

## **Chairman's Letter from Ballymore**

**December 23, 2009**

With Christmas upon us I thought it important to make contact with you for one last time in 2009 before we all disperse for the holiday break. It will only be a short one for the QR Reds as training resumes on January 4 and our first trial match is against the Waratahs in Lismore on January 23 - just on a month away.

Before we all know it, we'll be facing the Waratahs at Suncorp Stadium on February 13, where I expect the Reds will set the tone for the 2010 season.

Ewen McKenzie and his coaching staff have been working the players extremely hard over the past few weeks - with a good blend between skills work as well as fitness - and he is confident they will be ready when the time comes. Defence was an area where the Reds were poor in 2009 and Ewen and his coaching staff have placed a particular emphasis on improving that facet of the game this year, while also improving the attacking structures.

It was encouraging to see the Queensland Wallabies perform so well on the UK tour and to see young Luke Morahan get a call-up to join them. His selection along with that of Richard Kingi augurs well for our talent ID program which recognised their talent early and kept them in the development fast lane here in Queensland.

Particular congratulations go to Will Genia on the way he has made the transition to become a starting regular in the halfback spot - and on his level-headed refusal to get carried away by his recent success.

Distressingly, one of the other great Queensland success stories of the tour, Quade Cooper, made news headlines for all the wrong reasons soon after his return when he was arrested on the Gold Coast and charged with a criminal offence.

I am sure you will understand my inability to comment on a matter that is before the courts and which may not be resolved for several months. Suffice to say that along with the ARU we view the whole matter very seriously and have put in place an extensive program designed to help Quade get his life back on course while he awaits resolution of the court matter. His progress with this will be carefully monitored, with an initial review date set down for early February. His genuine remorse at the situation he has found himself in and regret at the embarrassment he has caused for himself and others is certainly an encouraging first step.

Also regrettable is the situation Queensland Rugby found itself in when the Crime and Misconduct Commission decided to investigate the role of ministerial advisers and their relationship with public servants, in matters such as grants to schools and community organisations. Unfortunately, the 2008 grant of \$4.2 million in state funding became the test case for this enquiry, due to alleged irregularities in the process. We maintain our stance that there was no wrongdoing on our part and that funds were applied according to our understanding of what had been agreed at the time.

We are hoping this matter can be resolved in the near future; that our reputation will be left unsullied and that we can proceed with plans to redevelop Ballymore.

In more positive news, our new CEO Jim Carmichael is settling in well and will strive to introduce himself to as many of our stakeholders as he can over the next couple of months. He has already undertaken a major reorganisation of Queensland Rugby by beefing up the commercial and community rugby arms. He sees our strong community infrastructure as being one of our best assets and has empowered Simon Taylor as Community Rugby General Manager to make the most of those assets.

The efforts of our development staff are paying off with news that our new "sampling" programs in schools are reaching thousands of potential new fans and players. Regular competition numbers have increased but the "come and try" program numbers have gone through the roof. The one-off sampling programs jumped by 70 per cent between 2008 and 2009, from 21,315 to 36,043, while non-regular schools participants (carnival-style competitions over one or two days) jumped by 160 per cent from 3,689 in 2008 to 9,615 in 2009.

As a result, total player participation numbers in Queensland went past 90,000 in 2009, a 32 per cent increase on the preceding year.

Junior club numbers went up by 4.4 per cent (14,080 to 14,701), led by the Sunshine Coast (7.1 per cent), Cairns (8.2 per cent), Townsville (6 per cent) and Brisbane 4.7 per cent.

The biggest junior success story was in Central Highlands, where a brand new competition attracted 294 junior players in its first year, thanks to the community support of Xstrata Coal.

QRU Rugby Development staff plan to build further on the success of the sampling program in 2010, liaising closely with junior clubs to identify or target schools and particular age groups in their catchment in order to grow junior numbers. The sampling program will be bigger and better in 2010 and be badged "Rookies to Reds".

Finally, congratulations to Reds prop Laurie Weeks on being named Newcomer of the Year by the Rugby Union Players Association. This follows similar awards to Laurie earlier in the year as both the Reds and Super 14 Rookie of the Year.

Thank you all for your continued support of Queensland Rugby and the QR Reds throughout 2009 in what have been trying times.

The QRU offices will be closed from December 18 to January 4, but if you haven't yet finished your Christmas shopping, a Reds membership always makes a great gift and our Membership staff will be on duty until Christmas Eve, contactable on 1300 733 899.

Best wishes to you and yours for an enjoyable and safe festive season and I look forward to sharing a very successful 2010 season with you next year.

Rod McCall  
Chairman