

The 'Riverstone Rubies' Rugby League Team

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A legendary name in the sporting history of Riverstone is the 'Riverstone Rubies' football team. This all girl rugby league team was formed in 1956 by Helen Liepa (nee Wheeler) to raise money for the Blacktown Ambulance Fund. The Rubies played two fiercely contested matches against the 'Belles of St Marys' another female football team.

Some of the girls who played were Helen Liepa (nee Wheeler), Dawn Cartwright, Shirley, Betty and Jean Roots, Dotty Robbins, Phyllis White, Enid Ryan, Fay Mulford, Jean White, Maureen Baldwin, June Martin, 'Googy' White and Gwen Stephens. Lorraine Forbes (nee Wilkins) was the ball girl.

Helen convinced the girls to take part, all were about eighteen or nineteen. The games were taken seriously and they trained hard for them. Each girl played a specific position and knew what her role was. Dawn Cartwright (nee O'Brien) recalls that she played in the front row. The matches were twenty minutes each half and the referee was an official from one of the Football Clubs.

The matches were very popular, all the St Marys and Riverstone locals came to watch as well as people from the surrounding district. According to Helen the male footballers were behind the team all the way, especially in the second match.

The girls travelled to St Marys to play the first match and when they got there they found that the St Marys team was all properly fitted out in jumpers and shorts. The Rubies were wearing whatever they had, some girls had no shoes, some wore shorts, some peddle pushers. There was a massive crowd there to watch and they ended up being beaten by three points.

A return game was organised and to try and improve their chances of winning the Rubies organised Brian Woods to coach them. This time they were well dressed for the game, borrowing football jumpers from the men. Once again however the Rubies were beaten. The match was covered in the St Marys' paper the *Weekend* on 9 June 1956. The Belles won 8-0.

There was always a bit of rivalry between Riverstone and St Marys and Helen recalls that a couple of the St Marys girls actually lived in Riverstone and they meant business when they played. Two of the Rubies girls ended up injured, Maureen Baldwin with a broken collar bone and 'Googy' White with a broken arm!

St Marys contacted Cinetone about the fundraising event and they brought their cameras out and filmed one of the matches which was later played as a short before the movies at cinemas.

(My thanks to Helen Liepa (nee Wheeler) and Dawn Cartwright (nee O'Brien) for their assistance with this article.)