

Chairman's Letter from Ballymore

August 21, 2009

With so much going on at Queensland Rugby and the QR Reds, I thought it timely to exercise the privilege that normally rests with the Chairman to provide you with this update.

As you are no doubt aware, your Board will soon be considering the appointment of a new director to replace former Chairman Peter Lewis and, all things being equal, the new appointee will also become Chairman.

May I take this opportunity to acknowledge the good work Peter did in moving Ballymore forward and driving for greater QRU connection with community rugby. Peter put his heart and soul (and money!) into the QRU. Thanks Lewie.

The QRU Constitution empowers the Board to fill a casual vacancy for the interim period until the next Annual General Meeting and in this case, your Board has sought the assistance of a nominations sub-committee to review the candidates.

This committee, chaired by QRU President David Crombie plus Bruce Swann, from the Sunnybank Rugby Club, merchant banker Peter Hemming and myself, will advise the board, who will make the final decision.

With a new CEO also to be recruited to take over from Ken Freer later this year, it is appropriate that the new Chairman be in place before this process progresses further.

The sub-committee has eight strong candidates to consider. Their names will remain confidential out of respect for the wishes of a number of the nominees.

In selecting the new director we will be mindful of having a good balance of skills on the Board and, ultimately, with the new CEO.

Also, because of all that is happening in the world of rugby at this time of the year - Reds preparations for 2010, sponsorship negotiation and forward planning - we are mindful of the need to move with appropriate speed on resolving both of these matters.

While it's inevitable that these sorts of challenges tend to claim the spotlight, there are many good things happening in Queensland rugby which can be too easily overlooked, such as:

- * the recent re-signing of Digby loane, potentially one of the most exciting backs in world rugby;
- * the re-signing of our most capped Red, Sean Hardman, who epitomises the commitment and dedication we want from every Reds player;
- * the signing of flanker Lei Tomiki, a try-scoring, hard-on-the-ball flanker who's proved himself in the rugged French professional competition;
- * the signing of try-scoring centre Will Chambers from the Melbourne Storm;
- * the number of Queensland players (9) in this year's Australian U20 World Cup squad of 26, the most of any province;

* Premier rugby is firing. Easts are the reigning national club champions (they beat Sydney Uni in Sydney earlier this year) and crowds are up at premier games. The semi-finals will be real contests;

* Ballymore will be pumping during the Festival of Rugby from September 12/13 to October 9 - a QRU initiative showcasing the best of the amateur game; and

* we have a successful junior development program that has won national Under 16 and Australian Schools championships (2008 was the fourth year running for Queensland Schools and they supplied just under half of the Australian and Australia A school squads) and which is delivering a steady stream of talented young players to the OAS Reds Academy and QR Reds ranks.

Thanks to the efforts of OAS Reds Academy coach Paul Carozza and many others, our young, up and coming rugby talent is being identified and the best prospects retained, despite some misinformed claims to the contrary.

Our next challenge is to nurture and eventually feed that talent through to the Reds, where Coach Phil Mooney and his men are determined to prove the knockers wrong. We remain optimistic that Wallaby coach Robbie Deans was spot on when he predicted that the Reds would be finals material in 2010 and potential champions in 2011.

Let's not forget that in 2009 the Reds were one of the youngest teams, on average, in the competition (23.6 years – forwards 25.5, backs 22.6).

The Reds' average number of Super Rugby caps at the end of the season was 26.7.

One year's additional experience will obviously make a much bigger difference to a younger team than an older one.

Without the huge turnover of the previous year the 2010 team will also be more settled and they will welcome back experienced players like Morgan Turinui and Daniel Braid, who were lost to us for part, or all of 2009.

Scrumhalf is such a critical position and we are blessed to have some of the country's best in that area, including new Wallaby Will Genia.

While it was disappointing to lose Hugh McMeniman and Berrick Barnes at the end of the season, it should be remembered that both became Wallabies while they were at the Reds and that the development of Will Genia shows that the pathway from Queensland to national selection is there for those players with the talent, drive and ambition to take it.

No doubt you will be aware that there is a Criminal Misconduct Commission inquiry pertaining to last year's state government grant to Queensland Rugby. Legal considerations mean I am unable to make further comment on the circumstances. This has constrained our ability to respond to media and other enquiries.

We remain steadfast in our view that Queensland Rugby acted in good faith at all times but must keep our own counsel until such time that the inquiry has run its course.

Unfortunately this same constraint has not applied to media speculation about the matter and it is not at all helpful to Rugby in Queensland when commentary is offered that further feeds speculation, controversy and any perception of in-fighting within our great Rugby family.

Your Board is determined to see Queensland Rugby through these challenges and to emerge with a strong Union that will enjoy the fruits of its hard work and enterprise on and off the field in 2010 and beyond.

In closing I would like to wish all the best to Central Highlands on their upcoming Xstrata Coal rugby charity day at Tieri on September 12. A number of junior games will be followed by a match between Brisbane Suburban and the Queensland Outback Barbarians and then a charity match between the Xstrata Coal Old X-Men and the team from BMA. Reds players Ben Lucas and Mark McLinden will be there to help run junior coaching clinics and fun games for the kids, in what is shaping up as an excellent day of country rugby.

And don't forget the combined BJRU Junior Grand Finals and QR Reds Family Fun Day at Ballymore on Sunday, August 30. The day will kick off at 9.30am with the Under 13s the first of 14 grand final games during the day. The Family Fun Day activities kick in from midday and Reds players will be on hand to sign autographs. There'll also be fun rides and food and drinks available. Entry is free.

Finally, I invite you to enjoy your rugby in those regions that are now approaching finals and to join me in looking forward to next month's Festival of Rugby at Ballymore and the Investec Super 14 season to come in 2010.

Yours in Rugby

Steve Wilson
Chairman