

History of the Taieri Junior Rugby 7's. 1962 to 1977

The first tournament was held at Memorial park, Mosgiel on Saturday 25th August 1962 with entries from 42 teams in six grades. At this time there were 16 clubs with teams entered in the Saturday morning school boys section. The only club not still participating today is Otakau. Three full-sized grounds, two smaller grounds and two other temporary grounds playing cross-field were used. Changing facilities were available at the swimming pool within the skeleton of the Memorial Park Sports Centre, which was then in the process of being built by voluntary labour, and a builders hut. The first five years gate charge for spectators was 1/6 and the entry fee was 1/- per player. Despite all manner of inflation, the entry fee remained unchanged until 1976 when it was increased to \$1.00 per team. Medallions were awarded to each player in the winning team and the first years medallions cost £10.10. Refereeing was a problem with little support coming from the referees association. This situation has improved in more recent years, but the club owes a lot to its band of local identities who have assisted with referring on Saturday mornings. Tents were erected and an energetic band of women manned the staff with hot pies, sweets, soft drinks etc. All the valuables owned by the ladies (the stock of sweets etc) were always locked up in the famous tin trunk. This must have started its career in the days where gold dust was transported by armed escort from Central Otago to Dunedin and was guarded by the ladies with equal zealousness. The weather conditions for the first tournament were not very good. It was a cold overcast day with a light drizzle.

The following year, a sub-committee chaired by Laurie Pheloung, formulated plans for an annual seven-a-side to be held on Queens Birthday to be on a knockout basis to start at 9.30am and finish at 4.30pm. The senior Body was approached for support in running the tournament but throughout the years the school boy committee have conducted these tournaments very much on their own. The second years tournament on Queens birthday was cancelled through heavy rain and snow. It was postponed until a day in August. Clubs held all entries without defection and it was

then run off successfully. The cancelation caused a major problem in disposing with 21 dozen pies which had been ordered and the tournament cancelation came to late to stop Frews in their manufacture. Without the aid of a Hawkers licence, they were staked out all over Mosgiel and many citizens must have lived on pies for many days there after.

In years 1964 and 1965 the tournament continued in much the same pattern, except in 1965 some grounds were available on Peter Johnstone Park. Building of the present pavilion had started but no boundary fence had been erected and dressing facilities were still available at the swimming club. The O.R.F.U restricted finishing time to 1.00pm as they were afraid that the tournament would become too large a counter-attraction to Country Day!! Entries in 1965 were 52 teams and a balance sheet shows that a reasonable profit of approximately £40 was made.

In 1966 the tournament was held entirely at Peter Johnston Park although the pavilion was not finished and officially opened until 25 March 1967. A new draw allowing for sectional play was introduced which ensured that all teams got at least two games with most getting three before moving into post sectional play. The pie order had increased to 40 dozen. Control became sophisticated with white coats for ground managers and gate keepers, a public address system was in operation and a large result board ensured that there as no arguments as to which team was the section winner.

In 1967 with the opening of the pavilion, saw further improvements with small dummy goalposts being donated to the club by Ernie Parker, for use on the half-sized grounds. These were used on small grounds set up in the dead ball area behind the full sized grounds. Entries were increasing and it was becoming a problem to finish anywhere near the 1pm deadline. The winners medals were presented this year by Peter Johnstone.

The 1968 tournament proceeded in much the same manner and there is nothing extraordinary to report.

1969 became the club's first red letter days as members of the Welsh Rugby Supporters club were present for most of the day. [Bledwyn Williams presented the medals and he was assisted by Clem Thomas who had played against the 1935 All Blacks in Wales and the great rugby writer Vivian Jenkins. He was heard to remark after watching some last minute coaching by Bert Haig with his team which went on to win the final, "how can Welshman ever beat the All Blacks when contact rugby is taught here in New Zealand to players so young".](#) Not that he objected to our methods, more so that he and the other Welshmen present, were all dumbfounded at the spectacle of more than 700 primary school boys playing seven-a-side rugby with so much enthusiasm. Cameras clicked incessantly and copious notes were taken on weights, gradings etc all for taking back to Wales.

The 1970 tournament proceeded as usual, the only innovation being that programmes were available to the public. This was the year of the great disputes over coaching of schoolboy rugby players when several ill-informed, but possibly well-meaning people had lots to say, and write, about instruction to players during the week etc. The enjoyment evident to all players, and more particularly the skill shown by the players on seven-a-side days, shows that some coaching, even in the barest basics of the game, is demanded by the boys just as much as the elders feel that it is necessary for them to be taught. It is obvious – perhaps?? – That many of our seniors today never had enough coaching!!!!

By 1971 the annual entries climbed over the hundred mark and this meant that the tournaments were being organised with over 150 games being played in the space of about five hours. Organisation was pretty streamlined by now and except for the odd dispute regarding overweight boys and such like, the tournaments were being run fairly smoothly. To avoid the bias towards our own club players, an independent Disputes committee was established this year when Taieri representatives was joined by two other representatives from other clubs to handle any disputes that might arise. This also was the year when some thought was given to extending

the tournament to include high school boys in an overweight grade. Entries were received from McGlashan, Alhambra, Bayfield, Dunedin and Taieri but the organisation had been left a bit too late and it was found that the grounds were just not available to add this extra grade to the tournament. It has since been taught, however, that the present concept of primary school boys seven-a-side tournament to be run some Sunday afternoon perhaps at the end of the season. The spectacle could be tremendously exciting.

By 1972 the O.R.F.U. had been prevailed upon to drop their objection to trying to finish the day as soon after 1 o'clock as possible, and the tournament this year started at 10 am and finished around 3pm and tournaments in succeeding years have kept much to the same timetable. 1972 also saw the start by the Southern club in running a 10-a-side tournament at Bathgate Park at the end of the season and this has also been a continuing success.

[1973 was our second red-letter day in that we had the pleasure to welcome Colin Meads and his wife, Verna to our tournament.](#) He was visiting Dunedin for the weekend as a guest of the Union club at their jubilee celebrations and we were grateful to that club in allowing us some of his time to see some of the final games and present the winners medallions. The weather was not kind to us for this auspicious occasion and later in the day it turned positively awful with heavy shows of rain and sleet. The players were equally determined, however, to finish the games out to the finals in conditions which on any other day without such honoured guests present, the cancellation committee would have closed up the day a couple of hours earlier. Colin himself had not started playing rugby until well on into his teens, but his amazement was profound as he watched the little 5 stone 7 pounders battle out their final in the poring rain. The medals the winners received that day meant almost nothing compared to the hand-shake they received from someone who must be almost every schoolboy rugby players idol. And to think that he had the time to come and watch them play, and in the pouring rain as well. This, and other similar incidents, is all that the

organisers of school boy rugby would wish as their reward for a job well done.

The 1974 tournament was cancelled because of heavy rain over the preceding few days, but ironically the weather cleared during the morning. Clubs once again held their entries intact and the tournament was run off on Sunday 17 June. The use of Sunday was not generally accepted by everyone as the ideal day and it was with some trepidation that it was agreed to run a Sunday tournament. The day was beautifully fine, spectators turned out in their hundreds and it turned out to be possibly the most successful tournament held yet. It was seriously thought that future tournaments should be held on a Sunday a little later in the season as Queens Birthday weather was proving to be generally bad, however Queens Birthday Monday retained most favour.

The 1975 and 1976 years followed without undue incident, with young All Blacks Lyn Jaffray and Garry Sear presenting the medals in those respective years. Both these young men had started their rugby in the lower grades of Saturday morning rugby and each had played in the seven-a-sides in winning teams. From the primitive beginning, the tournament has grown into a highly organised affair. There was the year when toilet facilities were at their barest minimum with a temporary barricade of straw bales stacked at the requisite angle to upset the view. The referees were late in arriving thinking that it was a 10.30am start instead of 10 o'clock, and Allan Michelle in charge of refs for the day rushed them out to their respective grounds with undue haste. On ground no 4, both teams were lined up ready to start, the ball was nicely set up ready for the kick-off when the ref blew his whistle, he then streaked for the banks of the Silverstream. Nature was calling in no uncertain manner, and we had not provided the necessary rolls of paper in that particular area. The game duly commenced 2 ½ minutes late but the programme for the day was not greatly upset!!! Another year saw the amazing spectacle of a scrum packing down without an opposition. The rules state that if one team is late in taking the field, the team that is ready can kick off, and if no infringement is made it is

feasibly possible for them to score under the bar convert their try and score six points. If the opposition then arrives the game can continue with the opposition six points down and working all the harder to make up the leeway. This day, the team that had started on their own managed to knock the ball on somehow, and the ref blew his whistle and indicated that a scrum should follow. But try as he could he just could not conceive a true scrum without the opposition forwards to pack down against. He tried very hard, however, until a kindly ground manager interpreted the rules correctly for him!!!

1977 will see the 16th tournament being held at which it is hoped members of the touring Lions team will be present. We expect that entries will exceed 110 teams which means that 770 boys will be playing and possibly another 100 boys will be their emergencies. Five full sized grounds and six half-sized grounds will be in use and between 10am and 3pm on Monday Queens Birthday 6 June more than 160 games of seven-a-side will be played. Each game is 5 minutes each way and the timetable allows 12 minutes per game. Each ground has two ground managers, and most grounds have two referees so that the organising team consists of about sixty people in various guises, not counting the dozens of ladies in the pie stalls etc. Profits in money measure might exceed \$100 but in pleasure would be uncountable at what is considered in these parts to be the largest seven-a-side tournament of its kind to be held anywhere in New Zealand.

And helping in 1977 will be at least five people who helped to get the first tournament off the ground. They are Allan Michelle, Trevor Bent, Ray Wilson, Laurie Pheloung and Len Blackie. Many others have helped along the way as ground managers for several years, gate keepers, liaising with the ladies (not to be alarmed – it means keeping the copper boiling etc) loud speaker announcer, raffle ticket sellers and even to tidy up afterwards. Without them all, this tournament would not have grown to become such a popular function that it has.