

# YEAR IN REVIEW 2016



**HONG KONG  
RUGBY LEAGUE**  
香港欖球聯盟

## Chairman's Foreword

I sometimes forget that 2016 was only Hong Kong Rugby League's second year in existence, because the progress we have made in such a short space of time is really quite remarkable. Our Nines tournament and the Hong Kong Residents tour are becoming more and more popular with each edition, and Hong Kong has now held its first ever senior 13-a-side Rugby League match with the inaugural Hong Kong Side of Origin, and what a great occasion it was.

The strides we have made in 2016 have been thanks to a steadily growing group of passionate and dedicated volunteers. All the directors, myself included, are pushing HKRL along the path to success because we love the game of Rugby League and we want to see it grow in Asia; such that new people can begin to play and watch the sport.

It's for this reason that I see one of our greatest successes this year being the growth of HK Tag. HK Tag is a non-contact version of Rugby League which allows those unable or unwilling to play full contact an avenue to enjoy the sport. It truly is a gateway to our great game and my favourite feedback all year, from across all our events came from one new comer to our social HK Tag sessions:

*"I do not have any background of playing team sports/ball games but in recent weeks when I took up Tag Rugby practice I felt that I broke some new ground in my life"*

From all corners we're seeing an increasing demand from players and fans alike for more and more Rugby League and tag rugby. We have some extremely exciting plans for 2017, with more domestic fixtures and Hong Kong's first ever international fixtures on the horizon for both HKRL and HK TAG.

Of course none of this would be possible without the hard work of our volunteers who are the heart and soul of everything we do, as well as our sponsors who have given us the support we have needed to grow the game here in Hong Kong. A massive thank you to Hooked, ICG and Rula Bula, without their support we would not be playing Rugby League in Hong Kong.

We look forward to taking The Greatest Game of All here in Hong Kong to new heights in 2017 with you all.

**James Hall**  
HKRL Chairman

## HKRL 9s & HK Tag Challenge



The first major event of an extremely successful year for Rugby League in Hong Kong was the second edition of the Hooked Hong Kong Rugby League Nines and HK Tag Challenge that took place at King's Park on May 2nd. This year's edition saw the competition double in size with 8 teams competing in the 9s tournament with over 100 players competing, many of whom were either new to the tournament or perhaps even more impressively, new to Rugby League entirely. Teams representing the full range of districts in Hong Kong entered the competition with the newly formed South Pacific All Stars beating last year's third placed Hong Kong Hunters in a tightly contested Grand Final 28-8.

Running concurrently with the Nines tournament was the HK Tag Challenge which saw 6 mixed teams compete with over 60 players participating, again many of whom were either new to tournament or new to the sport itself, paving the way for an extremely popular HK Tag schedule that followed in the rest of the year. Congratulations to HSBC who ran out winners on the day.

Special thanks to our sponsors, Hooked Fish and Chips, ICG, Rula Bula and Gweilo Beer as well as all the volunteers, players and spectators who contributed to a fantastic day.

## Hong Kong Residents XIII



Following on from last year's successful tour to the Philippines, the HK Residents XIII, Hong Kong's first ever representative Rugby League side, once again went abroad to play in what transpired to be an absolute thriller of a game, this time in Thailand against a Thailand Residents XIII. The team this year included a high percentage of HK Residents debutants, and the game itself saw a fantastic level of rugby being played between two very strong sides with the lead switching back and forth throughout the game. Hong Kong finally grabbed the match winning score with 5 minutes to go and held out for an impressive 20-16 win, maintaining the side's 100% win rate for another year.

The HK Residents XIII is a team consisting of open-age players currently residing in Hong Kong and was conceived to give a wider mix of players the opportunity to represent Hong Kong, as well as to help grow the game in Asia outside of the formal international representative side (Hong Kong Thunder). It has quickly established itself as a one of the most anticipated dates in the HKRL calendar amongst the players and HKRL are delighted to be part of and contributing towards the growth of the game in Asia.

We would like to thank the Thailand Residents side who showed great hospitality entertaining us and helped us deliver another fantastic tour.

## Referees



In what was another huge landmark in the progression of HKRL and the sport here in Hong Kong itself, 2016 saw the development of 3 Level 1 Rugby League referees and 8 fully qualified Oztag referees. To achieve this the referees attended qualification courses ran and taught by Bill Harrigan, former Head of Referring for the NRL who retired with the record for the most State of Origin, Grand Finals, first grade games and test matches officiated, and flew over to Hong Kong specifically to help train our referees.

Having fully qualified referees who have access to quality teaching and learning is integral to the future success of both Rugby League and Tag in Hong Kong. We would like to thank Bill greatly for training our referees directly and his contribution to our continuing success.

If you're interested in becoming a referee please get in touch at [info@hongkongrugbyleague.com](mailto:info@hongkongrugbyleague.com).

## HKRL Side of Origin



In a year packed to the brim with firsts, one of the most exciting was hosting the first ever senior 13-a-side Rugby League match here in Hong Kong. The one-off HK Origin fixture was based on the NRL's State of Origin concept, with a Hong Kong Islands representative side taking on a Kowloon and the New Territories representative side. Though the match was won convincingly by HK Islands 38-4, the Kowloon and New Territories side put up a valiant effort and further enforced the popularity and appetite for Rugby League in Hong Kong amongst players and spectators alike.

The inaugural HK Tag Origin was also held in conjunction which followed the same format but was a much tighter affair, with the Islands side winning 7-5. As part of HK Tag's continuing drive for diversity in the sport, both sides adhered to the rule of a minimum of 3 female members per side playing on the pitch at any one time. This was a great showcase for and reflection of the sport's ever-increasing popularity amongst all demographics here in Hong Kong.

## Social Tag



One of the great successes of the year was the rapid growth of Hong Kong Tag which was largely driven by regular weekly social evening Tag sessions throughout Spring and Summer at Happy Valley. The sessions saw an average of 30+ players turn up every week, with some sessions reaching 50+ players. Not only did each session see a high percentage of new participants, HK Tag also developed an increasingly committed core group of players who went onto participate in the hugely successful ICG Super League (below).

Many of the participants were entirely new to tag rugby and for many it was their first experience of any code of Rugby and for 1 or 2 their first experience of sport full stop. We were also delighted to regularly see a very high number of females and local Hong Kongers playing, a great reflection of the growing popularity amongst a range of demographics of the sport here in Hong Kong.

The social tag season also paved the way to regular social gatherings outside of the Tag games themselves, which has seen HK Tag host social events such as hikes, karaoke and beach tag.

## ICG Tag Super League



The inaugural ICG HK Tag Super League was Hong Kong's first ever on-going domestic Tag league, which saw four mixed teams compete in a 7 week season that ran through the summer at King's Park. The Taguila Bombs bounced back from an opening day defeat to go on unbeaten for the rest of the tournament culminating in their Grand Final 5-1 victory against the Tag Buffaloes.

However the greatest success of the tournament belonged to ICGX and ICG who, despite finishing fourth, showed considerable commitment and improvement throughout the tournament pushing GW Wolfpack hard in the third place playoff despite being a team made up of almost entirely newcomers to all codes of rugby.

The success of the league further cemented the great appetite for the game here in Hong Kong as well as its vast potential for growth. A big thank you to ICG who were the main sponsors of the tournament.

## Battle of the Hemispheres



The popularity of both the Nines tournament and Origin fixture and player demands for more Rugby League in Hong Kong gave way to the creation of a Northern Hemisphere v Southern Hemisphere fixture, which became Hong Kong's second senior 13 a-side Rugby League match. The match itself saw the Northern Hemisphere side race away to an early 24-0 lead before the Southern Hemisphere side clawed two scores back, making the final score 24-12.

A HK Tag Hemisphere clash was held on the same day which was also won by the Northern Hemisphere side 4-3 completely a hugely successful day for the Northern Hemisphere.

## Hong Kong Corporate Sevens



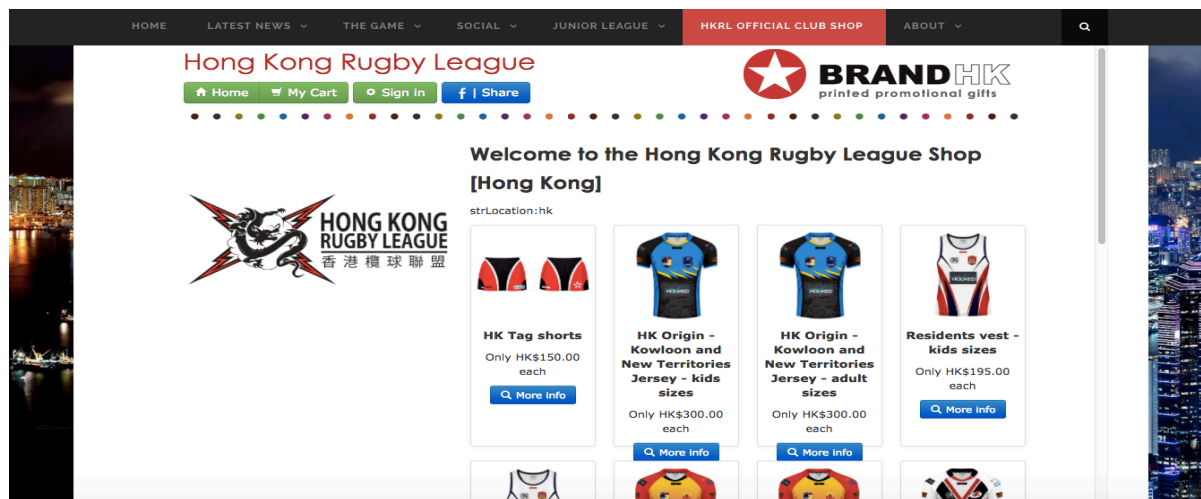
The Hong Kong Corporate Sevens this year was revamped as a Tag rugby competition to allow it to become a much bigger and more sociable tournament, with both a men's competition and a mixed competition running.

As such, HK Tag were invited to help in the co-ordination and running of the competition, with HK Tag providing organisation support such including match rules, pre-tournament coaching and the matchday referees.

We also entered a HK Tag committee team into the men's competition, the HK Tag Gazelles. The HK Tag Gazelles finished runner's up, losing in the final to Swire Property, but managed to take home the titles of tournament top scorers and Player of the Tournament.

The day was a fantastic success with a record 20 teams taking part and an estimated \$1 million HKD raised for the Deaf Rugby Programme. HK Tag were delighted to be part of a such a worthwhile cause, as well as being able to capitalise a considerable amount of exposure for the sport amongst corporations and players alike which will undoubtedly prove extremely beneficial for the code moving forward.

## HKRL Online



HKRL's online presence has grown impressively along with the sport this year, with a 33% organic increase in our social following and engagement, as well as a huge increase in output of branded content. Our online presence provides an important touch point for fans of HKRL both within Hong Kong and outside of Hong Kong and has helped HKRL cultivate a truly global audience. Advocates of HKRL from around the world are engaging, promoting and supporting HKRL and its efforts to grow the game here.

In addition to the already established channels, HKRL also launched a online store with HKRL playing kits and merchandise now readily available for purchase. This gives HKRL supporters another opportunity to engage with and promote our brand, as well as providing an additional revenue stream for HKRL. Despite having just opened, we have seen purchases from all over the world including US, UK, New Zealand, Australia, Philippines etc and it is a true reflection of HKRL's international appeal.

The online channels will remain a crucial touch point for the growth of the game, allowing supporters to engage and interact in a number of different ways with us that is not bound by geography. As we continue to aggressively grow these channels next year, we expect even more opportunities for HKRL and their partners to engage with their supporters and promote the Greatest Game of All in Hong Kong and beyond.

## HKRL and HK Tag Board Restructure

As both Rugby League and Tag Rugby continues its rapid development here in Hong Kong, HKRL and HK Tag saw a board restructure in 2016 to accommodate new comers and to better define the roles and responsibilities of those involved.

### HKRL Executive Board

|            |                |                 |                 |
|------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| James Hall | Peter Cornwell | Jack Muir       | Dan Mascord     |
| (Chairman) | (Treasurer)    | (Exec Director) | (Exec Director) |

### HKRL Management Board

|  |  |   |  |                                     |   |
|--|--|---|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| Neville Metcalfe<br>(Managing<br>Director) | Ringo Lung<br>(Marketing<br>and Media<br>Director) | Toby Lei<br>(International<br>Director) | Tom Hayden<br>(Junior Rugby<br>League<br>Director) | Jacob Weeks<br>(HK Tag<br>Director) | Lee Griffiths<br>(Clubs and<br>Players<br>Director) |
|--|--|---|--|-------------------------------------|---|

| HKRL Volunteers Committee   | HK Tag Committee  |
|---|---|
| Brad Newman<br>Craig McElhinny<br>Ian Molyneux<br>Jason Fairleigh<br>Penny McElhinny<br>Steven Birchall<br>Andrew Zucco | Ian Kerr<br>Eddy Ang<br>Laura Fernández<br>Jack Yan<br>Sandy Fung |

The number of regular volunteers who are dedicated to the on-going support of both codes has grown substantially and importantly across both HKRL and HK Tag we have welcomed female and native Hong Kong representation on to the boards and working committees which we believe to be vital to the success of both sports moving forward, and is a reflection of our commitment to build a truly diverse and representative game in Hong Kong.



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