



PETER CRITTE AO
PRESIDENT

Rugby in Australia celebrated many milestones this year and there was a curious juxtaposition of many of these.



A commemorative dinner in Sydney acknowledged the great 1984 Grand Slam Wallabies.
Getty Images

As 2004 drew to a close, a catastrophic global event claimed more than three hundred thousand lives in regions to our north – Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and elsewhere.

Of course, this event dominated our lives for some months. As Rugby people, we had much to be proud of throughout 2004, but in those closing few days, the Rugby community responded swiftly and generously.

I make mention of this because in Australia's magnificent response as a nation, Rugby sought no special mention of its efforts, but they should be recorded.

The ARU, Member Unions, clubs and individuals in our game rallied by way of donation, planning events to raise funds and simply offered help in any way possible.

We often talk about the values of our game and Rugby's response to this disaster was an admirable illustration of those values in action.

Rugby in Australia celebrated many milestones this year and there was a curious juxtaposition of many of these.

George Gregan became the most capped Australian Test player of all time, passing David Campese's record of 101 Test caps. He finished the year with 106 caps, setting the new mark on the hallowed turf of Twickenham, where he led his team to a magnificent victory over the old foe.

George's mark came in a year when we also honoured great players from our past, whose efforts have made an enormous contribution to the strength of the Australian game today.

A commemorative dinner in Sydney acknowledged the great 1984 Grand Slam Wallabies. Australian Rugby was honoured by the presence of the Prime Minister, the Hon. John Howard MP, who spoke of the impact of this team on our game.

Australian Rugby has not looked back since Andrew Slack led his side to victories over England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland and the Barbarians.

Another group of players were acknowledged at the John Eales Medal dinner in 2004. This group was first selected for Australia in the 1990s. Over the past few years, the ARU has been awarding caps to those players who did not receive an actual honour cap when first picked for their country.

The '90s Wallabies formed the final contingent to be recognised. Many of these players provided the backbone of the first group of professional players when the game changed forever in 1995.

Apart from their contribution on the field, these players have also played an important role in passing on the Wallaby traditions and values to a new group of players who have only known the professional game.

This was a significant responsibility for the likes of John Eales and others from those transitional times.

We are now further down this path and there is added risk that this heritage may be lost,

along with the understanding of the great character of those who wore the Wallaby jersey in previous times.

Rugby lost some great people in 2004 and I would like the players of today to think about these people. They were great Australian Rugby identities whose achievements are detailed elsewhere in this Annual Report, but I will mention two here.

Bill Hammon, who captained Victoria to a win over NSW in 1938, played a Test against the Springboks and survived the terrible conditions over three years in a Japanese prisoner of war camp. He was awarded an OBE for his selfless leadership during this ordeal, during which he suffered punishment in order that sick and weakened fellow prisoners were spared.

Another war veteran, "Tarakan" Jack Baxter survived terrible burns and broken bones in an explosion on board HMAS "Tarakan" in 1950, but incredibly turned out for the Wallabies against the All Blacks the following year. The Navy discharged him on health grounds, but Jack was not done, joining the Army and fighting in the Korean War.

These men knew something about sacrifice but they also showed the way for younger people by word and deed. They led from the front in everything they did.

It's important that the next generation of players learn about the deeds of these men.



Wallabies from the 1990s were awarded caps at the John Eales Medal dinner.
Getty Images

There were six new Wallabies capped in 2004. Congratulations to RadikeSamo, Clyde Rathbone, Matt Henjak, Nic Henderson, Mark Chisholm and Stephen Hoiles on this achievement.

These young players represent a strong endorsement of the game's future and, interestingly, this group has come into Test Rugby from diverse backgrounds – from Fiji, South Africa, Rugby League, Super 12 and Sydney Club Rugby.

Our talent and development programs are very sophisticated these days, but it's great to see a player can make a Wallaby tour because of his form in Club Rugby, as well as through a high performance pathway.

That pathway also includes the Telstra Australian Rugby Shield that was won by New South Wales Country over Perth Gold.

In 2004, a player from this competition made it through to the Super 12 ranks, with former Perth Gold flyhalf Todd Feather appearing for the Queensland Reds before injury ended his season.

It was quite a year for our Wallaby captain George Gregan, becoming Australia's most capped Rugby player and picking up his second Super 12 title with the Brumbies.

George should be commended for his focus on the team's performance throughout the



George Gregan is presented with a crystal bowl inscribed with the details of each of the 102 Tests he played.
ARU Media Unit

year rather than the personal milestone. Nevertheless, these milestones give us cause to reflect on the achievements of those who have gone before, as well as the individual accolade.

This year's Joe French Award saw deserved recognition of Rod Macqueen for his outstanding coaching record that was highlighted by Australia's World Cup victory in 1999, Australia's first Tri Nations series win in 2000 and the series victory over the British & Irish Lions a year later.

Rod introduced Australian Rugby to a new level of professionalism in coaching and

his methods set the benchmark, not just here, but right around the Rugby world.

Last year I noted a curious statistic for Australian Rugby. For the first time since 1899, Australia's Test match win/loss ratio entered positive territory.

With nine wins from twelve Test matches this year, that ratio has further improved, with Australia's record now standing at 217 wins, 209 losses and 13 draws.

There's sufficient evidence for the optimists among us to believe that Australia will remain on the positive side of that ledger for many years to come.