John Connolly, National Coach

NATIONAL COACH'S REPORT

Success is measured in many ways. In a rugby sense, it is often measured by the contents of your trophy cabinet at the end of the year.

However, the success of the Qantas Wallabies in 2006 is not exclusively measured by our results on the field. Our achievements in 2006 give us cause for optimism heading into rugby's biggest ever year.

For the Qantas Wallabies, 2006 was very much a transitional year.

We assembled a brand new coaching team with Michael Foley (Re-starts) and Scott Johnson (Attack) joining long-standing coaching staff John Muggleton and Scott Wisemantel, while Alex Evans returned to the Wallabies as forwards technical coach.

In my first year as National Coach, one of the biggest challenges facing Australian Rugby was the depth of the player base.

40 players represented the Wallabies in 13 Test matches, while a further six players toured the UK and Europe on the Spring Tour.

A number of up and coming players also earned their first taste of Test rugby. Tai McIsaac, Rodney Blake, Cameron Shepherd, Josh Valentine, Wycliff Palu, Guy Shepherdson, Benn Robinson and Brett Sheehan each made their Test debut, while Gene Fairbanks, James Horwill and Mitchell Chapman made their first tour with the Wallabies.

George Gregan led the team for eight of nine Tests during the domestic series, and in the process added two significant milestones to his unrivalled list of achievements. George became the most capped international player in the history of the game, before surpassing John Eales record as Australia's leading captain.

As part of our wider goal to increase the depth of our player base, we also took significant steps towards broadening our leadership group of senior players.

Stirling Mortlock was named captain for the Spring Tour and led the team on a total of four occasions throughout the year, while Phil Waugh became the 74th player to captain the Wallabies when he led the team out against Wales at Millennium Stadium.

These players were supported throughout the year by vice captains Dan Vickerman, Chris Latham, Stephen Larkham George Smith and Lote Tuqiri.

On the field we enjoyed our share of success, starting with a clean sweep of England to reclaim the Cook Cup, before a record win over South Africa in Brisbane and two fiercely-contested Bledisloe Cup Tests against the All Blacks.

Although not wins, the final two Tests against the All Blacks in Brisbane and Auckland proved that we are ready to take the challenge up to the world's best team as we look ahead to 2007 and the Rugby World Cup in France.

Off the field, the Wallabies received outstanding support from the coaching and support staff, led by Team Manager Phil Thomson.

To Phil, and to all the players, coaching staff and team management, I would like to thank you for your dedication, commitment and hard work throughout a long and challenging year.

Dr Martin Raftery led a committed medical staff, who worked around the clock in conjunction with Physical Performance Manager Jason Weber and his assistant John Pryor, to ensure players were at their peak for each Test. Dr Warren McDonald also provided invaluable assistance throughout the season, while physiotherapists David Bick and Cameron Lillicrap worked tirelessly alongside massage therapists Simon Atkin and Andrew Waring to maintain the peak physical condition of the players.

As a coaching team we faced a number of challenges in our first season together. Thanks to all coaches for their drive and commitment throughout the season, while the hard work of Technical Analyst Luke Spindler must also be acknowledged.

Assistant Team Manager Chris Webb once again provided outstanding support to Phil and his team, particularly in managing the logistics for the largest Wallaby touring contingent to leave our shores in October, while thanks must also go to Administration Assistant Lizzie Greenwood whose enthusiasm and professionalism should be commended.

Once again the team came under significant scrutiny from the media both at home and overseas. Communications Manager Michael Earsman and Media Unit Producer Anthony George ran an extensive media program to uphold and enhance the brand of the Wallabies and ensure that the profile of the team was at a premium.

To Managing Director & CEO Gary Flowers and his staff, who provide endless support to the Wallabies, thank you for the professional manner in which the ARU runs the Bundaberg Rum Rugby Series and continues to be a leader in world rugby in the way that it conducts itself and promotes the game of rugby as well as the Wallabies.

Lastly, thanks to President Paul McLean and the ARU Board, who continue to do an outstanding job overseeing the organisation, while a special congratulations is in order for Wallaby fullback Chris Latham, who deservedly won the John Eales Medal after being nominated in the top five players in the world by the iRB.

2006 Qantas Wallabies Honour Roll

John Eales Medal: Chris Latham
Rookie of the Year: Greg Holmes
Try of the Year: Matt Giteau