2019

Dragons Season Preview

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Winger Jordan Pereira
It may as well be painted on the wall at Dragons HQ – “2019. The beginning of something better”

But what does “better” look like? Consider this. The St George Illawarra Dragons finished the 2018 Telstra Premiership season in the semi-finals.

One more victory in last year’s regular season would have had the Red V sitting pretty in the top four. Two more wins? The Dragons hold up the J. J. Giltinan Shield as minor premiers for the first time since 2010. St George Illawarra members and fans all remember how that particular season ended!

Representative players, skipper Gareth Widdop, Paul Vaughan, Tariq Sims and Euan Aitken seasons’ also finished prematurely due to injury. While that’s no excuse, it’s certainly a yardstick of the brighter days ahead at the Dragons.

So let it be asked again. What does “better” look like? Dragons coach Paul McGregor has no illusions about his expectations in 2019.

“We have a vision of what the upcoming season will look like and we have a strong desire to achieve it,” McGregor said. “There are a number of factors that contribute to achieving a top four finish. We know that if we play to our potential and are consistent, we will give ourselves a chance of catching excellence more often. Going through the experiences of 2018 have made us far more resilient. We will be strengthened by the adversity we faced throughout the past season.”

“The majority of the squad have been back training since November, with the exception of James (Graham), Ben (Hunt) and Tyson (Frizell) who were fortunate enough to represent their countries. This has enabled us the opportunity to tweak the tactical and technical side of our principles. We are fortunate to have quality, experience and depth in all positions that has the versatility to interchange during games to get the best outcome for the team. The pre-season has given us the opportunity for diversification amongst the playing group, which will help to better prepare us for the upcoming season.

“Throw in the young talent we have coming through and it provides an optimistic outlook for the upcoming season and beyond.”

The 2019 pre-season hasn’t been without its distractions though either. Players have come, players have gone and others have gone by the wayside. Speculation has been rife about certain individuals, while club captain Widdop confirmed he would leave the NRL at season’s end to take up a deal with the Warrington Wolves in 2020 and beyond.

“Selfishly, I was saddened when I was first made aware. However, as a coach and friend to Gaz, I have compassion for him and his family and understand his reasoning as to why he made this decision and I support his decision fully,” McGregor said. “We all know he will give his all for the club throughout 2019.”

The ongoing matter concerning Jack de Belin – having been indefinitely stood down by the NRL and the Australian Rugby League Commission – has been another “distraction outside of the squad’s concern”.

“The playing group is unified and understandably have empathy for their mate. We are a very tight knit group who support each other and will continue to monitor Jack’s wellbeing and welfare,” McGregor said.

“You don’t replace a player like Jack. We will look from within first and foremost. The probability is that Tyson (Frizell) will move to lock and Luciano (Leilua) and Jacob (Host) will play edge back-row which will be a great opportunity for both players.

“We will focus on what we Dragons coach advisor Mick Crawley

Captain Gareth Widdop in training

PAGE 2
are good at and play to our strengths, and that is starting the season off on a positive note."

McGregor has made one personnel change to his coaching staff for 2019 following the appointment of Mick Crawley as coaching advisor – a holistic role that will encompass the NRL side's coaching program.

Crawley has spent the past 12 years as an NRL assistant coach at the North Queensland Cowboys (2009-11), Newcastle Knights (2012-14) and Canberra Raiders (2007-08, 2015-18).

Crawley has worked alongside veteran mentors Graham Murray, Wayne Bennett and Ricky Stuart in his 35 years spent coaching rugby league.

"The rich history of the Dragons excites me as well as the strong playing group. I'm very happy to be a part of this great club as the entire squad are very professional in what they do," Crawley said.

"I've been very lucky enough to work with a lot of good players and coaches over the past decade or so. Working at other clubs gives you a variety of experiences and I hope to help the Dragons with them moving forward."

Ben Haran will remain the executive manager – football of the Red V while Dean Young, Ben Hornby and Mat Head will continue in their role as assistant coach; the latter to again take charge of the Dragons’ NSW Cup team once again. Former Bulldogs and St Helens centre Willie Talau has also been named the Jersey Flegg coach for season 2019. Steve Nielsen steps into the role as the football manager of both the Under-20s and reserve grade teams. This move has enabled Scott Stewart to manage the Dragons’ education and wellbeing team alongside co-ordinator Holly Scheeringa. Shaun Timmins has replaced Richard Agar as the Pathways Recruitment Manager, while Ian Millward will again be the director of rugby league pathways and list management.

Nathan Pickworth will again control the Dragons’ performance team, and is another yearning for higher honours in 2019.

“We’ve identified key areas of athletic performance in which we can target to build upon our successful 2018 in the performance department.” Pickworth said.
“Plenty of players are a lot fitter, faster, stronger and more powerful than they were 12-24 months ago which is awesome. But it would be naïve of us to rest on our laurels so no doubt we’re looking to continue this improvement.

“We are very lucky here at the Dragons the playing group are exceptionally hard-working. Which makes our roles in the athletic performance department very enjoyable and rewarding.”

While staff changes within the Dragons’ performance team have been minimal, two crucial acquisitions have Pickworth excited for the season ahead. “We have created a new role titled athletic development coach of which Ryan Bailey has been appointed. Ryan’s previously worked at the club in the part-time lower grade role providing athletic performance servicing to the players in the Dragons’ pathway systems.” Pickworth said.

“The new role encompasses athletic development in with the NRL squad as well as overseeing the Under-20s, junior reps and pathways strength and conditioning and performance programs. Ryan facilitates the trickle-down effect of the athletic performance philosophies of our department throughout all rugby league at our club. Ryan is essentially my right hand man for youth athletic development.”

“We also have appointed Melanie Olsen as our sports dietitian for season 2019. Melanie will be the sole staff member focussing on sports nutrition and dietetics of our players. Gaining someone of Melanie’s expertise and knowledge has been hugely beneficial for the players’ advancement of their nutrition approach to training and playing. I am sure plenty of her hard work will be display come round 1 of 2019 NRL season”

Billy Hulin (sports science and conditioning coordinator), Alex Clarke (head strength and speed coach), Tim McGrath, Steve Dean and Liam Richardson (all physiotherapists) remain at the club.
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Throwing five parts into four position doesn't quite add up. For the St George Illawarra Dragons in 2019 however it could very well be the key to success.

The Dragons last campaign saw the spine of Gareth Widdop, Ben Hunt, Matt Dufty and Cameron McInnes lead the club to the semi-finals.

The arrival of long-term Parramatta Eels five-eighth Corey Norman on a three-year deal has changed that.

The impending departure of Widdop to the Warrington Wolves in 2020 means Norman's signature is crucial for the years ahead, but for the next 12 months it adds a whole lot of intrigue to how coach Paul McGregor uses his all-important playmakers.

McInnes will find himself featuring at lock, Widdop at fullback and Ben Hunt at hooker throughout the year ahead, as Dufty is used as an x-factor off the interchange. While Dufty was rewarded with a long-term extension in February, McGregor has indicated that he'll have to bide his time on the bench this season where competition for other interchange positions will also be hot.

"The club has done an outstanding job bringing Corey to the Dragons. A process which many people played a part in. Ben and Gareth were certainly consulted and very supportive of Corey's arrival," McGregor said.

"Corey too, was very conscious of those key players being comfortable with him joining the team, a trait which shows great character. Corey's experience and competitiveness since his arrival, has enabled our spine to train in a number of positions that players could be playing at different times during the season."

Brisbane Broncos front-rower Korbin Sims has also joined with the Dragons on a three-year deal. The Gerringong Lions junior is no stranger to the Dragons considering he was once a ball boy at the club. Brother Tariq being at the Dragons doesn't hurt either. Sims quotes

The retirement of Jason Nightingale and the release of Nene Macdonald on compassionate grounds departures add another element of intrigue to the makeup of the Dragons' first choice outside backs. Jordan Pereira, Euan Aitken, Tim Lafai and Zac Lomax remain but new recruits Lachlan Maranta, Mikaele Ravalawa and Jonus Pearson aren't planning on lying down for the familiar faces.

Excited by the prospects of his outside back stocks, McGregor said: "It is a position we are short of in experience, but certainly not in talent. There is an opportunity for all of them to bring a different type of talent and ability."

Fijian flyer Mikaele Ravalawa has impressed plenty since arriving from the Canberra Raiders, and while genuinely shy in personality is tipped to make his NRL debut in 2019. Maranta returns to the NRL after two years plying his trade in Super Rugby. A veteran of 70 first grade games at the Broncos, the 26-year-old is excited to be back playing his first love.

"Pre-season has been a shock to the system with the amount of running, wrestle and contact that we have done. I've moved in with Korbin (Sims) and seeing that friendly face every morning has certainly helped me get into the routine of it all," Maranta said.

"It's all been pretty exciting and I'm ready to rip in. I'm hoping to come out the other end of this season thriving again. Everyone says that if you're enjoying your footy and training then everything starts working out for you on and off the field."

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Pearson is another to come out of the Broncos’ junior system. The Thursday Island native has 11 NRL games already to his name and is keen to push for further berths at the Dragons. “I’m here for an opportunity to wear that Red V jersey and I’m so glad I’m here,” Pearson said. “There are a lot of quality players here so I’ve worked hard in training this pre-season to work towards earning a permanent spot in the 17. I’m hoping to get plenty of games under my belt.”

Former Melbourne Storm prop Lachlan Timm has impressed throughout his first taste of football with the Red V throughout the summer months and pre-season trials. “I obviously want to play first grade here at the Dragons. That’s why everyone is here for and I cannot wait to play for the club,” Timm said. “At the same time, it has been really great to learn off guys like Paul Vaughan, Tariq Sims and James Graham as well as the coaching staff. They have all played at a high level for a very long time.”

Joining Steven Marsters, Joe Lovodua and Jackson Ford in the NRL development squad this season are Eddie Blacker, Jason Saab and Hayden Lomax. Blacker – an Under-20s Queensland Origin front-rower – is another to join from the Broncos. “It’s amazing to be around the group of players we have here. They have all been very accepting of me,” Blacker said. “I’ve been in all of the forwards pockets. They’re probably starting to get a little annoyed with me with the amount of questions I’m asking but I’m very happy with how they have treated me here.”

Lomax and Saab are two examples of the Dragons’ highly regarded junior representative pathways. Lomax – who has featured for the Illawarra Steelers and Dragons’ Jersey Flegg team in past years – and Australian Schoolboy, St George SG Ball winger Saab are grateful for their current opportunities.

cont. next pg......
Lomax said: “It's been a huge learning curve for me since I've been promoted to the development squad. There's plenty of talent around and I'm looking forward to ripping in and hopefully getting a regular start. The boys have made me feel very welcome in the wider squad; there is so much talent running around in this squad.”

Saab added: “It's good to be surrounded by boys in my position who have the same goal in mind. It keeps you on the right track and keeps you very competitive. Not only will we grow as mates in the team but we will keep getting better together too.”

**ST GEORGE ILLAWARRA 2019 SIGNINGS AND DEPARTURES**

**In:**
- Corey Norman (Parramatta Eels)
- Korbin Sims (Brisbane Broncos)
- Mikaele Ravalawa (Canberra Raiders)
- Jonus Pearson (Brisbane Broncos)
- Lachlan Maranta (Brisbane Broncos)
- Lachlan Timm (Melbourne Storm)
- Eddie Blacker (Brisbane Broncos)

**Out:**
- Jason Nightingale (retired)
- Nene Macdonald (North Queensland Cowboys)
- Kurt Mann (Newcastle Knights)
- Leeson Ah Mau (New Zealand Warriors)
- Hame Sele (Penrith Panthers)
- Reuben Garrick (Manly-Warringah Sea Eagle)
- Patrick Herbert (New Zealand Warriors)

**Promoted:**
- Jason Saab (St George SG Ball)
- Hayden Lomax (Dragons Jersey Flegg)
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Newcastle Knights trial
St George Illawarra secured an 18-10 trial win over the Newcastle Knights on March 23 at WIN Stadium, Wollongong.

While the match was shifted to WIN Stadium due to problems with the playing surface at Kogarah’s Netstrata Jubilee Stadium, it didn’t stop the Dragons from trotting out a host of new names in five-eighth Corey Norman and front-rower Korbin Sims.

Euan Aitken, Zac Lomax and Fijian sensation Mikaele Ravalawa took their fight for top 17 positions to the field after a long pre-season, while the new-look spine of Norman, Gareth Widdop, Cameron McInnes and Ben Hunt look smooth on its maiden voyage.

New South Wales Origin prop Paul Vaughan made a successful return from a leg injury that ended his 2018 season and scored the opening try in the 14th minute.

The Dragons dominated the second half and scored three unanswered tries after trailing by four at the break. Josh Kerr crashed over in the 57th minute and Ravalawa scored his first try nine minutes later after receiving a cut-out pass from Matt Dufty and stepping inside four defenders to score.

The Fijian winger claimed his second try in the 78th minute to secure the Dragons’ eight-point win.

St George Illawarra Dragons 18 (Mikaele Ravalawa 2, Paul Vaughan, Josh Kerr tries; Gareth Widdop goal) defeated Newcastle Knights 10 (Lachlan Fitzgibbon, Edrick Lee tries; Kalyn Ponga goal) at WIN Stadium, Wollongong.

Westfund Charity Shield
The St George Illawarra Dragons suffered a 36-24 loss to the South Sydney Rabbitohs for the Westfund Charity Shield at Mudgee’s Glen Willow Stadium on February 24.

The Dragons led 18-16 at half-time but only after overcoming a horror start in which Souths scored two tries in the opening five minutes through wingers Campbell Graham and Corey Allan.

The new St George Illawarra spine combination of Ben Hunt, fullback Gareth Widdop, five-eighth Corey Norman and hooker Cameron McInnes looked more fluent than it did against Newcastle.

McGregor injected fullback Matt Dufty into the game late in the second half, with Widdop moving to five-eighth, Norman to halfback, Hunt to hooker and McInnes to lock and it is a tactic he is likely to use throughout the season.

The signing of Norman has enabled Hunt to take on more of a running role and an inside pass from the Test and Origin representative to Korbin Sims created room for Widdop to run through a hole and put Lafai over for his first try in the 29th minute.

Lafai grabbed his second three minutes later after Hunt put Tariq Sims into space and swept around behind him to create an overlap for the Samoan international.

The second half began like the first, with Rabbitoh Cody Walker scoring from a run-around with John Sutton in the 41st minute.

A Damien Cook 40/20 kick at the end of the next set put the Rabbitohs in position to post further points and lock Cameron Murray put them ahead 28-18 when he crashed over in the 44th minute.

Corey Norman in the Red V for the first time

Allan got his hat-trick in the 50th minute after Widdop fumbled a kick near his own line and his fullback opposite Alex Johnston chimed in to create an overlap for Souths after quick service from Cook at dummy-half.

Hunt put Tariq Sims over in the 57th minute but Rabbitohs rookie Bayley Sironen put the result beyond doubt when he scored 11 minutes later.

South Sydney Rabbitohs 36 (Corey Allan 3, Campbell Graham, Cody Walker, Cameron Murray, Bayley Sironen tries; Dane Gagai 4 goals) defeated St George Illawarra Dragons 24 (Tim Lafai 2, Zac Lomax, Tariq Sims tries; Gareth Widdop 4 goals) at Glen Willow Stadium, Mudgee.
Canterbury Cup pre-season trials

Newcastle Knights

The St George Illawarra Dragons drew 18-all with the Newcastle Knights in their first trial against the Newcastle Knights at WIN Stadium, Wollongong on March 23.

Having this year been promoted from the Under-20s to the reserve grade squad in 2019, Jason Gillard started his season in the best way possible when he crossed the white stripe to put the Dragons ahead 4-0.

The Knights held an 8-4 lead by the end of the game’s first 20, but it would be Gillard again who helped peg the Red V back to an 8-all equal pegging by the end of the second third.

The two teams would go tit-for-tat for the remainder of the game. Shaun Sauni-Esau helped the Dragons back to a 12-all before Charly Runciman helped secure the eventual draw.

St George Illawarra Dragons 16 (Jason Gillard 2, Shaun Sauni-Esau, Charly Runciman tries) drew with Newcastle Knights 16 at WIN Stadium.

South Sydney

The St George Illawarra Dragons were huge 56-6 winners in their final New South Wales Cup trial against the South Sydney Rabbitohs at Erskineville Oval on March 3.

The Dragons played their strongest possible team, which included suspended NRL forward Korbin Sims, against the Rabbitohs who namely played their part-time reserve grade squad.

Most notably, Josh Kerr – fresh off his memorable NRL Indigenous All Stars debut a fortnight prior – crossed for four tries against the Rabbitohs.

Jonus Pearson also donned Dragons colours for the first time ever and celebrated the occasion with a brace of four-pointers. Pearson missed the Red V’s initial trials against the Knights due to personal reasons.

St George Illawarra Dragons 56 defeated South Sydney Rabbitohs at Erskineville Oval.
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ROUND 12 BYE
2019 HOME JERSEY

AVAILABLE NOW AT SHOP.DRAGONS.COM.AU
Back (L-R): Reece Robson, Jonus Pearson, Steven Marsters, Lachlan Timm, Jackson Ford
Middle: Luciano Leilua, Mikaele Ravalawa, Zac Lomax, Jason Saab, Josh Kerr, Paul Vaughan,
Front: Matt Dufty, Korbin Sims, Tim Lafai, Ben Hunt, Tyson Frizell, Gareth Widdop (captain), Paul McGregor
The inaugural NRL Holden Women’s Premiership was a wonderful success for not only the female game but for rugby league as a whole.

The final standings may not particularly reflect this for St George Illawarra’s maiden tilt at the Women’s Premiership, but success cannot always be measured by on-field performances.

Although it was only points’ differential that dictated the Red V women finished fourth below the Brisbane Broncos, Sydney Roosters and the New Zealand Warriors; the establishment of a pure women’s pathway in the club’s local regions helped dictate the talent pool at the club goes well beyond the Dragons’ inaugural 22 players.

The Dragons also had 11 players picked to represent the Prime Minister’s XIII win over Papua New Guinea in October, which manifested into Australia Test debuts for Holli Wheeler, Keeley Davis and Hannah Southwell.

Women’s Premiership coach Daniel Lacey was pleased he contributed to justifying the basis on which the Dragons were initially granted a licence for the female competition.

"As soon as the Dragons were granted a licence, we nutted out what direction we wanted to go to in which was obviously the desire to be a development club because that would help highlight the talent throughout our local juniors," Lacey said.

“We have an abundance of girls playing in our catchment areas, and the number is really rapidly rising so we needed to make sure if we have a pathway – which we definitely do – that we used it the right way.

“That way we generate interest and players coming through the ranks, and we give them every opportunity to do that. Therefore in return, they get to wear the Red V jersey and we can then say that they have come through our system.

"Part of my role was to find girls who were suited to that brief, follow them through to our high performance unit if necessary and then up-skill them from there.

"We ticked a lot of boxes with what we wanted to do in our first year. We obviously would have loved to have qualified for the grand final, but a blessing with that was a lot of girls were picked for higher honours off the back of our NRLW team.

“The culture we established was incredible and everyone from the board to the sponsors loved it as well as the fans.”

With a full 12 months of preparation to come ahead of the second NRL Holden Women’s Premiership, Lacey knows the only way is up for the Dragons’ women’s side.

"As there were so many unknowns last year, we can get better. Both on and off the field. It will allow us to prepare a bit more than last year. Even personally, I’m more up-skilled as a coach and so are the staff and players so we’ll have more time to get our heads around everything," Lacey said.

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“Hopefully we’ll get more time to talk and negotiate with players also. We’re seven or eight months away now so we’ll have plenty of time to prepare above all. This time last year, we didn’t even know if we were going to be one of the teams participating.”

Speaking of, discussions surrounding the processes of the 2019 Women’s Premiership are currently underway and Lacey remains hopeful that the Dragons will be able to sign players sooner rather than later.

In 2018, the Dragons alongside the other competing teams were given two months to establish their inaugural rosters; a process that had most clubs settling on player contracts at the eleventh hour. How the salary cap will be arranged and when the four teams can start signing players to their respective 2019 rosters is still not finalised. The NRL have communicated however that they will allow training camps once per month leading into the pre-season’s August commencement.

While there remains plenty of uncertainty – including whether inaugural skipper Sam Bremner will make a last ditch effort to play just a month post-pregnancy – Lacey has remained vigilant in his planning for the upcoming season.

“I’m in the early stages but my hope is to tie our training camps into our high performance unit and our local Tarsha Gale teams, of which we can show these young girls what it takes to be an NRL player,” Lacey said.
"It will also be a great opportunity for the medical staff and I to screen them, train them, up-skill them and educate them. It essentially gives us more scope to plan their season out ahead of times compared to last year, which will stop the what-ifs.

"It was very hard to plan last season out not knowing who your team was until about two weeks out from training commencing. We literally signed girls on the last day of the cut-off in 2018.

"That doesn’t mean we’ll go and sign up a complete squad in March if we end up being allowed to. Obviously we’ll look to lock up our top players, but it would be naïve to think that there won’t be other talents coming through the Tarsha Gale and at the National Championships."

The future is bright in the Tarsha Gale Cup too, with the St George Dragons and Illawarra Steelers sitting pretty in the top four after five rounds.
Core to Canterbury Cup success

The Canterbury NSW Cup St George Illawarra Dragons team went within a whisker of premiership glory in 2018. Going down to eventual premiers, the Bulldogs, in the preliminary final, the CC Dragons could only watch on as their conquerors pushed on to grand final and NRL State Championship success.

The beauty of the upcoming season is that the core of the squad remain, and you better believe they’re still disappointed with the way they were eliminated last year.

Improving from sixth to second in the regular season wasn’t good enough in CC Dragons coach Mat Head’s mind. He wants to see greater improvement from his team; an outfit which finished a lone try away from being the best defensive team competition-wide in 2018.

Finishing top four will forever be the goal, as will Head’s desire as NRL transition coach to push his player to a first grade debut, but he’s honest in his assessment that none of this would be possible without the level-headed veterans at his disposal.

“The best thing we have done as a club over the past few years is recruit quality people into the club. These players – when they play in the reserve grade setup – fit straight into training,” Head said.

“They don’t have ‘bigger than the team’ attitudes, they’re looking to get better together which is important aspect considering the circumstances of playing first grade. It’s exciting the club is starting to grow in that sense. We’re blessed having Darren Nicholls, Mitch Allgood and Lachlan Maranta in our squad.”

They understand the importance of reserve grade and getting the younger boys to buy in. Without that attitude, you’re no hope of being promoted to first grade. Tristan Sailor, Jackson Ford and Jai Field, while they are younger guys, have a similar enthusiasm for the team.”

Consistency is key for Head. Considering 13 players still remain at the Dragons from their two-point loss to the Bulldogs this year, is proof that success isn’t far away.

“Our spine for one hasn’t changed. They obviously want to be pushing for first grade and that’s my job to help them get there, but in saying that, they’re going to be around to help all the other boys at the start of the season.” Head said.

“They all know their roles and all know what to do to hopefully get that NRL shot. We have lost a couple of players to other clubs but that’s no excuse.

“The new players who have come into the squad, either from the 20s, the NRL development squad or the younger guys we’ve signed from elsewhere like Eddie Blacker and Jason Saab, have fitted into the full-time system pretty well.”

The Canterbury Cup competition is an open age pathway to the NRL and Head couldn’t be more impressed by the attitude of his players over the summer months.

“The [part-time squad] have all been great throughout the pre-season. They all still have the goal of making a career out of rugby league. It means when they turn up to training that they work hard and know what they need to get better at,” Head said.

“They have all been good trainers, have good personalities and they are good to be around. It’s a really good bunch of boys, considering too the experience we have there with former Dragon Charly Runciman returning to the club following four years in the English Super League and seasoned reserve grade playmaker Adam Clune.

“Those two have run the show in that sense [this pre-season]. Whenever they are called upon they’re all going to do a great job, which includes Eli Levido who’s been around the traps, so I’m excited by what the part-timers are going to bring to the table in 2019.”

An 18-all draw against the Newcastle Knights and a huge 56-6 victory over the South Sydney Rabbitohs has the CC Dragons primed for the long season ahead.

“I thought we had two good weeks. We were able to get good minutes into our part-time squad who played some really nice footy against Newcastle. We let a few soft tries in which were disappointing but overall it was a good performance,” Head said.

“The following week, a lot of our full-timers and part-timers were able to play together for the first time. Obviously we had a really good win but we were also able to get exactly what we wanted out of it as far as combinations and a one-squad approach go.

“That’s a big thing for us under these circumstances, that there’s no divide between the part-timers and full-timers so we’re all looking forward to Round 1 now.”

The CC Dragons will commence their season on Friday, March 15 against the Mounties at Aubrey Keech Reserve.

2019 Canterbury Cup pre-season training squad

- Tristan Alvarado
- Adam Clune
- Zeik Foster
- Jason Gillard
- Eli Levido
- Jayden Morgan
- Ashley Nisbet
- Charly Runciman
- Juilie Samiu
- Matt Sheppard
- Pio Sokobalavu
- Topiese Taufa
## 2019 Canterbury Cup fixtures

| Round 1 v Mounties | March 15, 6pm | Aubrey Keech Reserve |
| Round 2 v Souths | March 23, 2pm | Redfern Oval |
| Round 3 v Panthers | March 30, 12:50pm* | Panthers Stadium |
| Round 4 v Knights | April 7, 3:55pm | McDonald Jones Stadium |
| Round 5 v Bulldogs | April 14, 1:45pm | Jubilee Stadium |
| Round 6 v Sea Eagles | April 20, 5:15pm | WIN Stadium |
| Round 7 v North Sydney | April 26, 7:30pm | North Sydney Oval |
| Round 8 v Wentworthville | May 5, 1:50pm | Bankwest Stadium |
| Round 9 v BYE | May 19, 3:30pm | Henson Park |
| Round 10 v Knights | May 26, 1:45pm | WIN Stadium |
| Round 11 v Newtown | June 2, 1:05pm* | Jubilee Stadium |
| Round 12 v Wests | June 8, 2:50pm* | Mt Smart Stadium |
| Round 13 v Warriors | June 16, 3pm | HE Laybutt Sporting Complex |
| Round 14 v Blacktown | June 29, 4pm | WIN Stadium |
| Round 15 v Panthers | July 6, 3pm | Henson Park |
| Round 16 v Newtown | July 14, 3:45pm | WIN Stadium |
| Round 17 v Mounties | July 20, 3pm | Leichhardt Oval |
| Round 18 v Wests | July 28, 1:05pm* | WIN Stadium |
| Round 19 v Souths | August 4, 1:45pm | Jubilee Stadium |
| Round 20 v Wentworthville | August 10, 12:50pm* | Jubilee Stadium |
| Round 21 v Norths | August 24, 5:15pm | Jubilee Stadium |
| Round 22 v BYE | August 31, 12:50pm* | Belmore Oval |

* Denotes games live on Fox League
^ Denotes games live on Channel Nine

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**THE BEER FROM UP HERE**

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**2019 DRAGONS PRESEASON**

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**PAGE 19**
The 2019 Jersey Flegg Under-20s season can only be described as a changing of the guard for the young St George Illawarra Dragons.

The numbers don’t lie. Based on the 27-man Jersey Flegg pre-season squad, there is only 128 games of Under-20s experience among it. That’s 4.7 games per player.

There is only one player remaining who featured in the Dragons’ 2017 then-called Holden Cup campaign (Bailey Dickinson). The rangy red-headed front-rower is now the equal most-experienced in the squad alongside outside back Sam McCann (18 games). Only Matthew Delbanco, Luke Gale (both 17 games), Shaun Sauni-Esau (16), Tyran Wishart (15), Jiyi Ellis (eight), Dante Lusio (seven), Matthew Nicholson (six), Shalom O’Ofou (four) and Tyler Moon (two) have featured for the Dragons’ Under-20s side otherwise.

However, as the club looks to the future this year's Jersey Flegg season will present an opportunity for the young talent in the Dragons’ pathway. Former Bulldogs, St Helens and Salford centre Willie Talau has been tasked with turning this inexperienced squad into a well-oiled machine.

Talau played 277 first grade games across his distinguished 13-season career. Talau featured in the 1998 NRL grand final and was fortunate enough to win Challenge Cups, Super League grand finals and the 2007 World Club Challenge during his time at St Helens. The dual New Zealand and Samoan international has worked his way through the coaching ranks of the Bulldogs’ junior representative for the past four years, which culminated in their SG Ball team qualifying for the 2018 grand final.

“I know already there’s potentially plenty of good players in this squad. From my experience so far as their coach, they are hard workers who are taking it upon themselves to take ownership of their learning,” Talau said.

“When we first started at the beginning of pre-season, considering it’s probably a clean slate for a lot of us, I thought it was important to lay down some core values and standards and one of those was that I always reward hard work.

“I made a point to say to all of these fellas that it doesn’t matter how old you are, if you’re good enough, you’ll play. That’s a message I’ve tried to get across from day dot as far as them competing every day.”

Talau is of the opinion that his illustrious playing career holds him in good stead as coach as he knows full well where each of the Dragons’ Under-20s players are currently at in their careers.

“My playing days are full of great experiences to draw upon especially with these young fellas coming through the grades. I’ve been where they want to go, I know where they’re at right now and I know where they have come from,” Talau said.

“I can use my experiences to help them develop and grow into potential first grade players. When this opportunity came up to come and join the Dragons, it was a no-brainer really.

“I’ve been getting plenty of support from the coaching staff at my disposal. They are really handy at what they do as the players’ needs are met on a daily basis.”

Dragons Jersey Flegg coach Willie Talau

Like every coach across the rugby league universe, there’s no better feeling for Talau then seeing his team run out for the first time.

“This time of year all the boys are working really hard and the players are being challenged on a daily basis,” he said.

“Working hard comes with the territory at this time of year. We have to work hard and build the foundations for the rest of the season.”
The Jersey Flegg St George Illawarra Dragons had two hit outs in the pre-season against the Newcastle Knights and South Sydney Rabbitohs.

The unfortunate scenario of Netstrata Jubilee Stadium being ruled unfit to be played on in late February meant the young Dragons were robbed of the opportunity to play a curtain-raiser to their NRL and Canterbury Cup counterparts. The location change of the team’s next trial – Redfern to Erskineville – wouldn’t influence them second time around.

Newcastle Knights
The St George Illawarra Dragons’ Under-20s outfit were defeated 16-14 against the Newcastle Knights at Charlestown’s St John’s Oval. Two of the young Dragons’ experienced players, Sam McCann and Luke Gale, stood up for the Red V by combining for three tries in the eventual two-point loss.

Newcastle Knights 16 defeated St George Illawarra Dragons 14 (Sam McCann 2, Luke Gale tries; Luke Gale goal) at St Johns Oval, Charlestown.

South Sydney Rabbitohs
The St George Illawarra Dragons recorded their first victory under the tutelage of new coach Willie Talau following their 36-16 win over the South Sydney Rabbitohs at Erskineville Oval.

McCann and Gale led from the front again for the young Dragons by combining for three tries for the second-straight week, while Jiuta Wainqolo also crossed the white stripe twice.

Fresh off his taste of Canterbury Cup football, Shaun Sauni-Esau returned to the Jersey Flegg fold by crossing for a four-pointer of his own.

St George Illawarra Dragons 36 (Sam McCann 2, Jiuta Wainqolo 2, Luke Gale, Shaun Sauni-Esau, Blair Grant tries; Luke Gale 3, Blair Grant 1 goal(s)) defeated South Sydney Rabbitohs 16 at Erskineville Oval.
Dragons Community will once again be proudly supported by Recoveries and Reconstruction ahead of the 2019 NRL Telstra Premiership season.

Dragons Community is driven by its role as a representative of the Red V community and committed to playing a positive role across the St George, Illawarra and South Coast regions.

The mission statement of Dragons Community is a simple one: to have a positive impact on people’s lives within our community; a community that stretches from Earlwood in the north to Bateman’s Bay in the south.

Entrenched within Dragons Community’s mission statement are a number of objectives. They are as followed:

- To support and encourage young people, especially youth, to make positive choices around health, education and other social issues
- To promote respect for self and others, responsibility and self-esteem
- Promote rugby league as a means of delivering health benefits and promoting positive social interaction
- Use the profile and the strength of the Dragons brand to assist selected local charities and associations

St George Illawarra Dragons’ players in particular understand too, that they are in a unique position, whereby they can promote and encourage – either directly or indirectly – the physical, cultural and intellectual welfare of young people in our community.

Dragons Community will again utilise three pillars of focus that reflect the needs of the community to deliver their programs in 2019.

These three key areas of focus remain as: Health and wellbeing, education and skills and social inclusion.

These three focuses will expand to the following key initiatives and programs that have been planned for 2019.

- Second phase implementation of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)
- The implementation of the 2019 The Best You Can Be school planner (5th edition) will present students with different focuses and tips for students to follow. Additionally, Dragons players draw from their own lives to provide motivation within the planner for all children to be the best they can be in all aspects of life.
- Female participation initiatives leveraged from the success of the Inaugural NRL Women’s Premiership and employment of Kezie Apps and Sam Bremner.
- Community valued initiatives including: the, Dusty & Friends Early Childhood program, NRL School 2 Work Indigenous advancement program and the University of Wollongong’s ENERGISE Believe, Lead, Succeed program.
- Junior league players from Under 6s to 13s will receive a Little Dragons Membership
- Back 2 Juniors program with player support for junior rugby league clubs

Dragons Community also have the support of other female athletes with Emma McKeon (Olympic swimming), Grace Stewart (hockey), Sally Fitzgibbons (surfing) and Shakiah Tungai (Rugby League) all volunteering to be ambassadors.

The Dragons as a whole will be bolstered once again by the return as an ambassador of Dragons WNRL Fullback and Captain Samantha Bremner in 2019 working alongside teammate and new Community Officer Kezie Apps in 2019.

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community initiatives

Social Inclusion

Disability Support
• Score Dragons
• Lifestyle Solutions Game On
• Game day experiences for disadvantage groups

Engagements
• Kids Big Day Out
• High Tea at the Footy
• WIL Activations

Partners
• NRL
• Disability Trust

Education and Skills

Indigenous Advancement
• School to Work
• IA Schools Mentoring

Mentoring
• ENERGISE Believe, Lead, Succeed program (UOW)

Engagements
• NAIDOC Activities
• Indigenous Round (Rnd 11)

Partners
• NRL
• UOW

Health and Wellbeing

Game Development
• Gala Days
• Holiday Clinics
• School Clinics

The Best You Can Be
• School Planner
• Dusty and Friends
• Best You Can Be Schools

St George Bank Little Dragons
• Back 2 Juniors
• Game Day Challenge
• Little Dragons Membership

Partners
• NRL
• School for Livinig
• UOW

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• Up to 20 per cent off purchases from the Dragons Team Store
• Access to exclusive member events to meet the team
• Opportunity to win behind-the-scenes experiences
• Red V loyalty program and rewards
• Priority booking periods and ticket access for NRL ticketing events including State of Origin and grand final
• Five per cent off food and beverage purchases at selected home games

Membership packages
Season 2019 sees a continued commitment to our heartland venues, with five home games at the traditional Netstrata Jubilee Stadium, Kogarah and five home games at the picturesque WIN Stadium, Wollongong.

The Dragons will also have one home game in beautiful Mudgee as part of our ongoing commitment to regional NSW. Additionally one marquee home game will be played at the iconic Sydney Cricket Ground.

Ticketed Memberships start from just $69 for adults or $50 for juniors. We also offer non-ticketed options for those who can’t get to games, with ultimate flexibility also offered through flexi add-on tickets.

Purchase the perfect gift now as the Red V Membership program offers a range of flexible packages to suit everyone.

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Holcim (Australia) Pty Ltd (Albion Park) Building 02 4256 7233
Hornby Transport Transport 02 4272 5399
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Illawarra Hino Trucks/Automotive 02 4256 7900
Illawarra Mercury Media 02 4221 2333
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ITF Cabinet Making Joinery Building 02 9521 3994
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