

## **Building Long Term Club Success – A Case Study**

### **Introduction**

All sporting organisations, regardless of the level, go through various stages of success at different times in the organisations history. The challenge for all organisations is to maintain their position at the top for as long as possible and to also have a clear definition of success and how it is measured.

The following is a case study of Merewether Carlton Rugby Club, who competes in the Newcastle and Hunter Rugby competition and is an account of how a 10 year plan resulted in a successful period in the clubs history.

### **Background**

The club was formed in 1930 and has won more Club Championships and First Grade Premierships than any other club in the NHRU competition. In 1995 it was identified by a few ex-players who were coaching their son's in the Junior ranks that the senior club's culture and results was not what they wanted their sons to be part off in the future.

It was agreed that if a positive on and off field culture of the players and stakeholders was started in the Juniors it would permeate throughout the senior club through the passage of time as the players and stakeholders graduated into the senior ranks. We wanted to create success both on and off the field.

### **The Plan**

#### **Off field – the following initiatives were implemented:**

1. We formally created a Junior Committee with highly defined roles. This was to provide structure and to give guidance to potential committee members of exactly what was expected from them. (see attached). The first job for the committee was to create a mission statement which provided direction for the club. It involved various concepts including developing the player as a whole, enjoyment, safety and an ethos of Club – Team – Player.

**Comment: It was made clear that if you were to be a part of the committee you must perform all of your duties to the expected standard and not use the excuse that “I am a volunteer and don't have time” if you under performed. We wanted people that were fully committed and capable and support was offered where needed. We also wanted to create an environment that provided player safety and enjoyment and for all stakeholders to understand that no-one is bigger than the club.**

2. Every player had to pay their registration fees even if it meant paying by instalments.

**Comment: This was important from a financial perspective for the club and also it put every player on an equal footing within the club. Confidential special consideration was available but no-one asked for it.**

3. Build relationships with the local business houses with a view to obtaining sponsorships. This was done successfully with the following sponsorships achieved:
  - Major Sponsor
  - Minor Sponsor
  - Individual team sleeve sponsor
  - Junior Club Short Sponsor

- Player Football Bag Sponsor
- Events Sponsor

**Comment: Building long term relationships with our sponsors proved fruitful later in the clubs history as one of our \$300 a year Junior sponsors turned into the clubs major sponsor in 2008. The sponsorship packages weren't expensive and it provided an opportunity for a lot of parents who were time poor to put back into the club through sponsorship from their place of employment/business. One of our sponsors was a surfboard manufacturer who donated a surfboard each that was raffled and continually raised in excess of \$3,500 each year – a sizeable amount for a Junior club at the time. This also provided credibility to the club through association with some very prominent businesses**

4. Parent Functions: We wanted to create a good social environment for the parents which would help recruit volunteers. An annual cocktail party was organized and proved to be very successful.

**Comment: We didn't make money from these evenings to ensure the costs were kept to a minimum. The whole focus was for the parents to meet and enjoy one another's company and have them feel part of our club.**

5. Communication: A monthly newsletter was produced that included recognition for all our sponsors, recognition of players achievements e.g. rep honours, scholastic, leadership etc. and various reports from the President, Coaches and Social Committee.

**Comment: As the club grew it was important to maintain a flow of information to all our stakeholders to keep them informed. Recognition of all achievements was in keeping with our mission statement.**

6. Rugby Tradition: we believed a major tradition of rugby was dinners so we organized an annual Parent/Player dinner for the Junior Club. We also invited Mark Ella to be the club's Junior Patron which he graciously accepted and was our first speaker.

**Comment: The first dinner attracted approximately 80 guests and the tradition still continues with numbers capped at 200 and sells out every year. The players are required to wear long pants and a collar as a minimum dress standard. Speakers have included Ewen McKenzie, Nick Far Jones, Peter Fitzsimmons, Topo Rodriguez, David Campese and Matt Dunning to name a few. At the end of each night a group photo with all the junior players and the guest speaker is taken and the players proudly sing the club song.**

#### **On Field: the following initiatives were implemented:**

1. Recruitment: we ran skill sessions at the local primary and high schools prior to Xmas which the schools welcomed. We then continued these sessions for the first few weeks when school returned and also put advertisements in the school newsletter regarding registration days. Posters were also displayed in the windows of local businesses and banners displayed on the fence of our rugby field.
2. Coaches: we identified ex-players and whose children were playing with the club and senior players who we thought would be good mentors for the players. The funds we raised through sponsorship, functions, fees and the canteen allowed us to put the coaches through the ARU

Coaching Accreditation courses. Within a three year period all our junior coaches had achieved their ARU Level II Coaching Accreditation.

**Comments: This was important to ensure the parents had confidence that the children were in competent hands. We also encouraged our coaches to get involved with the HJRU representative teams which further challenged and developed their coaching skills.**

3. Coaching Clinics: at the beginning of each year we organized a full day of coaching for all players in the junior club. This was held at our rugby field and guest coaches were invited in for the day including ex and current Wallaby and Waratahs players. The clinics were well attended and the players were issued with their club t-shirt at this clinic which they wore proudly and would then worn around the local streets for all to see.

**Comment: The clinics were held on a Saturday and that evening an informal dinner was held with the parents and guest coaches attending. The guest coaches always spoke on the evening for around 20-30 minutes and typically commented on what a great day they had with the players which made the parents happy and proud.**

4. Prop School: was held each Thursday night for the first 6 weeks of the season for al props and hookers. This was conducted by one of the club stalwarts who had over 350 first games plus country representative honors and was a ARU Level II Accredited Coach.

**Comment: We wanted to ensure that we had plenty of players capable of playing this position in both the short term and long term period. In time this was implemented into the senior ranks with great success.**

5. Equipment: Through careful fiscal management we were able to provide over time new equipment for training including balls, cones, poles, pads bags and body suits and scrum machine.

**Comment: The new equipment for the players showed them that the club was serious about providing a safe learning environment for them to train and that we wanted to give them every opportunity to get the most from their rugby.**

6. Touring Culture: all teams were encouraged to go on end of season tours.

**Comment: We developed a program of destinations that teams would go to as they progressed through the years. Touring is an important part of rugby and was another reason players wanted to be part of the club**

## **Outcomes**

### **Off Field**

Many of the Junior coaches and administrators moved into the senior ranks and took on coaching and administration roles as their sons graduated. This was a smooth transition and the same standards the players were used to in the Junior ranks were up held.

1. Fees – 100% of fees were collected. This was aided by the installation of eftpos facilities and payment schemes and a policy that if fees were not paid or an arrangement put in place by a certain date players were ineligible for selection.

2. Social Functions: numerous functions were held during the year including The Presidents Luncheon, Karaoke Night, team dinners and the most successful being a luncheon to launch the season called Lunch on the Green. This was a sit down 3 course meal for 450+ people under a Marquee that was set up the clubs football field.
3. Communication: the club's website was developed and a monthly newsletter is still published
4. Sponsorships: many of the junior sponsors are still involved and the senior clubs major sponsor is a former junior sponsor which highlights the importance of the relationships which were built.
5. An old boys club has been formally established which allows the clubs history to be passed onto the next generation and these old boys man the barbecue and bar and home games.

## On Field

Players were required to train both nights to be eligible for selection in the top 2 grades. This was initially meet with resistance however overtime proved to be the correct decision. Competition for positions increased and the playing numbers also increased to allow the club to enter a team in every senior competition conducted by the NHRU – the only club to do so.

The following table reflects the on field results of the club up until 1995:

	<b>Club Champions</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Grade Premiers</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Premiers</b>
Period	1930 – 1995	1930 – 1995	1930 – 1995
Times Won	13 times	15 times	7 times
Last Won	1979	1989	1990

In 2005 the senior club won the Club Championships for the first time in 26 years. They went on to win a record seven (7) Club Championships in a row. They won the 1<sup>st</sup> Grade competition in 2007 with 12 players in the starting XV having come through the junior ranks along with the coach. In 2009 they were minor premiers and lost the grand Final by 1 point in overtime, and in 2011 had an undefeated season. The focus on Club – Team – Player had permeated through to the seniors and the results during the period from 2005 – 2011 is shown below:

	<b>Club Champions</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Grade Premiers</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Premiers</b>	<b>Colts</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Grade</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>
Period	2005 - 2011	2005 - 2011	2005 - 2011	2003-2011	2005 - 2011	2005 - 2011
Times Won	7 times	2 times	5 times	5 times	4 Times	5 times

In addition to the above the club also received the following during this period:

Coach of the Year:	3
Hawthorne Cup:	2
Most Best and Fairest Points:	4
Leading Point Scorer	3
Leading Try Scorer	3
Rep Player of The Year	3
Best And Fairest Player	3
Colts Best and Fairest	3

During this period the club grew organically from within in both players and coaching staff. The success of the club was now attracting new players moving to the region. We had now become a "Club of Choice". It must be noted during this time that there were no payments made to players, coaches and administrators.

## **Summary**

There is no one definitive solution to building long term success as there are many different influences and environments that clubs operate under however the following points are good stepping stones:

1. Create a structure to operate under and develop a plan
2. Volunteers must be accountable
3. Build relationships with all stakeholders
4. Set standards and do not lower them to accommodate the lowest common denominator
5. You can never be too organized
6. Publicly celebrate milestones, victories and achievements
7. We play rugby to have fun and be with mates – create a safe environment that promotes this concept.
8. Club – Team – Player
9. Focus on organic growth – club culture should not be underestimated.
10. Providing good on and off field programs will attract and retain players and other stakeholders

Finally the single most important factor contributing to the club's success was that we focused on organic growth. Former Wallaby Ben Darwin has recently completed a study of teams competing in some of the major competitions around the world including the Super 15, NRL and English and French Premier Rugby and how much money they spent, their organic growth how successful they are. Ben states that teams can fail with high organic growth but they can't win without it. He also states that teams who win with low levels of organic growth return to failure very quickly.

Good luck

Tony Munro