

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**

12<sup>th</sup> Assembly

Public Accounts Committee

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**Inquiry into Funding of Rugby League Facilities in Darwin**

**FROM: Rollo Manning**

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**SUMMARY**

This Submission will seek to convey the opinion of the writer that there is **NO CASE** for a decision to be taken that finance should be allowed for \$20 million to be spent on upgrading the Richardson Park at Ludmilla.

The reason for this will be that there is every likelihood that the game rugby will eventually have only one form and that will be the game known as **RUGBY UNION** and all players of the game will be registered to play the game which operates in a professional game environment. Given this situation there will be no reason why any player would be forced to decide whether they should choose between “league” or “union” as only one choice will exist.

**OPINION**

The opinion of the writer is come about because of a firm belief that the two games of rugby will be re-combined with **ALL** players only having to register once to allow play in the game is now fully professional and has no barriers that would allow a form of the game in which there was a discrimination between “professional” or “amateur” status within the code (league or union).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**FUNDING**

- That there be no case for an upgrade of the precinct known as Richardson Park and it be converted back to recreational use with control by the Territory Government controlled by laws applying to all recreational space.
- That any funding set aside in the 2015/16 Territory Budget for expenditure on an upgrade to Richardson Park be returned to community funds available for proposals put forward by members of the “community”.
- That all plans to upgrade Richardson Park be terminated and funds ear marked for “rugby league” be returned to the Parks budget and used for purposes determined by priorities of need in community funding.

## **SPORTING INVOLVEMENT**

- That the transition between rugby league and rugby union to a one code game be managed in a way that allows participation of players in a game of choice and in no way coercion.
- That all players registering for playing one rugby be made aware of the process undertaken by the Administration to allow a truly vigorous environment on rates of pay as a best way of gaining a competitive nature for the game.
- That the two administrations of rugby league and rugby union work together to enable a maximisation of joint effort for money being spent on high quality representative fixtures that will attract a large “gate” to the ground being promoted.
- That the fact that “one rugby” will emerge at the end of the journey and is the main deciding reason why two rugbys are not being promoted by the NT Government.

### **BENEFITS TO:**

#### **1. Players**

- a. Ready access to a game that interests a player
- b. A minimally priced entertainment to a safe and instructive game
- c. A free choice of deciding between the two rugbys and the potential they offer for travel and personal development.

#### **2. Taxpayers**

- a. A minimal amount of money should be spent on maintaining a facility which will allow pleasant ambience in viewing and following of a game being played in a civilised environment with common courtesy to the surrounding public.
- b. The administration of the rugby football should be covered by a cost to the public to maintain the above mentioned ambience.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The game of Rugby Union was initiated in 1823 when a young man named William Webb Ellis picked up a soccer ball and ran with it. This happened at Rugby School in Warwickshire in England. Rugby School was the birthplace of [Rugby football](#). In 1845, three Rugby School pupils produced the first written rules of the "Rugby style of game. According to tradition the game of rugby was amateur with strict rules associated with receiving money for purposes other than playing the game.

Over time and extending to 1908 it was not possible for anyone to obtain remuneration for playing Rugby. A move generated from Australia, was canvassed with contacts in England allowing players to be rewarded playing a very similar game with minor changes to the laws of the game including having two less players on each side. The pressure to allow pay for play was eventually relaxed and in 1995 it became possible for member affiliated unions to arrange contracts for players to be remunerated for playing rugby.

This was a significant change to the operations of players and allowed a set of players to be under contract and open for “switching “between the amateur and professional play of the game.

In Australia the move to a professional code of laws for rugby players was established immediately following the ban on play for pay in 1908. So much so that tours were undertaken by players grouping together to make tours of countries where there was sufficient number of players to assemble a team and play against an Australian team of paid players. This occurred because of sufficient players forming the paid for play group which had been advocating for some twelve years the opportunity for players to be compensated for injury as a result of time off from purposes of playing rugby.

The force of strength caused the paid game in Australia to gain a momentum that resulted in a competition being established in Sydney and eventual growth to Queensland. Attempts to extend the paid game beyond these two states did not succeed despite attempts over the years to penetrate the game philosophy into States that were dominated by the Australian Rules football.

1995 was the eventual deciding time when moves were made to allow pay to be received by players of the Rugby Football Union and cause the initiation of Contracts between players and affiliated unions. The money to allow this to happen was made available from media organisations which saw the benefit to obtaining contracts with the game of rugby to be aired on television networks. This brought in millions of dollars to enable players to be paid and a healthy state exhibition of the game by professional players.

## **THE FUTURE FOR RUGBY PLAY**

It had been a case of difference between the two codes of laws for rugby league and rugby union to be that one game (league) was paid players and the rest were amateur.

“Switching” between the two games became a common occurrence and in fact there were 55 players who had represented their country as Wallabies changing over to the paid game and becoming Kangaroos – the name adopted for the national side that represented the paid players.

There had been a set of rules for the paid (professional) game of rugby to be played and over the period of 87 years that this code developed a number of changes had occurred to the way the game was played.

This caused a differential that was recognisable to the spectator (viewer) and in many instances this difference between to the two codes of rules were obvious to the spectator. The result was a culture of person “liking” one set of rules against the other. Money was poured into the professional form of rugby and the ensuing publicity obtained for that game an “image” that was acceptable to the TV Viewer.

The main difference in the rules centred around the contest for possession in the amateur game that was ruled out of the professional codified game. At the breakdown of play it

was resolved that a “play the ball” would be played instead of a tussle for the ball on the ground between the players of the amateur game.

This difference altered the spectacle whereby in the amateur game to contest for possession obvious and an event that detracted from a freer flowing style of play that centred around running, passing and scoring tries. This main difference became the determining influence between the two codes of play and caused the professional game to be seen as the most popular of the two and gave in Australia a dominance of the game of rugby league over the “other” game of the original rugby union. This has been largely because of the coverage given to the game of rugby league in the mass media influenced by the media ownership through News Limited.

The use of the two names of “league” and “union” caused confusion to viewers of both games in other countries where “league” was a term used to convey a competition format where in actual fact the real difference between the two was more distinct in the way the game was played.

The recently held Rugby World Cup was highly successful attracting two million attendees at the gate in England and a viewing audience into millions across the 102 countries that hold a ranking with the World Rugby peak organisation. On an international level rugby (union) is played across a vast array of nations. Rugby (league) on the other hand is confined to about ten nations that then try and compete in an “international” competition largely dominated by Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain.

The likelihood of rugby football being “one game” is always possible and in this instance should be used as a contribution to a decision on funding for the provision of stadia.

The indecision around the location of the headquarters for rugby league in the NT has added conjecture to the present discussion, however if the purpose of this inquiry is centring on the provision of funding for rugby league then it is important for the Inquiry to be made aware of the fact that the lobbying for funds by the two rugbys will always be a subject under discussion as each game tries to dominate the scenery in its own domain. The main point about funding for rugby league is the fact that it (the game of National Rugby League) is contributed to in a large extent by the media moguls of National television networks and the matter is a large contributor to the running of the game. Rugby Union obtains a share of the profits from the Rugby World Cup but in many instances this does not make its way to the “grassroots” development work at Junior ranks and schoolboy development.

#### **THE AUTHOR**

This submission has been prepared by Mr Rollo Manning, a rugby aficionado, who is from a long spanning involvement with the game of rugby (union) from playing for Box Hill Rugby Club in Melbourne followed by a term as a referee then joining the Victorian Rugby Management Committee as a Publicity Officer which saw him do freelance journalism for the Sporting Globe newspaper and act as a Rugby Correspondent on ABC Radio in Melbourne and subsequently Darwin since 1998 where he has been involved with Rugby commentary on Rugby Super and representative matches. A hobby he has had since retirement has been to write a book about the interaction between rugby (union) and rugby league as they tussle with the question of how long “two rugbys” will continue to seek domination of their codes in mainstream sport.