

Title: Becoming Deadly - Reengaging Grassroots Rugby League

Category: Fostering Grassroots Sport

Club Name: Casino RSM Club

Entrant: Neale Genge

1. Provide an outline of the program, project or cause that addresses each of the following aspects:

- a. The program/project/cause objectives**
- b. The support the club provided, i.e. was it financial, in-kind, staff volunteers or use of club facilities?**
- c. A timeline of activities/events**
- d. Any developments made since implementation (for example: if the support spans multiple years, how has the program grown? Will the club provide support again? Will the program be enhanced in the future?)**

a. the program/project/cause objectives.

The Casino RSM Junior Rugby League Football Club (the 'Casino Cougars') has been in operation for over 55 years with the Casino RSM Club (the 'Club') being both major sponsor and operator of the sporting club. The Casino Cougars JRLFC has produced many talented NRL players over the years but in the early part of the past decade the Casino Cougars JRLFC had experienced a decline in participation numbers.

The Club and the Casino Cougars JRLFC undertook a program to reinvigorated involvement in Junior Rugby League through the development of the players, coaches, and official's and by building a stronger connection to our local Indigenous community and the development of a female player base.

b. the support the club provided, i.e. was it financial, in-kind, staff volunteers or use of club facilities?

The Casino RSM Club has been a stronger supporter of Rugby League in Casino for many decades. The Club has been the continual Major sponsor of the Casino RSM Senior Rugby League for over 57 years – a sponsorship which is believed to be the longest continued sponsorship in what was the former Country Rugby League of New South Wales. The Club has also been the major sponsor of the Casino Cougars JRLFC since their inception in 1976, and now both sporting clubs operate as part of the Club's operations under our incorporation and trading on our Australian Business Number.

The Club's investment in the Casino Cougars Junior Rugby League has been substantial, through financial contributions, administrative support, marketing and adverting, fundraising channels, and utilisation of the Club facilities.

c. a timeline of activities/events.

2011 and 2012 formed a low point for the Casino Cougars JRLFC with player numbers dwindling and discussions from some parties to form a new breakaway club.



In 2013 the Club set about to rebuild the Casino Cougars Junior Rugby League commencing with a two-fold increase in financial assistance.

The aim was for every child who wished to play rugby league with Casino Cougars JRLFC to be provided with their shorts, socks, and training shirt as part of their registration fees, while feeling united as a team.

The Club worked with the volunteer committee of the Casino Cougars JRLFC to improve their professionalism and administration. New sponsors soon also came on board, providing additional financial assistance to the Casino Cougars JRLFC.

A partnership was formed with the Gold Coast Titans and through contacts with the Country Rugby League professional assistance was provided to train and develop our volunteer coaching staff.

The Club engaged with NRL Star and former Casino Cougars JRLFC player Matthew King to conduct coaching clinics in Casino and provide player development, while trips to a Titans home game were instituted, free of charge for Casino Cougars JRLFC players to inspire our youth to pursue their NRL dream.

The Club also worked with local council to upgrade training facilities at our home ground. Previously the Casino Cougars JRLFC had been conducting training under one light at night. The Club committed \$35,000 to the installation of lighting on the fields and an additional \$12,500 was committed by Council to bring this project to fruition.

In 2014 the Club undertook several fundraising initiatives to raise funds towards the development of the Casino Cougars JRLFC Clubhouse facilities. Through Matt King several NRL stars were secured for a fundraising and coaching weekend at Casino, with Australian Kangaroos halfback Cooper Cronk attending hours after playing in a Test match against New Zealand. In 2014 the Casino Cougars JRLFC was also successful in having every team from U/10 to U/16 play in the Grand Final.

In 2015 additional State Government funding of \$75,000 was received, which combined with \$425,000 contributed by the Club allowed for the construction of a new Clubhouse and canteen facilities.

The Club has continued to support the Casino Cougars JRLFC, and player numbers continued to increase.

In 2019 the Club undertook a redevelopment of the junior league playing surface and installation of an irrigation system to improve the playing surface for our junior athletes at a cost of \$50,000. This process also involved the repositioning of 3 playing fields and the development of a dedicated mini league field to accommodate our ever-growing rugby league player numbers.

d. any developments made since implementation (for example: if the support spans multiple years, how has the program grown? Will the club provide support again? Will the program be enhanced in the future? etc).

Since our increased commitment and professional development of junior league the Casino Cougars JRLFC has experienced considerable growth in playing numbers. In the past two seasons alone, we have seen an increase of 39.8% in playing numbers. Locally 24% of Casino's 5-17-year-old males are registered Rugby League players, playing with the Casino Cougars, while we have also seen a growth

in female players with 5% of Casino's 5-17-year-old females being registered Rugby League players. Additionally, allowing for our Senior Rugby League players a total of 18.4% are female.

In 2021 the Casino Cougars was awarded the Richmond Valley Council NADOIC Week Reconciliation Award while also being awarded the New South Wales Rugby League Grassroots Club of the Year.

2. Provide a brief insight into why this program, project or cause was supported by the club. In your answer, summarise:

- a. How the project, program or cause was first presented to the club. For example, did a member present it to the Board or Executive team, was it part of a ClubGRANTS submission, did it come from a local business or the community based on a need, was a survey conducted to identify areas of community need, etc.**
- b. Why it was important to the club to support this community need.**

a) how the project, program or cause was first presented to the club. For example, did a member present it to the Board or Executive team, was it part of a ClubGRANTS submission, did it come from a local business or the community based on a need, was a survey conducted to identify areas of community need etc.

The Club's increased commitment to the Casino Cougars JRLFC was initially driven by the need to rebuild the Junior League following the turmoil of 2011-2012. During this period there has been a split in the volunteer executive of the Casino Cougars JRLFC, a decline in player numbers, and attempts to establish a new Junior Rugby League Club in Casino.

The Club took the initiative to take a more leading role with the Casino Cougars JRLFC. Discussions with parents, coaches and other stakeholders lead to the Club investing more heavily in junior league and taking a guiding hand in providing financial assistance and development.

The Club reformed links with the Casino Cougars JRLFC former players who had made it to the NRL and encouraged them to become involved in the development of the Club.

b) Why it was important to the club to support this community need.

The engagement of our Youth, particularly our Indigenous Youth was a very important reason for the Club to support the reinvigoration of the Casino Cougars JRLFC. Due to the nature of the sport, Rugby League has a relatively low cost of entry, compared to other sports such as cricket. The purchase of a pair of footy boots is often all that is required and, therefore, the sport has a higher participation rate amongst persons from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who are not able to access other sports due to the cost of equipment, hire fees and other associated costs.

Casino, and more so the Richmond Valley Council Local Government Area is one of the most socioeconomic disadvantaged in the region. The town lies on the banks of the Richmond River and is situated at the junction of the Bruxner Highway and the Summerland Way. It is located 726 km north of Sydney and 228 km south of Brisbane. Casino has an unemployment rate of 9.0%. The median individual income is \$406 per week and the median household income is \$757 per week. We have a reasonably high indigenous population with 10% of our community being First Australians.



Rugby League is known as a sport that has been, particularly in New South Wales, heavily embraced by the Aboriginal Community. During the 2019 season, 46.1% of the Casino Cougars Junior Rugby League players identified as Indigenous Australians. Combined with the Casino Senior Rugby League Club we have 42% of our players being First Nations people.

3. Provide an outline of the positive impact the club's contribution had on the community.

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The positive contribution the Club's decision to support the reinvigoration of the Casino Cougars JRLFC can be well seen in our local community. Every weekend and after school local youth can be proudly seen wearing their Casino Cougars JRLFC training shirts with the Casino RSM Club logo proudly displayed.

The growth in our player numbers is a testament to the benefit our support has had. We now boast the largest junior rugby league club in the Northern Rivers in terms of player numbers. 24% of Casino's 5-17-year-old males are registered rugby league players with the Casino Cougars JRLFC, while 5% of Casino's 5-17-year-old females are playing for our team.

Our Indigenous Youth now account for over 46% of our players despite only representing 10% of our population. Indigenous All Star, South Sydney and New South Wales representative and former Casino Cougars JRLFC player, Codie Walker, frequently callouts support to our Junior League Team and promotes us on a national level, giving further hope and inspiration to our Indigenous and non-Indigenous players alike.

The Casino Cougars JRLFC was awarded the Reconciliation in Sport Award at our Local Government NADOIC Week Awards, and Casino Cougars RSM JRLFC Indigenous Player and Referee, Lincoln Close took out the Individual Award and continues to promote Indigenous involvement in the sport and into the refereeing field.

On a State Level the efforts of the Casino Cougars JRLFC was recognised by the New South Wales Rugby League with the awarding of the Grassroots Club of the Year Award in 2021.

4. Add any credits here (optional).

5. Supporting material:

- *To request copies of the supporting documents, please email events@clubsnsw.com.au*