

THE BRIARS GOLDEN OLDIES RUGBY

Golden Oldies rugby was started with matches between New Zealand, Japan and USA played in New Zealand and USA prior to the Third International Golden Oldies Rugby Festival held in Sydney in July 1983.

One afternoon, before the third festival, Bruce Robinson and John Staniforth were enjoying a beverage in the George Street clubrooms when they spotted an article in the Daily Telegraph promoting the 1983 festival in which players had to be at least 35 years old, content to play the game for the game itself in a spirit in keeping with the Golden Oldies motto of fun, friendship and fraternity.

Robbo and Stanno observed that the Briars had many current players in the Sub-District competition who were qualified by age and could easily adopt the other criteria. So, the decision was made to enter a Briars team in the third festival which had attracted 128 teams from around the world. There were enough eligible current players for a team and retired players were also invited to join up.

A trial match was held before the festival and was played in the mud at Concord Oval against the Western Suburbs Golden Oldies. The friendly spirit shown on the field and the after-match hospitality provided by Wests indicated what we could expect in the festival.

Public interest in the festival grew and our oldest player, Charlie Williams, was interviewed on 2KY.

The Golden Oldies adopted the original all gold playing jumper and we had them embroidered identifying the festival with the club's usual Rose Badge sewn on. A separate sew-on badge would be made for each subsequent festival.

The Briars were fortunate to draw three international games in the festival against the Glenfield Grizzlies from NZ, the Old Frothonians from USA, and the Caymen Island Rugby Club. All games were played in the eastern suburbs. There were many highlights during and after these games. Who can remember David Blair wearing a wet suit and flippers serving glasses of Briars Special Port to both teams at one-third time?

A function to honour our opponents, held in the George Street clubrooms was a resounding success.

The next international festival was announced to be held in London in 1985 and the work of organising the tour commenced.

1984 was a quiet year with only two games. One a return match with the Western Suburbs "Black Knights" and the other against a President's XV comprising younger players selected from the clubs ranks. We also had a game with the Central Coast Seagulls.

It should be noted at this stage that the results of Golden Oldies games are of no consequence.

No record of the scores is kept as is the case for the international festivals.

Planning for the 1985 London Festival proceeded. Eventually 52 people made up the tour party being 31 gentlemen 19 ladies and 2 children. Peter Dunlop's father, Gordon, joined the tour and distinguished himself by attracting the most fines, primarily for currency violations.

Air New Zealand was the sponsor of the festivals and teams were required to fly Air New Zealand unless they had no suitable flight. We were permitted to fly JAL.

We first played the Old Vulgarians from England. After this game the festival organisers presented Briars with a bottle of scotch for being the best dressed team to play at the London Irish ground that day. This was in no small part due to the Briars all wearing their maroon and gold striped blazers when arriving at the field. These blazers were a big hit with other participants but the check-in girl at Narita Airport mistook us for an old-time song and dance group on our return flight home.

Our second game was against Richmond who had international representatives and were a regular club side in the local competition. Doug Staniforth scored a try which he appeared to convert. Bob Clark joined us for the team photo.

Our third game was against the Boston Brahmins from USA and some strong friendships were formed with their players including Frank "The Trader" Ching.

The festival ended with a HUGE formal dinner in a disused dock store attended by over 5,000 guests making it the biggest sit-down western cutlery dinner in the world. It was serviced by 5 kitchens and 3 different bands provided music for after-dinner dancing.

After the festival, the Briars travelled via Oxford to Amsterdam where we played a match against the Amstel-Veen side under flood lights. After the game, we were treated to goot zupe and draft Heineken beer.

Leaving Amsterdam, the tour continued through Rudesheim, Munich, Venice, Lucerne, Paris, Trier and finally home via Tokyo.

The next festival was announced to be held in Auckland in 1987. We were low on numbers, but honorary Briar status was granted to some players from Glenfield Grizzlies and Carlton Comets to supplement our numbers.

In Auckland we first faced the North Island Vikings who had the Going brothers and Richie Guy in their team. A back line move code named "going-going-going-gone" was a wonder to behold.

We then played the Pakaranga Fencibles in which "The Richmond Move" was repeated and the try converted by "phantom of the red shorts".

Finally, we played the NZ Evergreens from Manawatu in which game the 3 Grizzlies and Don

Flynn were the only players left try-less due to their unselfish ball distribution.

The next festival would be held in Toronto, Canada in 1989 and the Briars again were present but this time wearing a maroon and gold jumper similar to that of the Brisbane Broncos at that time.

As many teams had imaginative names such as Crippled Crows, Legless Emus, Wrinkled Rats and Tarnished Turtles, the Briars Golden Oldies adopted the "The Wilted Briars" as their alternative name although all festival entries continued to be made as The Briars Rugby Club.

In Toronto we played Balmy Beach, Northcote Old Boys and another New Zealand side.

A function held in the Balmy Beach clubhouse on the shores of Lake Ontario was a great night.

We left Toronto and travelled down the east coast of USA stopping in Boston for a match with Boot Hill Rugby (formerly the Boston Brahmins).

The 1991 festival was to be held in Perth and Bob Stephenson took over as Tour Organiser.

We again wore the maroon and gold jumper used in Toronto.

We drew games against a team from Japan and two New Zealand Sides.

Following the successful Perth festival, Ted Callaghan became the organiser of the 1993 festival to be held in Dublin.

As our numbers were dwindling, Ted arranged recruits from Terry Hills Rugby Club and CBOBS, but we entered as The Briars. The team wore maroon and gold striped jumpers.

We played the Frankfurter Bembelschwenkers, the Ruatoki Mystys and the Dublin Police.

Queensland coach John Connolly and Wallaby prop who were in France joined us, The Wallaby was keen to play against the Bembelschwenkers despite being just a little "under age". We explained this to the opposing captain and he asked his team. They all said - "Yah we want to play a Wallaby". In fairness to them he was not played at prop but at five-eighth. His size and ball skills allowed him to excel at this unnatural position.

The 1993 Dublin festival was the last one in which the Briars participated.

John Staniforth
February 2018

1983 Briars Golden Oldies



- Back Row:** Bob Hodgson, John Staniforth, Ian Blair Ross Pearson, Rex Harris, Ken Kable; Bruce Robinson, Greg Williams, Peter Grant, Don Flynn Graeme Rolleston, Mike Elder, Bruce Evans
- Standing:** Dick Vanderfield, Ian Richard, Mike Mathews, Lindsay Dyter, Leo Purtell, Dave Watkins, Phil England, Paul McKenzie-Wood, David Hayles Tony McSweeney; Ian McGregor
Doug Staniforth, Bob Hellyer, Warren Rann, Jim Barret
- Sitting:** Rod Smith II, Tom Cusbert, Charlie Williams, David Jamieson, Bob McLeish, Mike Twemlow, Peter Burt, Gordon Hutcheson, Larry Thompson Joe Rose, Hughie Burns
- On Grass:** Laurie Yeomans, Mascot Yeomans, Dusty Saunders, Col Dennis, Craig Hickey