PUBLIC AFFAIRS & COMMUNICATION

For the Australian Rugby Union (ARU) the year was dominated by the public debate on the need and subsequent decision to go ahead with a new national competition in 2007. Now named as the Australian Rugby Championship, it will be broadcast on free-to-air ABC and its digital channel, ABC2.

The competition was designed by the ARU High Performance Unit to deepen the pool of international class rugby players in Australia and will see intense competition amongst the 97 professional players not going to the Rugby World Cup and the best available 127 Club rugby players.

The public debate was as intense and passionate as one would expect from rugby supporters and administrators and the work now is focused on making the competition a success.

However, another momentous event occurred last year – the Super 12 expanded when the Western Force entered the Tooheys New Super 14 tournament (the South African team the Cheetahs was the other addition).

In early 2006, after nearly nine years as Head of Media & Communications, Strath Gordon left the ARU. At the end of 2006, Tim Archer departed as Media Manager after six years with the organisation. Both made enormous contributions during their time at the ARU.

The normal and critical work of the department continued, with a name change to Public Affairs & Communication (from Media & Communications) to reflect a new focus on Government interaction. Media continues to be a major focus for the department.

The demands on the department in 2006 were significant but will grow dramatically with the advent of three new competitions in 2007 (Australian Rugby Championship, the IRB Pacific Nations Cup for the Australia A side and the IRB Sevens World Series in Adelaide), in addition to the 2007 Rugby World Cup in France.

In addition, 2006 and 2007 sees the department supporting the SANZAR secretariat, which resides with the ARU for that time.

2006 PUBLICATIONS

- Australian Rugby Union's 2005 Annual Report
- Tooheys New Super 14 Media Guide
- Bundaberg Rum Rugby Series Media Guide (England, Ireland, South Africa & New Zealand)
- Spring Tour Media Guide

MEDIA

Media relations and sponsor support was provided around the Tooheys New Super 14 tournament, for the Bundaberg Rum Rugby Series, the Qantas Wallabies' Spring Tour of Europe, the Wallaroos' Rugby World Cup campaign, the Australian Sevens side, the Under 21s, the Under 19s, the Under 16s Championship, both Australian Schools' Championships and the Australian Rugby Shield.

In addition to the usual requests from the media for interviews, statements, facts and statistics about the season's rugby games, a broader debate was waged around the future of the game, possible rule changes, players off contract, third party deals – to name just a few.

TRUE COLOURS E-NEWSLETTER

This publication continues to be well received by rugby players, supporters, officials and fans alike – in 2007 it has been rebranded Get Onside, inline with the new branding campaign run by the ARU.

The newsletter, with original content, was produced monthly during the non-rugby playing months and weekly during the Super 14 tournament, domestic Test series and Wallaby Spring Tour.

Brian West, General Manager Public Affairs & Communication

SPEECHES & PRESENTATIONS

Literally dozens of speeches and presentations were produced for a number of ARU Executives during the year, as well as supporting the Season Launch, the Super 14 Awards and the publicity of the new inductees to the Wallaby Hall of Fame.

WALLABIES MEDIA MANAGEMENT

The cameraman producer and Media Communications Manager attached to the Wallabies drove significant increases in media coverage of the team in the electronic media – both in radio and television. The team shot vision of team training and other activities, as well as interviewing and recording team management and players' views on issues of interest.

Managing the media around the Tests played in Australia was a core function for the department, as is driving good news and 'colour' pieces on the events and characters in Australian Rugby.

RUGBY WORLD CUP IN FRANCE

The department has a big year in 2007, culminating in the Rugby World Cup to be played in France in September and October.