

# 2006 - University First Grade Premiers

The 2006 season saw a major change to the Illawarra competition that was to have a great impact on University Rugby with “The Illawarriors” accepted into the Shute Shield - the one round competition that ran in Sydney while the clubs were without their Super 14 players.

A great deal of soul searching had gone on by the local clubs whether to support the proposal or not as entering the Shute Shield would mean that the players would be unavailable for the first five rounds of the Illawarra comp. Some clubs openly opposed the move while some merely paid lip service to it and others, including University, were all for it. The clubs were also assured that several Sydney players would play for the Illawarra side and no club would be hugely disadvantaged. However, this did not turn out to be the case as Uni ended up with seven players required for the Illawarriors.

The other change to the competition format which was hugely disappointing to our club was that there was no Under 19’s as a number of clubs were unable to field a side.

## The Coaching Staff

### Sean Tolich

Sean Tolich stepped up to the first-grade coaching role as Keith McCreedy’s work commitments had him travelling to Western Australia.



A Kiwi, Sean grew up in Auckland and played rep rugby at a junior level for Counties Manakau and for the James Cook High School First XV, where he had the challenge of taking on a 14 year old Jonah Lomu who played in the tight five.

In 1998 Sean moved to Newcastle where he played for the Wanderers Club who made the semis in the two years he played there.

Sean moved to Wollongong in 2000 to work at Bluescope Steel and through a connection to Andrew Hales joined the University club and Sean took on a leadership role in first grade. Sean was a great influence on the teams he led, especially in the tough years early in the new century.

Although we did struggle Sean maintained his high standards and kept the first-grade side moving forward. Sean was also club captain and an active committee member who spent a lot of time ensuring the players’ views were well represented.

Upon retiring in 2005 Sean took on the coaching role of the second-grade side and with close mate Andrew Hales got the boys to the Final, which was a huge achievement.

Sean took over the first-grade coaching position in 2006 and had the distinction of being in charge when University club won its initial first grade premiership. Oh, what a night! Sean had stamped his own style on the team, and he went about his job in a relaxed and professional manner and the players responded positively.

## **Paul Murray.**

Paul Murray was to continue as the club coach, and he was instrumental in establishing a strong culture throughout the club with his no nonsense approach to the game.



Paul was a talented rugby player who played for Country while playing for Waratahs in the Illawarra Competition.

Paul had retired from playing at 28 due to family/teaching/Uni course commitments. He also joined the Teacher Exchange program and spent the next year on the Mornington Peninsula – No Rugby in Vic so he played Aussie Rules.

Paul's coaching career started in 1980 – Waratahs U18's didn't have a coach he said 'Yes.' Illawarra U18's didn't have a coach either so he said 'Yes' again. Next year he was Country U18 coach, then Illawarra U21 coach the following year.

In 1992 Paul was assistant Country coach to Bill Eddy, followed in 1993 as Country Coach. He coached Country against City that year and NSW politics had it that the City Coach was appointed NSW coach in 1993 and the Country counterpart would do the same the following year. The City Coach was Greg Smith. In 1994 professional Rugby was born and they changed the rules so Paul became NSW 2<sup>nd</sup> XV coach as well as state selector. He coached Country against five International teams over the next few seasons – the highlight of which was defeating the England team at Gosford.

The following year he coached Southern Districts 1sts (they not only avoided relegation but just failed to make the semi's after finishing last the year before). He moved on to Sydney Uni as skills coach in 1998 – the students winning 4 of the 6 GF's that year. In 1999 he was FT coach of the Northwest Athletics Association Rugby team in Alberta, Canada Paul returned to Wollongong in 2000 and coached Vikings for the next 3 seasons before moving to Uni in 2003. Somewhere along the time line – he was invited to sit his Level 3 Coaching Course and he is one of relatively few Level 3 Rugby Coaches.

## **Physiotherapist - Michael Baines**

A major plus was the signing of Michael Baines as Physio, as he not only performed miracles to get players back on the field but was instrumental in getting the club fit and motivated by his input in training sessions throughout the season.

## **Manager - Alan Hardcastle (aka The Pelican)**

Alan's involvement in the rugby club came about through him being a devoted father who came along to watch his son, Nick, play in the 19s. A very vocal supporter, Alan soon got caught up in the workings of the organisation and when asked to help manage the First grade side jumped at the chance and became a vital link on Match day. Alan was also on the committee and was a sponsor of the club.

## **The Players**

As is the case at all University clubs some members of the '05 team graduated and moved to all parts of Australia. Mark Robertson, Mitch Crawford and Tritium McNamara were not available but the majority of players were back and very determined to go that one step further and claim that elusive first title.

On the positive side the club welcomed Jack Nash, a promising prop, along with Simon McVeigh and Jason Zafiriadis, two dashing back rowers, to the fold. At the same time a number of players from the previous year's lower grades in Tom Brett, Grant Clark, Rob Fisher, Tom Keller and Mark Stubbs were all going to be pushing the regular first graders for spots in the top team.

Mark Placek, Justin Placek, Paul Tuala, Wa Hanita-Paki, Dean Rossitt and Jack Nash were to play a big part in the Illawarrior's Sydney endeavours while Jason Zafiriadis and Gareth Hirst both had to withdraw from the squad due to injuries. The club realised that with so many players on rep duty the first weeks were going to really stretch our playing strength.

What made the situation even more precarious was that we also suffered a horror run of injuries to other first graders before the season even started. 'Doc' Fenwick, Mark Stubbs, Shaun McCreedy and Vince Ochiel were all unavailable for the opening rounds due to illness or injury and Junior Baines was only able to play lower grades as he made his way back from his serious knee problem.

The opening three rounds saw us take on two of the heavy weights of the comp in Kiama and Tech-Tahs plus a resurgent Vikings outfit and it was a matter of survival for all three grades. It was great that the lower grades recorded some solid wins in this period which really boosted the morale of everyone but first grade struggled. The leadership and tenacity displayed by Andrew Stuckey and Lucas Combes was vital in maintaining focus when the going was the most difficult.

The team also lacked experience but an old war horse in Peter Nikolovski stepped forward and became a key figure in keeping things together. A number of young players also surprised many with their ability but games were lost by simple errors. What was pleasing was that no one gave up and we gradually improved with each outing and turned the season around with a gutsy draw with Camden, earned in the last minute with a converted try.

The players that did a grand job in this tough period included Chris Carroll, Amir Dato, Jeremy Futeran, Matt O'Sullivan, Tom Keller, Tim Gainsford, Tai Mackie, James Thorpe, Simon McVeigh and others who made brief appearances.

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief when the game against Shamrocks meant there was an influx of rep players into first grade. This marked the beginning of a great run which saw first grade complete the remainder of the season undefeated. A lot of the credit for this achievement can be attributed to the fact that the rep players had a great combination and were a lot fitter for their big game experiences. The club's depth also improved dramatically with injured players coming back and the return to the club of Hugh Clouston from Randwick.

The side played magnificent attacking Rugby as is exemplified by the huge wins over Avondale (85-0) and Bowral (98-0) while the defence was awesome and we finished the season proper in second spot. However, we had also had some close encounters with Kiama and Tech-Tahs which suggested it would not be an easy matter to win the coveted premiership trophy.

## Match Results

<i>Rd</i>					<i>Tries</i>	<i>Bonus Points</i>	<i>Comp Points</i>
1	University	<b>10</b>	v	Kiama	<b>38</b>	2	0
2	University	<b>10</b>	v	Vikings	<b>22</b>	2	0
3	University	<b>15</b>	v	Tech-Tahs	<b>24</b>	2	0
4	University	<b>24</b>	v	Camden	<b>24</b>	4	1
5	University	<b>13</b>	v	Shamrocks	<b>3</b>	2	0
6	University	<b>39</b>	v	Shoalhaven	<b>19</b>	5	1
7	University	<b>85</b>	v	Avondale	<b>0</b>	13	1
8	University	<b>20</b>	v	Kiama	<b>16</b>	3	0
9	University	<b>41</b>	v	Vikings	<b>20</b>	6	1
10	University	<b>17</b>	v	Tech-Tahs	<b>7</b>	2	0
11	University	<b>25</b>	v	Camden	<b>17</b>	4	1
12	University	<b>24</b>	v	Shamrocks	<b>10</b>	4	1
13	University	<b>45</b>	v	Bowral	<b>0</b>	7	1
14	University	<b>26</b>	v	Shoalhaven	<b>5</b>	4	1
15	University	<b>98</b>	v	Bowral	<b>0</b>	16	1
16	University	<b>34</b>	v	Avondale	<b>29</b>	5	1

### The Finals Series

As we entered the semis we overcame some injury scares and the squad that played in the finals was mostly made of the following players: Jack Nash, Hugh Clouston, Doc Fenwick, Junior Baines, Grant Clark, Mark Stubbs, Lucas Combes, Peter Nikolovski, Paul Tuala, Andrew Stuckey, Wara Hanita-Paki, Mark Placek, Justin Placek, Tom Brett, Gareth Hirst, Rob Fisher, Shaun McCreedy, Simon McVeigh, Dean Rossitt, Tom Keller and Chris Carroll.

The first semi was played at Shoalhaven and this proved a difficult place to get to for some young adventurers who had gone bush the previous day to attend a 21<sup>st</sup>. This minor hiccup was overcome and we did beat Tech by 25-20 with some gutsy defense and a matching turning performance by Wa Hanita-Paki who scored a try and kicked a penalty and conversion. Other try scorers were Mark Stubbs, Tom Brett and Mark Placek. However, the real hero in many ways was a person who didn't even get on the paddock in the form of Mick Baines. This miracle worker was able to get a number of injured players including Stuckey, Wa and Paul Tuala on the field when others would have given up and his efforts were a significant part of our success.

The next hurdle came in the form of Kiama who relied on a dominant scrum to lay the foundations for their wins. Even Mother Nature seemed to be conspiring against us as the game was played in torrential rain and gale force wind at a very muddy Vikings Oval.

The boys ran into the strong southerly in the first half and defended doggedly to keep Kiama at bay. The forwards were outstanding in the lineouts and gained a plentiful supply of ball to see us cross for three superb tries to Baines, Tuala and Brett. It then became a matter of hanging on as Kiama came into their own with two tries and the game was in the balance for a long period until the bell sounded. This 15 – 10 win ensured that Uni were on their way to another Grand Final.

Tech-Tahs ended Kiama's season in the Final and this meant a replay of the Grand Final of 2005 was the result. This time we were the favourites.



## The Grand Final Squad



*Left to Right: Back row— Alan Hardcastle (manager), Luke Wilcocks (runner), Adam Wright, Sean Tolich (coach), Simon McVeigh, Tom Keller, Chris Baines, Grant Clark, Jack Nash, Mark Stubbs, Shaun McCreedy, Chris Carroll, Paul Murray (club coach), Michael Baines (physio). Middle Row—Alex Fenwick, Dean Rossitt, Lucas Combes, Hugh Clouston, Paul Tuala, Peter Nikolovski. Front Row—Tom Brett, Justin Placek, Andrew Brooks, Gareth Hirst, Mark Placek (captain), Andrew Stuckey, Wara Hanita-Paki, Rob Fisher.*

The team that took the field that day was:

- |                      |                   |                       |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) Chris Baines     | (2) Hugh Clouston | (3) Jack Nash         |
| (4) Mark Stubbs      |                   | (5) Grant Clark       |
| (6) Peter Nikolovski | (8) Paul Tuala    | (7) Lucas Combes      |
| (9) Andrew Stuckey   |                   | (10) Wara Hanita-Paki |
| (12) Mark Placek (c) |                   | (13) Justin Placek    |
| (11) Gareth Hirst    | (15) Rob Fisher   | (14) Tom Brett        |

In a game that failed to reach any great heights we built a lead of 10-3 at half time through a try to Junior Baines and a conversion and penalty to Wa. After that it was battle to keep Tech at bay and there were chances missed by both sides. A couple of sin bins to both teams meant that the game was a stop start affair until Paul Tuala sealed the victory with a typical rampaging effort to give Uni a 15-3 lead.

The game ended minutes early when a potentially serious neck injury to Andrew Stuckey saw an ambulance being called onto the field. After a very nervous wait the anxious players and spectators were informed that all was well and it was only then that all the emotions came bubbling to the surface. I must say that many felt more relief than anything else that after so long we had finally had our name on the trophy.

Celebrations went on late into the night and many carried on for what seemed days but everyone connected with the club felt immense pride in the achievement and the players basked in the glory so richly deserved.

**Players who played First Grade (includes games as replacements).**

	<i>Games</i>		<i>Games</i>		<i>Games</i>
Andrew Stuckey	19	Lucas Combes	19	Peter Nikolovski	18
Grant Clark	18	Justin Placek	17	Matthew O'Sullivan	16
Tom Brett	15	Mark Stubbs	15	Mark Placek	15
Jack Nash	15	Wara Hanita-Paki	14	Chris Carroll	14
Robert Fisher	14	Chris Baines	13	Gareth Hirst	13
Paul Tuala	13	Tom Keller	12	Simon McVeigh	11
Amir Dato	10	Jeremy Futeran	10	Hugh Clouston	9
Tai Mackie	7	Alex Fenwick	7	Dean Rossit	6
Shaun McCready	6	Mathew Kinred	5	James Thorpe	4
Adam Wright	4	Tim Gainsford	4	Vincent Ochiel	3
Andrew Brooks	3	Killian Grennell	3	Jason Zafiriadis	2
Jason Mackie	2	James Hanita-Paki	2	Raul Rojas	2
Graham Ryan	2	Raul Rojas	2	Dave Shepherd	1
Mark Robertson	1	Andrew Hales	1	Robert Leslie	1
Chris Bockhodt	1	Tom Marrett	1	Brad Milner	1

**Points**

	<i>Tries</i>	<i>Goals</i>	<i>Pen.</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Tries</i>	<i>Goals</i>	<i>Pen.</i>	<i>Total</i>
Mark Placek	10	42	8	158	Wara Hanita-Paki	8	4	2	54
Simon McVeigh	2	3	1	19					

**Try Scorers**

	<i>Tries</i>		<i>Tries</i>		<i>Tries</i>		<i>Tries</i>
Tom Brett	16	Paul Tuala	15	Mark Placek	10	Justin Placek	9
Gareth Hirst	5	Andrew Stuckey	5	Matt O'Sullivan	4	Jack Nash	3
Mark Stubbs	3	Rob Fisher	2	Tom Keller	2	Simon McVeigh	2
Lucas Combes	1	Jeremy Futeran	1	Killian Grennell	1	James Thorpe	1
Chris Baines	1						

**Best and Fairest Points**

	<i>Club B &amp; F</i>	<i>District B &amp; F</i>		<i>Club B &amp; F</i>	<i>District B &amp; F</i>
Justin Placek	12	0	Andrew Stuckey	12	12
Mark Stubbs	10	4	Tom Brett	9	0
Mark Placek	8	4	Wara Hanita-Paki	6	10
Paul Tuala	6	17	Jack Nash	5	0
Peter Nikolovski	4	3	Chris Baines	3	0
Simon McVeigh	3	0	Chris Carroll	3	0
Grant Clark	3	0	Dean Rossit	3	0
Robert Fisher	2	0	James Thorpe	2	0
Vincent Ochiel	2	0	Raul Rojas	1	0
Tom Keller	1	2	Lucas Combes	0	4

## **IDRU 2006 Honours List – University winners**

Player of the Year	Paul Tuala
Illawarriors Player of the Year	Paul Tuala
Leading Point Scorer	Mark Placek
Player of the Grand Final	Mark Placek

### **What They Said**

Well what a year it was! 2006 will go down in the history of the club as we won our first ever FIRST grade premiership as the University club and the first in 34 years since Teachers College won it in 1972. All the players, coaching and support staff are to be congratulated on this monumental effort particularly winning the last 15 games and this side arguably will go down in history as one of the great sides.

*Dr Paul Webb - President*

It was a slow start to the season due to a number of players being unavailable for the first 5 rounds. This gave a number of players a chance to gain experience in higher grades - which will be valuable for next season. It is a credit to everyone who dug deep during these first few weeks as 44 Mallee Bulls had the privilege of playing first grade this year. The draw against Camden in round four was the catalyst for first grade's remarkable run towards the premiership.

Saturday the 1<sup>st</sup> of July was one of the most important days in the clubs 45-year history - Reunion Day against Vikings at Uni Oval. As a player I don't think there have been many other games where there has been more pressure to win. From the function at the North Gong the night before and at the game all we heard was "Don't you dare lose to these bastards". I think I can speak for everyone who played that day and say how proud it was to run out as a Mallee Bull in front of all the old boys. Needless to say that everyone enjoyed the dinner that night after witnessing the Uni smash the Blue Scum in all three grades.

The second highlight of the season was no doubt Grand Final day at WIN stadium. Thank you to all the water runners, managers, doctors and physios for allowing the players in both grades to concentrate on playing. Also a big thank you to all our supporters for being part of the day and night, it was great to be able to share our success with you.

*Mark Placek First Grade Captain*

Throughout the past four years it has been my pleasure to work with so many young enthusiastic players. I have seen the development of many of these players through physical and mental strengths within the game of rugby and as exceptional young men entering the work force. The commitment they developed and the discipline necessary to play at the levels they achieved will hold them in good stead whether in rugby teams or just life in itself.

*Paul Murray - Club Coach*

The grand final victory of 15-3 was the culmination of a season's effort. The team went in expecting to win and executed all day to achieve the result. The defensive effort was outstanding with our line not crossed. The replacements all did a fine job in the second half and with a bit of luck we could have really blown them away. History though is all that matters and that shows that University were the Premiers of 2006.

*Sean Tolich - First Grade Coach*

