

Hearts in Rugby Union 2025 Annual Report

*Helping Rugby
Help its Own*



Conor Tweedy - Australian Steeler
Injured - July 2018

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Note; VIP – Very Injured Person

At Hearts in Rugby Union, our affectionate term for those we support is VIP, which stands for Very Injured Person. While the acronym is commonly associated with "Very Important Person," to us it represents something even more meaningful—recognising the courage, resilience and importance of those living with life-changing rugby injuries. Every VIP is at the heart of everything we do.

I. Foreword

Hearts in Rugby Union delivered a powerful impact in 2025 in providing crucial and passionate support for players in Australia who have suffered severe life changing injuries participating in the rugby union.

The British and Irish Lions massive tour of Australia lit a fire under the game across the country, with sold out test and provincial games giving Hearts in Rugby Union a great platform to raise much needed funds & increase awareness.

The 50:50 raffles held at the test matches were strongly supported by fans of all ages and nationalities and a big thanks to Rugby Australia for getting behind Hearts in Rugby Union to run these events.

Our two marquee lunches, the Legendary Laffo's Long Lunch and The Australian British Chamber of Commerce were sold-out and terrific events.

Most importantly in 2025, Hearts in Rugby Union granted applications to five VIPs to assist in improving their lives and those of their families.



Our thanks to General Manager Richard Tombs, who has put in the hard yards with great energy and leadership. Thanks also to our outstanding board.

II. About Hearts in Rugby Union

Hearts in Rugby Union (HIRU) is a registered charitable organisation dedicated to supporting rugby union participants and their families in times of serious injury, hardship, and need. Established to ensure that no member of the rugby community is left without support following life-altering circumstances, HIRU exists as a safety net grounded in compassion, solidarity, and long-term care for those who have contributed to the game.

Mission

HIRU's mission is to provide meaningful, sustained support to permanently injured rugby players (**Very Injured Players – VIPs**) and their families, while promoting welfare, connection, and wellbeing across the broader rugby community.

Vision

To support the requests of our VIPs every year and be a recognised charity in the Australian Rugby community.

Core Values

HiRU is guided by the values of compassion, respect, accountability, inclusiveness, and community. These values underpin every decision and ensure that support is delivered with integrity and empathy.

History of HIRU

HiRU was established in 2007 in response to the recognised need for structured, ongoing support for rugby players who suffer catastrophic injuries during their involvement in Rugby. Over time, the organisation has evolved

into a trusted support network within the rugby ecosystem, building strong partnerships across clubs, stakeholders, and supporters committed to player welfare.

Charity Purpose and Status

HIRU operates as a registered charitable organisation with Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status. This enables the organisation to receive tax-deductible donations, ensuring that fundraising efforts directly translate into meaningful support for beneficiaries. The core purpose of HIRU is to provide financial, emotional, and practical assistance to those affected by serious injury within the rugby community.

Key Focus Areas

HIRU's work is centred on delivering holistic support across several critical areas:

Permanently Injured Players

Providing long-term financial, educational, and lifestyle support to players who have sustained catastrophic injuries.

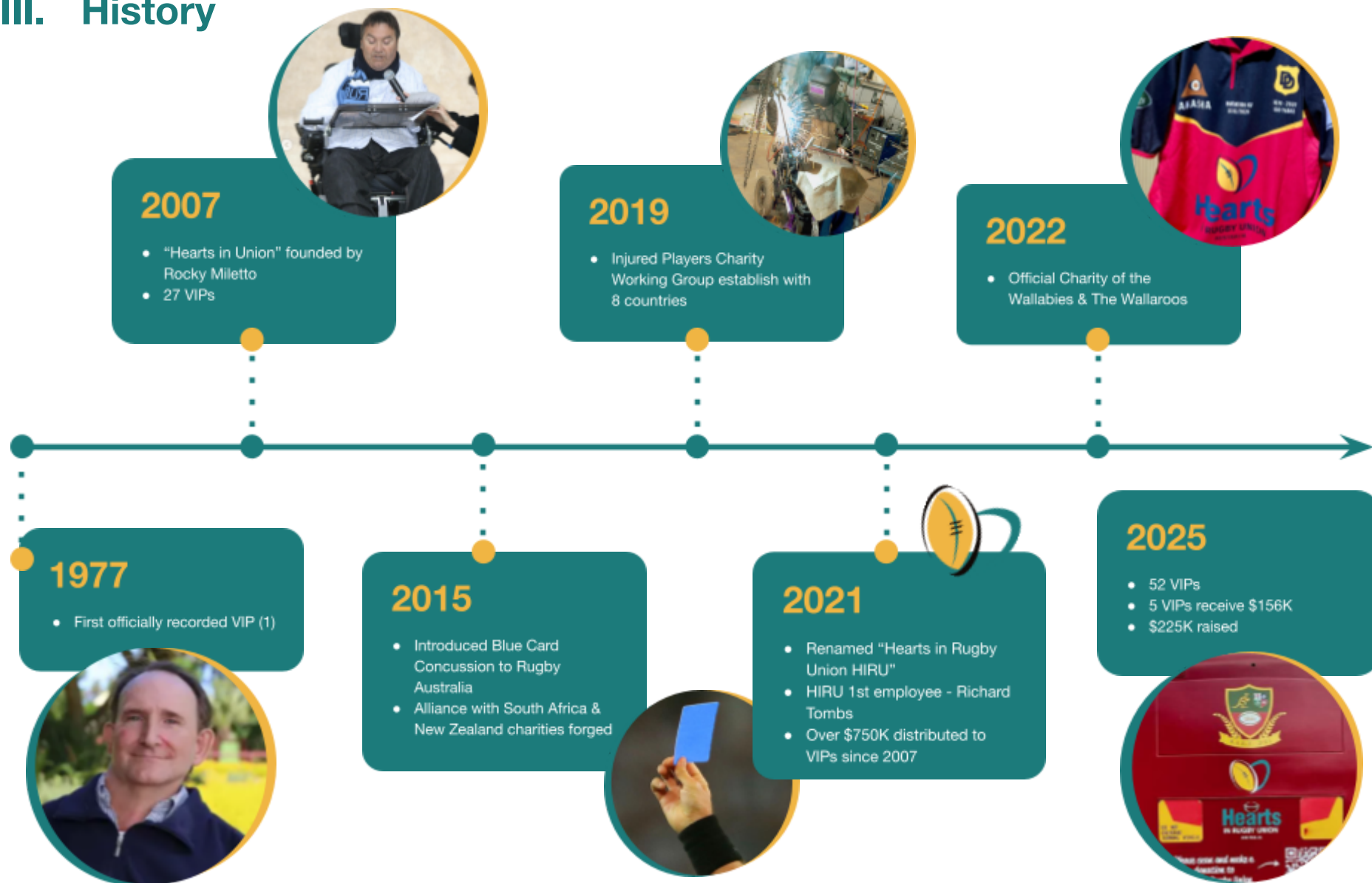
Community connection

Maintaining strong ties between injured players, their clubs, and the wider rugby community to reduce isolation and strengthen belonging.

Advocacy Within Rugby

Promoting awareness of player welfare, improving safety outcomes, and ensuring the long-term interests of injured players remain a priority within the sport.

III. History



IV. Chairman's Report

It is my great honour to write this Chairman's message in this inaugural Hearts in Rugby Union Annual Report for 2025. I am glad that after many years we have been able to produce this valuable report of all the great work we do as a Rugby Charity.

Since our humble beginnings in country NSW in April of 2007, Hearts in Rugby Union (Hearts) has sought to help the most vulnerable in the Rugby community of Australia at its time of need. Catastrophic injuries are unfortunately part of life, a part of all contact sports including rugby union.

In this our 18th year as a Charity, the past year has been a challenging one for Hearts, with significant changes to our funding proposal, strains on assistance with running the Charity and longstanding relationships. Despite this, we would like to thank the ongoing support of Rugby Australia to Hearts, in particular to making us one of the official Charities of the Wallabies and Wallaroos since 2022.

We have unfortunately had 2 more rugby players join the ranks of Hearts in 2025. Despite this we have significantly contributed to the donation of 2 motor vehicles, half the costs of the modification of a motor vehicle, dental work assistance and house modifications to our VIPs (Very Important Players).

During the year, Hearts in Rugby Union continued discussions with The Nick Tooth Foundation regarding the future of the Foundation and opportunities to preserve Nick's legacy through an established charity. Following extensive discussions, it was confirmed that Hearts in Rugby Union will launch The Nick Tooth Education Grant in 2026.

The Education Grant represents the next chapter in our commitment to supporting our VIPs and their families, providing educational opportunities that honour Nick Tooth's enduring legacy while continuing to make a meaningful difference within the rugby community.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to my fellow dedicated Board of Directors, John Dunlop, Sam Robson, Hayden Rorke, Greg Eddy, Liz Swinburn, Melissa Hall & Linda Hutton for all the hard work and assistance during the year.

I would also like to thank our excellent General Manager, Richard "Tombsy" Tombs for his dedicated and unrelenting support of VIPs and his hard work which has enabled us to provide the services we do at Hearts.

Also thank you for the tireless, thankless and often unnoticed assistance of Blake Simpson in assisting with Hearts accounts and minutes in running the Charity.

Special thanks also go to our sponsors and supporters in 2025 for their generous and unwavering support. In particular to the Cropley Foundation, Lisa Kane & the Rugby Club Foundation, St John's College Alumni Association (University of Sydney), the Australian British Chamber of Commerce, Gordon Bray, James Mayo, John Honan and Manildra, Qld Reds, Nick McDonald and Norths Rugby Club, Moura Rugby Festival, Ron Ross and GPS Gold Challenge, Anglo-American & the Dawson Valley Drovers RUFC, Simon Bowden and Niv Tadmor of Jones Day, Rugby Australia and all the many and tireless volunteers who assisted in making things happen during our various events.

Despite the challenges and the competitive nature of Charities in the Australian rugby community space, Hearts is looking to adapt through innovative new fundraising methods.

Looking forward, we aim to further improve the unique and tailored support to our VIPs in Australian rugby, so that Hearts can continue to *"Help Rugby Help its Own."*



Nick Stevens

V. General Manager's Report

As the sole employee of Hearts in Rugby Union, my role is to ensure the continued development and strengthening of meaningful partnerships with rugby clubs, associations, and community organisations. These relationships are essential to delivering engaging, interactive, and enjoyable events that underpin our fundraising success, strengthen awareness of our work, and ultimately enable us to support members of the rugby community in times of greatest need.

As outlined throughout this Annual Review, we have been extremely fortunate to receive unwavering support from our charity partners, volunteers, and broader community. Their commitment, generosity, and belief in our mission remain the foundation upon which HIRU operates, all sharing a commitment to "Helping Rugby Help its Own."

Looking Ahead

"Helping Rugby Help its Own" is more than a motto; it is the philosophy that underpins everything Hearts in Rugby Union represents. It reflects the spirit of a community that consistently comes together to support those facing life's most challenging circumstances and remains central to our ability to raise both awareness and vital funds across the rugby landscape.

Over the past 18 years, HIRU has relied on a diverse range of accessible, community-driven fundraising channels, including partnerships with rugby clubs and associations, through charity lunches and events, 50-50 Charity Raffles at Test matches, and the ongoing generosity of individual donors. These initiatives form the backbone of our fundraising model and have enabled us to provide meaningful, practical support to our VIPs when it is needed most.

As economic pressures continue to impact charities across Australia, it is increasingly important that grassroots charities such as HIRU remain innovative, agile, and forward-thinking. We must continue to position Hearts in Rugby Union as the charity partner of choice—one that delivers tangible outcomes for its beneficiaries while also creating meaningful opportunities for engagement and contribution from supporting individuals, clubs/associations, businesses etc.

As we approach our 20th anniversary in 2027, we are exploring a range of more ambitious initiatives designed to elevate our profile within the rugby community and extend our reach beyond traditional audiences. These opportunities will build on our strong foundations, broaden our impact, and create new and sustainable pathways for support.

While these plans are still in development, we look forward to sharing further detail as they progress. What remains constant is our unwavering commitment: when members of the rugby community need support, Hearts in Rugby Union will be there to help.



Richard Tombs – GM with Rugby Legends

VI. The Team

Board of Directors



Nick Stevens
Chairman



John Dunlop
Director



Sam Robson
Director



Hayden Rorke
Director



Linda Hutton
Director



Greg Eddy
Director



Liz Swinburn
Director



Melissa Hall
Director



Michael Procalio
Director

VII. Year in Review



52

HIRU VIPs



2

New VIPs



5

VIPs Received Support



\$24K

Largest Fundraiser



\$226K

Successfully Raised



\$155K

Recipient Support



16

Fundraising Events



175

Amazing Volunteers



19

Support Partners

VIII. Financial Performance & Sustainability

Key Metric	Year (2025)
Total Income	\$226,477
Total Assets	\$817,334
Net Assets	\$772,374
Cash Reserves	\$252,131
Investment Portfolio	\$565,202
Direct Assistance	\$155,300
Beneficiaries Supported	5



Figure 1. Income Composition 2025

Donations and fundraising activities generated approximately 80% of annual income, while investment earnings contributed 20%, demonstrating the value of diversified revenue sources.

Figure 2. Asset Composition

The investment portfolio represented 69% of total assets at year end, providing long-term sustainability, while cash reserves represented 31% of assets available for operational and beneficiary commitments.

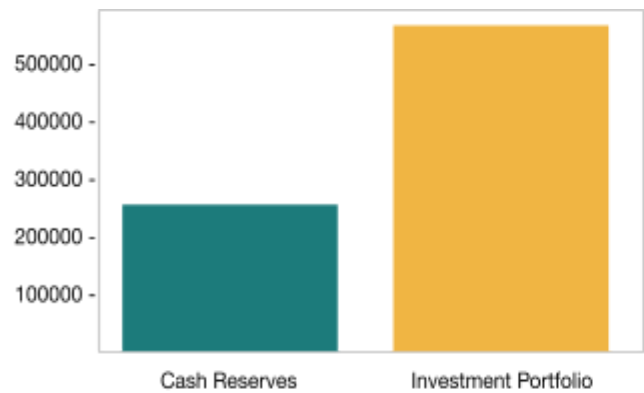
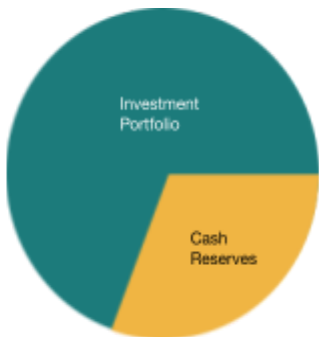


Figure 3. Financial Position at Year End

Total assets reached \$817,334 during 2025, reflecting a strong balance sheet supported by both liquid reserves and long-term investments.

2025 Fundraising Facts

Description	Type	N°	Amount
Gordon Bray “The Immortals of Australian Rugby Union”	Book Sales	1	\$40K
Australian British Chamber of Commerce	Charity Partner Lunches	2	\$37K
Family Foundation	Private Donor	1	\$33K
HIRU 50/50 Raffles	50/50 Raffle	6	\$65K
Laffo’s Long Lunch	Charity Lunch	1	\$21K
Dawson Valley Drovers / Anglo American	Moura Rugby Festival	1	\$14K
Other Events	Various	8	\$42K
Total		16	\$252K



Dear Hearts in Rugby Board Members,

I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the incredible gift of the Oakley Meta AI glasses. They are truly life changing. Because of you, I can now capture precious, everyday moments with my boys that I would ordinarily miss, and that means more to me than words can express.

Your generosity, kindness, and ongoing support have not gone unnoticed. This gift is far more than technology it provides me the special ability now to preserve memories, and to share experiences with my children in a way that simply wasn't possible before.

Thank you again for your compassion and for the difference you continue to make in my life and the lives of so many others.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Nathan Stapleton
Injured | 09/04/2022



IX. Strategic Partnerships

In addition to the partnerships outlined above, HiRU was proud to partner with 2bLimitless to host a joint fundraising evening in support of The Matt Hampson Foundation, a UK-based charity that provides support and opportunities to people seriously injured through sport. The event was staged during the British & Irish Lions tour of Brisbane and brought together supporters from both hemispheres to celebrate the power of sport and the importance of supporting those whose lives have been changed by catastrophic injury.

The feature attendee's being British & Irish Lion's Mike Tindall & Lee Mears along with Wallabies Fletcher Dyson & Pat Howard, hosted by Georgina Robinson.

We look forward to exploring future opportunities together and are excited about the potential this relationship presents in the years ahead.

HiRU was also proudly provided the opportunity by Rugby Australia to participate in the 50-50 Charity Raffles conducted across two British & Irish Lions Test matches in Melbourne and Sydney, as well as Test matches in Newcastle and Townsville. Thanks to Dove Men + care we were able to underwrite to guarantee winning figures, this initiative supported us generating approximately \$60,500 in revenue.

These partnerships were invaluable, not only in helping us achieve important fundraising outcomes, but also in significantly elevating the awareness and profile of Hearts in Rugby Union on a national stage. Exposure to large rugby audiences across multiple states provided a powerful platform to further communicate our purpose and the support we provide to members of the rugby community in times of need.

Equally inspiring was the overwhelming support shown by our volunteer network. Across the 19 events staged throughout New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, more than 175 volunteers generously gave their time and energy to assist our team. Their enthusiasm, warmth and commitment embodied the spirit of the rugby community and played a vital role in the success of these events.



X. Community Engagements

Increased Regional Engagements

HIRU has been invited to participate as the charity partner at a number of regional rugby events, opportunities that we value enormously and actively seek to expand. These partnerships not only provide important fundraising avenues but also allow us to raise awareness of our mission and strengthen connections within rugby communities across Australia.



Regional rugby remains the backbone of the game, and our presence at these events ensures that players, families, volunteers, and supporters understand that Hearts in Rugby Union is there to help when catastrophic injury impacts members of our rugby family.

Due to the natural ebb and flow of events and campaigns, fundraising revenue can vary from year to year. However, 2025 proved to be a successful year, assisted greatly by the excitement and atmosphere generated by the British & Irish Lions Tour. We continually seek opportunities to establish meaningful charity partnerships, particularly with rugby clubs and community groups. These collaborations are essential not only in raising funds, but also in strengthening awareness of our work throughout the rugby community.

Our regional engagements include:

Dawson Valley Drovers – Qld, who staged a gala rugby weekend featuring both junior and senior rugby, alongside appearances from classic Wallabies David Croft, Matt Gibbon, Nick Stiles, and Henry Speight. This event generated approximately \$14,000 and Dawson Valley Drovers are expected to expand this event even further as the gala event moves into Rockhampton in 2026.

Kiama 7s - NSW – Returning for our second year as charity partner following a successful inaugural involvement.

SALT VX (The South Australian Lions Tour), a group of fifteen British and Aussie rugby enthusiasts who purchased an old-school bus and followed the second half of the Lions Tour from Adelaide through to Melbourne and Sydney hosted by various rural rugby clubs as they made their way up the east coast of Victoria & NSW.

The Armidale School (TAS) 'Live a day in another person's shoes' involved 3hrs of middle school & families pushing a wheelchair over a 3km course. There was grit & determination to reach milestones, but in the end they got a real appreciation of the challenges of being disabled.

These initiatives demonstrate the extraordinary willingness of the rugby community on a national basis to rally together in support of those 'doing it tough', reinforcing the strength of connection and generosity that sits at the heart of the game.



XI. Supporting Our VIPs

The assistance provided by Hearts in Rugby Union spans a broad range of needs, reflecting the unique circumstances faced by each of our VIPs and their families. Vehicle purchases and modifications remain among the most common forms of support we provide, helping recipients maintain independence, mobility and access to employment, education and community life.

We also regularly assist with home modifications, rehabilitation programs and specialised medical equipment, all aimed at improving quality of life and enabling individuals to live as independently as possible.

While the number of assistance requests received each year may be modest compared with many larger charities, the impact of that support is significant.

Every grant, modification, piece of equipment or educational opportunity has the potential to make a meaningful difference to the lives of our VIPs, helping them overcome challenges, regain independence and enhance their overall wellbeing.

The financial results presented in this report reflect more than income and expenditure; they represent the resources entrusted to Hearts in Rugby Union and our commitment to directing those resources where they can have the greatest impact. It is this lasting difference in the lives of our VIPs, rather than the volume of assistance provided, that defines the success of our organisation.

Beneficiary Impact

Assistance Provided	HIRU Contribution 2025
50% contribution of modifications to new vehicle	\$25,000
Dental work assistance	\$12,000
50% vehicle contribution (pending)	\$40,000
50% Vehicle contributions	\$50,000
House Modifications (Exhausted his NDIS Funds)	\$28 300
Average Support per Beneficiary	\$31,060

More than \$155,000 was committed in direct support during 2025. Assistance included mobility equipment, vehicle modifications, healthcare-related support and initiatives that improve independence and quality of life.

XII. Spotlights

The Nick Tooth Education Grant

Hearts in Rugby Union (HIRU) were elected by The Nick Tooth Foundation (NTF) to carry the legacy of Nick Tooth, which will benefit our VIPs & their families for years to come.

NTF was established following the tragic passing of Nick Tooth, who suffered a fatal brain injury while playing rugby for Inverell in 2015. For the past decade, the NTF has worked tirelessly to raise funds and support vital research into brain injuries, creating a meaningful legacy in Nick's memory.

Running a charity requires significant commitment, energy, and community support. After ten highly successful years, the NTF Board made the difficult decision to conclude the Foundation's operations and sought a worthy rugby charity to continue making a positive impact within the rugby community. We are deeply honoured that Hearts in Rugby Union was selected to receive the Foundation's remaining funds of \$200,000 which will be invested to preserve the seed funds.

This generous contribution will ensure that Nick's legacy continues to support rugby families for years to come. As a direct result of this gift, HIRU has established The Nick Tooth Education Grant, a new initiative designed to assist our VIPs and their immediate family members with education-related expenses.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the NTF Board, supporters, volunteers, and donors whose dedication over the past decade made this contribution possible. Through The Nick Tooth Education Grant, Nick's legacy of helping others will continue to make a lasting difference in the lives of rugby families facing adversity



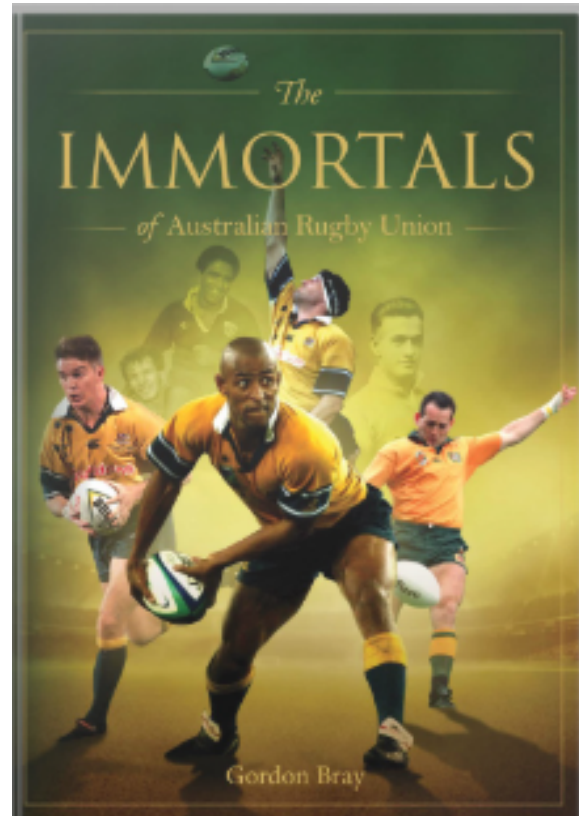
Late Nick Tooth- his legacy lives on through
the Nick Tooth Education grant

Special Recognition – Gordon Bray

A special acknowledgement must be made to Gordon Bray, widely regarded as the voice of Australian rugby. In 2025, Gordon demonstrated extraordinary generosity through the publication of his book, *The Immortals of Australian Rugby Union*, donating all proceeds from book sales to Hearts in Rugby Union.

This remarkable contribution generated approximately \$40,000 for HIRU, providing significant support and strengthening our capacity to assist our VIPs.

While the financial contribution was substantial, it was Gordon's belief in our mission and his willingness to champion our cause that made this gesture particularly meaningful. To receive the support of someone so respected and admired within Australian rugby was both humbling and deeply appreciated. On behalf of our Board & VIPs, we extend our sincere gratitude to Gordon for his generosity, advocacy and ongoing commitment to the rugby community & specifically to the cause of HIRU on this occasion.



I suffered a traumatic spinal injury in 2001 during a game of rugby union which left me an incomplete quadriplegic. Despite regaining the ability to walk, I have permanent partial paralysis on the entire right side of my body, and sensory deficits on the left side of my body. Hearts in Rugby Union has been supporting me since its inception in 2007. Over the years they have provided me with invaluable assistance in accessing rehabilitative items that have aided in the ongoing management of my daily pain and neurological symptoms. I, along with many injured friends continue to receive the unwavering support of Hearts in Rugby Union – as Australian Rugby Union continues to help its own.

Nick Hanley

Legal Practitioner

Injured | 09/06/2001



SALT 1st XV (South Australian Lion's Tour)

A couple of years prior to the Lions tour, 15 blokes from Brighton and Onkaparinga Rugby Club in Adelaide put their heads together and decided they would follow the Lions on the southern states leg of the tour. Over two years, they built up a fund, eventually purchasing a 50-seat touring coach. With a concerted effort, the seats were removed, spun around, and the ugly duckling was transformed into a luxurious mode of transport fit for the adventure ahead.

As their preparation gathered momentum, they also decided to give back—and **Hearts in Rugby Union** were fortunate to become their charity of choice with an objective to raise \$5000.

With wine donated by Alluca Vineyards and Geddes Wines the team's bottling day resulted in some funds for Hearts, donations to rugby clubs along the journey and one or two bottles to consume.

Their itinerary kicked off in Adelaide with the Aus-NZ match, continued to Melbourne for the MCG Test, they then rolled into a blissful seven-day road trip through the southern states of NSW.

The tour concluded in Sydney, just in time for the 3rd Test match.

Sleeping in swags at rugby clubs and bush camps the team was blown away with the generosity of the rugby community and new friendships forged at Geelong Rams, Batemans Bay Boars, Shoalhaven and the Woonona Shamrocks.

Tour misdemeanours were swiftly dealt with by Kangaroo Court and all fines paid directly in the Hearts CrowdRaiser fund.

A trip of a lifetime and planning already underway to buy a boat for the Lions in NZ in 4 years' time!



As someone who has benefited from the support of Hearts in Rugby Union over many years following my spinal injury, I've seen firsthand the difference the charity makes. The assistance provided is invaluable, but just as important is knowing that the rugby community is always there when you need it.

It's also why I'm proud to volunteer and give back whenever I can. Hearts in Rugby Union embodies everything that is great about rugby – community, generosity and looking after one another.

Ben Harvey
Injured | 06/04/2003



XIII. Acknowledgements



We can't survive without charity partners & donors who supply events, valuable gifts for raffles, auctions & support for various purposes.



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www.heartsinrugbyunion.com.au

