

## CIRU President Report 2020

**Kia orana,**

2020 Rugby has been a Challenge for all of us in our paradise country. We never thought that one day our borders would be closed because of a Covid-19 pandemic. Luckily, we only have one International Flight a week and our International Shipping is under the control of Te Marae Ora (Ministry of Health) and the Task Force Border Control Agency. Nevertheless, we are still facing uncertainty and more challenges ahead of us. We must be thankful to the Almighty who continues to care for us. With his guidance, we will overcome these challenges in anticipation of the benefits and enjoyment that Rugby will bring to our people both locally and abroad.

### **Admin and Development**

February 8 – 19: our Oceania Rugby Educator Talemo Waga and Tihrani visited us to conduct a training workshop for Coaches, Referees, Medics, Strength & Conditioning Trainers and Management training for locals and the wider Sport Community Clubs on the Island. Unfortunately, because of the Rugby League Season, the attendance from the Five Rugby Union Clubs across the Island was low. However, five participants from rugby clubs attended the Management Training, two for Coaching Training, five for Referees Training, two Medical Training and two for Strength and Conditioning Training.

### **Covid 19 Epidemic**

Towards the end of March all Sporting activity across the Country was suspended until further notice because of COVID 19 Pandemic. Our Border was closed, with only one International Flight a week throughout these hard times, bringing in essential supplies for our people and businesses.

During April, an emergency meeting for the CIRU Executives was called to review what course of action we would take because of Covid 19. I emailed an official letter to the Secretary of Health for the way forward for Rugby Union. I was advised two days later by the Secretary of Health (MOH) that the Covid 19 Taskforce would review our status by the end of the month.

### **Quick Rip Rugby 7s**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> May I received an approval letter from MOH that Quick Rip 7s was approved to start as these games fall more under non-contact Sport. Ben Koteka our CIRU Rugby Development Manager quickly prepared an action plan, assisted by two of our Rugby Development Officers (RDOs) to implement the Quick Rip 7s. Implementation also included three of our Local Rugby Club Senior Players. The plan was to set up and run a Rising Stars programme for Rarotonga Primary Schools Quick Rip 7s. All schools across the Island were asked to confirm their participation and sessions were organized so that the RDOs could commence training.



These training sessions culminated in a tournament which was held at the Arorangi Rugby Field on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2020 for both Boys and Girls. It was great to see the Parents, Grand-Parents, Aunties and Uncles there to support their Kids. This really brought back memories of the old days of community support. The kids just wanted to play rugby throughout the whole day. We also appreciated the support of our small sponsors on the day. We had the Senior Students from Tereora College to officiate at these games. Some of our Senior Referees took leave from work to assist at the events. It was a great day for Rugby in general. 36 teams participated, 17 Girls teams and 19 Boys teams and over 400 active participants in the Tournament.

### **Domestic Rugby Union**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July we received an official approval from MOH for full active contact Sport. A meeting was called for all Rugby Clubs on the Island to come together to plan a 2020 Rugby Union Competition. On the 11 July 2020, the first tournament was played at the Arorangi Field in a Town vs Country format. It consisted of: Juniors Under 11 to Under 13 Quick Rip, under 16 – 15-a-side rugby, under 19 Womens Open 7's Quick Rip, and the Seniors A Open 15 a side. The winners were: under 10, Arorangi- Cowboys; Under 12, Avatiu/Nikao Eels; Under 14, Town; Under 16, Country; Under 19, Country, Women, Country, Senior A ,Tupapa Panthers on extra time. One benefit was that all the Rugby games were played at one venue. So it was good to see five Rugby Union Clubs coming together and supporting each other. This will continue for the 2021 season as all clubs were excited about the format. This is great as each host club can implement fundraising activities for their club during the day.

### **Cook Islands Games**

From the 3 – 17 October an Inaugural Cook Islands Games took place consisting of 23 codes plus an introductory day of traditional games. The participating teams were made up of residents on Rarotonga from the eleven Islands of the Northern and Southern groups of the Cook Islands. Over 4,000 athletes & officials played over a period of 2 weeks of competition. The Rugby 7s Tournament was played from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> October. There was a total of 19 teams from their respective (11) Islands. The following are the category winners: MENS (10x teams): Gold – Pukapuka, Silver – Aitutaki and Bronze – Atiu. WOMENS (4x teams): Gold - Atiu, Silver - Aitutaki and Bronze - Mauke. The Under 17s Men (5x teams): Gold - Atiu, Silver - Mauke and Bronze - Pukapuka. The Overall winner of the Cook Islands Games Competition Trophy was Mauke. Most events including rugby were livestreamed on social media such as Facebook and YouTube. There was significant support from all four corners of our Society - the Government, Traditional Leaders, Religious Communities and our many Sponsors. The many Volunteers made things easier on a day-by-day basis. Thank you to the Cook Islands Sports and National Olympic Committee (CISNOC) and their hard-working staff under Owen Lewis's and Hugh Graham's Leadership. This game created an awesome 2020 atmosphere and the government later announced to the sporting bodies that the next Cook Islands Games will be held in October 2022.



## **A New Birth - Tri Series Rugby Union 15-a-side**

### **Between Cook Islands, Samoa and Fijians players residing here in the Cook Islands.**

This Tri Series was initiated by one person with the support of his Club namely, Mr. Pare Rongokea Jnr, who was a former Senior Rugby Union Player and an Arorangi Cowboys Rugby Union Executive for a number of years. He also represented the Cook Islands in Rugby Union and Rugby League in regional and international competitions. The tri-series was held at the Arorangi Sport Rugby Field. Thank you also to the Arorangi Rugby Union Executives and your many supporters. The attendance and support from the three ethnic communities across the Islands was hugely noticeable throughout the three days of the games and contributed to its great success. The standard of play shown during the matches demonstrated real passion and country pride.

First game - Cook Islands (15) vs Fiji (10) in extra time.

Second game – Fiji (21) vs Samoa (22)

Third and final game – Cook Islands (20) vs. Samoa (28)

Final Placing – 1. Samoa 2. Cook Islands 3. Fiji

This is a new format for the Cook Islands Rugby Union. It will form part of the Annual Rugby Union Calendar for years to come. We can see that the standard of rugby has been lifted by the introduction of a new competition. CIRU will continue to support these new initiatives which will also renew interest in the game of rugby, so that rugby will be the true winner. This new series also provides selectors with another format for trials whereby they can assess players as possible selections for our national team to represent the Cook Islands.

### **Raro 7s Rugby**

Due to the closing of our borders to our traditional International Raro 7s teams, our 2020 Raro 7s teams and players were restricted to more Community oriented 7s Rugby tournament. The event started with the Under 13 Rarotonga Primary School boys and girls 7s Rippa Rugby tournament which was played on the 1<sup>st</sup> December on the Country side of the Island, on Ngatangia Sports Field. There were 14 teams from the Schools across the Island. The winners were: Under 13 Boys - Nukutere College, 2<sup>nd</sup> – Arorangi; Under 13 Girl's division Winner - Papaaroa SDA College, 2<sup>nd</sup> - Nikao Maori School.

The Raro Open Men's and Women's 7s consisted of 21 teams altogether that participated during the two days 7's competition. Twelve (12) Men's teams, five (5) Women's and four (4) Under 17 Boys teams. The standard of the games was high as witnessed during the Cook Islands Games period. This was a continuation from the Cook Islands Games

The winners in the Men's division were 1. Tupapa - Panthers, Runner Up - Pukapuka.

Women's division – Winner - Avatiu, Runner Up - Atiu



Under 17 Winners - Arorangi Cowboys, Runner Up, Tupapa - Panthers

### **Social Media Presence**

Because of Covid 19, we did not have much of a Social Media Promotion. All International events competitions were deferred to 2021 and hopefully the landscape will improve for us come 2021. We now have a dedicated person on our CIRU board responsible for updating our social media page on a monthly basis - our Female Executive namely Ashleigh Wihongi Willis

### **World Rugby funding**

The funding from World Rugby remains the same as from previous years of GB£30,000.00. This funding is being utilized to fulfil our goals set out in our Strategic Plan administered by our Rugby Development Officer and also assisting schools and development projects for the Outer-Islands. With the downturn in our economic landscape, our traditional sponsors were unable to contribute funding resources to support rugby however they were still supporting rugby by way of in-kind sponsorship particularly for our Raro 7's and Rippa Rugby program.

### **Coming in 2021**

The 2020 Domestic Rugby Union season has been in discussion a lot, with some surprising and excitement events. For that purpose, we will see some changes in our rugby calendar in the coming 2021. We have just appointed our Cook Islands World Rugby Under 18 Womens. Coach - Mr Frank Karati. His Management and a CIRU Executive Rep is the Coordinator - Mr William Taripo. They will be working with our NZ CIRU counterpart in ensuring we have the best team to assemble for this WORLD EVENT.

After a vigorous consultation with our clubs and community stakeholders we have finally adopted our new CIRU Constitution at the 2020 AGM. This document is in line with the current Oceania and the World Rugby Principles and Guidelines. In my view there is still areas for improvement to suit our working Environment as a Country. We pray this Covid 19 will not deter our commitment to Rugby Union as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

On behalf of the CIRU, I would like to thank all of our sponsors and community stakeholders for their on-going support during the year even though we were unable to participate in any international events this year due to Covid 19.

Special acknowledgement to our traditional sponsors, Vodafone, CITC liquor store, Cook Islands Tourism, CI General Transport, ANZ bank, RaroExpo Ltd, MADD design, TAU, CI Red Cross, Ministry of Health, CIIC, Islands Car & Rental Hire, CISNOC for the Accreditation, CITY & Herald, CI News, Pacific TV, CI Rugby Union Referees, CIBS & Arama Associates, Bench Officials, Blue Pacific, Vaima Water, Ministry of Cultural Development and the Cook Islands Government.

To our Regional Oceania Rugby and International World Rugby partnership, thank you for your support to Cook Islands rugby during 2020



A special acknowledgement to General Mr George George, our dedicated MC during the domestic Raro7's and our National Raro Rugby 7's Events

We look forward to next year with re-opening of our borders and welcoming other international players who were unfortunate this year to miss out on their usual pilgrimage to Rarotonga for our iconic and exciting rugby events.

Special meitaki maata and thank you to our many Players, Coaches, Managers and your families who have been part of our CIRU activity for 2020.

Also special meitaki maata to our Clubs Rugby Executives and administrators, first aid providers and supporters.

Lastly to my Executive that have given up their time, passion and love of rugby through their voluntary time, Meitaki Kore Reka.

Meitaki maata

Simiona Teiotu



President CIRU.

24-December-2020

