

- 1971 -

In 1971 the Club was to experience its most successful season to that stage of its relatively short history, both on and off the field.

Most important was the fact that after many representations over the years to the management of the Billabong Hotel in Merrylands permission was finally received to conduct weekly hamper raffles on the Hotel premises of a Friday night.

This meant that at last the Club had achieved a certain degree of financial stability, solving the problems of purchasing equipment and materials, meeting the medical expenses incurred by injured players, providing for team registration and ground fees as well as various other items and expenses that previously had to be met by players and officials operating with limited resources.

While the turnover from these raffles was not great, it was nevertheless a form of constant and steady income to the Club's treasury and gave the Committee funds with which to work and organise, allowing them more freedom and greater scope in their plans and projects.

This year was also to prove the third and final year for the Club under the guidance of Captain/Coach Bob Henderson and it was the year in which the Club was to surpass the efforts of their three previous seasons.

Bob Austin was to serve his second term as team manager in 1971, while after three years as President Bob Rees was replaced by Paul Hiddlestone as the Club's senior official.

That year, due to a further increase in the number of teams, the Sub-District Council introduced a new system of conducting its competitions, dispensing with the former method whereby all teams played two complete rounds against the other teams comprising their respective cups.

Under the new system of competition all cups formed into two sections of six teams in each cup on both the North side and South side of the Harbour. Each cup to be contested by one full round between teams on the same side of the Harbour - five games - followed by one full round against teams on the other side of the Harbour - six games - followed

by a further full round between teams on the same side of the Harbour - five games - making a total of sixteen games. Teams finishing first, second and third on each side of the Harbour were to qualify for the semi-finals with the teams finishing second and third playing to find a winner to play the team finishing first in the final. The Grand Final was to be played between the winners of the North Harbour and South Harbour finals.

Merrylands were entered into the Richardson Cup and because of their geographical location were naturally placed in the South Harbour section.

With the loss of several players depleting their strength Merrylands were to wage a constant battle throughout the season to field a full team every Saturday. A few new players helped to ease the problem with Mal Belanzsky, Jeff Keating, Maurice Whittaker and Tony Chapman all joining the Club. Tony Chapman, being the younger brother of John Chapman, was to give Merrylands its first ever pair of brothers to play for the Club, a situation that has been repeated by several families over the ensuing years.

Despite these new players acquired the Club was to contest many of their matches that season with less than the regulation fifteen players. On one occasion during their first round match with Sydney High Old Boys the Club actually took the field with only eleven players and with another two turning up midway through the first half they were to complete the match with only thirteen players and still manage to win 8-0.

Included among many other fine performances throughout the season were a 21-3 win over Randwick/Botany, a 24-0 win against St. Augustines Old Boys, a 21-6 win over South Sydney and a 25-3 win against Sydney High Old Boys.

Thanks to the fine efforts of the players involved, the Club was to go through the premiership rounds and win thirteen matches, draw two and record a solitary loss against St. Leos Old Boys (and that was on one of the occasions when a man short) and accordingly the Club finished first on the South side of the Harbour with 28 points.

RICHARDSON CUP - 1971

<u>SOUTH HARBOUR</u>		<u>NORTH HARBOUR</u>	
Merrylands	28	St. Leos O.B.	29
Leprechauns	22	Beecroft/P.Hills	26
Greystanes	18	Wanderers	20
Sydney High O.B.	13	Hills	12
Lindfield	2	Balgowlah	10
Bye Included		St. Augustines O.B.	10

Because of their position on the competition table, Merrylands had the bye while Leprechauns met and eliminated Greystanes 6-0 in the semi-final.

The following Saturdays final between Merrylands and Leprechauns was deferred til the following day and changed to a new venue when ground conditions prevented the match from being played following heavy overnight rain. Despite the conditions being no better the following day the match was still proceeded with due to the tight schedule and ground bookings arranged by the Sub-District and Merrylands, after leading 3-0 at half time, won 8-0 on a mudheap scoring a try in each half to qualify for the Grand Final.

As a result on the following Saturday August 28th after four seasons in Sub-District football Merrylands appeared in their first ever Grand Final at Wills Oval, Dulwich Hill. Their opponents were Beecroft/Pennant Hills who in their only previous clash during the season had succumbed to Merrylands 6-3 in an all goals affair.

After only a few minutes of the Grand Final Merrylands trailed 3-0 following a Beecroft/Pennant Hills try. Fifteen minutes later chunky five-eighth Mal Belanszky barged over for the equaliser and the 3-3 score remained right up until the final moments of the match when a successful attempt at penalty goal gave Beecroft/Pennant Hills a 6-3 lead and the premiership, frustrating Merrylands ambitions to achieve their initial premiership pennant in Sub-District competition.

The team that represented Merryland that day was :-

J. KEATING, T. CHAPMAN, P. BROWN, K. WEATHERHEAD,  
R. ABSALOM, M. BELANSZKY R. OSBORNE, M. WHITTAKER,  
R. HENDERSON, R. REES, J. CHAPMAN, M. TOLLENS,  
I. MACKAY, R. DONNELLY, J. MURPHY

Several weeks later the Club had its first official presentation night, held at Merrylands R.S.L. Club, and during the evening trophies were presented to each member of the team for their efforts in making the Grand Final, while best and fairest trophies were awarded to Keith Weatherhead for best back and Bob Rees for best forward.

Also a special trophy was presented to Captain/Coach Bob Henderson who capped a fine season of personal achievement by becoming the first, and to date only, player to score one hundred points in a season for the Club.

Throughout the 1971 season the Club scored one hundred and seventy points for while conceding seventy three with Keith Weatherhead being top try scorer with seven and John Chapman, Bob Rees and Mal Belanszky scoring five tries each.

Merrylands were one of one hundred and thirty two teams entered in Sub-District competition that year competing in eleven cups - Kentwell, Whiddon, Burke, Judd, Barraclough, Stockdale, Blunt, Richardson, McLean, Grose and Walker.

MERRYLANDS R.U.F.C. - 1971

Back Row : M. Whittaker, A. Chapman, P. Hiddlestone, M. Belanszky,  
J. Keating, M. Tollens, S. Murphy, J. Chapman, R. Rees,  
R. Absalom.

Front Row : R. Donnelly, R. Osborne, K. Weatherhead, R. Henderson  
(Captain/Coach), I. McKay.

