

Russell “ Rusty” Magennis

Clarrie Neal

Russell was born on the 2nd July 1951, the second of three children born to Ken and Zela Magennis, of George Street, Riverstone. When born, his legs were placed in calliper splints which he had to wear for the first 10 years of his life. It was seven years before he was able to walk.

His early schooling was done at the Spastic Centre at Mosman, and because it was too far to travel, he boarded at Allambie Heights. The only time he could return home to Riverstone to live with his parents was during the school holidays.

When a decision was made that the Spastic Centre could do no more to help him, he returned home to live permanently with his parents. Still wearing the callipers, he recalls learning to walk around their back yard by using two cricket stumps, one in each hand, for his walking sticks.

He continued to improve and in 1963, aged thirteen, he ceased wearing the callipers, and commenced his secondary education at Riverstone High School, enjoying his two years there. Leaving school he found himself a job with Alby Taber who had a contract cleaning poultry sheds; he worked 15 years with Alby, whom Russell regarded as one of his best mates.

He joined the Riverstone Bowling Club in 1969, playing both Social and Pennant bowls. With two of his Bowling Club mates, Gary Pettitt and Charlie Wheeler, he went on a three week tour of Asia, linking up with another mate, Lyle Cunich, who at the time was working in Singapore. They also visited Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong; it was a holiday he has great memories of.

In 1970 Russell, with encouragement from Eric Gunton, became the manager of the Riverstone Under 8 Rugby League team that Eric was coaching. He enjoyed this experience and managed the team again the following year. The next year, and again with further encouragement from Eric, Russell became the coach and Eric became the manager. Russell has been coaching and managing junior teams ever since. He recalls it took him 22 years to get a premiership win, though his teams had been runners up in five previous grand finals.

He has fond memories of his Under 7 team that were Premiers in 1971, and were Under 8 Premiers again in 1972, remaining undefeated for the year, scoring 800 points to 53.

Besides his deeds of coaching and managing the Junior Rugby League teams; Russell has been the Riverstone Club's staunchest member. For 20 years he has been the club's groundsman, marking the playing fields, clearing rubbish from the park, hosing the toilet blocks, being on hand to accept deliveries to the clubhouse, etc. For the past few years, he has been assisted with these tasks by John Cartwright, another Life Member of the Riverstone Club.

Every Saturday morning he could, along with other club members, be found on the Commonwealth Bank corner selling raffle tickets for the 'Sunday Roast' dinner. For many years the club also ran the Saturday afternoon 'Meat Tray' raffles at the Tourmaline Hotel on the Windsor Road, and Russell was always there to assist.

He has been a Committee member of the club for many years, having held the position of President for two years, and several years as Vice President. Ron Bates, a Life Member and Secretary from 1968 - 1982, when asked to write a brief history of that period, wrote –

“There is one friend I really want to thank - Russell Magennis, he was a real mate, he was always there to lend a hand, he managed and coached teams, marked the fields, and was the club’s best seller of raffle tickets, you name it, he's done it.”

Over the years, Russell has been recognised for his service and dedication to the football club and to the community of Riverstone, and has received several awards - the Dug-Out on the half-way line where the game officials sit is named “The Russell 'Rusty' Magennis Dug Out.”

Russell's achievements include –

1984 - Became a Life Member of the Riverstone Junior Rugby League Club.

2005 - The Riverstone & District Sports Council introduced a special annual sports award. It was named the Russell Magennis Award.

2008 - Awarded the Riverstone High School Harmony Day Community Award.

2008 - Won the Penrith District Junior Rugby League Volunteer of the Year Award.

2008 - Awarded a NSW JRL Volunteer of the Year medal. This award was presented to Russell at a function organised by the NSW Rugby League held at the Balmain Leagues Club.

2008 - Made a Life Member of the Penrith & Districts Junior Rugby League Association.

2009 - Awarded the Riverstone Sports Council's 'Russell Magennis Award' for a Lifetime of Service to Sport in Riverstone. The Award was presented with Russell receiving a standing ovation from those present.

Accepting the award from the Federal Member Louise Markus, he recalls being lost for words, but finally responded by thanking those concerned, and inviting all present to celebrate with a beer.



Russell and Louise Markus MP at the 2009 Memorial Club Sports awards.

Photo: Rosemary Phillis

This article appeared in the Rouse Hill Times 10th December, 2008, under the heading –

NOTHING RUSTY ABOUT ONE OF OUR GREATEST

There are few people who embody the heart and soul of the community they serve. Russell Magennis is one of those men. Reporter David Catt spends time with one of Riverstone's best.

Russ Magennis lives and breathes Riverstone. Unable to play Rugby League -- the game he loves - due to lifelong battle with a spastic disorder, the 55 year old is determined to make sure the youth of Riverstone have a safe place to play the game.

From the moment he wakes to tend to Riverstone Park to the moment his head hits the pillow after training his beloved Riverstone Razorbacks, Russell serves the community with every breath. Since he was 16, Russell has been running around with the kids and he has been a Life Member of the club since 1984. In fact, it is often said around Riverstone that if you've played sport there, you've been coached by Russell.

"Years ago, one of my best mates asked me to come down here and give him a hand training the kids" he said. "I reckon I've trained 600 kids. If I had a reunion, I would have to have it at the park - you couldn't fit them all in the club" he said. "A lot of kids are 40, going on 45, and they still remember me. We will go down to the club, I used to buy them milkshakes, now I buy them a beer."

In that time he has taken the club to four grand finals, with back to back victories in the 1991 and 1992 seasons. When not coaching, he battles arthritis and uncooperative legs to mark out the fields, pick up the rubbish and maintain the clubhouse. But you will never hear Russell complain. "I've been a groundsman for the last 20 years, marking the fields, and I love it" he said.

"They nicknamed me "Young Basil" after Basil Andrews. They named the field after him, he was the guy who kicked the club off. They say while I'm alive Basil will never be dead."

As he recalls a fallen mate and student, Boyd Hart who died earlier this year in a boating accident, you can see the love for his pupils past and present in his eyes as they mist over with sadness. To Russell, every one of the 600 kids he has coached is a Boyd Hart. "Rivo, all stick together, young Boydy had a boating accident and drowned and we all stuck together" he said. "He was one of my best mates, one of my first pupils, he was only 43."

Russell's love for the community is very clearly reciprocated. The sports council named the Dug- out in the park the Russell 'Rusty' Magennis Dug-out, and recently named one of their Annual Sports Awards after him. But for Russell its not about the plaudits. " I just like being around the kids and I'm only doing it to keep the kids off the street. I love it, it keeps me going" he said.

Compiled by Clarrie Neal from information and photos supplied by Russell Magennis 2009.