

Rugby's first Competitive Season 1923

The launching of the club into competitive sports was not confined to cricket. A team was entered in the 1923 competition of the second grade NSW Junior Rugby Union and, in this case the Club certainly did have something to crow about. The following is a list of matches played and their results: -

12.05.23	v	Paddington at Centennial park	- lost 16-nil
19.05.23	v	Clovelly at Hammond Park	- lost 20-3
26.05.23	v	Eastwood at Hammond Park	- won 26-6
02.06.23	v	Roseville at Centennial Park	- won 14-9
09.06.23	v	Mosman at Hammond Park	- won 17-9
30.06.23	v	Paddington at Centennial Park	- lost 9-3
07.07.23	v	Clovelly at Centennial Park	- won 8-3
14.07.23	v	Eastwood at Hammond Park	- won 31-0
21.07.23	v	Roseville at Killara	- drew 6 all
28.07.23	v	Mosman at Centennial Park	- won 6-3
04.08.23	v	Paddington at Hammond Park	- won 17-8
11.08.23	v	Clovelly at St Lukes	- won 12-6
18.08.23	v	Eastwood at Hammond Park	- won 43-3
25.08.23	v	Roseville at Hammond Park	- won 12-6
01.09.23	v	Mosman at Centennial Park	- won 8-0

Clovelly won the competition with ourselves as runners-up.

As this entry into competitive football was of such a momentous importance, we have asked one of the participants in this first effort to give us his impressions. He has very competently done so in the following manner: -

“Just a few impressions by one who took the field on that historic day of our first competitive game, Memory after 22 years is rather of course rather dim and vague. I can only recollect undressing in a canvas tent on Centennial Park and being very proud of myself in my new outfit. In those days the club colour's were maroon and gold horizontal bars.

The Paddington side looked formidable in All Black jerseys and I think we were a little overawed. They proved to be just as tough and competent as they looked, and we were soundly trounced to the tune of 16-nil. My only personal recollection of the actual play is Bob Clark's voice urging the forwards on and it was almost entirely due to his efforts both as a player and captain that our defeat didn't degenerate into a rout.

Although memory has deserted me as to details I still feel capable of conveying adequate impressions of my team mates during the early years of the Club's football career. First of all, there was our competent full back Langer McMillan. Then there was Booty as centre three quarters – perhaps the first of the “characters” which have at various times enlivened the Club with their wit. Even tough, ungainly and clumsy in appearance, he had the uncanny knack of doing the right thing at the right time and believe it or not, could kick a goal from the touchline.

Bob Clark, who also played in the centre three quarters, was another. Very few of the present generation may realize what a clever and capable centre Bob was in his young days (Editor's Note: Ah! So long ago). He was fast, a good handler with a slick cut-through, and unselfish in to the bargain. Next there was Bertie Travers – a rather remarkable young man with only one hand (a fend

with the stun pod the other was a formidable weapon in his armoury) – who was fast and determined and used the cross-kick quite cleverly.

Among the forwards the inimitable “Edda” Perrin was a star. His squeaky voice was often calling for the pass as he backed up. A good all-round forward was our Ted. Covering the others as briefly as possible, there were Archie O’Brien, a temperamental Irishman, Doug page, long rangy and drawly of voice, Peter Meulman and Claude Elbourne, both of whom played miles above their weight (about 6 stone). Peter eventually became a very competent centre forward. Perc Murray who later played on the wing, was the greyhound of the team.

Last but not least, there was the famous or infamous “Mac”, who talked his way through the match and has talked his way through club affairs off and on for the following 22 years.

In all, we were just a timid bunch of kids (Editor’s Note: !!!!!) doing our best in a game we loved for as club we loved. It took many years to develop the renowned Briars toughness and aggressiveness and many a ball had to be kicked and handled before opposing Club’s dubbed us ‘those bulldog Briars’.

Having tried to convey how most of us felt in our first competition match and given ‘thumbnail sketches’ of some of the players, I would like to conclude with a few impressions of the season generally.

It was extremely fortunate that we met the two strongest teams in the competition in the first two matches. From our defeats we learnt a number of valuable lessons which we applied, and which eventually enabled us to go through the second round undefeated to finish in second position. From the Paddington match we learnt that even Junior Competition Football is much tougher proposition than the hardest School football. In the forwards we were astonished at the number of tough tricks put over by the opposing forwards. The whole Paddington side were a hard-boiled lot and their backs included two brothers named Pallias, who not many years later changed over to the Professional code and were for long time prominent players for Eastern suburbs Rugby League. On the other hand, Clovelly was a fine sporting side which played fast open football and from them we sustained our biggest defeat of the season. We were particularly impressed with the play of their breakaways, Nixon and Hawthorne, whose cover defence stopped our own halves and whose backing up of their own three and roving were superb. In those days, the rules gave the breakaways much more latitude.

As a result of lessons learnt, the scrum was changed and Ted Perrin, our star forward was transferred to the breakaway position. He played there for the rest of the season with so much success that he was selected in the Junior representative team which played in the early match to the All Blacks who were visiting Australia.

Our next match against Eastwood provided proof of the quick absorption of technique and experience. Although the opposition was not up to that of our previous matches, our 26-6 win as the source of much pride to our players. To those who know the club’s football history, this match will be remembered as the first of a long series of struggles down the years with Eastwood who, because of their proximity, could almost be called our traditional opponents.

Apart from further defeats by Paddington and Clovelly at the second encounter, we piled an unbroken list of victories and high-light of the season came when, at our third try, we toppled Clovelly. Did we stick our chests out that day! It was our match on a fully enclosed ground. The weather was perfect and there were present to witness our triumph quite a large crowd of fond parents and friends not to mention a good contingent of the fair sex who held our hearts’ interest at

the moment. The details of this particular match were published in the local "rags" and will probably be included in this history."

We oblige our commentator by responding hereunder the report referred to: -

"Burwood Briars defeated Clovelly at St. Lukes Oval on Saturday. Clovelly kicked off against the wind and rushed play to Burwood's quarter where McMillan relieved with a fine kick. From a scrum in the centre, Clovelly secured and passing tried to get their three-quarter line moving. This succeeded till the winger fumbled. Murray, seizing this opportunity picked up and scored between the posts, but Booty failed at goal. Burwood 3 to nil. With another forward rush Burwood nearly scored again. A scrum on the line and Booty struggled over. Burwood 6 to nil. Play now see-sawed considerably and Clovelly had a free kick in front. Hawthorn kicked the goal making the scores: Burwood 6, Clovelly 3. On resumption Clovelly strove hard to equalise. They succeeded, Johnson, their wing forward scoring. Hawthorn failed with the kick. The game was still confined to the forwards who kept the ball on the toe. From a scrum on Clovelly's line McDowell secured and crossed. Booty failed at goal. Burwood came again which resulted in a try for McGregor. Full Time scores: Burwood 12, Clovelly 6".

From Ready Skill, Manly courage, circa 1938