the appalling behaviour of players and spectators I'm finished as CARU president'. He went on to say that 'I can retire with the knowledge that I put my whole self into serving others unselfishly. But from now on I don't give a stuff about what happens in Alice Springs rugby union'¹⁰⁵.

Tubbenhauer was, by his own admission, a controversial figure and had many clashes with officialdom during his involvement. He was 'sacked' as he put it, from the ABC's Saturday morning Sport Show after making critical comments regarding the NTRU's selection process, and the poor quality of representative Coaches the NTRU had chosen. Tubbenhauer was of the view that 'man for man Alice Springs had better players than Darwin and yet we cannot get players in the representative sides'¹⁰⁶. He was often embroiled in controversy and had resigned on an earlier occasion when he was not supported by the CARU Committee in his bid to strip six competition points from second placed Tigers in the 1990/91 season. The loss of points was the penalty for the Tigers not attending meetings as outlined in CARU rules of the day¹⁰⁷. The CARU Committee headed by Vice-President Andrew Jackson voted in favour of reinstating Tubbenhauer, although the vote was not unanimous. The Committee gave Tubbenhauer forty-eight hours to reconsider¹⁰⁸, however, the time passed and Jeff Tubbenhauer left Rugby Union forever.

Noel Bree, younger brother of Dennis and Bernie, stepped in as CARU President and served for one year until he was transferred to Darwin with the Public Service. Bree was replaced by Phil McGuinness who stood aside at the Annual General Meeting in 1991, at which time Brendon Peterkin took up the position. Vince Kelly, a NT Policeman who had contributed so much to Katherine Rugby Union, followed Peterkin as President in 1994, but stepped down in 2001 due to his being transferred to Darwin. Roger Ruddock once again stepped into the breach!

At the time of writing, Alice Springs maintains a four-team competition which is played during the summer months to coincide with the other competitions in the NT. Teams contesting the 2000/01 season are the Kiwis, the Dingo Cubs, the Feds Reds and the Old Alice Eagles. Sadly it appears the game is in something of a slump in the centre at this time, however, Rugby supporters maintain they are still ahead of their arch-rival code League. Much effort is being applied by the NTRU and its permanent staff, to lift the game from the doldrums and revitalise the interest within the community. Some of the old war-horses, such as Roger Ruddock, John Cooper, Joe Dixon, Phil McGinness and Paul Shaw, who were all there in the very beginning, are still taking to the paddock each Saturday¹⁰⁹.

While the game was developing, and in some ways declining, in the Alice and other centres, Darwin was also having its share of success in the developmental stakes. As previously mentioned, the NTRU had taken up residence at its own grounds within the Marrara Sporting Complex in 1984. Work commenced almost immediately to improve the facilities and to attract more support for the Union. Work also commenced on improving the playing skills base by arranging 'representative' matches whenever possible.

¹⁰² Bree, Noel., Personal interview, August, 2000. Also see the *NTRU 1992-1993 Season Handbook*, p. 35

¹⁰³ Tubbenhauer, Geoff., Personal interview. 5th November, 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Bree, Noel., Personal interview. August, 2000.

¹⁰⁵ Author unknown., 'I don't give a stuff' – Tubbenhauer'. *Centralian Advocate* 18 January, 1992

¹⁰⁶ Tubbenhauer, Geoff., Personal interview. 5th November, 2000.

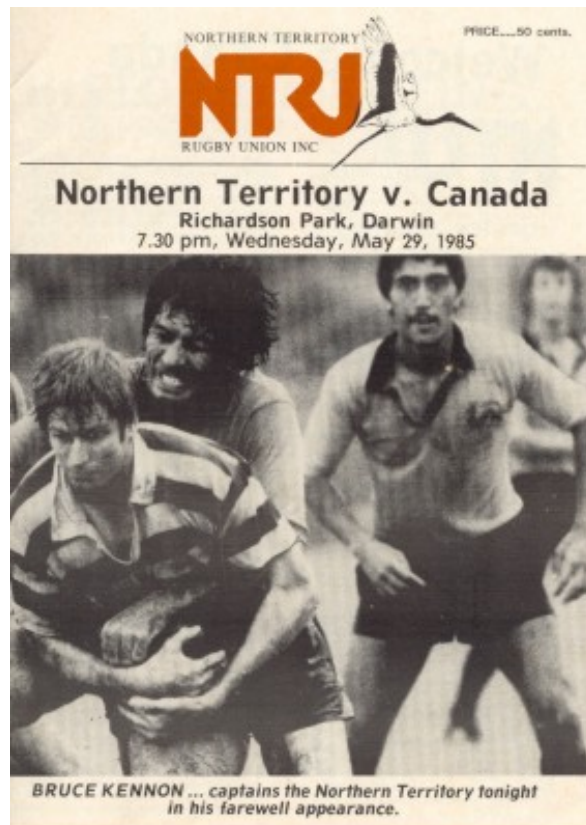
¹⁰⁷ Raymond, Justin., 'Rugby boss quits'. *Centralian Advocate*, 11 January, 1992

¹⁰⁸ Raymond, Justin., 'Vote backs president – Tubbenhauer come back call'. *Centralian Advocate* 13 February, 1992.

¹⁰⁹ Ruddock, Roger., Personal interview. 5th November, 2000

From the outset, the NTRU was determined to become involved in the national and international scene. Work progressed at a furious pace to establish the number two oval at Rugby Park in preparation for the Australian Schoolboys Championship that was held that year. The NTRU hosted its second international game in August 1984 when a touring Japanese Schoolboys team played an Australian Second XV side at Rugby Park. On the home front, it was Katherine's second part time appearance in the Darwin second grade competition and Jabiru entered the competition in the latter part of the season. Both Katherine and Jabiru were to enter the regular second grade competition the following year. The 1983-84 season also saw the introduction of the Third Grade competition¹¹⁰.

By 1985 the NTRU had achieved an illustrious, albeit short, representative record that it was keen to develop upon. To that time the NTRU representative teams had beaten recognised Rugby States South Australia (twice) and Victoria and had outclassed Mt Isa 41 points to 3 at the Queensland Country Rugby Carnival. They had also acquitted themselves admirably against then Brisbane Rugby champions, Brothers, and the famous Randwick Club in Sydney¹¹¹. They had already competed in carnivals in Queensland and elsewhere, but the first senior international encounter was achieved at 7:30pm on Wednesday, May 29th 1985 when the NT played Canada at Richardson Park, Darwin.



Cover of the NT v Canada match (A Ratahi collection)

The decision to host the game at Richardson Park rather than Rugby Park was an agonising one for members of the NTRU Committee. The final decision was based on future development and financial considerations, as had the NTRU played the match at Rugby Park it would have been at twilight as there were no lights at that venue in 1985. The earlier timeslot required for the Rugby Park venue would have precluded large numbers of spectators due to work commitments. The decision was also based upon a need to attract as much public and media support as possible in the interests of future development¹¹².

In 1985, hopes were high in the NT that the 'Territory' would soon become a 'State' and as such the clash between the NT and Canada had a few extra dimensions attached to it! As then NTRU President John Hogan said 'A win tonight would give the NT the distinction of being the first Australian team to beat tourists Canada – and the coming State's first international contest'¹¹³.

¹¹⁰ Hedger, Mick., 'Big game marks historic occasion'. Northern Territory News, 31st March, 1984.

¹¹¹ Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc., 'The BEST'. Souvenir Program: Northern Territory v Canada, 29th May, 1985.

¹¹² Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc., "Game moved". Souvenir Program: Northern Territory v Canada, 29th May, 1985.

¹¹³ Hogan, John., 'President's Message'. Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc – Souvenir Program: Northern Territory v Canada, May 1985.

But alas, it was not to be. The Canadians won the game 30 -12¹¹⁴ and the NT never became a State. The game itself was marred by all-in-brawls in the sixth and fiftieth minutes and a 'ratbag' element in the crowd who hurled full beer cans onto the field during the melee. Both activities did nothing for the game as a spectacle¹¹⁵. Tiny half back David Evans was selected as the NT's Man-of-the Match and NT players Kevin Collins (Prop), Laurie Holmes (Fullback) and Albert Cowley (Centre) were praised by the local press for their efforts¹¹⁶. It was, however, the last First Grade game of Rugby for NT Captain and legend Bruce Kennon. Kennon had decided to retire after twenty-two years in the game, seventeen of them in First Grade. Kennon had had a great career in Rugby, one by his own admission, that was topped by being a member of the Queensland side that beat the 1980 touring All Blacks 9 points to 3 at Ballymore, Brisbane.

The NT side on that historic day was composed of L Holmes (Fullback), J Burgess (R/Wing), S Johnston (L/Wing), B Smith (O/Centre), B Cowley (I/Centre), W Lingman (Five-Eighth), D Evans (Half-Back), A Morris (Lock), B Kennon (Capt and B/way), P Berrington (B/way), A Burns (S/row), A Walker (S/row), K Collins (Prop), L Papalli (Prop) and J Aland (Hooker). Reserves were; M Paraha, J Bruce, R Hawe, M McMahon and D Oliver. Patrick Van Rooyen was NT Coach with assistance from Des Kinnane while Peter Tibbits was Team Manager. To complete the picture, Mr Colin Waldron refereed the game with NT Referees, Dr Alistair Heatley and Mr Tony Duffy as his Touch Judges¹¹⁷.



1985 NT Team v Canada. (D Hart collection)

A major goal from the very beginning of the NTRU was to introduce a Schools and Junior Rugby competition, which it did in 1979, and to bring international Rugby to Darwin and to take NTRU teams to international competitions. This was also achieved very early in the history of the NTRU with NTS&JRU playing a match against the Irish Schoolboys in Darwin during the 1979-80 season. In 1988, the NT Junior Rugby Union sent a team to the 6th Pan Pacific Youth Rugby Tournament in Taiwan/Brunei, the first such outing by the NTJRU in a competition of this nature, although the NTRU had fielded teams in various national schools competitions. As then Minister for Transport and Works and Patron of NT Schools & Junior Rugby Union, the Honourable Fred Finch MLA said, 'By any standards the Northern Territory is a Rugby infant. The game has only been played in the Territory for 12 seasons. Our Junior competition is only Ten (sic) years old. So this competition marks a significant step in our learning curve'¹¹⁸. A significant step indeed!

1986 was both a good and a bad year for the NTRU. In that year a NTRU representative side toured Queensland under the Captaincy of Wiley Lingman and being coached by South African born Patrick Van Rooyen. Ray Howell was the Team Manager, Tom Stockwell, who had played a leading role in introducing Rugby to Katherine, was the Sports Trainer and Bruce Kennon, who was at that time Coach-in-Residence for the NTRU accompanied the team. David (Digby) Hart who was one of the leading Referees in Darwin at that time also travelled with the team as the NTRU's Referee's representative.

¹¹⁴ Atkinson, Geoff., 'Mounties get their men - gutsy NT no match'. Northern Territory News, 30 May, 1985.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc., Souvenir Program: Northern Territory v Canada, May, 1985.

¹¹⁸ Finch, Fred., 'Foreword' 6th Pan Pacific Youth Rugby Tournament Program. 1988.



1986 NTRU Representative Team to Queensland

Back Row (l-r): D Hart (Referee), A Cowley, K Collins, R Walker, P Connelly, M Curry, M Ferguson, W Pakeha, T Stockwell (Sports Trainer) **Middle Row (l-r):** B Kennon (Coach-in-Residence), J Aland, C McConchie, T Walker, W Lingman (Captain), T Morris, P Blackwell, C Woolams, R Howell (Manager), P Van Rooyen (Coach) **Front Row (l-r):** A Dawkins, S Hannon, G Burrows, B Strong, M Renshaw, S Radetsky, S Johnson, B Morrison (NTRU Collection).

That was the good part, the bad part was that Combined Services, who had been known as Larrakeyah until 1980 and had been First Grade premiers in 1978-79 season dropped out of the competition. The reason for the Club's demise was one of lack of competitiveness in the First Grade and the NTRU's ruling that all Clubs had to field a First Grade side. After been humiliated in numerous games during the 1984-85 season, often in the high nineties and once 113 points to nil, the Services Club decided to quit. It was to be the first of the original team/clubs to leave the Union.

Things were happening in Alice Springs in 1986 as well. The CARU sent a representative side to Darwin for the Club Championships with Australian representative player Gary Ella as an invitation player. It was in October 1986 that the first Honda Masters Games were held in Alice Springs, and Rugby was involved. The Alice Springs Dingoes Golden Oldies side was formed and several teams from Darwin and interstate travelled to Alice Springs for the festival. The Australian Barbarians were invited to play and did so, playing the closing game of the festival against the Alice Springs side, the result being Barbarians 68, Alice Springs 20¹¹⁹.

In 1988 the South Darwin Club introduced Seven-a-side Rugby to the NT, a move which attracted some criticism from then NTRU President Dr Chris Wake. Sevens Rugby as it is more commonly called, was devised in 1883 by a butcher named Nigel Haig who resided in the border town of Melrose, Scotland. The township of Melrose was apparently experiencing some financial difficulties and Haig suggested an abbreviated yet exciting and all action form of Rugby might well be a money-spinner by way of attracting players and spectators¹²⁰. Haig's prediction proved to be correct and sevens Rugby spread around the world. From its humble beginnings in Darwin in 1988, Sevens Rugby has developed into an annual international event on the NTRU's fixtures calendar. In the 2000-01 season, twenty-four teams contested the tournament with teams representing Brunei, Japan, Singapore, NZ Army and Fiji all taking part. While this competition has a history of its own, the 2001 tournament will be history making yet again as, for the first time, a team representing the Aboriginal Tiwi Islands will participate¹²¹.

In May 1989 the NTRU hosted a match against Western Samoa at Rugby Park, Marrara. The Western Samoan's ran out winners that day, beating the NT 38 to 13. More international games were to come, as was more development at home in Darwin, and across the length of the NT.

¹¹⁹ Rudduck, Roger., Personal interview. 5th December, 2000.

¹²⁰ Pollard, Jack., *Australian Rugby*. P??, ??

¹²¹ Manning, Rollo., 'From the Editor'. *Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc. Rugby News*. Vol 1, Issue 13 January, 2001



NT v Western Samoa May 1989

Back Row L-R: R Alexander (Manager), P Wilson, C Leach, P Cawte, C Martin, J Westover, R Bryant, T Hutchings, B Blyton, J Lotu, S Gill, R Green, T Watson (Coach) F Walters (Strapper), B Kennon (Coach-in-Residence)
Front Row L-R: S Radeski, J Cross, P Gerathy, D Ellis (Captain), L Seymour, P Witherspoon, W Lingman, B Hawe.
(B Blyton Collection)

A Very Busy Decade

In 1990, the NTRU took another giant leap forward by engaging a full time Executive Officer. The move followed the completion, dissemination and implementation of the NTRU's Five-Year Strategic Plan in early 1990. In August of that year the NTRU advertised nationally for 'a person with a knowledge of rugby to administer and develop the code in the Territory'¹²². The purpose of the position was, as then NTRU executive member Wayne Wood said, to 'fill the gap between an administration manager and the NTRU executive'¹²³. Mr Wood went on to say that 'We (NTRU) need a focal point for rugby union in the Territory'¹²⁴ and that 'The executive officer would not actually do the hands-on work but will co-ordinate and supervise the running of rugby'. Mr Wood was also of the view that volunteer workers could not 'afford the time to supervise and keep a tight check on the day-to-day running'¹²⁵ of the NTRU and to further develop the game across the NT. The move was supported by Rugby administrators, supporters, the NT Government who assisted financially with the creation and maintenance of the position, and the media alike¹²⁶.

The then existing position of Coach-in-Residence, which was at that time occupied by Bruce Kennon, was to be abolished following the filling of the Executive Officer position. John Green, writing for the NT News at the time, reported that Bruce Kennon was 'regarded as the front-runner for the position'¹²⁷. Applications for the position closed on August 18th, 1990 and after the due process of interview, Bruce Kennon was appointed to the new position.



**Bruce Kennon NTRU's first Executive Officer
(D.I.T. Rugby Rugby Union Football Club Year book 1987-88)**

Another major goal in the code's development had been achieved. At the same time another milestone had been achieved within the game with Dr. Alistair Heatley being admitted as the first life-member of the NTRU Referee's Association.

In 1990-91 season, Palmerston were victorious in the First Grade, South Darwin in the Second Grade and RSL Dragons in the Third Grade. The Tindal Lions roared over their premiership win in Katherine that season, and the Federal Devils took the trophy back to their clubrooms in Alice Springs. Palmerston were Club Champions in Darwin that year, and RSL made a clean sweep of the Under 14's, 16's and 18's. Colin Snowden of the Palmerston Club won Darwin's Best and Fairest medal in First Grade, Garry Russell also representing the Palmerston Club won the award in the Second Grade while Phil Kinch of the Casuarina Club took out the honour in the Third Grade¹²⁸.

It was in 1991 that Rugby Union participated in the inaugural Arafura Sports Festival in Darwin. The NTRU fielded three sides, the T.I.O Finance Northern Territory XV, the President's XV and the Paint Place Emerging Players XV. The tournament attracted only one international side, that year being the Hong Kong Under 24's¹²⁹. Rugby Union has been a participant sport in every Festival staged since the tournament's inception.

The Arafura Games, formerly known as the Arafura Sports Festival, is a biennial event which was established in

¹²² Green, John., 'NT rugby moves'. Northern Territory News. 28th July, 1990.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Green, John., 'NT rugby moves'. Northern Territory News. 28th July, 1990.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Green wrote 'The NTRU looks to be heading in the right direction'.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

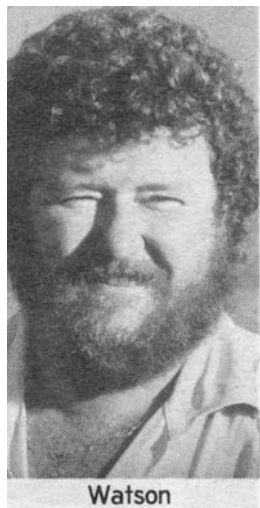
¹²⁸ Northern Territory Rugby Union., Arafura Sports Festival Handbook. 18th May 1991, P7.

¹²⁹ Ibid. pp 14--19.

1991 by the NT Government to attract top level competition for developing athletes (and perhaps) codes in Northern Australia and the Asia Pacific Region. The fifth Arafura Games were held in Darwin in May 1999, and proved to be the largest and most successful to that time. Over twenty countries were represented by athletes and officials in twenty-six sports including Rugby. Six teams contested the Rugby tournament with the Australian Defence Forces taking out the gold medal¹³⁰. Due to the lack of international team nominations, Rugby was not represented in the 2001 Games.

It was in 1991 that record breaking Wallaby five-eighth Michael Lynagh visited Darwin as a guest of the NTRU. Lynagh was in Darwin for the Seven's tournament held on January 26 and 27 and the Australian Airlines Invitation XV match on the 28th but did not play in either due to his heavy Wallaby commitments that year. Lynagh conducted coaching clinics and was keynote speaker the NTRU black tie dinner that was held on Australia Day¹³¹.

In December 1991, the NTRU took another significant step in its development by appointing a Development Officer for the first time. After the due process of application and interview, the then South Darwin Coach, Tim Watson, won the position. Watson was well known and respected in NT Rugby Union circles as he had been involved in the game for a number of years and held an impressive list of sport related credentials. Watson came to the position with an Associate Diploma in Sport Studies, a Sport Trainer certificate, an advanced level two Rugby coaching certificate and was a qualified Rugby Union Referee¹³². Watson had previously coached Rugby throughout Queensland and Northern Wales before returning to Darwin to coach the Casuarina Club and the 1989 NTRU representative side¹³³.



Tim Watson NTRU's first Development Officer (NT News 6/12/91)

Watson stated that his focus was going to be on junior and school level Rugby, although responsibility for the NTRU's Under 21 Development Squad also fell within his bailiwick. Watson was quite aware of where the focus should be and stated 'We're trying to get rugby union back on track in the schools so I'll be concentrating mainly on doing that'¹³⁴. Watson's role also included the setting up and implementation of Rugby's Talent Identification Program throughout the NT, as well as being a member of the Coaching Panel and Selector and Coach of the NTRU Under 21 team. Under his coaching, that team toured Singapore and Kuala Lumpur in April 1992 before contesting the Under 21 National Championships in Darwin later that year. Another giant step forward had been taken!

The 1991/92 season was to be a memorable and historic one for the NTRU in more ways than one. Then President Dr Chris Wake signalled this in his President's Message for the forthcoming season when he wrote; 'This coming season will be a watershed in the history of Rugby Union in the Northern Territory marked as it will be by the first stage of the long awaited Grandstand (sic) at Rugby Park and by our First (sic) International Rugby Board Game. These two factors represent an increasing maturity and experience for our Union, a coming of age if you like'¹³⁵. The people charged with responsibility of leading the NTRU through the 1991/92 season were;

- Dr Chris Wake, President,
- Tony Duffy, Dennis Bree, and Roger Ruddock as Vice-Presidents, with
- Adam Gordon the Union's Secretary and

¹³⁰ 'Arafura Games 2001', Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc: Rugby News. Vol 1, Issue 1 October, 2000.

¹³¹ Green, John., 'Michael Lynagh set for Australia day visit'. Northern Territory News. 11 January, 1991.

¹³² Urvet, Tiina., 'New man selected to develop rugby'. Northern Territory News. 6th December, 1991.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Wake, Dr Chris., 'President's Message'. Northern Territory Rugby Union Handbook 1991-1992 Season. p3.

- Wayne Wood the all-important Treasurer.

The much respected and honoured Commodore Eric Johnston A.M., O.B.E. was the Patron that season¹³⁶.

The Presidents of the affiliated Unions for season 1991-92 were:

- Jeff Tubbenhauer, CARU
- John Thompson, Katherine,
- Greg O'Mullane, NT Schools and Junior Rugby
- Brother Paul Brooks NTRU Referees Association
- Chris Calogeras, Bayside Club
- Danny Panapa, Casuarina Club
- Des Bredhauer, Humpty Doo Club
- Peter Jones Jabiru Club,
- Garry Russell, Palmerston Club,
- Steve Johnston RSL Club,
- Frank Steele, South Darwin Club with
- Kevin Maley representing the University Pirates.

Bruce Kennon was the NTRU's Executive Officer, Michael Callahan who was to coach the NT Invitation Team to victory over Scotland that same season, was Director of Coaching while Tim Watson was the NTRU's Development Officer. The Honourable Fred Finch was the Patron of the NTRU Referee's Association. All in all, a pretty impressive line up to address and manage what was to be a very busy, positive and progressive season.

The calendar of events for that season was impressive by any measure, with the NTRU hosting or participating in the following events.

- January 25-26: Territory 7's Tournament
- January 27: Casuarina Invitation XV versus Darwin Mosquitoes
- March 7: Katherine Grand Final (Astral Cup)
- April 4: Alice Springs Grand Final
- April 11: Darwin Grand Finals
- April 12-20: NTRU Under 21 tour of Singapore and Malaysia
- April 17-19: Outback Rugby Festival (Alice Springs)
- April 25: XXXX Cup City versus Country (Darwin)
- May 2: NT Under 21s versus Darwin XV
- May 9-17: Australian Under 21 National Championships and the NT Under 16s (Darwin)
- May 27: NT Invitation XV versus Scotland (Darwin)
- June: NT Schools Championship
- July 4: Darwin Under 19s versus Bloxham School, England.
- September: Australian Schools Championships (Melbourne) and last but not least many older Rugby players would say;
- October 17-25: Masters Games (Alice Springs)

The City versus Country game that year was one the Country boys would prefer to forget. The City team steam-rolled Country in a crushing 52 to nil powerhouse display. City Coach Mike Callahan, while being pleased with his team's performance was of the view that 'the goal kicking could have been better'! While Callahan praised forwards Darren Spurgeon, Braedon Early and Peter Roberts along with backs Maurice Walker and Steve Radeski, he was critical of the 'American gridiron-style' kicking tee introduced on a trial basis in that game. Callahan was of the view, the tee contributed to Walker missing four of his kicks at goal¹³⁷.

Commencing work on the grandstand was high on the NTRU Executive's agenda that year, and although there was no financial commitment from the NT Government to complete the grandstand, work commenced in May 1992. The construction contract valued at \$250,000, was awarded to local Darwin firm Paul Baxter and Associates, and took approximately fourteen weeks to complete. Regardless of the lack of formal commitment, Dr Wake was optimistic in his outlook for the completion of the grandstand and wrote that; 'with ongoing lobbying and good Executive management I do not believe my optimism is misplaced in saying I think the full one thousand seat stand will be completed by 1994'. He was to be proven correct as the roof was attached to the grandstand structure in time for the start of the 1993/94 season as predicted!

On the 12th April, 1992 the NTRU Under 21 team left Darwin for a four-match tour of Singapore, before returning home to contest the National Championships, which were staged in Darwin that year. Dr Wake commented that he could not stress enough how important these various games and strategies were in terms of the growth of

¹³⁶ Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc., *Handbook 1991 – 1992 Season*, p 5.

¹³⁷ Clark, Gordon., 'City wallops Country in rah-rah walkover'. *Northern Territory News: Sunday Territorian* 28 April, 1991..

Rugby in the NT. Although Rugby in the NT was on the national and international map, more hard work would be required in order to consolidate and maintain that position!

To make the 1991/92 season even more hectic, the NTRU hosted the Outback Rugby Festival in Alice Springs, then hosted the Dundee Beach City versus Country clashes for the XXXX Cup. In May of that year, the NTRU representative side played the NSW 'Tooheys Blues'. This was to be followed by the big match against Scotland on May 28th.



Darwin representative side to the Outback Rugby Festival Alice Springs 1992 (D Hart Collection)

In April of that year, Darwin outclassed Alice Springs to win the Outback Rugby Union Festival that was hosted by the CARU at Ross Park Oval¹³⁸. Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs, Mt Isa and Western Queensland¹³⁹ participated in the Festival, with Darwin wrapping up the title with a convincing 20 to nil victory, but at a cost. Star centre Wylie Lingman dislocated his shoulder as a result of being caught in a maul mid way thorough the first half and was forced to leave the field. Although having suffered such a convincing loss, Alice Springs coach, Andrew Jackson, was proud of his charge's showing in the second half and was ecstatic his team made the final having beating tough Mt Isa to qualify¹⁴⁰. The games in the red centre that year were in effect a curtain raiser to one of the proudest moments in NTRU history –the NTRU's defeat of the mighty Scots.

1992 was the year in which the NTRU Invitation XV overpowered the might of Scottish Rugby at Rugby Park, Marrara. On Thursday 28th May, 1992 the two teams faced each other, and after 80 minutes of hard running, hard hitting Rugby, the NT Invitation XV had withstood all that was thrown at them to outlast the Scotsmen 17 points to 16. The NT News report said 'The local boys, boosted by five Emerging Wallabies, put on a show of rugby never seen before in the Territory, and tackled their opponents into the ground'¹⁴¹. It was the NTRU's proudest moment, and the parochial crowd, estimated at 6000 strong¹⁴², gave the NT players all the support they needed to get them over the line.

¹³⁸ 'Darwin outclasses Alice in Outback rugby final. Central Advocate. 21 April, 1992.

¹³⁹ Wake, Dr Chris., 'President's Message'. Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc Grand Final Programme. 11th April, 1992.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Mighty Scots fall to NT XV'. Northern Territory News. 29th May, 1992.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Mighty Scots fall to NT XV



Northern Territory News Headline 29th March, 1992



Rugby Park scoreboard 28th March 1992. (C Leach Collection)

The NT team that day consisted of;

T Curran, S Gill, A Watson, C Hodson, M Coghlan, P Blackwell, R Seden, S Lord, C Snowden, M Grooby, M Pitts-Brown, J Evans, P Venturin, A Doidge, A Johnson, B Carne M Unwin, A Herbert (QLD), M Bridal (NSW), C Leach (Capt), B Earley, A Blades (NSW) G Morgan (QLD) and A Ekert (NSW). M Callahan was the Coach, S Langford the Trainer, David (Digby) Hart the Manager/Head Trainer and S Langford the team Trainer. Scorers for the NT were M. Pitts-Brown one try, M. Coghlan one try, C Leach a penalty try and A. Ekerts two penalty goals. M. Pitts-Brown was judged best on ground in the NT News report of the game.



NTRU team v Scotland 1992 (C. Leach Collection)

Not unexpectedly, the NTRU won the NT Sports Award for 'Outstanding Sporting Achievement' in 1992. What a season for a still-developing code!

Incoming President Dennis Bree commented in the President's Message for the 1992-93 season, that '1992 was going to be a hard act to follow with the construction of the grandstand and the defeat of the Scotsmen'¹⁴³. Something of an understatement many said, still, there were plenty of achievements to come. The first one being that very season, when the NTRU hosted its first grand final with the new grandstand (minus the roof) having been completed earlier in the year and during the off season.



Opening of the grandstand (minus the roof) at Rugby Park – 1992 (D Hart Collection)

The grandstand complex was opened by the Honourable Roger Vale MLA representing the NT Government, and Mr. J.P. French A.M. then President of the Australian Rugby Union on 28 May 1992.

¹⁴³ Bree, Dennis., 'President's Message'. Northern Territory Rugby Union Handbook – 1992-1993 Season.



Commemorative plaque at Optus Rugby Park, Marrara. (Author's collection)

The NTRU President, Dennis Bree, commented in the Presidents' Message for that year, that the completion of the grandstand had been a 'real boon for spectators who can see the ebb and flow of games in great detail. With further assistance from the government this may be the last one (grand final) without a roof'¹⁴⁴.

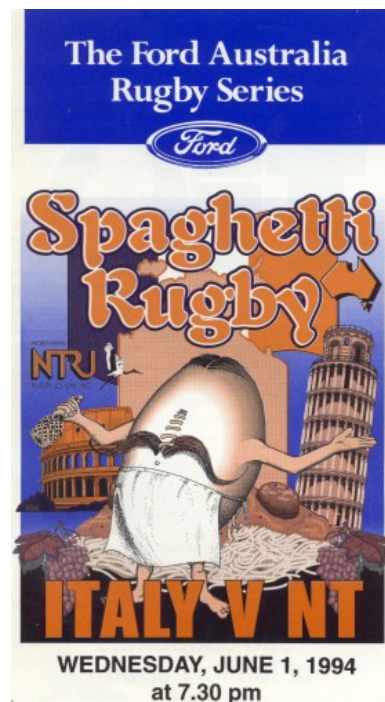


The late Roger Vale (then NT Minister for Youth, Sport and Recreation) left, and Sir Nicholas Shehadie opening the grandstand at Rugby Park – 1992. (D Hart Collection)

The 1993-94 season saw the addition of the roof to the grandstand, but arguably more importantly, it was the year the NTRU commenced the Women's competition. The addition of the Women's competition was a significant developmental step for the NTRU, however, the initiative was met with some initial resistance from the male dominated Rugby fraternity. The advent of the Women's competition in Darwin quickly led to strong representation at the national level, both from a team performance perspective but also individually, with several NT players being selected to represent Australia.

The 1993-94 season was indeed a hectic one for the NTRU with representative games against the NSW Development Squad, Italy and Hong Kong, in Hong Kong. The Italians came to town during the 1993-94 season and the NTRU served up a feast of 'Spaghetti Rugby'.

¹⁴⁴ Bree, Dennis., Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc, Grand Final Program April,3, 1993.



Cover of the souvenir program from the NT versus Italy match (A. Ratahi collection)

The Italians were very focussed in their approach to playing Rugby and the NT team. They were brutal on the field and a little anti-social off the field. Their on-field tactics left NT player Alex Watson seriously injured, following which a special tribunal was formed to consider disciplinary action. The incident occurred in the second half after the Italians became 'hot headed' which resulted in an all-in-brawl¹⁴⁵. Italian prop forward Franco Properzi was sent from the field for striking Watson and breaking his nose. NT prop Matt Grooby was left with no feeling in the left side of his face and Dave Johnson, the other NT prop, also received a head wound. Although the NT went down 37-6 in the bloody encounter, the Italians were full of praise for their opponents. Italian player Giovanelli was quoted as saying 'it was a hard game – the Territory is a strong team with hard players. They played from the first minute to the last'¹⁴⁶.

The game was the last for NTRU's 'Little General' Dave Ellis who retired after the game at thirty-four years of age. Ellis had been a regular in the NT University Pirates A Grade line-up since the clubs inception in 1987 and represented the NT every year of the fourteen seasons he played in Darwin. He was rated by many as one of the best scrum halves to have played in the NT to that time and who, before finishing his career on a representative note, coached the Pirates to a premiership win in the 1992-93 season. Ellis left the NT to take up a coaching position in Canada, returning to Darwin a year later to commence playing with the University Pirates¹⁴⁷.

The 1993-94 season saw the Outback Rugby Festival move to Katherine. To that time the Festival had been staged in Darwin, Alice Springs, Mt Isa and Longreach with teams travelling from various 'outback' locations to participate. Katherine had made its first appearance at the Festival in 1992 thanks largely to the hard work and effort of numerous players, administrators and sponsors. Key figures in the development of Rugby in Katherine were Vince Kelly and Wayne Nayda who worked tirelessly for Rugby with generous support from Marty and Jenny Duggan, local contractors and Rugby enthusiasts. While Katherine hadn't performed so well on the 'paddock' in 1992, the word was out and about that the Outback Rugby Festival was the place to be over Easter 1994. The hosting of the Festival was a demonstration that 'Rugby in Katherine' was on the move and being well supported¹⁴⁸.

It was also in 1994 that Bruce Kennon established the 'Friends of Rugby' group. The group was made up of local businessmen who supported Rugby and whose charter it was, and still is, to assist in developing the game by way of presenting at least one major Rugby match in the Territory (generally the Top End) each year. Seven years later the 'Friends of Rugby' are still active and are planning a significant event in 2001, but Bruce and Co are keeping the details to themselves at the time of writing!

¹⁴⁵ Brown, Peter., 'Territory side out-muscled' Northern Territory News, Thursday, 2 June, 1994.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Dave's final salute', Northern Territory News, 3 June, 1994

¹⁴⁸ Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc., 1993-1994 Season Handbook – Spaghetti Rugby, P 44.



Friends of Rugby Logo

By the end of 1994 the game was developing at an astonishing pace across the NT, but more was to come as the NTRU looked to the future. Plans were developed and implemented that were to ensure Rugby would be in the forefront of the broader sporting community in Darwin and the NT.

Almost every year has been a busy and progressive one for the NTRU and the list of achievements is outstanding by any measure. Up until the 1997/98 season, NTRU Senior teams had played fixtures against Canada, Western Samoa, Hong Kong, Papua New Guinea, Scotland and Italy. They had also played the NSW 'Tooheys Blues', the West Australians, the Queensland Reds and had toured Hong Kong and Singapore in 1994. In 1997, with assistance from the ARU, the NT Taipans toured Sri Lanka and Malaysia. The NTRU had also competed in the Seniors, U21, U16, U14 and Women's National Titles since its incorporation¹⁴⁹.

By 1996, there were seven clubs in Darwin, being; Casuarina Cougars, South Darwin, Palmerston, PINTS Dragons, University Pirates and Litchfield in the First Grade, with Jabiru in the Second Grade. Katherine boasted four teams being: Pandata Rangers, Tindal Lions, Pirates and the Brahmans and Alice Springs four being the Kiwi Warriors, Dingo Cubs, Old Alice Eagles and the Reds Devils.

1996 was the year in which the NT Government created the Northern Territory Institute of Sport (NTIS) through the office of the Department of Youth, Sport and Recreation. The 'Institute' is 'an athlete-focused centre of excellence, providing the services of coaches, sport science, sports medicine and sport education' to over twenty-five sports across the NT, Rugby being one of them¹⁵⁰. The NTIS was created in order to engage specialist professionals to assist Territory athletes to succeed at the highest levels of competition, through the allocation of equipment and resources. The NTRU was represented by a one of the Sports Development Squads, which, in season 2000/01 was to take the field in the First Grade competition in Darwin.

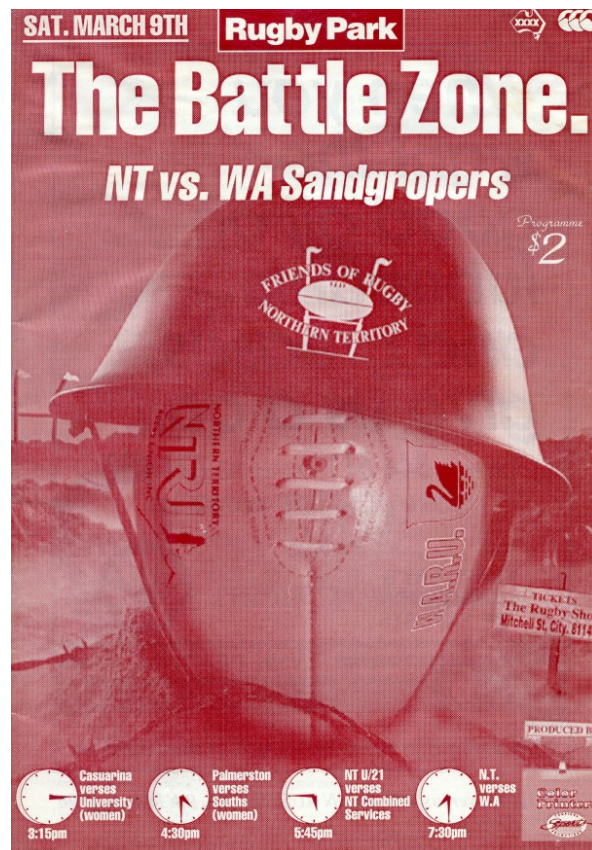
1996 also saw the Western Australian team travel to Darwin as guests of the Friends of Rugby. The 'Sandgropers' did battle with the NT Taipans on 9th March that year and ran out very comfortable winners humiliating the NTRU VX by a massive 74 points to 18.¹⁵¹ A bitterly disappointed NT Coach, Doug MacDonald, summed it up by saying 'it was a ver poor performance from the NT – they made us look ordinary'¹⁵². Still, Rugby was the winner as the local players had the opportunity to be exposed to a higher level of competition and the supporters we treated to some exciting, running Rugby.

¹⁴⁹ Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc; Sponsorship Advertising Proposal.

¹⁵⁰ Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc., Souvenir Program: NT Taipans v Queensland Reds, 22 February 1997

¹⁵¹ Urvett, Tiina., 'Massacre as WA trounces Territory XV', Northern Territory News, 10th March, 1996.

¹⁵² Ibid.



Cover of Souvenir Program NT v WA March 1996. (D Bredhauer collection)

In February 1997 the NT Taipans played the mighty Queensland Reds, one of the world's best provincial sides¹⁵³. It was of great significance that one John Connelly brought the Reds to Darwin, as Connelly had had a long association with Rugby in the NT. He was by far the most successful coach the NT had seen, having been player/coach of the Casuarina team that won the premiership in 1979/80 and returning to coach Casuarina's four successive premiership sides in 1983/84¹⁵⁴. It was the first time the Reds had played in Darwin and was their last lead up match to the Super 12's competition that year.

Included in the Reds line-up that season were Australian representative players Jason Little, Ben Tune, Damian Smith, Daniel Herbert, John Eales, Dan Crowley, Michael Foley and Paul Carozza. Brendon Cannon (ARU Under 19's), Tyron Mandrusiak (ARU Under 21s), Elton Flatley (Australian Schoolboys 1994-95), Brett Johnstone (Australian Schoolboys), Toutai Kefu (ARU Under 19's), Mathew Ryan (1990 Wallabies to NZ), Garrick Morgan and Jacob Raulini who was vice-Captain of his native Fiji's Test in fixtures against Ireland and Wales, also ran out for the Reds on that historic trip¹⁵⁵. In spite of NT Coach Doug MacDonald's call to not 'write off' his team¹⁵⁶, the Reds over-powered and out-played the NT side with a final score-line of 69 – 6¹⁵⁷. Reds skipper Tim Horan rated the win as 'an ideal hit-out for the Super 12s series' that commenced the following week. Horan went onto say that although Queensland had scored a lot of points, the NT had made them work hard for the win¹⁵⁸.

Still, regardless of the final score-line in that particular game, another milestone had been reached and another achievement notched up for the NTRU. The visit by the Queensland Reds with such a powerful line-up, demonstrated that NT Rugby was alive and well, and had become firmly established on the national representative calendar.

While senior Rugby was going ahead in leaps and bounds so too was junior Rugby. School Rugby was also developing at a fantastic pace with NT Schools teams regularly fielding teams in the National Titles from 1978, and having played against school sides from England, Ireland, Scotland, as well as National teams from Japan and Singapore. NTJRU teams had also toured Taiwan and Singapore before the close of the 1997/98 season¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵³ Bree, Dennis., 'Presidents Message' Northern Territory Rugby Union: Souvenir Program, 22 February, 1997. Unpaginated.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Keenan, Luke., 'Don't write off the NT: coach'. Northern Territory News, 22 February, 1997.

¹⁵⁷ Keenan, Luke., 'Reds' NT hit-out ideal for Super 12 lead-up: Horan'. Northern Territory News, 24 February, 1997

¹⁵⁸ Keenan, Luke., 'Red's NT hit-out ideal for Super 12 lead-up: Horan'. Northern Territory News, 24 February, 1997.

¹⁵⁹ Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc., Sponsorship Advertising Proposal.

Added to this impressive list is the fact that the NT had hosted the Australia Day International Rugby Sevens in 1988 which attracted teams from Japan and Fiji, and introduced the Corporate Sevens in 1992. Women's Rugby commenced in 1992-93 with six NT players being selected to represent Australia that same year. Besides all of this, NTRU Clubs were regularly participating in the Singapore Sevens, and had visited Kuala Lumpur, Brunei and Sabah. In 1994 the Friends of Rugby formed and began bringing interstate teams of some significance to Darwin annually to compete against a NTRU team¹⁶⁰. The development was nothing short of phenomenal.

In 1997/98 the NTRU had 2000 registered players across all grades in all centres of the NT¹⁶¹. In year 2000, the NTRU boasts approximately 2500 players in all grades in all centres. A twenty-five percent increase in two years!

The 1997 season kicked off with all teams being hopeful of a Grand Final win, but the NTRU was already assured of another 'organisational win' before the first whistle sounded for the season. On the 10th December, 1997 the Honourable Steve Hutton, MLA officially opened the Administrative Area at Rugby Park, Mararra. Another goal had been achieved and another major piece of infrastructure required to better ensure the Union's future was in place.

In the same year, the Bree family of Palmerston connection made history in NT Rugby and perhaps Australian Rugby to boot! On 15th February, 1997, three generations of the Bree family ran onto the paddock at Rugby Park to contest a Third Grade fixture between Palmerston and University. Father Gerry Bree, 85 years of age at the time, left the field after leading the brood on, but two generations participated in the game. Brothers Dennis, Bernie, Noel and Patrick and Daniel (son of Dennis) and Jeremy (son of Bernie) all played that day, and in doing so once again created history for the Palmerston Rugby Club¹⁶².



Three generations Bree's ready to take the field against University on February 15th, 1997 (l-r) Patrick, Jeremy, Daniel, Bernie, Dennis, Noel and Gerry. Patrick's young son James also joined the line up. (G Bree Collection)

On 16th July, 1997 the NTRU Presidents' XV took on the might of the combined Irish Universities in a one-off 'Test' at Rugby Park. The NT won the contest 21 – 20 in a very tight and physical game. NT Captain Craig Leach covered himself in glory that day by smothering an Irish field goal attempt right on full- time. The kick would certainly have crossed between the posts and resulted in an Irish victory, but Leach 'put his body on the line' and got the NT home in a real thriller!¹⁶³ The Irish were great competitors and guests and won the hearts of Darwin's Rugby fraternity.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Kelly, Blair., Rugby: it's a family affair'. *Northern Territory News*. 15 February, 1997.

¹⁶³ Keenan, Luke., 'Leach clinches win for Pres XV' *Northern Territory News*. 17th July, 1997



NT President's XV v Irish Universities July 1997

Back L-R: A Watson (Manager), D Spurgeon, S Kay, D Dowling, N Ahern, A Woodcock, B Blyton, P Stieger, R Prior, W Ellison, L Reif (Coach), D O'Donnell (Manager) Centre: J Bright, M Pierck, S Ellison, B Jones, N Roberts, B Niki, A Costello. Bottom: D Lowe, E Mills, J Sullivan, C Leach, W Ellem, M Coughlan, E Wiess, R Mareko. (B Blyton Collection)

1997 was indeed a year to be remembered!

In 1998 the NTRU completed and disseminated its second strategic (five year) plan in which its next objectives were outlined. Those objectives included; doubling junior participation rates, attracting more volunteers, achieve a strong financial position, improved facilities for players and spectators, ensure a career path for juniors to the national level, deepen and broaden the competition and to ensure the NT was part of a national competition by 2003. The NTRU also maintained the developmental program by bringing Daniel Manu, at that time one of Australia's most explosive players, to the NT, to conduct coaching clinics for NT juniors. Manu not only conducted skills sessions for the Juniors, he was also guest speaker at the NTRU's QANTAS Pathway dinner. Manu earned his first Australian Test cap as a replacement during the 1995 World Cup fixture, Wallabies versus Romania, which Australia won 42-3. At the time of his coming to the NT, Manu had played fourteen Tests for Australia, and was a member of the unbeaten Wallabies side that toured Europe in 1996¹⁶⁴.

In 1998 the NTRU toured Sri Lanka returning home with an undefeated record and the trophy. Whilst the NTRU's playing record was intact on that occasion, unfortunately the same cannot be said for the trophy which was accidentally broken only hours before the official presentation. According to Pat Bree who coached the team, quick repairs were made with electrical tape and glue and the presentation proceeded as planned. In 1999 the NTRU again toured Sri Lanka but unfortunately did not have the successes achieved the previous year.

¹⁶⁴ Kelly, Blair., 'Wallaby Manu on Top End visit'. Northern Territory News. 21st January 1998



NTRU representative team to Sri Lanka 1999. (NTRU Collection)

Back row (l-r) L Lawrence (Manager) S Roberts (Assistant Coach), unknown, B Martell, R Hoe, A Billsborough, J Lewis, B.J.Thomas, P McLauren, unknown, unknown.

Middle row (l-r) P Peasley, unknown, unknown, unknown, unknown, P Stephenson, T Burrburr, I Rasquilla, J Brahman, T Harrison, B Earley (Coach) D Bree (President NTRU)

Seated (l-r) I Kertz (Physio), V Wolfe, M Cabot, S Jefferies, J Sullivan, unknown, ? Hodson, M Kertz (Physio)

In January 2000, the NTRU hosted Wallabies Daniel Herbert and Mark Connors while later that same year Justin Harrison, the ACT Brumbie's star second rower came to Darwin for a series of coaching clinics and speaking engagements. Harrison had represented the ACT in the Under 21s Division and had represented Australian Universities 1994. His performances for the Brumbies in the Super 12's competition in 2000 identified him clearly as an emerging Wallaby¹⁶⁵.

In November, 2000 the NTRU held a reunion of the 1980 Schoolboy team that defeated South Australia and Western Australia at the National Championships that year. Nineteen of the twenty-six-member squad returned to Darwin to renew old friendships and to relive past glories. The Casuarina Straycats (the Casuarina Club's over thirty-five team), under the control and direction of Darwin Rugby legend Bruce Kennon, played a one-off game against the 'youngsters' at Optus Rugby Park.

Over the passed twenty-four years, Rugby in the NT has grown, developed and prospered, however, as is the case with most sports, the NTRU has lost some of its inaugural teams over the years. This is unfortunate in many respects but the NTRU has been fortunate enough to pick up other teams and Clubs keen to participate. Of the 'originals', both Bayside and Larrakeyah have passed into the history books, as have the 'Kiwis' outfit.



Kiwi Rugby Union Club logo

¹⁶⁵ Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc., Rugby News, Vol 1, Issue 1. October, 2000.

The Kiwi Club lasted only one season in the competition (1994-95) before folding and its players, administrators and supporters drifting to more established clubs.

The Jabiru 'Bush Rats', whose home base is in the heart of Kakadu National Park, joined the Second Grade competition in 1984 as a result of the Bayside Club being unable to field a team in that Division. Litchfield (representing the Litchfield Shire to Darwin's south) joined the Third Grade competition in 1986-87 season as the Humpty Doo 'Swampdogs' going on to win the premiership in that grade in 1989-90, the same season they entered the First Grade competition.

As previously mentioned, a team from the NT Institute of Sport (NTIS), the NTIS Royals, joined the Union for the 2000-01 season, fielding a side of up and coming youngsters in the First Grade competition. Although the NTIS team had joined the competition in the 1998/99 season, objections from various clubs regarding the player drain the new team was creating caused the NTRU to rethink the entry date of the latest contestant 'club'. After prolonged discussions, and some debate, the NTIS was admitted to the Darwin competition in their own right for the 2000/01 season.

Their first match was against South Darwin on 7th October, 2000, the result being a loss to the Royals by 10 points to nil – not quite the start the boys had hoped for! The team that represented the NTIS that day was made up of; Andrew Billsborrow, Scott Palmer, Adam Howell, Sinclair Hunt, Michael Scaturchio, Robert Nabolz, Mathew George, Tim Burbur, Adam Palmer, Joe Rotumah, Greg Warneke, Robbie Simpson, Jack Lawrence, Brad Hunt, Joe Harry, Stephen Buba, Daniel Hiekkenen, Alex Frew, Chris Ratahi, Judd Erickson and David Billsborrow. Squad members who did not play in that day were Karl Bauman, Adrian Davies, Michael McCoy, Nathan Graham and Matt Majid.



NTIS Royals January, 2001 (Author's collection)

Back row (l-r) M Scaturchio, M Majid, M McCoy, R Simpson, J Francis, T Burbur, A Howell, B Hunt, D Billborrow, J Erickson, S Hunt, W Greenhalgh (A/Coach), M Bismarck.

Kneeling (l-r) P Bree (Head Coach), J Lawrence, A Billborrow, J Harry, A Rowlands (Strapper)

Seated (l-r) A Frew, A Palmer, R Nabultz, C Ratahi, G Warnecke, J Rotomah. (Missing: A Davies, S Palmer, N Graham)

Commenting on what the 'new caps' could expect in their first game in the most senior grade, Darwin Dragon's Coach Wayne Johnson was reported as saying 'We won't be going soft on them – if you go in soft, you get hurt'. He went onto to say that 'the NTIS Royals will be a real threat to the established powers of Darwin rugby because of their superior fitness and on-field organisation' and warned his team would be making no allowances for the Royal's youth and relative inexperience. Johnson said, 'They are playing senior football now - and will have to adapt'¹⁶⁶.

In December, 2000 the Royals coach, Graham Reed resigned due to personal reasons. The vacant NTIS position of Head Rugby Union Coach was filled by Patrick (Paddy) Bree, youngest brother of Dennis and Bernie. Patrick Bree was formerly the NTRU's Development Officer and beat a number of interstate applicants to be come the first 'local' to hold the position¹⁶⁷. Bree, an accredited level three Rugby coach had been one of the leading coaches in the NT, and his appointment to the position met with widespread support throughout the NT Rugby fraternity. NTRU General Manager Bill Davies, stating he was 'delighted with Bree's appointment'. He went onto to say that Bree 'has been one of the leading coaches in the NT for some time and it's pleasing that he's been given an opportunity to coach at a higher level'.

Bree acknowledged the position was going to be a challenge, and it has not been a good season so far. At the time of writing, the NTIS Royals had played nine games, winning one, losing eight and having two byes, the win being over Litchfield in round three by 19 points to 16. A four and fourteen win/loss record was not what the players and coach had expected nor wanted in their first season. The season's performance was less than successful with one of the worst defeats being against the Darwin Dragons on 17 February, 2001 when the Royals were crushed 75 to nil. Only time will tell as to the success or otherwise of the team and its involvement in the First Grade competition. One thing is sure though, all involved in Rugby in the NT wishes Patrick Bree and his young charges all the very best of success in the seasons to come!

And so we come to the end of the twenty-fourth season and the beginning of the twenty-fifth in just a few short months. While there is much more that can be written about Rugby in the NT, hopefully this 'brief' history will serve as something of a starting point should the NTRU, or any individual, wish to research and record the complete, or at least a more comprehensive, history.

While conducting interviews for this history, two questions were posed to various people who had had a long association with Rugby in the NT. The first question was 'what do you think was the most significant achievement of the NTRU in the past twenty-four years?' Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority considered that three things were the most important achievements. In terms of development it was moving to Rugby Park and developing the infrastructure and providing Rugby with a home it could be proud of. All were quick to acknowledge the support of the NT Government and the legion of volunteers, supporters and sponsors in this achievement. The second most significant in their 'popular' view, was the development of the Juniors competition. The third aspect was from a playing perspective and, perhaps not so surprisingly, all said the victory over Scotland was the one single event

¹⁶⁶ Maharaj, R., 'Royals make A-Grade debut'. *Northern Territory News*, 6th October, 2000.

¹⁶⁷ Maharaj, Rajiv., 'Head coach was acting'. *Northern Territory News*, p37, 12 December, 2000

that eclipsed all others in the history of the NTRU.

The second question was 'what do think the direction for Rugby in the NT should be over the next five years'? Current President Dennis Bree is of the view that the focus should be on recruiting and retaining volunteers as well as the growth of the game and taking it to as many people as possible. He is of the view this can only be achieved through a number of approaches to different population segments. These groups include juniors, women and indigenous people although he adds that these are not mutually exclusive groups¹⁶⁸. Committeeman, and perhaps next NTRU President, Richard Norris considers that the NTRU and the ARU need to look to the north (Asia) in order to develop the game and that much support needs to be forthcoming from the ARU. This assistance would be vital in order to allow the NTRU to compete in south based tournaments and competitions¹⁶⁹. The man currently at the business helm of the good ship NTRU, General Manager Bill Davies, said that it was all-important to continue to promote the game in the broader community. In order to achieve this he believes it will be necessary to increase the number of development staff, improve the infrastructure at Rugby Park and to continue the support and development of the Women's competition. He was also of the view that a Junior Women (Schoolgirl) competition should be introduced and that Rugby should be promoted and developed within Aboriginal communities around the NT¹⁷⁰.

All three agreed that the NTRU must continue to attract players and supporters to all divisions and provide the infrastructure that they require. They also agreed that the NTRU needs to create heroes through supporting the elite players and strive to retain them in the Territory. Reflecting on the past and the successes achieved, all three acknowledged four basic factors. They were; the support of the NT government which has assisted significantly in providing first class facilities at Rugby Park, the professionalism of the Executive Committee over the years, the fact that there is, and has been, very little 'public bickering' within the game and perhaps most importantly Rugby's corporate image has improved immensely.

However, all three went onto to say there is much more to be done if Rugby is to maintain its current position as second highest football participant sport in the NT. All three were confident the management skills, drive and initiative existed to take Rugby into the 21st Century. The main item of the NTRU agenda as the game enters its twenty-five season, is whether or not the game will continue to be played in the 'wet season' as it has since 1976. There is a great deal of support for the notion that Rugby should move to the traditional 'winter' timeslot ie; the 'dry season' in the NT.

Moving the competition to the 'dry season' would provide significant benefits to players, administrators and spectators alike. For example, the weather would be much more pleasant for both players and spectators, the cooler weather would allow for more sustained and vigorous play, the spectacle would not be marred by tropical down-pours which all but obscure the players from the view of the paying public. Add to this the extra benefits of no festive season break (which interrupts the playing patterns and coordination in many teams), reduced damage to playing surfaces which results from continual wet weather fixtures, and that the junior competition would proceed uninterrupted by school holidays all have the Executive Committee thinking long and hard!

Of course, moving the competition to the dry season would obviously have Rugby Union and Rugby League in direct competition for players, administrators, supporters and sponsors. Bill Davies is of the view that Rugby has 'come of age' in the NT and that the time is right for it to take its place as a leading football code and a dry season sport. Davies is also of the view that Rugby has not only closed the gap on its rival League, but has indeed replaced League as the second major football participant sport in the NT¹⁷¹. Davies is all for the move, but only time will tell if the Executive Committee, Club officials and supporters feel as confident as the General Manager. The news that Union was investigating the feasibility of a move of season drew a quick and negative response from NT Rugby League Operations Manager Ross Forday. Forday predicted 'a quick death' to Union should it go head to head with League in the dry season¹⁷².

The debate over the future season for Union continues as does the current war of words between the rival codes, however the NTRU continues to focus on development and participation at the national level. In February 2001, the NTRU announced a forty plus training squad from which a team would be selected to contest both the Arafura Games and the Australian Shield.

¹⁶⁸ Bree, Dennis., Personal interview and written response. January, 2001.

¹⁶⁹ Norris, Richard., Personal interview. January, 2001.

¹⁷⁰ Davies, Bill., Personal interview. February, 2001.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Maharaj, Rajiv., 'Fast death for union: Forday'. Northern Territory News, 23 February, 2001.



Australian Rugby Shield Emblem (NTRU Collection)

It is the second time the NTRU has participated in the Australian Shield, the first being in 2000. The results on that occasion were not all that pleasing with the NTRU coming last in the six-team competition. However, the NTRU was confident that newly appointed Mosquitoes Coach Steven Roberts would build on the experience gained in 2000 and have the NT well positioned at the end of the competition¹⁷³.



Hewlett Packard Darwin Mosquitoes 2000

Back Row L-R: G Reed (Coach), B McQuaid (Trainer), M Pheeney, D Moodie, S Jefferies, E Tipene, B Jones, N Woodruff, M Grooby, B Evans, J Sullivan, K Shirley, S Lawrence (Manager), A Phieffer (Physio). **Middle Row** G Brehauer, R Callaghan, S Maley, A Woodcock, C Leach (Capt), C Moore (V-Capt), D Dowling, M Pitts-Brown, V Wolfe, M Ericsson, A Scott, B Clifford. **Sitting:** D Lewis, A Palmer. (Absent M Blackman, A Robb) (C Leach Collection)

This, however, was not to be the case with the NT suffering losses to NSW Country (76-7), South Australia (27-19), Western Australia (50-29), and Queensland Country (39-16) and recording a win over Victoria by 21 points to ten.

Only time will tell as to the outcome of the many issues currently confronting the NTRU and those that will appear in the future. As the NTRU moves into its next decade of operations and development, one can only surmise that it has the potential to be as busy a decade as the one just completed.

¹⁷³ Maharaj, Rajiv., 'NTRU names 40-plus squad'. Northern Territory News. 21 February, 2001.

The Scoreboard

First Grade Premiers

Darwin

1976-77	Waratahs (Bayside)	31	South Darwin	10
1977-78	South Darwin	19	Palmerston	10
1978-79	Larrakeyah	18	Bayside	0
1979-80	Bayside	12	Casuarina	7
1980-81	Casuarina	13	South Darwin	3
1981-82	Casuarina	7	South Darwin	6
1982-83	Casuarina	7	South Darwin	0
1983-84	Casuarina	6	RSL	0
1984-85	Casuarina	11	South Darwin	3
1985-86	RSL	25	Casuarina	13
1986-87	Casuarina	15	Palmerston	9
1987-88	South Darwin	23	Palmerston	9
1988-89	University	16	South Darwin	0
1989-90	University	9	Palmerston	0
1990-91	Palmerston	6	RSL	3
1991-92	University	23	South Darwin	13
1992-93	University	17	RSL PINTS	3
1993-94	University	22	RSL PINTS	12
1994-95	RSL PINTS	11	University	6
1995-96	PINTS	27	Palmerston	10
1996-97	PINTS	21	Palmerston	19
1997-98	Litchfield	13	Palmerston	10
1998-99	Palmerston	16	PINTS Dragons	7
1999-00	Palmerston	23	University	17
2000-01	Darwin Dragons	11	South Darwin	5

Alice Springs

1986-87	Tigers	19	Kiwi Warriors	17
1987-88	Tigers	14	Kiwi Warriors	0
1988-89	Kiwi Warriors	8	Tigers	7
1989-90	Verdi Devils	10	Tigers	0
1990-91	Federal Devils	19	Tigers	15
1991-92	Tigers	27	Kiwi Warriors	7
1992-93	Tigers	20	Federal Devils	17
1993-94	Kiwi Warriors			
1994-95	Kiwi Warriors			
1995-96	Kiwi Warriors		Dingo Cubs	
1996-97	Kiwi Warriors		Dingo Cubs	
1997-98	Kiwi Warriors		Dingo Cubs	
1998-99	Kiwi Warriors		Dingo Cubs	
1999-00	Kiwi Warriors		Dingo Cubs	
2000-01				

Katherine

1988-89	Tindal Lions	9	Pirates	6
1989-90	Tindal Lions	15	Pirates	6
1990-91	Tindal Lions	24	Rangers	9
1991-92	Tindal Lions	17	Brahmans	9
1992-93	Tindal Lions	17	Brahmans	7
1993-94	Tindal Lions	16	Brahmans	3
1994-95	Brahmans	18	Tindal Lions	3
1995-96	Brahmans	12	Barbarians	6
1996-97	Brahmans	10	Tindal Lions	3
1997-98	Pirates		Tindal Lions	
1998-99	Pirates	8	Brahmans	3
1999-00	Brahmans	21	Pirates	5
2000-01	Pirates		Barbarians	

Darwin Second Grade Premiers.

1979-80	Casuarina	6	Bayside	3
1980-81	Bayside	15	Casuarina	4
1981-82	Casuarina	21	Bayside	18
1982-83	RSL	6	Larrakeyah	0
1983-84	South Darwin	7	Casuarina	3
1984-85	Katherine	12	Jabiru	3
1985-86	South Darwin	16	Katherine	0
1986-87	Jabiru	7	Casuarina	0
1987-88	Palmerston	12	South Darwin	11
1988-89	South Darwin	3	Jabiru	0
1989-90	South Darwin	10	Palmerston	3
1990-91	South Darwin	7	Jabiru	4
1991-92	Jabiru	17	RSL	6
1992-93	South Darwin		Jabiru	
1993-94	University	23	Palmerston	7
1994-95	PINTS	17	University	0
1995-96	PINTS	24	Palmerston	0
1996-97	PINTS	24	Casuarina	7
1997-98	Palmerston	28	Litchfield	3
1998-99	Palmerston	24	PINTS Dragons	17
1999-00	University		Casuarina	
2000-01	Darwin Dragons	39	University	7

Darwin Third Grade Premiers.

1983-84	Combined Services	9	Palmerston	4
1984-85	RSL	10	South Darwin	3
1985-86	Palmerston	13	RSL	8
1986-87	Casuarina	10	Palmerston	0
1987-88	Palmerston	13	RSL	8
1988-89	Palmerston	9	Humpty Doo	3
1989-90	Humpty Doo	9	Palmerston	0
1990-91	RSL	14	Palmerston	0
1991-92	University	18	South Darwin	10
1992-93	Palmerston	11	University	0
1993-94	South Darwin	11	University	6
1994-95	Palmerston	18	PINTS	8
1995-96	Palmerston	11	South Darwin	7
1996-97	University	16	PINTS	8
1997-98	Litchfield	10	PINTS	0
1998-99	Litchfield	13	Palmerston	7
1999-00	University		South Darwin	
2000-01	South Darwin	10	University	3

Other Competition Results

President's Cup

Year	Team	Score	Opponent	Score
1979-80	Casuarina	6	RSL	0
1980-81	Casuarina	25	South Darwin	3
1981-82	Casuarina	13	South Darwin	6
1982-83	Casuarina	9	RSL	3
1983-84	Casuarina	13	RSL	0
1984-85	Casuarina	15	RSL	4
1985-86	RSL	19	Casuarina	15
1986-87	Casuarina	7	Palmerston	0
1987-88	Bayside	10	Darwin Institute Technology (DIT)	0
1988-89	University	19	South Darwin	8
1989-90	University	23	Palmerston	7
1990-91				
1991-92				
1992-93				
1993-94				
1994-95				
1995-96	Palmerston		(runners up not recorded)	
1996-97	Palmerston		(runners up not recorded)	
1997-98	Litchfield	20	Palmerston	10
1998-99				
1999-00	University	22	Palmerston	3

Casuarina Invitation XV versus Darwin Mosquitoes

(Game contested on Australia Day of each year)

Year	Team	Score	Opponent	Score
1977	Casuarina Invitation	32	Darwin Mosquitoes	28
1978	Casuarina Invitation	72	Darwin Mosquitoes	4
1980	Casuarina Invitation	31	Darwin Mosquitoes	6
1981	Casuarina Invitation	16	Darwin Mosquitoes	6
1982	Casuarina Invitation	36	Darwin Mosquitoes	8
1983	Casuarina Invitation	32	Darwin Mosquitoes	32
1984	Darwin Mosquitoes	19	Casuarina Invitation	18
1985	Darwin Mosquitoes	44	Casuarina Invitation	14
1986	Casuarina Invitation	22	Darwin Mosquitoes	12
1987	Darwin Mosquitoes	32	Casuarina Invitation	18
1988	Darwin Mosquitoes	32	Casuarina Invitation	6
1989	Casuarina Invitation	20	Darwin Mosquitoes	10
1990	Darwin Mosquitoes	35	Casuarina Invitation	19
1991	Darwin Mosquitoes	20	Casuarina Invitation	18
1992	Casuarina Invitation	22	Darwin Mosquitoes	15
1993	Casuarina Invitation	20	Darwin Mosquitoes	17

NTRU records indicate that the last Casuarina Invitation versus Darwin Mosquitoes game was played in 1993 due to the difficulty in attracting high quality players (ie; Australian or State representative players) to the match.

The 'competition' had been a great success and had achieved its goal of bringing top class players to Darwin in order to share their skills, experience and knowledge with local players, thereby further developing the game and the playing standard. The Casuarina Invitation XV versus Darwin Mosquitoes 'Scoreboard' currently hangs in the NTRU Administration Complex at Optus Rugby Park, Mararra.

In its place, the NTRU introduced a Country of Origin (Australia versus New Zealand) series. To be eligible to participate in either team, a player must substantiate that he was born in either country and that he played his first 'grade' Rugby in that country.

The series 'kicked-off' in 1997 with Australia running out winners. Australia won the series again in 1998, but the New Zealanders took out the trophy in 1999, beating Australia 22-7 and in 2000 with a 28-12 score-line. In 2001 the 'Kiwis' again took out the Australia Day honours in the Men's Division (although the game was played the evening before Australia Day ie; Thursday 25th January) by beating 'Australia' 20 -16.



New Zealand – 2001 Country of Origin

Back Row L-R: D Panapa (Manager), D Bartlett, M Swanson, V Grey, B Henderson, M Wilson, L Bedggood, C Thompson (Coach), B Watters (Trainer). Middle Row: H Rickard, R Callaghan, P Staiger, B Jones, G Bell, P Westrupp, B Hunt, F Mills. Front Row: G Reardon, P Good, J Duncan, M Thompson, T Tehwhata, S Walker.

The Australian Ladies were too strong for the Barbarian team running out winners 26 to nil. K Davis scored two tries, E (Libby) Andrews one try, and R Blackman one try with D Chisholm converting three of the tries.



Australian Women – 2001 Country of Origin

Back Row L-R: S Russell (Coach), J Warnecke (Trainer), M Sotheren, M Gavin, N Tuckerman, D Seaden, L Houghton, L Andrews, K Ainslie, K Pryor (Manager). Middle Row: E Eastick, M Goehr, C Butcher, K Honess, N Truran, N Jellis, R Blackman, J Kerr. Front Row: S Parker, R Pearce, V Botterel, R Barnett, K Davis, G Dinale, D Chisholm.

Sevens Competition Winners:

Souths Darwin 7's results:

	Under 13	Under 15	Under 17
1988	RSL Dragons	Souths	Palmerston
1989	RSL Dragons	RSL Dragons	RSL Dragons
1990	RSL Dragons	RSL Dragons	RSL Dragons

	Over 35s	Huaki Bowl	Berrington Plate	Hawkins & Clements Cup
1988	Palmerston		Palmerston	Randwick (NSW)
1989	Humpty Doo	Palmerston	University	South Darwin
1990	Humpty Doo	Casuarina	Humpty Doo	University

NTRU International 7's results:

	Croc	Buff	Barra	Jabiru
1989	Duavata	Phantoms		
1990	AIS	Crocs	Cougars	
1991	Sydney University	Singapore Cricket Club	Darwin U21	
1992	Duavata	Singapore Cricket Club	Pandata Panthers	
1993	Hong Kong	RSL Dragons	Lions	
1994	Duavata	Bayside	RSL Dragons	
1995	Sydney University	HMAS Albatross	Pints	Palmerston Sweethearts
1996	Burnside	Palmerston Crocs	Airport Hotel Cougars	Casuarina Cougars
1997	Potoroos	South Darwin	Aussie Signs	University Pirettes
1998	Potoroos	Aussie Signs	Dingoes	Pints Dragons
1999	Darwin Dingos	Albatross	Lions	NTIS
2000	Fiji Services	University	Poddies	Pints Dragons

Eric Johnston (A.M., O.B.E.) and Eric Johnston Medalists.

Eric Eugene Johnston A.M., O.B.E. was born in Shanghai, China in the Kiangsu Province on the 23 July 1933¹⁷⁴. Throughout his life Eric was to strive for excellence, to champion a cause and often the under-dog, and was to rise through the ranks of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) from the rank of Cadet Midshipman to that of Commodore. He was to be the only person to date to have served two consecutive terms as Administrator of the Northern Territory.

E.J. Johnston was the son of Captain V.V. Johnston (RAN), and was raised in and around Frankston, Victoria where he undertook his early schooling. He was educated at Frankston High School before entering the Royal Australian Naval College in 1947 at the age of thirteen. During his career in the RAN, Commodore Johnston served on various ships of the Fleet including the Her Majesty's Ships (HMS) *Devonshire* and *Maidstone* and Her Majesty's Australian Ships (HMAS) *Australia*, *Culgoa*, *Tobruk* and *Melbourne* off the Malay Peninsula during the period of confrontation, and the HMAS *Vendetta* as part of the US Seventh Fleet during the Vietnam War¹⁷⁵. The Commodore also attended and graduated from various War Colleges in the USA and Great Britain.

His association with the NT began in 1973 following his appointment as Naval Officer Commanding North Australia (NOCNA). Following the devastating effects of Cyclone Tracy on Darwin at Christmas 1974, during which he was trapped in the rubble of the Naval Headquarters, (the Naval HQ was originally the Darwin Court House until the time of the Japanese air raids in February 1942), Commodore Johnston was given command of 'Operation Navy Help' which was to assist with the clean up and rehabilitation of Australia's most northern city.

Commodore Johnston set up his headquarters in the MLC Building and promptly christened his new 'flagship' the HMAS *MLC*¹⁷⁶, and immediately set about the task at hand. For the next twelve months, Commodore Johnston and his sailors were common sights in and around Darwin, as they worked in with civilian and other military personnel under the command of Lt General Allan Stretton to remove the dead, demolish badly damaged and dangerous structures, and cleaning up the mountains of rubbish that lay strewn throughout the city and its environs.

In June 1975, Commodore Johnston was awarded the Division of the Order of Australia (AM) with a citation that referred to his 'outstanding leadership, exemplary conduct and steadfast performance of his duties while exposed to the dangers of Cyclone Tracy and for his tireless efforts toward the restoration of Darwin'¹⁷⁷. Although he left Darwin to take up his new posting as Commanding Officer of HMAS *Perth*, Eric Johnston was determined to return to the place he had grown so fond of, and where he had made so many friends. Among those friends were a group of civilians intent upon starting a Rugby Union competition.

In 1980, NT Chief Minister Paul Everingham offered Cmd Johnston the position of NT Administrator. Cmd Johnston accepted almost immediately and retired from the RAN on the 31st December 1980, to take up his post in Darwin on the 19th January 1981. Commodore Johnston was to hold that honoured position for two consecutive terms totaling eight years in all, the longest postwar period in office by any Administrator of the NT. In June 1988 he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for his service to the NT during his period as Administrator. Given this appointment was in the general division, Commodore Johnston has the rare distinction of being entitled to wear the insignia of both the AO and the military AM¹⁷⁸.

During his time in Darwin, he became greatly involved in Rugby Union and was a champion of the development cause. He was Patron of the NTRU for ?? and presided over official duties on behalf of both the NT Government and as a representative of the NTRU. Commodore Eric Johnston was indeed a great friend and true ally of Rugby Union in the Northern Territory, and worked tirelessly behind the scenes to best ensure the game was nurtured and supported.

Sadly, Commodore Johnston contracted leukemia and diabetes and passed away in Darwin in 1996. The passing of Commodore Johnston was, in some ways, the end of an era in NT Rugby Union history, however, it was the beginning of another. In 1996, the Board of Directors of the NTRU voted unanimously to name the Best and Fairest Player Award after Commodore Johnston (AM, OBE) in appreciation of his efforts on behalf of Rugby Union in the NT, and to honour a great man and a great Australian.

¹⁷⁴ Carment, David and Helen Wilson (Ed)., Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography. Volume 3, p 176.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. p 176.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p 175.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p176.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p 176.



Commodore Eric Johnston 'in the centre' for the first fixture at Rugby Park. (NTRU Collection)

Eric Johnston (Best And Fairest Player) Medal Winners.

1995/96	Bernard Niki	Pints
1996/97	Peter Mayo	Pints
1997/98	Chris Hodson	University Pirates
1998/99	Andre Thomas	University Pirates
1999/00	Craig Moore	University Pirates
2000-01	Stuart Boland	South Darwin

Darwin Second Grade Best and Fairest Player

1995/96	Brett Clifford	Casuarina
1996/97	Daniel Lewis	Casuarina
1997/98	Peter McLaurin	Jabiru
1998/99	Danny Roberts	Jabiru
1999/00	Alan Cox & Ken Wistrand	
2000-01		

Third Grade Best and Fairest Player

1995/96	Travis Tewhata	Pints
1996/97	Dave Ellis	University
1997/98	Chris Cuthbertson	Palmerston
1998/99	Dean Sydney	Palmerston
1999/00	Andrew Smart	Palmerston
2000-01		

Latter Day Clubs:

Club: University 'Pirates'

Colours: Black and White Harlequin Pattern.



The University Pirates, previously known as the Darwin Institute of Technology (DIT) Pirates, was formed in 1987 when several staff members including Wayne Dawes, Peter Edwards, Cliff Graham, Paul Gregory, and Bernie Trinne approached the NTRU with a proposal to enter a team in the Third Grade competition. The NTRU Director of Coaching at that time, Bruce Kennon, was very supportive of the initiative and, after pledging support from the NTRU, was able to convince the Pirates organisers to enter a team in the First Grade competition as well.



A-GRADE

BACK (L-R): C. Hodson, S. Littlewood, C. Jackson, R. Hawe, N. Taare, R. Taare, B. Kennon (Inaugural Coach)

CENTRE (L-R): S. Nibbs, C. McDowell, G. Burke, C. Martin, P. Gosbel, S. Buba, F. Walters (Team Manager)

FRONT (L-R): S. Gribben, B. Appo, D. Bailey, D. Ellis (Captain/Coach), W. Lingman, R. Law, W. Patterson.

DIT Pirates A Grade team 1987- 88 season (NTU Pirates Year Book 1987)

The Pirates chose the harlequin pattern with black and white squares for their strip and took the motto Conamur-Plus which roughly translated means 'We Try Harder'.¹⁷⁹ The Pirates' first season was something of a mixed bag, due to some very 'spectacular success and losses'. In that season, the Club finished second in the Jabiru 10-a-side competition, their first outing in scheduled competition, but by the end of the first premierships round, the Club's two teams were at opposite ends of the competition table. The First Grade team was in first position on percentage points, while the Third Graders were on the bottom of the table, not having won a match.

¹⁷⁹ DIT Pirates Rugby Union Football Club. 1987/88 Yearbook: Inaugural Season, p 3.



Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke meeting Pirates A Grade players prior to 1989 Grand Final.
l-r W Lingman, D Puketapu, D Harrop, D Ellis (behind PM). (NTU Pirates collection courtesy of B Ledurdge)

In 1989 the DIT became the Northern Territory University (NTU) and the Pirates changed their name to the University Pirates. In that same year, after competing for only two years, the Pirates won their first First Grade premiership. Since 1989, the Pirates have gone on to win the First Grade premiership in 1990, 1992, 1993 and 1994. The Pirates also won the Second Grade premiership in 1993/94 and took the honours in the Third Grade in 1991/92.



University players & officials celebrate their 1992 Grand Final victory. (NTU Pirates collection, courtesy of B Ledurdge)

With Shelley Lingman up front lobbying and organising games, the Pirates were instrumental in the pioneering of Women's Rugby in the NT, and have won five of the eight premierships that have been contested since the inception of the competition. The University Pirates have also provided five female Australian representative players and a Coach/Selector. In 1994 Shelley Lingman represented the NTRU in first Australian Women's Rugby Union Committee meeting and in 2000 was the Australian Women's coach¹⁸⁰.

The Club has always had a strong commitment to developing Junior Rugby in the NT, and over the years has contributed quite generously to that cause. The affiliation between the University Pirates Club and the University per se is demonstrated by the NTU/Pirates scholarship program which allows Pirates players to study for a qualification at the NTU. At the time of writing there were three such scholarships in place at the Northern Territory University¹⁸¹.

In year 2000 the Pirates lost several of their pioneering personnel when Wylie and Shelley Lingman left Darwin for Brisbane in a career move. In late 2000, Peter Edwards, one of the originals and true stalwarts of the Club, departed for NSW also as part of a career move. They will be sadly missed but at the Pirates den and in NT Rugby circles in general.

¹⁸⁰ Urvett, Tiina., 'NTRU pioneering pair bids farewell'. Northern Territory News: Sunday Territorian. 9th January, 2000. P49.

¹⁸¹ NTU Pirates Website: <http://www.unipirates.com.au/html/pages/history.htm>

Club: Jabiru 'Bushrats'

Colours: Green, White and Red



The Jabiru 'Bushrats' were formed in 1983-84 and were admitted to the NTRU's Second Grade competition following Bayside's inability to field a side in that competition that season. Paul Thomas is largely credited with Jabiru being admitted to the Union. Paul was to become the Club's first President and Coach and was instrumental in its development in its early stages¹⁸².

Their very first season saw Jabiru 'come of age' as a team and a club, with Paul Thomas at the helm as Coach. The 'Bushrats' finished a very creditable fifth that season, but it was just the beginning. In the 1984-85 season, with Paul Thomas still as Coach, Jabiru strung nine consecutive wins together to win a birth in the Grand Final. However, the game had to be postponed due to the impact of Cyclone Greta, forcing a replay the following week. Jabiru travelled back to Darwin the following week but went down to a stronger Katherine outfit by 12 points to 3. While the 'Bushrats' were understandably disappointed with the final result, the NTRU was ecstatic that the two country clubs had played off in the penultimate game that season. It was the first time both teams contesting a Grand Final came from beyond Darwin's boundaries, and as such it was a history-making event.

Brian Scott took over the coaching duties the following season and steered the team to another Grand Final appearance in 1986-87. On that occasion the 'Bushrats' lined up against the highly fancied Casuarina team, and at the end of a hard eighty minutes of football, Jabiru ran out winners by 7 points to nil¹⁸³. Club history had been made!

In 1987-88, Dave Clark took over the coaching reins with the 'Bushrats' having something of a mixed season in terms of playing results. In that season the team experienced eight straight wins, followed by eight consecutive losses, which kept them out of the final four. Another change of Coach saw the 'Ratz' as they then called themselves, appear in their next Grand Final in 1988-89, their third in four seasons! Coach Allan Bells' troops gave their all against a rock hard South Darwin side who were intent on reversing the outcome of the previous Grand Final when they had gone down to Palmerston by one point, 12 to 11. Try as they may, the 'Ratz' could not breach the solid South Darwin defence and at the end of the contest, the score-board read Souths 3, Jabiru nil.

Allan Bell kept the 'Ratz' in the hunt for another Grand Final pennant in 1989-90 when the team finished as minor Premiers but missed out on a Grand Final birth. In 1990-91, the 'Ratz' were back on Grand Final day again to face South Darwin. As was the case in 1988-89, Souths were to finish the season with the flag at Jabiru's expense, with a score-line of 7 points to 4, the same three point margin as was the case on the previous occasion.

The 1991-92 season saw Sab Lord take the coaching helm, and once again the 'Ratz' were centre stage on Grand Final day. This time they were successful, defeating RSL 17 points to 6. The following year, the 'Ratz' went down to South Darwin in the Grand Final. To date, that encounter was the last time Jabiru were to appear in Grand Final.

¹⁸² Jones, Peter., 'Jabiru Rugby Union Football Club', *Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc. Handbook 1991-192 Season*, P 33.

¹⁸³ Ibid. Jones, in this document, records the Club's first Grand Final appearance to have been in 1985-86, while the official NTRU records indicate that Jabiru played Katherine in 1984-85 with Katherine winning 12 points to 3. The 'official' version has been accepted as the record for the purpose of this history. Jones also records the score in the 1986-87 Grand Final as 10-nil in Jabiru's favour, while the NTRU recorded the score as 7 to nil. Once again the NTRU records have been accepted and put forward.

Litchfield (formerly Humpty Doo) Rugby Union Club

Colours: Red, White and Black



The 'modern day' Litchfield Rugby Union Club started its life in 1986-87 as the Humpty Doo RUFC when a then Taminmin High School Physical Education Instructor, David (Killer) Kilpatrick set about organising a seniors team from Darwin's rural area¹⁸⁴. Kilpatrick, who had previously organised an Under 13 side to participate in the Darwin competition, arranged a meeting of persons interested in playing senior Rugby with view to forming a team and club¹⁸⁵.

The meeting was quite appropriately convened at the Humpty Doo Hotel and enough interest was demonstrated at that meeting to have Kilpatrick push on with the club formation plans. Rugby enthusiasts such as Shuan Irvine, Peter Thompsen, Tony Henry, Brenton Maschke and Kieran Acoli among others all attended the inaugural meeting at which Bob Maxwell, a cook at the Humty Doo Hotel, was elected President of the new Club. The Club adopted the name Humpty Doo 'Swampdogs' in recognition of its birthplace and a reference to a rather strange animal that has the body of a crocodile and the head of a dog, complete with studded collar!! The 'Swampdog' was to become the club's emblem and although the club's colours and name have changed over the years, 'Swampdog' emblem has been maintained. The club also adopted the Latin phrase 'Ex Niliho Omnius', which loosely translated means 'sink more piss', as its motto and rallying, if not clarion, call.

The original colours of the club were maroon after a set of jerseys were ordered from a southern supplier and maroon coloured jumpers arrived. According to Des Bredhauer's recollection, the order, which was placed and paid for by Peter (Squeak) Youens¹⁸⁶, was simply 'send what you have in stock' as the team wished to compete in the upcoming competition. Many NSW (Blues) supporters were 'uncomfortable' wearing the maroon of QLD and in order to appease those aggrieved the next set of jerseys included blue – a very nice compromise!¹⁸⁷ So, by season 1988-89 the Swampdogs were taking the field in maroon and blue jerseys as shown in the photograph below.



Humpty Doo Swamp Dogs 2nd Grade – 1984 (D Bredhauer Collection)

In the early days Dave Kilpatrick, Des Bredhauer and Peter Thompson were the main organisers with Eddie Weber, Rod Bremner, Kevin Henry, the Hassall boys and 'Stewie' Vowels being the mainstay of the playing ranks. In later years Rod Bremner, Kevin Henry and Alan Hunt became the mainstays of the Club and, according to Des Bredhauer, without their effort and commitment the Club may well have folded on several occasions.

¹⁸⁴ Swampdog Anniversary Committee., Humpty Doo RUFC Tenth Anniversary booklet. p2.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Bredhauer, Des., 'Swampdogs turn 10 and going strong'. Litchfield Times. 4th September, 1997. p46

¹⁸⁷ Bredhauer, Des., Personal interview. 13 March, 2001.

In the early days, games were arranged against the Darwin Stubbies (Darwin's original Golden Oldies team) as fund raising events for the Under 13s but also as good 'training' for the 'seniors'. In 1986 the club was referred to as a 'Social Rugby Club' in the local press which ran an article calling for interested players, supporters and administrators to form and run the club, the original intention being to contest the Third Grade competition.¹⁸⁸ Until such time as Humpty Doo actually joined the Darwin competition in its own right, many of the players took the field to play with Katherine in the days when that team contested the Darwin competition¹⁸⁹.

The Third Grade reached the semi-finals in 1986-87 but did not win a Grand Final berth. In 1987-88 Scott Alexander arrived and immediately made an impact in both the playing and administration areas. In that same year the Swampdogs fielded two teams by moving into Second Grade. Dave Kilpatrick was elected President and plans were made to field a First Grade side. However, before the First Grade side was formed, the Third Graders took out the Premiership in 1989-90 beating Palmerston 9 points to nil thereby becoming the first senior team in the Club to take out premiership honours. The Under 8s brought home the Premiership trophy in the same season under the coaching direction of Sharon Johnson who also happened to be the first female Referee in Darwin¹⁹⁰.



Humpty Doo Swamp Dogs 3rd Grade Premiers 1989/90 (D Bredhauer Collection)

In only their fourth year in the competition (1990-91) the Swampdogs contested the First Grade under Coach Gary Harrison, however they struggled that year and finished outside the final four. Regardless, the Club pressed on and 1994 was to be a good year, one in which they attracted Canberra player Matt Weaver to the fold, rattled up a few victories (two against the Kiwis Club) in the First Grade and had Junior player Gerard Bredhauer, son of Des, selected in the Australian Division Two team. 1994 was also the year Coach Bredhauer declared the Swampdogs were going to stay in the First Grade although the numbers of first Grade players had diminished significantly. At one stage it was reported in the *Litchfield Times* that the Swampdogs were down to four First Grade players on the training paddock and the team's record was not good given they had only won three games in the previous two seasons¹⁹¹. Nonetheless, the President's prediction was seen to be correct as the 1993-94 season came to an end and the Club looked to a new start in 1994-95. Although the First Grade won a record number of games in 1994-95 they failed to live up to its early promise and once again there was talk of the team being dropped from the First Grade¹⁹².

By the beginning of the 1995-96 season the Humpty Doo Swampdogs had become the Litchfield Swampdogs, had a new President in Brett Martell, had adopted new colours and had appointed a new First Grade Coach in Les Reif. The Club had changed name to reflect its representation of the Litchfield Shire per se, rather than just the 'suburb' of Humpty Doo and adopted the red, black and white colours which were already being worn by the Litchfield 'Bears' Rugby League Club and Southern Districts (Litchfield) Australian Rules Football Club¹⁹³. Brett Martell and the Committee were of the view that the name and colour change would increase the Club's profile and that the changes could attract more sponsorship support. The Club was also 'excited' about attracting Les Reif as its First Grade Coach as he had previously been a First Grade player with Palmerston and First Grade Coach of South Darwin¹⁹⁴.

¹⁸⁸ Humpty Doo Anniversary Committee. 'Rural Rugby' in *Litchfield Times*. 16 October, 1986.

¹⁸⁹ Bredhauer, Des., Personal interview. 13 March, 2001.

¹⁹⁰ Bredhauer, Des., 'Swampdogs turn 10 and going strong'. *Litchfield Times*. 4th September, 1997. P46

¹⁹¹ Pickett Fence., 'Swampdogs to stay in A grade' *Litchfield Times* reproduced in Humpty Doo 'Swampdogs' RUFC Tenth Anniversary publication.

¹⁹² Author unknown., 'New start for Litchfield Swampdogs' *Litchfield Times*. 7th September, 1995.

¹⁹³ Author unknown., 'New start for Litchfield Swampdogs'. *Litchfield Times*. 7th September 1995. P48.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p48.

However, the Club experienced more hard times in 1995-96 suffering several large defeats early in the season. They went down to Souths 53-3 in October that year¹⁹⁵ and were crushed by PINTS 'Dragons' 107 points to 5¹⁹⁶ in November. Later that year the Club signed Fijian players Egala Duguivaiu and Manoa Veremalua in an effort to add some 'fire to the Swampdog's line'.¹⁹⁷ The tactic paid off with the 'Swampdogs' showing considerable improvement over the remainder of the season. The 1996-97 season commenced with an opening 18-10 win over Casuarina and Coach Reif was confident of repeats in the matches to come¹⁹⁸. His charges did not let him, nor their Club, down and the Swampdogs found themselves in their first ever semi final play off, however they failed to make the Grand Final. 1996 was also the year Litchfield entered a team in the Women's competition, however, due to lack of numbers the life of the team was short lived and the Swampdog ladies joined forces with South Darwin for the 1999-2000 season.

The Club was to wait eleven years to bring home the coveted First Grade Premiership trophy winning that division and the Third Grade in 1997-98. The First Grade defeated Palmerston 13 points to 10 and the Third Graders were too strong for PINTS winning 16 points to 8. The Third Grade repeated the performance the following year again dispensing of PINTS by 10 points to nil. That was to be the last Grand Final appearance by any Litchfield team to date.

In 1999 the Club lost one of its favourite sons when Ilimo Raqisia passed away after a short battle with a very rare form of cancer. Raqisia had been one of the Swampdogs leading players at the time, was well respected by team and club mates and opponents alike, as was witnessed by the flood of tributes that appeared in the NT News obituaries¹⁹⁹. He had been a member of the undefeated NTRU Taipans team that toured Sri Lanka earlier that year and was highly regarded by the team management. Ilimo Raqisia was a sad loss to both Litchfield Rugby Club and the sport pre se. He left behind him a wife, two daughters and a legion of Rugby friends.

The Swampdogs have always had a focus on developing Junior Rugby in the rural area and have supported teams in almost all junior divisions at one time or another. The history of the Swampdog Juniors is one in its own right and hopefully will be written in the not too distant future.

In 1997 the Swampdogs celebrated ten-years of involvement in Rugby in the NT and as part of the festivities hosted a 'remembrance match', an anniversary dinner and, arguably most importantly, a recovery lunch on Sunday 7th September. By all accounts the anniversary/reunion was a roaring success and well attended. All involved in Rugby in the NT trust the Swampdogs will be around to celebrate their twentieth year!

¹⁹⁵ Pickett Fence., 'Swampdogs lose the script'. Litchfield Times. 19th October, 1995. P63

¹⁹⁶ Pickett Fence., '107-5: Dogs get done like a dinner'. Litchfield Times. 16th November, 1995. P50

¹⁹⁷ Urvett, Tiina., 'Newcomers set in NTRU clashes'. Northern Territory News. 9th December, 1995.

¹⁹⁸ Kelly, Blair., 'Swampdogs want repeat'. Northern Territory News. 19th October, 1996.

¹⁹⁹ Northern Territory News – Classified Advertisements – Obituaries. 30& 31st December, 2000 and 1st & 5th January, 2001.

The Referees

No history of the game of Rugby would be complete without a section devoted to the men and women who control the game for the benefit of players and spectators alike. That small, committed and dedicated band of people who take their position mid-field at the beginning of every match regardless of where it is played, or between whom. They are loved and hated, respected and despised, applauded and jeered, they are supported and denigrated from both the grandstand and the playing field. They are the much, and often, maligned Referees!

The history of the Referees Association in Darwin is (obviously) directly linked to the NTRU's history, although in the very early days of the formal Rugby competition in Darwin, there were very few qualified Referees and no Referees Association. Rather, the players, many of whom were not qualified as Referees in any sport, officiated over games either before or after they had played themselves. The 'local rule' was that players from a particular club could not referee a game involving that club – for obvious reasons!

According to former first grade Referee Tony (Hoops) Hooper, one of the first qualified Referees to officiate in Darwin was a local Solicitor named Anthony (Tony) Watson-Brown²⁰⁰. Watson-Brown had arrived in Darwin in 1976 just as Rugby was starting. At that time Dick Barber was organising the Referees and Watson-Brown and a 'teacher from Newcastle' joined in to help form the Referees Association. Watson-Brown recalled a few 'incidents' in the early days including one day when the fields were so deep in rainwater that there was a real danger of players drowning in the mauls. He also recalled a day when a substitute player took the field and started to act 'strangely'. It didn't take long to work out that the player was inebriated, so Watson-Brown advised the team Captain he would not let anyone be 'drunk in charge of a football on his field'. The player retired from the field to sleep off his over indulgence²⁰¹.

Dick Barber left Darwin the next season, the teacher 'disappeared' and Col Russell, Johnny Walker, a RAAF Dentist and Alistair Heatley joined up, as did Ian Smith a little later²⁰². Heatley was an academic, a Rugby fanatic and a very good Referee. He was to be at the forefront of Rugby refereeing in the NT for fifteen years and was rewarded for his efforts by being admitted as the first life-member of the Referees Association in 1990. Sadly, Alistair Heatley passed away in Darwin in November 2000 after a short battle with cancer²⁰³.



Dr. Alistair Heatley in the thick of it – Casuarina v Palmerston circa 1985 (J Fraser collection)

Watson-Brown was always on the look out for new Referees and identified David 'Digby' Hart as a likely candidate. Hart was an internationally qualified Hockey Referee, and was well known in Darwin sporting circles. According to Hart, Watson-Brown approached him to leave playing and take up refereeing, to which 'Digby'

²⁰⁰ Hooper, Tony., personal interview. January, 2000.

²⁰¹ Watson-Brown, Anthony., Notes on the Start of Rugby Union Referees in the NT. Unpublished. p1.

²⁰² *Ibid.* p1.

²⁰³ 'Heatley's Legacy' Northern Territory News. 21 October, 2000.

replied he was not qualified! Not to be put off, Watson-Brown responded by saying 'don't let that bother you, just keep the game going, no forward passes and not too much rough stuff and you'll do okay'²⁰⁴. 'Digby' Hart who was, and still is, a practicing celebrant, was growing tired of attending functions after Rugby games with either a black eye, broken nose, or cuts and bruises. He decided to take Watson-Brown's offer and was to become one of the NT's leading Referees for more than 15 years.

Watson-Brown became the first President of the NT Rugby Referees Association and he, Heatley and the others gathered around them a band of Referees that would take the game forward over the next twenty-four years. Anthony (Hoops) Hooper, Tony Duffy, Brian Kemp, Dennis Medway, Ken Stevens and David (Digby) Hart joined Watson-Brown and Alistair Heatley, and were the mainstay of Refereeing in the NT. With the exception of Watson-Brown, all of these people were rewarded for their efforts and services by being admitted as life-members of the NTRU Referees Association. Darryl DeClifford was also to join the refereeing ranks and was to contribute a significant amount of time and energy to both the Referees Association and the Schools and Junior Rugby Union.



NTRU Referees at Rugby Park 1985

Left to Right: P Leggo, K Stephens, A Heatley, B Kemp, D Medway, B Brunell, P Abersule, T Hooper (NTRU Collection)

Watson-Brown left the NT in 1980 to further his professional career in Hong Kong. He returned briefly to Darwin in 1991 when he refereed his last game in the inaugural Arafura Games. Anthony Watson-Brown had spent seventeen seasons blowing the whistle at Rugby fixtures from social games to junior internationals to the Hong Kong Seven!²⁰⁵

There have been a host of characters, achievers and non-achievers, and the odd shyster or two if one believes the anecdotal feedback, involved in Rugby refereeing over the past twenty-four years. One of the more memorable characters who have been involved in Rugby over the years is Jeff Tubbenhauer who was one of the first, if not the first, qualified Referee in Alice Springs. As related elsewhere in this history, Tubbenhauer was by his own admission a 'controversial character'²⁰⁶ and as such he ran afoul of the NTRU and other officialdom on numerous occasions. Nonetheless, he was intrinsic in developing Rugby, and Rugby Referees, in the 'Red Centre' and his memory lives on! Joe Schooner has been the other stalwart of refereeing in Alice Springs. Others have come and gone, but Joe is still there doing what he loves – refereeing Rugby!

Bill Ingram was another 'colourful' character who donned the Referees garb and blew the whistle around the NT for many years. Ingram was a carnival owner and operator who worked the show circuits in Western Queensland and the NT. He was a likeable rogue, full of fun and possessed of a 'devil may care' attitude, but he loved Rugby and didn't mind contributing his time and energy to the cause. As Dr Heatley once put it, Bill Ingram was 'a rough

²⁰⁴ Hart, David (Digby)., Personal interview. January, 2000.

²⁰⁵ Watson-Brown, Anthony., Notes on Starting Rugby Refrees in the NT. Unpublished. p2.

²⁰⁶ Tubbenhauer, Geoff., Personal interview. December, 2000.

diamond'²⁰⁷, but a man with his heart in the right place – at least as far as Rugby was concerned!

Another Referee who made a name for himself in the NTRU, and probably for all the wrong reasons, was David Pollack. Pollack was, by all accounts, an excitable fellow and one not well suited to receiving or accepting criticism of any form – from anyone. NTRU Referees President Jeff Fraser recalled Pollack 'was actually a pretty capable administrator and Referee, but there were occasions when he would get inflamed and distracted by the antics of some players which would reduce his credibility and effectiveness'. He was a 'dummy spitter' extraordinaire and was involved in more send offs than any other Referee in NTRU history'. Fraser went on to say 'He (Pollack) would march players ten or sometimes twenty metres for even the hint of criticism or backchat. He was known to have 'marched teams the complete length of the field for player backchat! In honour of Pollack's quick temper and dubious refereeing qualities, the Referees Association initiated the annual 'Dummy Spitter of the Year Award'. Pollack won the award on several occasions before departing Darwin. The 'trophy' is still awarded every year by the Referees, but President Fraser refused to name those so honoured in recent years! However, the Alice also had its own controversial characters in the mid 1980s, David Lloyd being among them. Lloyd was invariably at loggerheads with the players and kept the local Association, the NTRRA and the NTRU busy with weekly dramas, dilemmas and controversies – mostly of his own making!

Some noteworthy players also joined the Referees ranks and made their mark within that august group. David (Digby) Hart played for the Waratahs and Bayside Clubs and was a member of the first premiership winning team in 1977. Hart retired from playing for various reasons and at the suggestion of Watson-Browne commenced a very successful refereeing career which covered sixteen years many of which were controlling First Grade fixtures. He travelled interstate on numerous occasions as the NTRU Refereeing representative as well as officiating at the Singapore and Hong Kong 7's. In 1992 Hart was awarded the Best Rugby Referee Award by the NT Dept Youth Sport and Recreation and in 2000 he was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his services to Rugby Union in the NT. During an interview in 2001, Digby advised that he had not retired from refereeing, rather he was working on his fitness following a serious injury and was hopeful of making his coming back in the twenty-fifth season. He also advised he had two ambitions left in Rugby, one being to referee a First Grade game at age fifty and the other to officiate at a wedding ceremony at Rugby Park!



David 'Digby' Hart refereeing a Casuarina versus Combined Services match. (Reproduced from the cover of Rugby Week, January 1984

Jeff Fraser, a native of Alexandra, in New Zealand's South Island, was a live-wire half-back with the South Darwin Club during his playing career. Fraser had been a key member of the South Darwin Rugby Club having served on its Committee as Treasurer and Secretary for many years, as well as involving himself in fund-raising activities, player recruitment, Club development and part-time refereeing. He retired from playing in 1988 (after several

²⁰⁷ Heatley, Dr Alistair, personal discussion with the author, London, 1985.

years of less than mediocre playing according to him) and took up full-time, (serious refereeing he called it)²⁰⁸ the same year. In an interview with him in January, 2001, he reflected on his Rugby career and regretted he had not turned to refereeing sooner, nor applied more of a personal focus to that part of the game. He said he had enjoyed the experience so much, and had gained personally from the involvement. In 2000, Jeff Fraser was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his services to Rugby Union in the NT. While being thrilled and honoured at receiving the award, he was a little bemused and asked 'why would you be given a medal for having fun?'²⁰⁹ Such is the quality of Jeff Fraser, and many more like him who have contributed generously of their time, energy and skills to Rugby in the NT over the years.



Jeff Fraser officiating on Number Two Oval Optus Rugby Park, January 2001 (Author's Collection)

Another quality player (and Kiwi) to take up the whistle was Kevin Potter. Potter was arguably one of Casuarina's and the NT's best players during his long career who, following his retirement from playing, was to go quietly about developing into one of the better Referees in the NT. He was well respected by both players and his refereeing colleagues and well liked by Darwin Rugby spectators. Another success story for the NTRRA was David Johnstone, an ex-Palmerston prop forward, who started refereeing after sustaining a serious neck injury while representing the NTRU. Johnstone rose rapidly through the ranks to control the First Grade Grand Final in only his second year of refereeing! Johnstone left Darwin to further his career in the NT Police force.

NTRU Referees have for many years controlled games in the Singapore and Hong Kong 7's tournaments, and have given generously of their time and knowledge in developing the refereeing skills in those Rugby developing countries. Tony Hooper recalled several trips to Singapore and Thailand with refereeing colleagues Alistair Heatley, Tony Duffy and Jeff Tubbenhaeur. The pace was hectic both on and off the field, but somehow the trio kept up and represented the NTRU, and Rugby per se, very well indeed!

Although NTRU Referees have not participated in any overseas tournaments since 1997, negotiations are currently under way to address that situation. Jeff Fraser is confident the NTRU, ARU and the various Referees sponsors will all answer the call for support in taking the NT's leading Referees to international tournaments as part of the skills and experience development program. Fraser is hopeful this may take place as early as the 2001-02 season and is predicting Asia to be the first port of call.

Rugby players and Referees alike are generally considered to be a rough, tough and not particularly attractive lot. However, this is not always the case as was shown when Carolyn Warren, a Cairns based flight attendant took up refereeing in Cairns and further developed her career in Darwin. Warren had commenced her refereeing career in 1988 after being introduced to the game by a Rugby playing friend. In 1998 she was in Darwin on work related trips and was given several First Grade games to control throughout the season²¹⁰.

²⁰⁸ Fraser, Jeff., Personal interview. January, 2001.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Kelly, Blair., 'Carolyn's the boss on the rugby field'. Northern Territory News. Monday, 12 January, 1998



Carolyn Warren controlling an A Grade fixture at Rugby Park (NT News 12 January, 1998)

Carolyn Warren's career over the ten-year period 1988–1998 was quite extraordinary and fulfilling. She handled several major Women's Division clashes including a national final and an international fixture between Queensland and the Canadian province of Alberta. She had also been selected as a touch judge in an international Women's Test match between Australia and New Zealand²¹¹. Warren was highly regarded in the NT for her refereeing ability and was given much support and plenty of opportunity to develop her skills. In order to assist with her development and career, the NTRU worked in conjunction with the Queensland Rugby Union to nominate her for selection as a touch judge and/or Referee at the World Cup of Women's Rugby. The World Cup was staged in Amsterdam, the Netherlands in May 1998. The nomination received positive response from the organisers and after much hard work, Carolyn Warren found herself selected as a touch judge. However, she performed her duties so well, she was appointed to control the centre in one of the last minor round World Cup fixtures²¹².

Current NTRU Referees Association President, Jeff Fraser, reflecting on the history of the Association, considered that the support given by the NTRU and ARU to developing Referees was perhaps the single most important issue in terms of Referees development and development of the game. He recalled several Referees that had been recruited, trained and developed by the NTRU who not only served the game well in the NT, but went onto 'bigger and better things'²¹³ interstate. Both Fraser and Tony Hooper²¹⁴ agree that Tony Duffy was the most outstanding Referee to officiate in the NT. Duffy brought a wealth of talent and experience to the game and raised the standards by coaching and training and attracting top line interstate and international Referees to Darwin. These Referees held coaching clinics and provided invaluable advice to the NT Referees.

Stewart Glynn was one Referee Fraser recalled who, in the early 1980's, became one of the NT's best Referees before moving to Adelaide where he became one of SA's top Referees as well. Michael Tutty, a 'young' Referee at 20 years of age, was also coached and supported by the NTRU during the mid 1990s to the top level in the NT. Tutty moved to Brisbane where he is now Refereeing at the top level and training with the elite and international squads²¹⁵. Other Referees that were of high quality and contributed significantly to the game and its development were Major John Adler and Nick Rees, both of whom were Army personnel who have since moved on to their next posting. The 'Services' have provided and still are providing a major contribution to the ranks of the NTRRA.

With the increased professionalism in Rugby Union and the increased expectation that accompanies it, the ARU has placed much greater emphasis on Referee coaching and development. The NTRRA has been fortunate indeed to have secured the services of Chandra Seneviratne as its Referees Coach. Chandra had refereed in Sri Lanka, England and throughout the Asian Region and controlled several international fixtures before his retirement. The recruitment, training and support of Referees goes on, and the numbers of current and up-and-

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Fraser, Jeff., Personal interview. 28 December, 2000.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Hooper, Tony., Personal interview. January 2001.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

coming Rugby Referees is quite pleasing according to Fraser.

For as long as the game is played, there will be a need for men and women to control it and ensure the rule of Rugby law is enforced fairly and equitably. They will (probably) forever be loved and hated, agreed and argued with and honoured and pitied. But one thing remains constant – they are needed and more often than not do a good job in often very difficult and trying circumstances. They are to be appreciated and acknowledged for their commitment and effort for without them, there is no game!

Women's Rugby Union

While Women's Rugby is relatively new to the NT, women have been infrequently taking to the Rugby pitch for over fifty years. Mostly inexperienced, but nonetheless enthusiastic women who enjoyed the game and a good time, played curtain raiser games to the men's fixtures. This 'tradition' was maintained in Australia until the 1990s while in England, Canada and the United States women were playing in organised competitions²¹⁶. Rugby clubs around Australia were soon to follow suit, but in some cases not without a struggle against the male dominated establishment.

By the end of the 1990-91 season there was still no Women's Rugby being played in the NT, but the numbers of interested females was on the increase. For the 1991-92 season, the University Pirates formed a women's team around Shelley Lingman and David Ellis as coaches, but as there were no other women's team to play, the ladies played matches against the Golden Oldies. After the due process of deliberation, and a reasonable amount of lobbying from various members of the Rugby fraternity, the NTRU decided to initiate a Women's Division into the Darwin competition for the 1992-93 season.

That season saw three Women's teams University, Palmerston and South Darwin form the first formal Women's Rugby competition in Australia²¹⁷. The Palmerston 'Sweethearts' ran out premiers that year defeating the University Pirettes 10 points to 7 thanks to a Gail Barlow penalty goal in extra time! Casuarina entered a team in the 1993-94 competition, with PINTS entering a team the following season and in 1994 the NTRU contested its first National Championships.



Palmerston Sweethearts – first ever NT Women's Division Premiers 1992-93. (G Barlow collection)

Women's Rugby in the NT and across Australia was on the move! Initially the women played under the rules of the Under 18s competition with restrictions being placed on crutch-binding and scrum movement. However, by 1995 the women were playing under the open rules of Rugby.

Women's representative Rugby commenced in Australia in 1992 with an interstate tournament which was, in effect, the humble beginnings of what has become a national sport in its own right²¹⁸. In 1994 the first National Championships in Australia were staged in Newcastle, NSW, at which the NT's Shelley Lingman officiated as an Australian selector. The NTRU Goannas competed, with David Ellis as Coach, and performed admirably finishing in fourth place overall²¹⁹. In 1994 Australian Women's Rugby went international by playing a New Zealand side for the first time with NTRU players Karla Clay, Angie Doidge and Kerry Davis being selected in the team.

²¹⁶ Manning, Rollo., 'History of Women's Rugby in the Northern Territory'. Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc. Souvenir Program: QANTAS Australia Day Country of Origin Australia V NZ 2001.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Forno, Joan., 'President's Message'. International Rugby Review: Australian Women's Rugby Championship: Souvenir Program. p3.

²¹⁹ Manning, Rollo., 'History of Women's Rugby in the Northern Territory'.



Australian representative players v New Zealand 1994. L – R: K. Clay, A Doidge, K Davis (NTRU Collection)

The initiative to host a Women's competition in Darwin was largely due to the efforts of Shelley Lingman, with later support from Gail Barlow, both of whom were keen to see women playing Rugby Union. The purpose of initiating a Women's competition was to bring the whole family into the game and to take the game further into the community. However, joining the competition and taking their place in the sport was not easy. As Shelley Lingman, who at that time was the National Women's Rugby team's assistant coach, said, 'We've had to fight to get into the sport but we've made it now'. She went on to say 'The NTRU is very supportive. It started as a real battle but attitudes have really changed. We don't get segregated from the men's competition and we help each other coach'²²⁰. The fight was worth it as the results showed with three NT ladies being selected to represent their country in the Australia versus New Zealand Test fixture in 1992.

Over the seven years the women have contested Rugby Union in the NT, the NTRU has contested every National Championship staged and has had considerable success. In 1994 the NT Women, with Gail Barlow as Captain and David Ellis as Coach, were placed third and in 1995 the NT won the National Championship which was staged in Canberra. Shelley Lingman coached the side and Angie Doidge captained the team to victory that year. Lingman coached the team again the next year with Barlow as Captain.

In 1997 Tim Watson took over the coaching duties for the next two tournaments with Shirley Russell being selected as Captain. In 1999 Kim Thurbon took the team to the Nationals in Perth, with Gail Barlow as Captain and in 2000 Tony Attwood won the coaching position, again with Barlow as Captain, to contest the tournament in Canberra. As a result of the NT's performances at the national level, the team has remained in the Division One category, a position that is rigorously defended at each and every tournament.

The NTRU has also had considerable success with respect to the number of players chosen to represent Australia. In 1994, Karla Clay, Angie Doidge and Kerry Davis represented Australia against New Zealand. In 1995 Gail Barlow, Naomi Roberts, Angie Doidge, Kerry Davis, Jody Collier and Vicki Botterell represented Australia, and in 1997 Melanie Goehr, Shirley Russell and Naomi Roberts also represented Australia.

²²⁰ Voss, Nikki., 'Don't try us ... we play rugby'., Northern Territory News, 13 December, 1991.



NTRU Women's Australian Representative players that toured NZ in 1995
(l-r) Gail Barlow, Vicki Botterall, Kerry Davis, Jody Collier, Shelley Lingman and Angie Doidge (G Barlow collection)

In July 1998, the NTRU hosted the National Women's Rugby Union Championships in Darwin. The NTRU Women's representative team, the Goannas, had previously won the National Championship and were confident of repeating the performance in front of their home-town supporters. Shelley Lingman, then President of the NTRU Women's Sub-Committee, welcomed the visitors to the 'HOTTEST' rugby in the world²²¹ and wished them a safe and successful tournament. Lingman, and NTRU President Dennis Bree, went onto to thank the small band of workers such as Maree Young, Bobby Barnett, Bill Davies, Tim Watson and the NTRU Women's Rugby Union Sub-Committee for their support and commitment²²².

In all, eight teams contested the Championships, representing Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, the Northern Territory and a side representing all of Australia's defence forces, the Australian Services Rugby Union²²³. The Championship fixtures were played at the NTRU's headquarters at Optus Rugby Park from 12-19th July.

1998 was a big year for Women's Rugby both in the NT and Australia. That was the year in which the Australian team won the World Cup of Women's Rugby in the Netherlands, with Shelley Lingman as the Assistant Coach and Naomi Roberts and Shirley Russell as players. It was also the year the NTRU Women's Sub-Committee launched the Women in Rugby calendar as a fundraiser and an awareness/recruiting activity. The cover of the calendar featured three stars of NT Women's Rugby Naomi Roberts, Shirley Russell and Shelley Lingman. The 1998-99 season was a big one for Naomi Roberts as well. In that season she was the NTRU's Women's Division leading points scorer, the NTRU Women's Rugby Best and Fairest player, as well as being the NTRU's leading try scorer²²⁴.

²²¹ Lingman, Shelley., 'President's Message'. Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc. National Women's Rugby Union Championship Souvenir Program. p5. July, 1994.

²²² Ibid. Also see Bree, Dennis. 'President's Message' in the same publication.

²²³ Ibid. p10.

²²⁴ Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc: 1998-99 XXXX Grand Final Souvenir Program. March 1999.



Shirley Russell (left) and Kerry Davis with the Women in Rugby calendar (NTRU Collection)

The calendar featured a host of classy photographs of the ladies in the gym, at the beach and at Rugby Park Darwin, but it was anything but sexy. Shelley Lingman said 'It's not sexy. We're showing the girls as fine sports-women with just a little bit of glamour thrown in'²²⁵. The calendar, that retailed at ten dollars, was a great success, and a lot of fun as well!

In year 2000, the 'Buccaneers Barbarians' were born. The 'Buccaneers' are a women's team put together to contest the inaugural Bangkok Women's Rugby Union 7's competition. The team was formed after an official invitation was received for a Darwin based team to participate in the competition. The team was made up mainly of University Pirates players, hence the Buccaneer title, with other Club players from across the NT being invited to participate which provided for a true Barbarian side. It was the first time NT women players had had the opportunity to travel overseas and compete in such a contest, and representatives from previous, and current, Aussie Gold 7's teams were members of the team.

The team, which included Australian 7's and XV's players Naomi Roberts and Libby Andrews and NT 'Goanna' representatives Mel Goehr, Danielle Chisolm, Maata Young, Nat Jellis, Michelle Gavin, Dahlia Seden, Donna McInnes and Tanchia Petaera left Darwin on the 26th October, 2000 to do battle in far off Thailand. The team was coached by former Australian representative player Shirley Russell and was managed by Megan Philpott and John Cooper. The team won the competition and are set to return next year to defend their title.

Since the inception of the Women's Division, the University ladies have been the most dominant of all of the competing clubs, winning three premiership pennants and being runners-up on two occasions. An enviable record indeed, and one of which the University Club is justifiably proud.

²²⁵ Voss, Nikki., 'Don't try us ... we play rugby'. Northern Territory News. 13 December, 1997.



University Pirettes Women's Division Premiers 1993-94

Back row l-r A Richardson, D Miller, L Kennett, M McArdle, R Franklin.

Middle Row l-r S Tompson, K Cavanagh, J Van Heerwaard, B Tompson, K Davis, L Karaitiana.

Front Row l-r K Clay, M Timms, S Lingman, K Richardson, N Rosas, A Drew.

With the 2000-01 season behind them, premiers Darwin Dragons and all other clubs look forward to the next season and the next on-field battle for season's honours. Season 200-01 has been a great success and more is promised for 2001-02! Women's Rugby is very much alive and well in the NT and going from strength to strength.

Gail Barlow sees the future as being bright for the Division, but cautions that much needs to be done at the national level to lift the player and skills base if Australia is to remain competitive at the international level. Gail and her Committee colleagues are aware that the future of Women's Rugby is in the development of juniors and schools female Rugby. As such, the focus over the next few years will be to develop that level of the game.

Darwin Women's Premiers

1993/94	Sweethearts	10	University Pirettes	7
1994/95	University	15	South Darwin	5
1995/96	Palmerston	18	South Darwin	0
1996/97	University	22	South Darwin	0
1997/98	University	10	Pints	7
1998/99	South Darwin	13	University	12
1999/00	Darwin Dragons	12	University	10
2000-01	Darwin Dragons	14	University	7

Women's Best and Fairest Player

1993/94		
1994/95		
1995/96	Nalita Turner	South Darwin
1996/97	Cyanne Mason	Pints
1997/98	Shirley Russell	University
1998/99	Naomi Roberts	Pints
1999/00	Sarah Gardiner	South Darwin
2000-01		

Women's Coach of the Year

1993/94		
1994/95		
1995/96	Shelley Lingman	University
1996/97	Tony Attwood	Pints
1997/98	Colin Snowdon	Litchfield
1998/99	Michael Greenall	Casuarina
1999/00	Tony Attwood	Pints
2000-01		

Australian Women's Division Representative Players

1994	Carla Clay Angie Doidge Kerry Davis
1995	Angie Doidge Kerry Davis Jodie Collier Naomi Roberts Gail Barlow Vicki Botterall
1996	Angie Doidge Kerry Davis Naomi Roberts Gail Barlow Vicki Botterall Melaine Goehr
1997	Melanie Goehr Shirley Russell Naomi Roberts

1998	Naomi Roberts Libby Andrews Shirley Russell Melanie Goehr
1999	Naomi Roberts Libby Andrews Sarah Gardiner 1999 Development Squad Carmen Butcher and Delhia Seden
2000	Naomi Roberts Libby Andrews Cyanne Mason

As a footnote to season 2000-01, Elizabeth (Libby) Andrews was transferred from Darwin to Alice Springs in her position as a NT Police Officer. As a result of the transfer Andrews has not been able to compete in any regular competition as no Women's competition exists in Alice Springs at this time. Andrews has called upon the NTIS to fund her playing schedule which allows her to travel to Darwin for club matches and to Sydney twice a month at the end of the NT season²²⁶.

Andrews is of the view that she may lose her place in the national team to play a Test series against England in May, 2001 unless she is seen to be competing on a regular basis and maintaining her skills and fitness levels. Andrews has requested \$20,000 travel allowance but NTIS Director Lindsay Ellis has ruled out the Institute meeting those costs. Only time will tell if Libby Andrews once again dons the Australian jersey and represents her country.

The next few years will be very important for Women's Rugby as the division continues to consolidate and work to attract new players. Gail Barlow sees the most important issues as the establishment and development of a Schoolgirls competition and ensuring the next generation of players are well catered for²²⁷. She says both the NTRU and the Women's Sub-Committee will need to work hard to achieve the goals – but they've done that before!

²²⁶ Maharaj, Rjiv., 'Aussie hooker fears axe over lack of NT funding'. Northern Territory News, Page 40, 30 January, 2001

²²⁷ Barlow, Gail., Personal interview. December, 2000.

Schools and Junior Rugby

Ask most sports fans what they consider to be the most important part of any sport or/and sporting code, club development and longevity, and the majority would answer juniors and junior development programs! Rugby Union administrators were of the same view from the very beginning, and placed much importance and emphasis on the juniors and their development.

Junior Rugby comes in two varieties in the NT as it does in most other Rugby playing communities. First there is Schools Rugby, where school aged children play in either an in-house (in school), or inter-school competition as part of the physical education and sport program. The age groups are also divided with junior schools being eight to ten and seniors schools eleven to twelve²²⁸. Then there is the out of school, or club, competition which is traditionally staged on Saturday mornings all over Australia – the NT being no exception!

Junior Rugby started in the NT by way of a school-based competition, and moved from there to a club/suburb based Saturday morning competition, with the transition taking place under one NT Rugby 'umbrella'. In 1979 NT Schools Rugby Union (NTSRU) was created with T Baczkowski being elected as President and Bernie Bree as Vice-President. Dr J.H. Eedle was Patron, P Malone Secretary. The Committee was made up of D Cooper, CYHansen, G LaForrest, M Ireland, R McAndrew, G Buckley, J Nichol, N Dondas and G Oates²²⁹.

In that same year the NT Schools Rugby selected a team to travel to Brisbane to contest the Australian Schoolboys Championship. The NT Schools Rugby Union had the honour of playing the first international match of Rugby in the NT when its representative side played the visiting Irish Schools in 1980. The match was played at Gardens Oval with the Irish running out winners 37 to nil. It was to be the first of many representative fixtures played by various NTSRU and then the NTS&JRU teams over the next twenty-one years.



NT Schools Rugby Union Team 1979

L-R: N Vrodos (Captain), M Lawler, D Hegarty, R Baban, L Papalii, B Tooy, D Galvin, S Christie, J Woodwood, K Howard, C Majid, M Raymond, M McAskill (obscured), T D'Arcy (Coach), R Cookes (obscured), D Craufurd. (NTRU Collection)

Times were tough in the early days in terms of funding, attracting players and sponsors and getting Rugby accepted and supported within the schools system and the community at large. So hard was it, that the NTSRU called upon the NTRU and the Rugby fraternity around Australia to lend a financial hand to the young Union. The NTRU responded by giving all it could, as did the Australian Capital Territory Rugby Union (ACTRU), the Western Australian Rugby Union (WARU) and the New South Wales Rugby Union (NSWRU), along with the NTRU Referees Association who provided Referees to officiate at all games in the 1980 season²³⁰.

As the NTRU had identified the development of the junior grades and the junior competition as a very important part of the overall Rugby development program, so too did the Executive of the NTSRU. In 1981, Br Floyd wrote

²²⁸ O'Mullane, Greg., 'President's Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1988.

²²⁹ Floyd, Br A., Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report - 1981

²³⁰ Ibid.

that the promotions in 1982 would be;

(a) To get coaches around to the six centres outside Darwin to coach in the local schools with the new coaching manual and audio-visuals as they become available

(b) A game played in Darwin against newly formed Queensland Country Schools. We hope this would become a regular fixture with us going to Queensland Country each other year.

(c) A promotion game played in Alice Springs between NT Schools and SA Schools.

(d) To have one of our School Coaches attend a Coaching School in Brisbane and to have a Coaching Camp in Darwin with coach from Down South (sic) for our NT Schoolboys Squad²³¹.

It was a big ask, a tall order one might say, but those involved put their minds and energy to it and much of it came to fruition. It was indeed the beginning of junior Rugby development in the NT and it was to pay handsome dividends in the years to come²³².

In 1980, Dr Eedle and Br Floyd worked toward organising a group of local businessmen to assist with fund-raising. In that same year, the NTSRU rated a mention in the Australian Schools Rugby Union Handbook and then Minister for Sport and Recreation, Nick Dondas, organised a function at which the books were presented to each of the 1980 NT Schoolboys' representative players. On that auspicious occasion, the then NT Administrator and Patron of the NTRU, Eric Johnston OA., OBE., and the Honourable Minister Nick Dondas were both on hand to present the year books²³³. It was an amazing year and the start of an amazing history.

In 1980 the NTSRU First XV returned from the National Championships victorious over South Australia and Western Australia, but the following year in Melbourne, the Territorians didn't fare so well. However, they did finish the Championships with a 10-nil win against South Australia and had two players, John Kefelianos and Peter Seden selected to represent in the Australian 2nd Division side²³⁴. It was the first time a Rugby player from the NT had been so honoured.

PHOTO OF THE 1980 TEAM – SEE O'MULLANE

1982 saw the introduction of Mini-Rugby under the guiding hand of Bruce Kennon, along with the first NTSRU 'State' Championships from which representative teams were selected. 1983 saw the senior clubs beginning to organise their teams for and under age competition, an Under 21s side was selected and played a number of games against senior club sides and an Under 16's competition was 'gradually being developed'²³⁵. In that year Kelvin Costello, Leslie Grant and Thomas Petterson won selection in the Australian Division Two squad²³⁶.

In 1983 the Junior competition was introduced by having various school teams nominate as Clubs. Since that time the Association has been known as the NT Schools and Junior Rugby Union (NTS&JRU). Over the next eighteen-years, the NTRU and the NTS&JRU worked (mostly) in conjunction and cooperation to take Rugby to the schools and the community. Along the way, the NT has been represented at the National Championships every year and hosted their first National Schools Championship in Darwin in 1984²³⁷. It was in 1984 that David Ross was the first NT player to be selected in an Australian Division One squad when the Under 16's 'toured' for the second time taking out the 'Most Improved Team' trophy at the National Schools Championships in Hobart. From that tournament, the NT also had John Aland, Ben Blyghton, Kelvin Costello, Ian Ford, Stuart McGill, Lesley Grant and Kim Hill, selected in the Australian Schools Division Two team²³⁸.

1985 saw twenty-three ex-schools players enter the senior sides, with several of them making their mark almost immediately. Among the most notables were John Aland and David Evans who joined the Casuarina Club and played their part in taking that club to its fifth consecutive premiership. Both were selected in the NT side that played the visiting Canadians that same year, David Evans receiving the 'Man-of-the-Match' award for his efforts in that game²³⁹.

1986 saw the NT Government's Department of Youth Sport and Recreation set up the Coach-in-Residence scheme. Bruce Kennon was appointed to the Rugby position and Greg O'Mullane took over as President of the NTS&JRU²⁴⁰. The NTS&JRU finished the representative year with Glen Boath, Damien Hale and Darren

¹⁶⁰ Floyd, Br A., Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report -1981

²³² Floyd, Br Alan., 'President's Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1980.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Floyd, Br Alan., Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1983.

²³⁶ Snowdon, Warren., 'Coaches Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union Annual Report – 1983.

²³⁷ Snowdon, Warren., 'Coaches Report' Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report - 1983

²³⁸ Kennon, Bruce., 'President's Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1984.

²³⁹ Kennon, Bruce., 'President's Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1985.

²⁴⁰ O'Mullane, Greg., 'President's Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1986.

Flanagan being selected in the Australian Division Two team²⁴¹.

The NTS&JRU, like all sporting codes and associations, had its share of 'ups and downs' over the years. For example, in 1985-86, changes to the NT education system, by way of the introduction of Senior and Junior High School system had a detrimental effect on the Darwin Schools competition²⁴², while falling player numbers in 1988 resulted in reduced team nominations for the Under 13 and Under 16 Territory Titles²⁴³. 1987 saw the establishment of a 'coordination Committee' for the junior competition with Des Bredhauer at its head with Robyn and Alan Ratahi, Tony and Pam Ayers and Margaret Moody serving as Committee members. The 'Committee' was created in order to assist with the administration and development of the Juniors, a role which, until that time, was the sole responsibility of the NTRU's Development Officer. Bredhauer was to remain involved in the Coordination Committee for seven years and was to represent the NT as the Under 16s Manager from 1987 to 1994! The Committee contributed a significant amount of time and energy which had positive outcomes in terms of development and participant numbers.

The NT won the Australian Division Two title in 1989 and had eleven players selected in the Australian Division Two team. It was an amazing effort given the team as forced to travel to the tournament by bus due to a plane strike at the time. The team spent three days on the bus going to the tournament, played six days of Rugby and then another three day bus trip get home! In 1994 the NT won the title again and had five of its players selected for the 1995 tour of Japan.

1989 saw the introduction of a program whereby the NT Schools accepted touring teams into Darwin around July/August in order to provide much needed match practice for the coming NT Championships. Bruce Kennon co-ordinated the tours with the first team to visit being the Brisbane State High School. Since then there have been visits by fifteen international teams mainly from England, Scotland and Wales. However, 1990 was another difficult year for the NTS&JRU with several clubs suffering falling numbers after the Christmas break, which resulted in their withdrawing from the competition. This in turn brought about a premature finish to the season in all age groups²⁴⁴.

The situation however, was not all doom and gloom. 1991 saw a schools team from Singapore visit Darwin in June to contest the Under 16's Northern Territory Championships and the NTS&JRU Under 14's travelling to Singapore for a ten-day, four-game tour. The boys won three of their games and stimulated a great deal of interest both in Singapore and back home in Darwin²⁴⁵. 1991 also saw the Oundle Schools visit Darwin for a one-game 'tour'. This was a particularly good year for the Juniors, as it was in 1991 that the NTRU first provided financial support to the NTS&JRU by way of allocating grants to each of the junior representative teams.

And so it went, with the NTS&JRU taking every opportunity to promote and develop the game across the NT, as well as beyond our borders and shores. Greg O'Mullane, a teacher in the Catholic schools system, was to remain President of the NTS&JRU from 1986 to the present during which period he helped steer the organisation through troubled times and much development. Along with other Rugby devotees such as David Ley, Bernie Bree, Shaun Killiner, Roger Rudduck, Garry Harper, Des Bredhauer, Paul Toohey and a legion of club delegates and supporters, O'Mullane continued to strive for increased player numbers and additional support from the NT Government, the NTRU and sponsors. The financial support was vital in order to defray the costs of sending representative teams to interstate tournaments. The task never diminished, but neither did O'Mullane's resolve to meet it and beat it! In year 2000, Greg O'Mullane was awarded the Australian Sports Medal in recognition of his services to Rugby Union in the NT.

In 1997 the NT Schools Rugby Union was asked by the Australian Schools Rugby Union to host the visiting English Schoolboys team. This was done and the English team members enjoyed themselves so much that they spent more time in the NT than any other venue on the tour itinerary! All of this development and success costs money of course, and fortunately local company Nortruss answered the call for assistance by sponsoring the NT Schools for all visiting teams. This generous assistance has been one of the main reasons this program has been so successful.

The NTS&JRU, in conjunction with the NTRU, again hosted the Under 16's National Championships in Darwin. In the same year the Under 12 and Under 14 NT teams travelled to Melbourne to contest the Griff Hunt Carnival. The Under 12s were to win their Division undefeated, creating history in doing so as no other NT Junior team had finished a carnival with an unblemished winning record. The team rattled up some impressive victories along the way by beating Victoria 64 – nil and South Australia 20 – nil²⁴⁶. The Under 14s did not fare as well as their junior colleagues however they did acquit themselves admirably.

²⁴¹ O'Mullane, Greg., 'President's Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1987.

²⁴² Kennon, Bruce., 'President's Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1985.

²⁴³ O'Mullane, Greg., 'President's Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1988.

²⁴⁴ O'Mullane, Greg., 'President's Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1990.

²⁴⁵ O'Mullane, Greg., 'President's Report'. Northern Territory Schools and Junior Rugby Union: Annual Report – 1991.

²⁴⁶ 'Junior rugby side comes home victorious', Darwin/Palmerston Suburban, 18th June, 1998.



Territory U/12 & U/14 teams with Alan Bartlett, Daniel Lewis & Michael Greenall, Melbourne 1998 (The Darwin/PalmerstonSuburban 16/8/1998)

In 1998 the NT Schools effectively split from the Junior Rugby Union, however both organisations continued to operate under the combined. In 1999 the Under 14s 'Scorpions' toured Thailand returning home undefeated after four games.



NT U14 "Scorpions" – 1999 Thailand Touring Team

Standing L-R: A Bartlett (Coach), P Raymond, D Eagan, R Fejo, W Couzens, M Sharrock, N Lee (Cptn), S McKenna-Greaves, B Bader, M George, I Lewis, M Parlett, M Istitini, H Couzens (Manager), J Warnecke (Trainer). Middle Row: C Smith, A Davies, T Smith, C Blasch, G Tobin. Front Row: J Madden, D Whitehurst, P Simpson, N Gribben.

After nearly twenty-years of combined effort and development, both organisations will operate under their individual identity from the commencement of the 2001-02 season. Regardless of the administrative arrangements, past present and future, the history of Schools and Junior Rugby Union in the NT is a history in its own right, and, as previously mentioned in this work, it needs to be researched and presented in its own right! The key players in that early and lasting development include Br Floyd, Dr Eedle, Paul Toohey, Bruce Kennon (ASM), Greg O'Mullane (ASM), Warren Snowdon (MP., ASM), Terry Burkett, Garry Harper and Roger Rudduck (ASM) in 'the Alice'. Without these people it is arguable that Schools and Junior Rugby in the NT would not be what it is today. In later years, tireless workers like Bernie Bree, Des Bredhauer, David Ley, Shaun Killener and Maureen Greenup (ASM) have continued the hard work.

The people involved in the establishment, development and management of Junior Rugby Union in the NT deserve all of the accolades that have and should be showered upon them. Their story and their history needs to be recorded in detail and told. It is hoped that one day in the very near future the history of this Division of Rugby will be written. The challenge is there for someone to take up and record what is truly a major part of the overall history of 'Rah-Rah in the Never-Never'.



Golden Oldies Rugby



Darwin Stubbies RUFC

Golden Oldies (over thirty-five years) Rugby burst upon the playing fields and in cities and towns around the world in 1979, when nineteen teams attended the first festival in Auckland, New Zealand²⁴⁷. The Golden Oldies Festival was designed to allow Rugby players of all ages and ability to continue their playing 'career' well after their days of serious competition had come to a close. The minimum age of contestants was set at thirty-five years and a system of colour coded shorts allowed for those players well into their later years to continue to compete with minimum risk of injury.

The system was quite simple, yet very effective. Those players thirty-five to forty years wear club shorts, forty to fifty white shorts, fifty to sixty black, red for sixty to seventy year olds, gold for seventy to eighty and purple for those above eighty. The wearing of red shorts is not compulsory and anyone wearing the gold, purple or special coloured shorts can have their progress halted with minimal force but are not to be tackled.

The concept of Golden Oldies Rugby was, and still is, about playing Rugby, meeting new and old friends and having fun! Any seriousness or breaches of the 'code of conduct', on or off the field, is dealt with harshly, as is witnessed in the photograph below!

Darwin Stubbies' Sergeant-at-Arms Terry (Macca) McMahon and wrongdoer Peter (Pedro) Burgess in the stocks at Twickenham, 1985. (Author's Collection)

In order to consider the case/s and to decide upon appropriate punishment the 'court' (kangaroo some would say) deems suits the 'crime', the Stubbies have their own Sergeant-at-Arms in the form of one Terrence Michael (Macca) McMahon, late of Darwin now resident of Brisbane, Queensland. It is Macca's sworn duty to have the villain face the 'court' and to enter a plea, which more often than not is not heard or taken into consideration. Fortunately, the 'court' is generally quite merciful in considering its verdict, and most offenders are found guilty and fined accordingly (ie; a donation to charity or a round of drinks).

The second Golden Oldies Rugby Festival was staged in Long Beach, California with forty-six teams from eleven countries participating²⁴⁸. In August 1982, friends and Rugby enthusiasts Dick Norris, Matti Urvett, Ian Hedger, Terry (the Ferrett) Annersley, Dave Cooper and Alistair Heatley decided to organise a Darwin based team to participate in the Sydney Festival. In July 1983, armed with copious amounts of amber fluid in the shape of the world famous Darwin stubby, an equal amount of good cheer and 'devil may care' attitude, along with a fair amount of Rugby ability, the first NT contingent to enter the Festival arrived in Sydney.

²⁴⁷ Gleeson, Paul., 'Tom Takes A Punt'. The 1983 International Golden Oldies Rugby Festival: Souvenir Program, p 3.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p 3.



Darwin Stubbies – Sydney Festival 1983. (K. Sargent collection)

**Back Row (l-r) L Powierza, Tony Hooper, N Torkington, D McAdam, A Heatley, C Clements, W Caldwell, M Kelly
Middle Row (l-r) G Oats, R Broadley, B Edwards, W Adams, M Urvett, P Wood, K Sargent, G Gard, W Hill, R Coombs
Bottom Row (l-r) T Annersley, I Hedger, D Norris, P Burgess, N Dondas, P Goodwin, B Townsend, T Badkowski, A Beasley, G Buckley**

The Darwin Stubbies hit Sydney like a cyclone from the far north. They played hard, partied hard, made wonderful friends, and attracted some very nice supporters. They enjoyed themselves so much that they have contested every festival held since that time.



Ian (Bense) Hedger (left) and Geoff Gard with a Golden Oldies supporter – Sydney, 1983. (K Sargent Collection)

Their travels in search of the Rugby holy grail and eternal playing life has seen them pack their sports bags every two years and head off to the Festival. In 1985, the Stubbies left Australia for the first time to compete internationally in the London festival, and had the privilege to play on the carpark oval at Twickenham - and a carpark it was! The 'tour' was an outstanding success and many tales (true and tall) continue to do the rounds even today.



Darwin Stubbies at Twickenham, London 1985.

Back row (l-r) A Beasley, W Caldwell, K Potter, D McAdam, D Gallagher, G Gard, I Duggy, D Reid, R Broadley, I Conole, D DeClifford, J Farrell, A Heatley, P Evans, M Urvett, T McMahon, T Hooper
Middle Row (l-r) P Wood, C Clements, D Norris, I Hedger, N Cramp, G Good, B Ingraham, L Poweska
Front Row (l-r) P Burgess, K Sargent, R Watters, B Dowie. (Author's collection)

Since 1983, the Golden Oldies philosophy has been spread widely around the world and across the NT. The likes of Richard (Dick) Norris, Tony (Hoops) Hooper of refereeing fame, Matti Urvet and Co have been instrumental in developing and maintaining the Oldies 'competition', and ensuring the tradition lives on. The original Stubbies headquarters was located in the Saloon Bar of the Marrara Hotel, which was managed in the 1980s by Ron Coombes. Coombes was a great supporter of Golden Oldies Rugby, and gave freely and generously of his time, his business property and often some of the business product, to assist the Stubbies. In 1985, Coombes lent considerable support to the Stubbies request to the NT Brewery for a sponsorship-in-kind to assist with the London campaign. After much discussion, the Carlton United Brewery gave the Stubbies twenty-four cartons (one hundred and forty four bottles) of the giant beer bottles to take to London, and QANTAS, generously flew the prized possessions to England - free of charge!

Following their first international 'outing', their travels have taken them to Sydney, Australia London, England in 1985, Auckland, New Zealand Toronto Canada in 1989, Perth, Dublin Ireland in 1993, Christchurch New Zealand in 95, Vancouver, Canada and then Adelaide, Australia in 1999. The bags are being packed again in 2001 when the Stubbies will invade Toulouse in Southern France to once again take part. There has only been one Festival the Darwin Stubbies have not attended, that being Capetown South Africa in 1998. The owner/organisers of the Festival moved to host the games on an annual basis but the Stubbies opted to attend the Festival on a two yearly basis.

From its humble beginnings in 1983, the NT Golden Oldies 'chapter' has grown from one team/club, the Darwin Stubbies, to eight teams in 2001. At the time of writing, the Stubbies, Casuarina Straycats, Palmerston Old Salties and the Litchfield Docile Dogs clubs were active in Darwin, the Bauxite Derelicts active in Gove, the Old Crocs in Katherine, the Dingoes in Alice and the Kakadu Fossils in Jabiru. The Gove Challenge (Darwin Stubbies verse Bauxite Derelicts) takes place every year with the Darwin Stubbies making the long, hard, thirsty trip to Gove. Over the years some Golden Oldies teams have sadly passed in history mainly due to the lack of player numbers to support the emerging clubs. Clubs such as the Bayside Vintage Reds, the South Darwin Faded Greens and the Old Galahs no longer take the field in their on right. Regardless, many of the old faces can be seen huffing and puffing their way around the paddock on any occasion the Oldies get together.

The Stubbies are in (inn?) training for the trip to France. Fund raising has commenced and firm plans have been set in terms of the pre-festival tour. Positions on the tour are keenly sought after, and a rigorous selection criteria has been imposed. To be successful, a tour 'hopeful' must demonstrate all of the finest qualities of the Golden Oldies Rugby player. Play the game to enjoy it, no winners – no losers, travel, meet people and arguably most importantly, have a good time within the Rugby fraternity.

As the Golden Oldie's say 'Long live Rugby – the game they play in heaven'.



Cartoon from the Golden Oldies Festival Souvenir Program - Sydney 1983
(K. Sargent collection)

Other Luminaries

The growth and development of Rugby in the NT would not have been what it is without the efforts and unselfishness of countless people who have contributed so much of their time, energy, skills and knowledge to the cause. A separate history could be written about such people from both the club and corporate level and perhaps in the future it will be, as the volunteers need to be acknowledged and thanked.

The list of such people would be almost endless, however, there needs to be some acknowledgment albeit at the risk of leaving some very noteworthy persons out! In year 2000, the Queen of Australia approved the awarding of a sports medal (the Australian Sports Medal - ASM) in recognition of those people who had given so freely of their time and expertise to their chosen sport. In December, 2000 fourteen people associated with Rugby in the NT, including most of the Founding Fathers, were awarded the medal. Others who had contributed significantly, such as Dr Chris Wake, did not receive the medal but nonetheless their efforts are appreciated and need to be recognised. Numerous efforts were made to arrange an interview with Dr Wake in order to record his recollections of NT Rugby's history, unfortunately his medical practice and other interests in both Darwin and Alice Springs precluded this and as such his story has not been told to date.

The recipients of the medal other than the Founding Fathers were; Jeff Fraser, Maureen Greenup, Digby Hart, Brett Martell, Greg O'Mullane, Alan Ratahi, Colin Snowden, Naomi Roberts, and Craig Leach. These people were awarded the medal for their services to Rugby in the NT in various aspects of the game. For example, Digby Hart and Jeff Fraser participated over a twenty-year period as players, administrators and Referees while Naomi Roberts, Colin Snowden and Craig Leach were outstanding in their contribution as players. Maureen Greenup was awarded the ASM for her services to Junior Rugby Union while Brett Martell was recognised for his contribution to the Litchfield RUFC.

The brief biographies below acknowledge some of the 'Other Luminaries', although not all medal recipients, who have been associated with NT Rugby over the past twenty-four years and who have contributed so much to the sport. Of particular note is the differences in backgrounds and professions of those involved in the game and in some ways the overview highlights some of the differences between Rugby in the NT and other places in Australia and around the world. That is to say that Rugby in the NT is and always has been a 'working persons' sport rather than the domain of the University or College set.

Doctor Alistair Heatley

Dr Alistair Heatley was a native of New Zealand's South Island having been born in Christchurch in 1939. He was educated at Christchurch High School before attending the University of Canterbury from which he graduated with a Degree in Political Science. Alistair travelled to Canada to complete his Doctoral studies, graduating as a Reader in Politics.

According to Tony Hooper who grew up with Alistair and refereed with him in Darwin many years later, Alistair was a talented player (hooker) in his youth and represented the University of Canterbury and the Canterbury Province before first blowing a Rugby whistle in Fiji in 1967²⁴⁹. Alistair arrived in Darwin in 1975 to take up a position as Senior Lecturer in Political Science at the then Darwin Institute of Technology (DIT), the forerunner of the NTU. He quickly became involved in the fledgling Rugby Union, and along with Tony Watson-Browne formed the NTRU Referees Association. He officiated at the first pre-season games as well as throughout the first 'formal' competition.

Alistair was to become one of the leading Rugby referees and contributed an enormous amount of time and energy in developing refereeing skills and numbers across the NT. He represented the Referees Association for many years on the NTRU Committee and was instrumental in gaining support for NT referees to participate in overseas tournaments such as the Singapore 7s.

Alistair was a Rugby man through and through and was focussed on the development of the game and protection of the participants through the correct application of rules of the game. He had the ability to control the most fearsome of players and have them as 'putty in his hands' as Dennis Bree once said! He officiated over numerous Grand Finals in Darwin and several international fixtures during his fourteen-year involvement at the senior level.

In acknowledgment of his contribution and commitment to Rugby over that period, Dr Heatley was admitted as the first life-member of the NTRU Referees Association in 1990.

Sadly, Alistair Heatley, Rugby fanatic and Academic, passed away in Darwin in November 2000 after a short

²⁴⁹ Hooper, Tony., Personal interview. January, 2001.

battle with cancer.

Bruce Kennon A.S.M.

Bruce Kennon was born in Darwin, NT in 1951 and was educated at the Brisbane Boys College (BBC). He was chosen to play in the First VX in 1969 and has vivid memories of a very short season mainly due to the fact that he broke his leg!

He moved to Townsville to continue his studies at the Townsville Teachers College (now part of the James Cook University) and in 1971 was a founding member of the Teachers Rugby Club (now known as Teachers -West). Whilst in North Queensland, Bruce represented Townsville District Rugby Union (TDRU) going onto to represent Queensland Country (QCRU) from 1972 to 1981. With QCRU he played international matches against Japan, England, France, New Zealand and Fiji and Captained a QCRU side to New Zealand's South Island in 1980.

He represented Queensland Rugby Union (QRU) in an undefeated tour of New Zealand's North Island in 1980, and toured Europe with QRU in the same year. In 1980, he was a playing member of the Queensland side to defeat the NZ All Blacks 9 points to 3 in Brisbane.

In 1982, after representing the QRU on nine occasions, Bruce returned to Darwin and took up a teaching position at Moil Primary School. He was approached by Dennis (Slim) McLoughlin to play for the Casuarina Cougars which he did, and helped them win four Grand Finals. In 1983 he Captained the Casuarina Cougars to victory in the Singapore Seven's competition. That team is the only team in the history of the competition to have gone through the competition without conceding a single point! Bruce played all of his NT career with Casuarina as well being an Assistant Coach and administrator with the Club. He was also the first NTRU Coach-in-Residence, Development Officer and Executive Officer. He was President of the NT Schools and Junior Rugby Union and is largely credited with taking Rugby to the schools of Darwin and the NT.

In 1989 Bruce formed the Casuarina Straycats, an Over Thirty-Five's team, to participate in the Golden Oldies movement. In 2001 he is the President of that august body of Rugby players and takes to the field as a player whenever the opportunity presents. In 1994 he established the 'Friends of Rugby', which is a group of local businessmen whose charter it is to present at least one major Rugby match in the Top End each year. The Friends of Rugby remain active in 2001 and are currently planning their next invitation match.

These days, Bruce owns and operates the highly successful Rugby Shop in Darwin's Mitchell Street tourist precinct. He is still involved in Rugby as a sponsor, supporter and adviser to his Club. In 1997 he was made a life-member of the Cougars for his services to Casuarina Rugby Club²⁵⁰.

In year 2000, Bruce Kennon was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his services to Rugby Union in the NT.

Roger Rudduck A.S.M.

Roger Rudduck was born in Geraldton, Western Australia in 1951 where he was educated through the public school system. He had a passion for flying at a very young age and earned his commercial pilot's wings as soon as he left school. He flew charter flights in Western Australia before applying for a position as pilot with the NT Police force in 1979. He was successful in his application and moved to Darwin that year.

On arriving in Darwin, Roger signed up with the Casuarina Rugby Club and was a member of that Club's first ever premiership side, a Second Grade side, in the 1979-80 season. He went onto be a member of Casuarina's First Grade premiership sides in the early 1980s, playing alongside John Connelly, Bruce Kennon, Danny Panapa, Kevin Collins and company. One of Roger's most vivid memories of those heady days was his scoring the winning try against Souths at St Mary's Oval in 1983.

Roger was transferred to Alice Springs with the NT Police in late 1984 and immediately set about organising a game of Rugby. With the help of Dennis Bree, Peter Dean, Paul Brann and Laqui Papalii, Roger organised the first games of Rugby in the centre. In order to get the game started, Roger spent \$4000 of his own money to purchase playing jerseys to outfit the teams. Later, he also paid out of his own pocket to have the Verdi Oval top soiled, and contributed significantly to various Alice Springs representative sides.

Roger developed and steered Rugby in the red centre until 1991 when he was posted back to Darwin. During that eight-year period, he was involved in every aspect of the game. He was the President, a player, an administrator, a Referee, groundsman, barman, adjudicator, developer and advocate for the game. He was indeed the founding Father of Rugby in the Alice and his efforts to nurture and develop the game knew no boundaries.

²⁵⁰ Kennon, Bruce., Personal interview. November, 2000.

Roger recalls the highlight of his career and involvement in Rugby as being the Manager of the Casuarina Cougars team that contested and won the Singapore 7s competition in 1983. He managed the team again in 1984 and 1985. Another highlight was being the President of the Australian Junior Rugby Union for two years, 1994 to 1996. As well as that, he managed the Australian Under 16s and Under 17s teams from 1991 to 1995 during which time both teams toured New Zealand and achieved great success²⁵¹.

In 1992, he returned to Alice to fly for the NT Police Force, and immediately became involved in Rugby. He once again commenced playing, joined the Committee, and volunteered to carry out all and any task in order to assist.

Roger was made a life-member of the Misfits club (known now as the Eagles) in 1990 and in 2000 was awarded the ASM. After seventeen years, Roger still takes to the paddock every Saturday to play the game he loves, and has given so much to.

Jeff Tubbenhauer

Jeff Tubbenhauer was born into a Rugby Union family in Gosford, NSW in 1951. He played most of his Rugby in country NSW before moving to Adelaide to further his career as a radio and television technician.

While in Adelaide, he represented South Australia in the curtain-raiser to the Australian 'Wallabies' versus South African 'Springboks' game in 1972. He commenced refereeing in Adelaide in 1980 and moved to the NT in 1984 where he continued his involvement with Rugby. Jeff responded to an advertisement in the Centralian Advocate calling for people interested in playing/organising Rugby to meet at Traeger Park. It was the beginning of a ten-year association with Rugby in the red centre.

Jeff and fellow Referee Joe Schooner formed the Central Australian Rugby Union Referees Association with Jeff as the President, Joe as the Vice-President and Jeff as the Secretary-Treasurer. They were the only two qualified Referees in Alice Springs at that time and controlled one game each every Saturday of each season for eight years. Geoff assisted Roger Rudduck to mark the fields, run the bar, adjudicate at tribunals and coach Referees. He was the CARU's speaker on the ABC's Saturday morning sport show for many years, before being 'sacked' (as he puts it) for his critical comments regarding the NTRU's selection process and the poor quality of representative coaches.

In 1988, he travelled to Singapore with refereeing colleagues and friends Tony Duffy and Tony Hooper to represent Australia and the NT at the Singapore 7s competition. He was the CARU President from 1990 to 1992, coached the Federal Devils team to a Grand Final berth in 1992. However, he was sacked as coach of that team following his out-spoken remarks about the quality of his friend Joe Schooner's refereeing on Grand Final day! He was also Manager and Assistant Coach of the Alice Springs representative side that won the NT Championships in 1991/92. Jeff continued to referee until 1994 when he stepped aside in some controversy.

Jeff Tubbenhauer was, by his own admission, a controversial character during his period of involvement with Rugby in the NT. Nonetheless, he made a significant contribution to the game and its development over the ten years in which he was involved²⁵².

Jeffery Fraser A.S.M.

Jeff Fraser was born in Dunedin in New Zealand's South Island in 1950. He grew up and was educated in the nearby town of Alexandria where he attended the Dunstan High School. He undertook a Degree in Science at the Otago University but the love of swimming and travelling took over and he 'dropped out' to go in search of fun and adventure.

He spent two years in Invercargill where he played his first grade Rugby with the Old Boys Rugby club. In 1974 he travelled to Australia arriving in Darwin via Adelaide. He secured a position with the Commonwealth Government and was in Darwin when Cyclone Tracy struck. He was evacuated to Brisbane where he remained until September 1977 when he returned to Darwin with other Departmental employees.

He commenced playing Rugby with the South Darwin 'Rabbitohs' in 1978 mainly through the lobbying of work mates Neil White and Grant Harrington. He started his career in the lower grades but soon earned a promotion to Souths First Grade team. Jeff played all of his career with Souths and was a member of the South Darwin Committee almost from the beginning of his association with the club.

He was a member of the NTRU Committee for many years and played a leading role in organising, establishing and developing the Souths Global Rugby 7s competition in 1988. He was instrumental in organising the Souths

²⁵¹ Rudduck, Roger., Personal interview. 5th November, 2000.

²⁵² Tubbenhauer, Geoff., Personal interview. 5th November, 2000.

tours to Singapore, Brunei, Sarawak and Malaysia over the years. Jeff says he lost count of the trips Souths undertook but recalled he participated in four of them and considers them to be among the highlights of his career. Another high point was his being selected in the Darwin team for the Casuarina Invitation game. He played alongside the Ella Brothers Mark and Glen and had the horrifying experience of having to tackle Mark Loane head-on! He survived but he thinks Loane 'took pity' on him and took the tackle in a manner suiting the circumstances.

In 1988 Jeff was 'playing pretty ordinary Rugby' as he put it and was on the look out for that elusive good game. One Saturday afternoon that season, Referee boss Tony Duffy approached the teams to advise there was no Referee for their game and that each team would have to provide a Referee to do a half each. Jeff thought he'd give it a go, and do his mates a favour seeing he wasn't playing very well, and from that moment on, he has been involved in the game as a Referee and administrator. Since that time, he has been promoted through the refereeing ranks to the senior grades with the high point being his appointment to the centre for the Friends of Rugby versus Brisbane Brothers match. He is currently the President of the Referees Association.

Jeff has been involved in Rugby for twenty-three years and has performed every task from playing, marking fields, fundraising, working the bar, refereeing, administering but mainly, according to him, having a good time. In year 2000 Jeff was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for having such a good time²⁵³.

Greg O'Mullane ASM

Greg O'Mullane was born in Sydney NSW in 1957 and was educated at Christian Brothers School in Lewisham before entering the University of NSW (UNSW). While living in and studying in Sydney, Greg played for Canterbury-Bankstown in the Division Two competition, however, he was forced to leave his playing career behind him as a result of a serious injury (not Rugby related) that he sustained in 1987.

He graduated from UNSW in 1980 with a Bachelors Degree and a Graduate Diploma in Teaching but found it hard to find employment in his chosen profession. As such he decided upon a twelve-month overseas trip but first found himself in Darwin having won a teaching position at St John's College. It was at the College in 1980 that he met Paul Toohey and Mark Ireland who at that time were playing for Casuarina Club. It was through that meeting and friendship that evolved that became involved in Schools and Junior Rugby Union.

He commenced coaching St John's College juniors that same year and joined the Schools Rugby Union Committee to assist in organising the games against the Irish Schoolboys. He travelled overseas in 1981 returning to Darwin married in 1982 where he once again took a Teaching position at St John's College. In that same year he became the Secretary of the Schools Rugby Union and has remained as part of the administration of Schools and Junior Rugby ever since. He was instrumental in establishing the Juniors competition in 1983 by way of introducing school based teams to clubs and was elected to the Australian Schools RUF Council in that same year. He was also a leading light in organising the Under 16s National Championships that were held in Darwin in 1984 and 1993. He is currently involved in organising the Championship to be staged in Darwin in 2001.

From 1983 to 1985 he managed the NT Schoolboys representative teams and in 1986, 1988 and 1989 was Coach of the NT Under 16s team. It was during this period that the Casuarina Secondary College was established which placed a severe strain on the balance of playing talent across Darwin schools. The majority of local talent was located at Casuarina College and as such beating them in the 1987 Grand Final remains one of Greg's fondest memories! However the highest point in his twenty-one year involvement in Schools and Junior Rugby came in 1989 when the NT Under 16s won the Division Two National Championship under his coaching.

Greg was Team Manager of the Australian Division Two side from 1985 to 1988 during which period the team played both NZ and Ireland. Although the team was defeated on both occasions (38-12 to NZ and 19-16 to Ireland) the game against the Irish is another of Greg's favourite memories as the game 'went to the wire' and was only lost in the last minutes!

In 1986 Greg was elected President of NT Schools and Junior Rugby Union (NTS&JRU), a position he still holds in 2001. Greg is justifiably proud of the excellent reputation the NT has gained in Schools and Junior Rugby over the years and very quickly acknowledges the hard work and commitment of all involved in achieving this²⁵⁴.

In year 2000 Greg was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his services to Schools and Junior Rugby Union.

Gail Barlow

Gail Barlow, now the mother of two boys, was born into a Rugby family in the New Zealand (NZ) North Island town

²⁵³ Fraser, Jeff., Personal interview. 31st January, 2001.

²⁵⁴ O'Mullane, Greg., Personal interview. 16th March, 2001.

of Te-Awamutu in 1963. She was the fourth of nine children, five of them Rugby playing boys.

Gail was educated through the public school system and Technical College in Te-Awamutu from where she graduated as a Chef. In 1986 she travelled to Australia for the first time and in 1987 found herself in Katherine, NT on a contract project. She returned to NZ, was married and returned to the NT, this time to Darwin, in 1991. Her involvement with Women's Rugby in the NT started shortly thereafter and has not stopped since!

Along with Shelley Lingman, Gail fought hard to establish Women's Rugby in the NT, and was instrumental in developing the Division. Not only was she involved in establishing and developing Women's Rugby, she was leading from the front in terms of commitment, skills and endurance – in more ways than one! Gail started her career as a player/coach for Palmerston in the 93-94 season and stayed with the Crocs until moving to South Darwin in 1997.

Along the way, she represented the NTRU as Captain on five separate occasions, and played for Australia against her native country NZ in NZ in 1995, and in Australia in 1996. She became involved in junior development in 1996 and remains involved in 2001.

Gail played a leading role in recruiting players, forming teams and spreading the word about Women's Rugby and the place of women in the game. She involved herself in the management of Rugby in the NT by being elected to the management Committee in 1994, a position she still holds in 2001. Without her efforts, and those that rallied around her and Shelley Lingman, and commitment to the cause, the development of Women's Rugby could have been quite different to that upon which we reflect.

Gail, who has lectured at the NT University and now runs her own contract cleaning business, retired from representative Rugby in 2000 after the National Championships. However, she was appointed to the position of NTRU Women's Coach in 2001 and also remains active in recruiting, organising, and promoting women's Rugby across the NT²⁵⁵.

David (Digby) Hart ASM

David Hart was born in January 1953 in Portsmouth, England - the home of the British Fleet. He migrated to Australia in 1964 to meet his sister who was living in Darwin. He was educated in the NT's Public School system graduating from Darwin High School in 1972. To begin a career with the NT Public Service.

David acquired the nickname 'Digby' along with numerous schoolmates and fellow Hockey players. The nickname started with the departure of a school chum whose real name was Digby. He was according to David 'a cool guy' and as every group needed a 'cool guy' he and his friends (boys and girls) designated themselves Digby! In David Hart's case the name stuck, perhaps because he was the 'coolest' guy but David was not prepared to say that!

Digby's preferred game while at school and after was Hockey with Rugby League being second choice. He played both sports for the Waratahs Club but this was difficult as both sports were played in the 'dry season'. With the introduction of the Rugby Union competition in the 'wet season', and the Waratahs Club entered a team Digby saw an opportunity to play sport all year round, mostly in order to maintain his fitness level for Hockey.

Digby's recalled playing his first game of Union in 1976 against Palmerston on Alawa Oval No4 when he played on the right wing. He also recalled he scored a try in his first outing but bemused (if not confused) his more experienced Rugby Union colleagues with his unpredictable and 'un-Rugby' style of play. Digby was to have a playing career with Waratahs and Bayside spanning ten years, at which time he 'retired' to take up Refereeing full time.

Digby had become a marriage celebrant in the mid 1970s and was growing tired of attended functions with a broken nose, black eyes, split lips and other injuries which did not lend themselves to a pretty sight at a wedding. It was quite well known around sporting circles at that time that he was an Australian badged Hockey Referee which probably accounts for Tony Watson-Brown (the head of NTR Referees at the time) approaching him to control a match in 1978. Digby advised he had no real knowledge of the rules of the game, but Watson-Brown suggested he had only to keep the rough play to a minimum, no forward pass and all should be okay! Digby's first appointment was a Second Grade clash at Richardson Park, following which he played First Grade!

From 1985 Digby began to focus on refereeing and with Tony Duffy as his mentor was to progress quickly through the ranks. During his twenty-year involvement in refereeing, he has represented the NT at interstate and international fixtures, was appointed to the Australian Referees Panel and controlled invitation matches including

²⁵⁵ Barlow, Gail., Personal interview. Darwin, 8 December, 2001.

one in which the Australian Barbarians played. He refereed at numerous Australian National Championships, took the centre for a Sydney First Grade game and an Under 21 game between Qld Country and Brisbane City at Ballymore in 1986. He was appointed to control an international match between Auckland and Fiji in 1988 however injury struck him down (severely torn Achilles tendon) and the opportunity was lost. He also controlled numerous Grand Finals in Darwin and represented the NTRU as Manager and Trainer as well as a Referee. However his real pleasure was in refereeing Juniors and assisting with the development of Referees.

In 2000, he suffered a severe injury which put him out of the game for several months and which made for a prolonged recovery period. In 2001, Digby is working on his fitness level with a view to returning to the game and controlling the centre. He has two ambitions left in Rugby, one being to referee at 5 First Grade game at age fifty, the other being to officiate as the celebrant at a wedding at Rugby Park!

In 2000, David 'Digby' Hart was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his services to NT Rugby Union.

Craig Leach ASM

Craig Leach is truly a product of NT Rugby Union. He was born in Darwin in 1967, raised on Mount Ringwood Station near Adelaide River and played his first grade Rugby in Darwin in 1985. He was educated at Brisbane Boys College where he first came into contact with Rugby Union at the tender age of eleven years. Since that time he has played no other code of football.

Craig commenced playing grade Rugby in Darwin in 1985, in the third grade, for the Palmerston 'Crocs'. By the end of that season he was a regular in first grade and has never looked back. Other than for two occasions when he left the NT for work and/or study, Craig has played all of his Rugby career with Palmerston. On those occasions when he was away from the NT, he played first grade for the Brighton Rugby club in Adelaide and had two and a half season with Eastern Suburbs in Sydney.

During his sixteen-year career, Craig has represented the NT on more than fifty occasions and has captained the NT team on forty-two of those outings. He played in internationals against Scotland, Irish Universities (both wins), Western Samoa and Sri Lanka as well as playing against the Queensland Reds and Western Australia when they visited the NT. Reflecting on all of the games in which he represented the NTRU, he recalled the game and the win over Scotland as the highest point and most memorable moment in his playing career. Craig considered 'Rowdy' Callahan, the NTRU's coach for the Scotland game, as one of the best coaches he has played under and gave Callahan full credit for the team's victory over the Scots. Other highlights in his career were the opportunity to play against Australian Rugby legends, John Eales, Tim Horan, Dan Herbert, Dan Crowley and Willie Tabua, to have toured Sri Lanka and return with the championship trophy, to have been a part of the Darwin Mosquitoes team and to have played 200 first grade games for Palmerston. On the subject of best opponents, Craig paid tribute to David Ellis, Tony Morris and Wylie Lingman, all outstanding players for the NTRU and their clubs during their careers, as players who made him work hard on the field and learn fast. The lessons obviously stuck!

²⁵⁶

Craig considers the NTRU's involvement in the Australian Shield via the Darwin Mosquitoes to be the key to future development of NT Rugby at the elite level. He is of the view he has one last season at the representative level and a 'couple more in A grade' before he retires to the ranks of the thirsty thirds! Craig is one of, if not the most 'capped' players in NTRU history and is something of a local legend in his own playing 'lifetime'. Amongst all of his best Rugby memories Craig places the representative tours to Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaysia in which he participated. Good times, good mates and good Rugby – as he says 'what more could you ask for?'

In December, 2000 Craig Leach was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his outstanding contribution to NT Rugby both on and off the playing field.

Alan Ratahi ASM

Alan Ratahi was born in New Zealand in March, 1945 and was raised and educated in the small town of Taupo on the shores of beautiful Lake Taupo. Alan played Rugby throughout his youth and prior to his leaving for Australia in 1969 had represented the Hawkes Bay Maoris and Taupo. During the time he spent in Queensland before moving to the NT, he was a regular Townsville, North Queensland, Central Queensland and Queensland Country representative player.

Alan's first stint in Australia was at Gove where he played Rugby League as no Union competition was available, however, there were occasions when "friendly" games of Rugby Union were organised. He recalls playing "social" games of Rugby on a cleared area (not a grassed field) that was to become the Nhulunbuy sewerage treatment ponds. In August 1979, Alan and his wife Robyn arrived in Darwin where he was attracted to the RSL club by "Uncle" Benny Kiwi. Alan was to play the remainder of his Rugby career with the RSL club, and was to achieve notable success along the way.

²⁵⁶ Personal interview Craig Leach. March, 2001

He played his first representative game in the NT against the visiting Roan Antelope Rugby club from Zambia. The NT won the match and Alan was voted man-of-the-match. It is interesting to note the character of NT Rugby. Back then with NTRU Secretary John Hogan writing to the Roan Antelope's Tour Secretary advising "We offer a small wager on the outcome. A keg of beer to be purchased by the losers and drunk by all"²⁵⁷. Alan also recalls the early days of Rugby at Nakara Oval, the Showgrounds but most of all Richardson Park where players from all teams would gather after the days games to enjoy a drink and a singalong. The good days of Rugby he feels.

In his long career, Alan represented the NT on 'numerous' occasions (he cannot recall them all and kept no record) with his first tour taking place in 1979-80. He completed his representative career in 1984 at age 39, then went on to win his first grand final with RSL at age 41! From 1981 to 1983 Alan, with a great deal of support and assistance from Robyn was heavily involved in establishing junior Rugby in Darwin. In company with Bruce Kennon, Shane Walker, Graham Rose, Tony and Pam Ayers and Tony and Debbie Gribbons he worked tirelessly to develop the juniors.

Reflecting on the highlights of his career Alan recalls playing alongside greats like Frano Botica, Chris Hull, Moses Kolloto, Brett Iiti. He also remembered the tough opponents such as Tony Shaw, John Connolly, Kevin (Besser) Collins, Dale Beasley, Dick Lee and Wally White. Other players who rate high in Alan's estimates include David Evans and Eli Wees, a great talent lost so young. The Mosquitoes Australia Day games also hold fond memories, but the one achievement that stands out above all others is his being a part of junior Rugby and watching the juniors come through the ranks and often reach their full potential²⁵⁸.

In 2000, Alan was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his involvement and commitment to Rugby in Darwin.

²⁵⁷ Hogan, John., Roan Antelope Rugby Union Club: Australian Tour Souvenir Programme. Unpaginated.

²⁵⁸ Personal interview – Alan Ratahi, June, 2001.

Looking forward, looking back.

With the twenty-fourth season of Rugby in the NT already behind us and the Darwin Dragons winning the First and Second Grade Mens and the Women's competitions and South Darwin the Third Grade, all eyes turn to the next season and another milestone in the NTRU's history. As the twenty-fifth season draws closer we can only guess at the likely outcomes of the on-field struggles, and off-field achievements and failures, during season 2001-02.

Time flies and memories fade, as current NTRU President Dennis Bree can testify. Mr Bree made mention in his President's Message in the October 2000 edition of NTRU Rugby News, that that season (ie; 2000/01) was the 25th Anniversary rather than the 2001/02 season!²⁵⁹ Given the amount of time that has passed, almost a quarter of a century, and given Dennis Bree has been there for everyone of those years to help steer the Rugby 'ship', the slip can be forgiven!

As the NTRU moves toward hosting and celebrating its twenty-fifth year of Rugby in the NT, a new era is dawning and an earlier era is coming to a close. After twenty-five years on the NTRU Committee, Dennis Bree is stepping down as President in 2001. Bree announced on 20th February 2001 that he was stepping down as the NTRU President in order to 'let someone else have a go'²⁶⁰. His long time friend, playing adversary and fellow Committeeman, Richard (Dick) Norris is tipped to become the next President of the NTRU which, according to the local press, helps dispel the myth of a Palmerston 'mafia' running NT Rugby²⁶¹. Dennis Bree will continue to serve the NTRU if the Committee so wishes, however he will be stepping down as the President at the 2001 Annual General Meeting. In March, 2001 Dennis Bree was elected to the ARU Board of Directors by defeating incumbent ARU Board member Jim Ferguson of the ACT in a secret ballot. Bree advised his earlier decision to step down as NTRU President would not be reversed as a result of his ARU Board election result²⁶².

Bree's reasons for stepping aside as NTRU President are quite simple. He is of the view it is time for a change of leader, some new blood so to speak. He is also of the view that many, if not all of the objectives he set have been achieved, the Union is in good financial condition and it is time for another perspective²⁶³. However, Bree also acknowledged there were issues still to be addressed. Those issues included the falling numbers of volunteers, the need for a symposium on the relationship between volunteers and sporting bodies and a review of the inclusion of the NTIS Royals team in the First Grade following their poor performances throughout the season. A lack lustre performance that was capped by the Royal's 75-0 defeat by the Dragons on 17 February, 2001.

Another major issue to be addressed was the consideration and investigation into Rugby Union becoming a dry season sport. The war of words between Rugby Union and rival code Rugby League commenced in February 2001. Darwin Mosquitoes Coach Stephen Roberts announced on 22nd February 2001 that any Union player selected in the 40 man training squad for the NTRU's campaign in both the Arafura Games and the 2001 Australian Shield competitions that played Rugby League would be dropped from the squad²⁶⁴. This announcement brought a sharp response from the League ranks, however the suggestion that Union would turn to the dry season attracted even more attention. NT Rugby League (NTRL) Operations Manager Ross Forday predicted a 'fast death for union'²⁶⁵ should the fifteen-a-team code move its competition to the dry season. Forday was quoted as saying 'We know well and truly what's going to happen. It won't even last the first round and we will be the ones still standing'²⁶⁶. Forday also said the NTRL was 'not worried about union going to the dry', rather he encouraged the move as Union had kept 'threatening it' (the move of season) and that Union should 'make the move so that we can fight it out once and for all'²⁶⁷. NTRU President Bree dismissed Leagues 'war cry' and insisted Union had no intension of wanting to 'wipe out' League, rather Rugby Union was simply exercising its right to investigate the feasibility of a dry season competition²⁶⁸.

Bree called a Special General Meeting, which was held on 28th March, 2001, to discuss the matter and for all Clubs and Affiliates to vote on the issue. There was obviously going to be some opposition to the move with Darwin Dragons President Gordon Shirley being quoted as saying 'it was unlikely his club would support the motion'²⁶⁹. South Darwin and Litchfield were also concerned the move would effect their playing strength. Bree was keenly aware the house was divided and moved to reassure all interested parties that the NTRU would not 'go to the dry at the risk of losing a club'²⁷⁰. All the while NTRU General Manager Bill Davies remained a major

²⁵⁹ Bree, Dennis., 'From the Presidents (sic) desk'. Northern Territory Rugby Union Inc Rugby News. Volume 1, Issue 7th October, 2000.

²⁶⁰ Maharaj, Rajiv., 'NTRU boss quits after nine years'. Northern Territory News, 20th February, 2001.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Maharaj, Rajiv., 'NTRU president elected to ARU'. Northern Territory News, 10th March, 2001. P75.

²⁶³ Bree, Dennis., Personal interview.

²⁶⁴ Maharaj, Rajiv., 'NT war of the rugby codes'. Northern Territory News, 22 February, 2001.

²⁶⁵ Maharaj, Rajiv., 'Fast death for union: Forday'. Northern Territory News, 23 February, 2001.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Maharaj, Rajiv., 'Dragons could scuttle rugby dry plan'. Northern Territory News, Thursday 8th March, 2001.

²⁷⁰ Maharaj, Rajiv., 'Dragons could scuttle rugby dry plan'. Northern Territory News, 8th March, 2001.

advocate for the shift stating he believed there was 'enough players in both codes to have a good niche. We can survive and work together in harmony'²⁷¹.

At the special meeting, the NTRU Management Committee voted in favour of a dry season competition in 2003. According to a Northern Territory News report on the meeting, South Darwin, Litchfield and Darwin Dragons representatives were 'left stunned' by the decision. The motion for a move to a dry season competition was carried eight to three with the vote of NTRU Executive carrying the day. There was some support for the move to take place for the 2001-02 season however the majority voted in favour of the later change²⁷². NT Rugby League Operations Manager Ross Forday said 'they have written their own epitaph, signed their own death warrant'²⁷³. Only time will tell as to whether or not the decision was right or wrong in the long-term.

One thing is for sure, that being that the development of Rugby over its twenty-four year history is nothing short of phenomenal. Those previously and currently involved in the organising, administering and playing the game acknowledge the hard work and tenacity of those who have given so much to this great game over those years. During numerous interviews that were conducted to compile this 'brief' history, it was often said that the time was right in 1976 to start a Rugby competition in Darwin, given the number of young men, including a large number of 'Kiwis', in Darwin at that time. The atmosphere in post-Cyclone Tracy Darwin was also conducive to people becoming involved in sport and, as was the case with Rugby, starting a new sport. Many have said it could never happen again.

But we will more than likely never know, as the matter will never be tested. Rugby Union, Rah-Rah, is alive and well in the Never-Never. The Founding Fathers and Other Luminaries of the NTRU have nurtured and developed the game well over the years, and have left it in good hands and good condition to move into the 21st Century. The game is well supported by the NT Government, players, administrators, supporters and the all-important sponsors. The list of sponsors for the 2000-01 season reads like a who's who of Darwin and NT business with Optus Communications, which is managed in the NT by Matti Urvett, heading the list. Urvett has been involved in Rugby in the NT for nearly twenty-five years having been involved with Dick Norris in organising the Old Plebians in 1975 and the Darwin Stubbies in 1982 and remaining a solid supporter of the game today.

The majority of clubs are also well supported and sponsored, which augers well for the seasons to come. The Junior's competition continues to grow, and the Women's Division continues to be well supported at both the NTRU and Club level.

All in all, it has been a phenomenal twenty-four years of Rugby in the NT. The NTRU has developed from a small band of volunteers selling meat tray and 'chook' raffles and playing on Council Ovals to an incorporated body. A corporation that has its own playing and administrative complex, employs seven full time staff and manages a budget about to hit the one million dollar mark in 2001.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Maharaj, Rajiv., 'Rugby War'. Northern Territory News. 30th March, 2001. P40.

²⁷³ Ibid. p40.



Optus Rugby Park – 2001 (Author's collection)

However, for all of this development, the future challenges are there, as is the past history, but it appears the ranks of the NTRU possess the necessary skills, drive and devotion to take the game into the next quarter of a century. There will be different challenges, different demands and expectations, but the 'old guard' and the majority of onlookers are of the view the 'young turks' will be equal to the task!

The history of the game in the NT, with its controversial characters and tales tall and true (many of which could not be related within these pages!) is a very important part of the game's life. As such, the 'custodians' of tomorrow's game need to reflect on that past, with a view to improving on the record and ensuring the availability of the game to all of those, in the various communities around the NT, that wish to participate.

May the next twenty-five be just as enjoyable, entertaining and rewarding as the first.

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