

1962: Inaugural Teachers College Team

'B' Grade

The Competition Setup

The 'B' Grade competition in The Illawarra District was in its infancy in the 1962 season and comprised five teams. Three of the teams, Teachers College, Weerona and North Wollongong Surf, were single teams but there were two clubs, University and Kiama that also had teams playing in the 'A' grade comp.

North Wollongong Surf Club had played 'A' grade in the early 60's but were rejoining the competition after a year's break. Weerona was a team made of trainees from the Steelworks who were housed in a residential College called, funnily enough, Weerona. The team consisted mainly of University students who even used the University grounds to train. University was the next-door neighbors and were also making their debut in the comp and a friendly rivalry was soon established between Uni and Teachers College that was to last for many seasons.

The Coach

Keith McLellan – Teachers College (1962 -68)



Keith McLellan was one of the original lecturers at the Wollongong Teachers College and lectured in Special Education. He was the person whose passion for rugby played a very significant role in establishing the game in the College and was responsible for developing the style of running rugby that became legendary.

Keith made a reputation for himself as a schoolboy where he starred for the Sydney Boys High Team that won the GPS and Combined High School championships in 1946.

After leaving school Keith enrolled at Sydney Teachers College and continued playing Union for the Eastern Suburbs Club as an outside centre.

Keith was noticed by English rugby league scouts playing in the City Versus Country match and signed a contract with the Leeds club where he was to become captain and lead his team to victory in the Challenge Cup Championship in 1956. Keith is pictured holding aloft the Challenge Cup Trophy.

During his time in England Keith played for the Great Britain All Comers side that played France and was a respected member of a side that contained some of the great names in rugby league at that time.

With injuries multiplying Keith called it quits at the end of the 1958 season and came back to Australia and took a position as a lecturer at Armidale Teachers College, where he stayed until offered the chance to help establish the new teachers College at Wollongong in 1962.

Keith decided that to improve the College a football team was needed and so he formed a team that entered the 'B' Grade competition in Illawarra in 1962. Things certainly grew from there and by 1965 the club was in the 'A' grade competition and was fielding three teams.

As a coach Keith earned the respect of all the players with many of them still referring to Keith as "Mr McLellan"

When people first met this mild, unassuming gentleman many didn't realize that under that meek exterior lurked a gifted and talented athlete.

Keith had a profound impact on all players in the club from beginning third graders to players who were to become Wallaby captains. Peter Sullivan, who did captain Australia writes of Keith:

"My first impression of Keith was that he was extremely articulate. He spoke with a great deal of authority and knowledge and he used his hands to explain himself or to stress an important point. We had no doubt as to Keith's keenness.

We soon learned that Keith had been an exceptionally talented footballer himself. He had played professionally for Leeds in the tough English Rugby League competition and had been selected to play for the Rest against the Australian touring side.

Over the next few months and years we quickly came to realize what an astute and technically sound coach Keith was. Keith was a real technician. The major problem the College team found during these times was lack of size and experience. We had no Hadja Palmer, Tim Beale or Nifty Fredericks but Keith McLellan made up for our lack of size by developing an innovative, fast moving attacking style of rugby that was to prove very successful over the following three years.

Keith held high expectations for all his charges but was an absolute gentleman who had the respect and admiration of every player. He believed in doing things correctly and his faith in his team and his tactics was complete, but he always believed in enjoying the game. Keith was a rugby philosopher who left a strong impression not only on the first grade but on the whole club.

Keith McLellan was always a great believer in making the ball do the work and he coached all of us to develop our skills and he taught us new ones. He masterminded numerous exciting and innovative moves which were eventually stolen and used at Illawarra and NSW Country levels and generally he made the most out of a relatively small and fast team.

We made the Grand Final in 1967 and 1968 only to be beaten on both occasions by the great Kiama Teams. While we were disappointed not to win the premiership for Keith I am positive

that all my fellow players would agree that we would never have got as far individually or as a team without Keith McLellan's guidance."

Peter Sullivan - Wallaby Captain and Teachers College player 66-69

Keith has since retired from Academia is now living in Melbourne but College and ultimately Uni rugby owe him a great debt for the very solid foundation he laid for the future of the club.

The McLellan Era

(The following includes the recollections of Keith McLellan,)

1962

Although the intake of male students into the opening session of Wollongong Teachers college was small (about 25) there was enough interest to enter a team in the Illawarra Rugby Union 2nd grade competition. This decision was not unanimously endorsed as some of the students preferred Rugby League. But as an inter-collegiate in Rugby Union was to be held later in 1962 and playing Rugby League might have divided the men as some had loyalties to local (Wollongong) League teams. Rugby Union- the game, it is said, that is played in heaven, was the game to be played here on earth by the Wollongong Teachers College.

The team enjoyed itself as it was decided early to play a running, passing game based on fitness, quick hands with support in depth for the ball carrier. This was developed through an addition to touch football in training. The team was young and light weight, so the attack took precedence over defense. More games were lost than won. Today it could be called coarse Rugby as anyone who would play, did play and anyway they could play! Phil Webster had the distinction of being elected the first President and Captain.

The Season

The season began with a three-week series of trial that allowed the clubs the opportunity to get organised for the competition proper. Teachers College were finding their way, and all looked good for the season thanks to the excellent coaching of Coach McLellan.

Teachers, as the team was known, had a mixed season with good wins over Kiama (18-6 & 17-0), close losses against Uni (3-9 & 8-9) and Weerona (0-8 & 16-26) and some rugby lessons against North Wollongong Surf (13-25, 14-19 & 3 -42). These results are not reflected in the points table below, but some results were difficult to find in the Mercury coverage of the games.

Our players were well known at the Ambulance Station which occupied the site of the Town Cinemas as we played many matches at McCabe Park, opposite The Illawarra Leagues Club. On one occasion, against Weerona, we started with thirteen players but were forced to play with eleven players due to injuries and everyone was either occupied with injuries or hobbling to the Zambuk. Bill McGrath, the Principal, even acted as linesman. In a testimony to the spirit in the team R Treanor came back on to the field after suffering a very nasty cut eye. Also, in the loss to Uni 'B' one of their players suffered a broken leg while a Teachers player dislocated his knee. It was certainly no place for the faint hearted.

And some of the games were tough, especially against North Wollongong Surf, who won the competition. In one game against them they were reduced to twelve players as three of them were dismissed by the ref. This was a fairly regular occurrence as the Surf club guys were a mix of very talented footballers and outright thugs, often egged on by very boisterous spectators.

Final Points Table

'B' Grade	<i>Played</i>	<i>Won</i>	<i>Draw</i>	<i>Loss</i>	<i>Bye</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Points</i>
North Gong Surf	12	12		0	3	370	62	30
University	12	6	1	5	3	113	142	19
Teachers College	12	5		6	3	138	166	16
Weerona	12	5	1	8	3	159	253	13
Kiama	12	3		9	3	125	272	12

Minor Semi Final.

To play in the semis in the first season was a fitting reward for all the hard work put in by people both on and off the field which resulted in the club having a very good reputation in the District.

The opponent on the day was Weerona but due to steady rain throughout the game the rugby played was not all that flash. In a tight encounter the Weerona boys came out on top winning eight points to six. The point scorers for Teachers were John Armstrong with a try and a penalty goal kicked by G Barratt.

Thus, ended the inaugural season for the Teachers College club that promised much in the future.

1963: Teachers College Team

Inaugural 'B' Grade Premiers

Fielding a team was less difficult as the number of men doubled. Indeed, there were enough players to field two teams in the 'B' grade competition. Phil Webster was again President, but the captaincy went to Arthur Osborne, who was to become a key member of the Union, as in Trade Union movement, who had transferred from another College into 2nd year. Most of the players from the previous year made up the team and with injection of new players from first year it was a much more experienced, cohesive and skillful team than in 1962.

The Squad

A number of very good players were to take the field for the Teachers College side. John Armstrong, a centre, was chosen in the Illawarra team for Country week which indicates the improved depth of the team. John played so well that he was selected as a reserve for the Country Seconds team but met with some controversy when the officials discovered he was

still only seventeen years old and was not allowed to take the field. Arthur Osborne was also a standout player in the backs and others who were selected in the Illawarra u/21 rep team were M Tierney, H Gersback, L Kieran and A Herald.

The Season.

The 'B grade expanded from five teams to ten teams for the '63 season and the standard of the rugby played also improved dramatically. University, Vikings, Kiama and Combined Banks were able to field teams in both the grades while Teachers College entered an 'A' and a 'B' team. Weerona again fielded a team and Corrimal Surf dropped from the 'A' grade comp and teams from Windang Surf Club and Technical College were making their first appearances.

The season was much more successful one for Teachers for at the conclusion of the regular season the 'A' team remained undefeated and were the overwhelming favorite to win the premiership due to the expansive style of rugby that they played.

The Finals

The Major semifinal against Technical College fell during the August vacation and two players (who will remain nameless) were 'at sea' on their surfboards 'hanging five' and forgot the starting time. They arrived late – disrupting the team's rhythm and composure. But full marks to Tech who took advantage ran out winners 14 to nil. Their ability to dictate scrums and tough tacking limited the team's opportunities and despite the efforts of Geoff Ewart, who made breaks that weren't finished off, Teachers were not good enough on the day.

At this stage things became quite muddled. In the minor semi Uni and Corrimal Surf had played a three all draw and after a lot of discussions at District Meetings the game was replayed on the following Saturday, with Corrimal coming out on top. This meant that the Final between Teachers and Corrimal was played on the Thursday evening at Wollongong Showground. Inspired by a three try performance by captain Arthur Osborne Teachers defeated Corrimal Surf 16-3, and won their way into the Grand Final against Wollongong Tech.

This game was played at Kemblawarra Oval the following Saturday and the 'Teachers', playing in their red white and blue gear, despite being very fatigued won comfortably 17-0, gaining great encouragement from their band of passionate supporters.

The team scored five tries with Graham Meers and Arthur Osbourne notching two tries each and Bob Hodgetts crossing for the opening points. Unfortunately, goal kicker, Graham Piper, could only convert one of the tries.

Minor Premier and then Premiers of the Illawarra 2nd Grade competition was a fitting finale for those players who had launched the Club into the competition. In those days Teacher Training was only a two years course so that there was to be a turnover of at least two-thirds of the team for 1964.

The team had developed an attractive style – running, passing, supporting each other well. And they had also learnt to tackle, though they were still very light and scrummaging was not

a strong point. But they were a team who played the game together and they enjoyed it. For future teachers this wasn't a bad approach to the game to take with them into our schools.

Foundation Players

The names listed below are not the only players to have played in the 62 and 63 seasons for Teachers College but with the passing of time these are the names that were found in records. Hopefully others will come to light.

Phil Webster, John H Armstrong, John A Armstrong, T Riley, N Walton, Graham Meers, Bob Hodgetts, Graham Piper, John McMillan, Paul Pfahl, John Curry, Geoff Ewart, Alan Day, Alan Bailey, Gary Cormack, R Treanor, M Tierney, L Kieran, A Herald, G Barrett, Arthur Osborne.

These guys laid the foundation that grew into one of the most successful clubs in the Illawarra District Rugby Union competition until their amalgamation with University in 1981.