

While 1971 was the most successful season that Merrylands Rugby Union Club had ever enjoyed to that stage, it was only to be two short years later in 1973 when the Club was to experience its worst season ever, both on the field and also within the Club generally as the Club came perilously close to disbanding.

Overriding any failures and disappointments that the players and officials were to experience during the season was the untimely and tragic loss of two of the Merrylands Clubs' most respected players.

Rodney "Ossie" Osborne, a former Merrylands junior who had played the past three seasons with the Club, died in March of that year as a result of an automobile accident while just three months later Robert Henderson, a member of the Club since its formation and the most successful coach the Club had ever appointed, was to die during the progress of a Rugby League match at Merrylands Oval.

In addition to the tremendous setback suffered by the loss of these two fine players and gentlemen, deep inroads into the Club's playing strength were made that season when a large number of the previous years' players switched codes, signing up with the teams in the Western Suburbs Business Houses Rugby League competition which had become centralised in the Merrylands District that year.

Merrylands early season training sessions were disappointing with sometimes as few as four or five players attending. With such poor response it came as no surprise when before the commencement of the season the Coach resigned. The Club committee had also begun to dissolve and there was much conjecture over the future of the Club. The possibilities of amalgamation with Greystanes Rugby Union Club were discussed but to their eternal credit Merrylands officials refused to accept such an arrangement.

To fill the unenviable position of Coach, the Club appointed one of its founders, Paul Hiddlestone, as a replacement in an endeavour to whip up enthusiasm in the district and keep the Club functioning.

For their sixth season of operation Merrylands were switched into the Clark Cup competition and because of the circumstances trial matches were not even considered. Thus when the first competition match arrived a frantic effort was made to secure players on the morning of the match and when kick-off time arrived that afternoon the Club took the field with only thirteen players, the majority of whom had never met previously and who were introduced to each other only thirty minutes prior to the match.

Not surprisingly the Club was well beaten by 18-0 but the most important objective had been achieved, the Club had managed to fulfil its first match commitment and had survived for the time being.

This pattern of playing with depleted numbers, continually fielding new players and suffering defeat was to be repeated for much of the first two competition rounds as the Club struggled to survive, but slowly and surely the Club was regathering its poise and with this settling down effect and re-inforcement by new players, there came a resurgence of the Club in the second round.

After winning only one of their first ten matches, the Club at last found form and proceeded to win five of their last six games, defeating several Clubs that had inflicted heavy defeats on them in the first round.

Among the many new players to join the Club at various stages throughout that year were Charlie Falzon, Colin Campbell, Ken Willock, Ray Ridley, Greg Fahey, John MacDonald, Andy Anderson, Ian Warby, Ivan Persic, John O'Malley, Tony Williams, Peter Woods, John Brennan, Bob Wilson and Bob James.

The most memorable match during that season and one of the Clubs finest performances ever, was the return clash with competition leaders (and later to become premiers) Rockdale at Lapstone Park.

Merrylands had been soundly beaten in the first round encounter with Rockdale, losing 26-0 in a one sided match, but all memories of that result were completely erased by Merrylands whole-hearted performance in a most aggressive, no holds barred match in which Merrylands

completely subdued the opposing pack of forwards and upset the attaching rhythm of the Rockdale backline.

In an exciting contest for players and spectators alike, Rockdale managed to finally win 7-0 with Merrylands having a second half try disallowed.

The team that represented Merrylands that day was :-

C. FALZON, C. CAMPBELL, R. RIDLEY, I. PERSIC,  
D. GERADA, G. FAHEY, I. WARBY, P. BRENNAN,  
M. CARR, A. WILLIAMS, J. BRENNAN, R. JAMES,  
I. MacKAY, J. McCABE, J. MURPHY.

Unfortunately, despite their steady last round performances the team had left its run until too late in the season and they were to finish just two competition points outside of the semi-finals on 12 points.

CLARK CUP - 1973

<u>SOUTH HARBOUR</u>		<u>NORTH HARBOUR</u>	
Rockdale	32	Northern Suburbs	30
South Sydney Old Boys	16	Roseville	25
Sydney University	14	Asquith Old Boys	16
Merrylands	12	Normanhurst	15
A.N.Z. Bank	7	North Steyne	11
Colleagues	5	Leprechauns	9

Despite not qualifying for the semi-finals that season the players in the Club had derived great satisfaction from their efforts which saw a remarkable fightback which had brought the Club back from the border of extinction and regather lost prestige.

Once again in 1973 the Club contested the Smithfield Rugby Union Club's Annual Keg Cup knockout competition however, as with the previous year, they were eliminated in the first round.

Later in the year the Club also undertook their second annual end of season trip to Dubbo, once again travelling by coach.

Early in November at the Club's Annual Presentation night which was held at Parramatta Bowling Club, trophies for best and fairest were

presented to Joe McCabe, Charlie Falzon and Brian Goff, while the inaugural Rodney Osborne Memorial Trophy was presented to Ray Ridley.

The Robert Henderson Memorial Trophy, which was implemented by Apex Batteries Business House Rugby League Club, for whom Bob was playing at the time of his death, was not to be incorporated into the Merrylands Rugby Union Club until two years later when the Apex Batteries Club disbanded.

During the 1973 season Merrylands had won six games and lost ten while scoring ninety three points for and one hundred and thirty seven against. They were one of seventy six clubs fielding one hundred and sixty two teams in Sub-District in fourteen cups - Kentwell, Whiddon, Burke, Judd, Barraclough, Stockdale, Blunt, Richardson, McLean, Grose, Walker, Clark, Jeffrey and Noice.