

Halligan Cup – 2007



After such a big year in 2006, where we won the Bingham Cup and Plate comps at the Gay Rugby World titles in

New York, the Convicts pre season recruitment drive proved fruitful with 15 new players joining the club. Of these, 5 were experienced players who joined our Noice team and remaining 10 joined the Halligan team to learn the basics of what the running game was all about.

With little to no experience these players needed a crash course in everything to do with rugby. From catching and passing, running and tackling, rucking and mauling, to line outs and scrumming and drinking and socialising. All essential parts of the rugby experience.

The boys took to the training with much enthusiasm and a little bit of trepidation. Getting used to running full tilt at another guy running full tilt straight at you and trying to work out what to do when you both hit is not a natural thing to do. Arms, legs heads and shoulders need to be in just the right positions otherwise injuries occur and the body takes a battering. Truth be told the body takes a battering anyway but this was also what the guys were to learn – how to take a hit and give a hit, wake up sore the next day and be keen as mustard to get back to training and do it all over again. The main thing we focused on is the principle that rugby is a simple game that people tend to overcomplicate. Retain and recycle possession, defend like your life depended on it, back up your mates and take advantage of the gaps when they arrive and you're well on the road to victory. Trial games saw our new head coach run the Convicts as a squad so it was not until our first game, against defending champions Kings, that we could actually work out if we had a Halligan player for every position. Turns out we were a fullback short of a line up and despite several changes to fill the gap they spotted our weakness and bombed us all day. This resulted in hard earned meters gained by our new forwards being lost to missed opportunities at the back. Despite some resolute defence by all new players Kings went on to win the opening round with late try and a dubious refereeing decision (Fuzz) 17-0.

The opening game proved two things. The new guys could muscle up with the best of them and we needed to fix our back line shortages if we were to be a force during the season. Although highly anticipated the next round against Petersham was washed out, so game two was against Briars away. This time with a fullback present we had a full team and the aggression of the new forwards started to pay off. Despite being down in size and experience, we dominated possession and were quickly camped in the opposition half. It wasn't long before our dancing fly half Dean had enough room for his kick-chase and the opening try resulted. More of the same in the second half saw us continue to threaten, however the lack of an experienced front row hurt us, as we had to go uncontested, and the short arm penalties resulted. This was the only time they could gain yards on us and despite holding them out on our line for a good ten minutes they eventually went over. At 5 all it could have gone either way but the boys rallied. Some strong runs from Laf saw the gaps start to appear and with Dean using his 1-2 step to advantage he was through and over for his second try. A late penalty saw us draw clear and run out winners 13-5. It was to be the first win of the season and a proud moment not only for the team but especially the new guys. They had brought respect to their team and heard the club song sung loudly for the first time. A return to Camperdown saw the field now fit to play on and the

postponed match against Petersham was next. Petersham came out strong and used their experienced forwards to fringe us at the rucks. They made good ground and before we knew it they were over for the first try 5-0. A few stern instructions from the captain at half back and the boys were back into it. They plugged the gaps and stopped the flow and were soon on the counter attack. With the forwards now going forward, the backs had room to move and started to slice them up. Tries to our flyer Frenchman Christian and the B-Train Brian resulted and we had taken the lead 12-5. Petersham hit back in the second half and despite some strong online defence, our inexperienced showed and they were able to dive over close to the line to move within 2 points at 12-10. Again the boys rallied and we were back on the attack. Some strong running from our No.8 Aron saw him knocking off players like nine pins and good backing up saw us take advantage with Alex was over in the corner for the match sealer. Convicts won their second game 17-10.

Mosman was next away and a string of injuries meant we could only just field a full side. Players were filling in anywhere they could and we knew we were in for a tough one. Mosman were slow but strong and played the game as tight as they could. The boys muscled up but the lack of experience in key positions told and we went down 10-5. The boys knew this was one that got away and it left a bitter aftertaste in the mouth. The highlight was the break from our own line by new winger Matt the yank and the try to big Stuie Fenton that resulted. It was almost worth the price of parking. Keen to hit back and with a dearth of opposition teams we were back at Camperdown for a rematch with Petersham. With Dancing Dean now back from injury we had our full line up back and were keen to take advantage. Once again our forwards lead the way and with a strong backline we were able to take full advantage. Tries to Dean and B-Train Brian resulted and by the time Laf crossed in the second half we had ran in a comfortable victory 19-8. Confident from our good win we next headed to Campbelltown to take on UNSW. The only problem was we had lost all of our experienced loose forwards and we were handed a lesson in ball retention. Large tracks of loose sand across the field didn't help our ability to defend on the run but with UNSW dominating the breakdown and with a weight of possession against us we were no match for them going down 33-5.

Another round called off due to ground closure and we were next at home to Kings Old Boys. The rematch saw us with some forwards back and we were well in the match despite their superior strength and experience. We went to the break 5-3 down but had lifted from the prior games performance. Despite some good attack we couldn't get the phase play happening and points were hard to come by. Another try to Kings in the second half and at 10-3 we needed something special. A break from Laf and we were into space but with the tackle from the full back came a last ditch forward pass and the try went begging. Exhausted at the effort to fight back and after falling just short we dropped our defence and they ran in a late try to go out winners 15-3. It was the second time we had played a close game with Kings and lost 3 tries to nil and we would make sure it would not happen again. Another rematch, this time to Briars, and they were keen to make up for their previous defeat. They threw an even bigger side at us but once we settled into our game plan we again began to dominate field position. Lead as always in the forwards by our Players Player swash buckling Spencer Blake, the pack were back and through some solid defence and great fringe play we found ourselves camped in the opposition half. Tries to Dancing Dean Tapiki and outside centre

Adrian resulted and we went to the break 12-0 up. Briars came out firing and after some sustained pressure ran in their first try 12-5. But, as was to be the measure of the side this season, the boys rallied and a late try to flying fullback Tom saw us run out winners 19-5. With the season half over, winter in full swing and ski season upon us, it became hard to find clubs with Halligan sides still competing and as a result we were back to Concord again to take on Briars for the third time this year. This time as part of a special old boys club day in which we played a Barbarians side which was captained by their 50 year old President at half back. Despite his age he had lost none of his cunning and competitiveness and was at us like a dog on a bone. With super coach Breezy away on leave and Captain ST (me) flying out to Japan later that day I handed the reigns over to Dean as Captain and took over as Coach. With the help of English import Ben at halfback it was to be a repeat of last week efforts but this time with no lapses in defence. The forwards again dominated and the backs finished off and the boys gave me an undefeated record as Coach running in three well deserved tries and taking it out 19-0.

The following week saw us in a rematch with Kings and determined to not to let another opportunity slip. The boys arrived with steely focus and found a Kings side that were too cocky for their own good. With two wins against us already they were expecting an easy third but they got the shock of their lives when we dominated from the kick off and ran in two first half tries to go to the break 12-0 up. The second saw our domination continue and another try to Adrian Betts took us out to 19-0. Kings threw everything at us and crossed for their lone try but we wanted this one too badly and another try to Matt V saw us run out convincing winner 26-5. We had shown that we could take on and beat the best and were now in the middle of a winning streak that would last the rest of the season. A week off, for the wet weather round, saw us once again take on Briars this time at home. After the big win over Kings the boys were pumped and their confidence was sky high. They played like men possessed and every ball seemed to go to hand. Briars were once again no match but this time the backs and forwards both clicked in attack and the tries flowed like bourbons from the bar. By the time the ref mercifully blew the full time whistle, the boys had run in 6 tries to 1 and with 5 converted we had scored our highest win of the season winning 40-7. Beecroft was the next to challenge and it was a long drive to Thornleigh for our 12th game of the season. We had now won four in a row and despite last minute changes and an unknown opposition we were determined to keep the run going. Beecroft however had other ideas and, after absorbing our early attack, they mounted their own from their goal line. With fast running forwards they ran it wide and with an inexperienced backline we found ourselves down early 5-0. Another try followed and we were down 12-0. The boys sorted out their defence and started to lift in attack. From an attacking scrum in the opposition quarter, big Aron took the ball from No. 8 and ran straight at the line. Taking 3 guys with him he barged over to bring us back 12-7 at the break. The second half once again saw Aron with another rampaging run from the scrum, this time from half way, and another try resulted. We had hit the lead 14-12. Beecroft seemed stunned to be behind and threw everything at us. Some sloppy defence saw them go over to regain the lead 17-14 but we weren't finished yet. We had come back too well to let our winning streak slip and the boys once again rallied. A penalty in their quarter and a chance to tie the match but we wanted a win and took the quick tap and threw it wide. Some strong phase play and good ball retention saw us move play to both sides of the field and eventually the B-Train went over and we regained the lead 21-17. Five minutes to go and Beecroft weren't done yet. With home crowd support they once again threw everything at us. Stuck in our own half and well into extra time we defended with everything we had left. When a turn over saw us regain possession we threw it wide

and when the ball crossed the sideline the ref blew his whistle and we had won a great game 21-17. The win and our 5 match streak saw us move to outright second on the table and, with only Colleagues Halligan above us, the club had already wrapped up the title for another year. There was just one thing left for us to achieve. There was only one team that we had still not beaten and with the last official match of the season we had our chance. Mosman at home. The boys were fired up and came out strong. This time with a more experience back line we were able to take advantage of our forwards play and Mosman's slower backs, to run in two first half tries to Bulldog Chris Helms and the flying Sam Chesterman. 10-0 at the break. Mosman came back and crossed for a try 10-5. But the boys were not about to let this one slip and another charging run from big Aron saw him over for a 15-5 lead. A late try to Mosman, who never gave up, saw the final score 15-10 and the Convicts finish the season having beaten (at least once) every team they played.

From a bunch of beginners, the Colleagues Convicts Halligan side had fought hard all season to grow into a formidable team that was well respected by all who faced her. From shaky beginners to finish the year with 6 wins in a row and number 2 on the table was a very satisfying felling for all involved. Especially when the only team above us was the Colleagues side and we knew the trophy was once again coming home to where it belonged.

Thanks as always to super coach Breezy who moulded the team, gave us passion and steel and somehow came up with a run on side each week. Special praise to the Supreme Team Manager Jeppo for services above and beyond the call of duty. For anyone who has tried to get a game, a field and a ref each week for a Halligan team will attest, it is a long and thankless task. The site of Jeppo driving up with his Halligan bus full of players he picked up along the way was a welcome site for Coach and Captain alike. Special mention also to Hustler Dave and the experienced players within the team, who gave of their time each week to help out the new guys, gave them direction on an off the field and showed them what rugby is all about – mateship in battle. Without their commitment and support we would not have had the successful season we did.

Simon Thompson Colleagues-Convicts Captain Halligan Cup 2007