

SPORTSMONDAY

RUGBY LEAGUE

Ready to tackle the big issues in league

Mackay rugby league identity Greg Sutherland confronts a host of new challenges after taking on the north's top job in the sport on the weekend

GREG Sutherland was elected unopposed as chairman of the QRL Northern Division at the body's AGM in Townsville on Saturday, after stepping down as chair of the Mackay and District Rugby League, a position he held since 1996.

He is the first from Mackay to hold the position, and only the fourth chairman of the Northern Division in almost 50 years.

He succeeded John Moore of Cairns, who held the position since 2000. Other chairmen have been Ben Wall of Townsville and Jim Calwell.

As chairman of the Northern Division, Sutherland also takes a seat on the board of the QRL, which governs rugby league in Queensland.

He said the Northern Division was keen to push improvements in

the game in the Gulf, Cape York and Torres Strait, which has been identified as an expansion area.

"There is also a proposal for a new coaching and development officer for the Mackay region," he said.

"The submission has been done and it's a matter of it going through the processes of the QRL.

"I expect it will happen in the upcoming season."

Sutherland said the Northern Division planned to rejuvenate the Foley Shield, the major inter-city competition of the north, with the final to be held on Easter Sunday in Townsville.

For the first time, a match will be played between combined Mackay/Townsville and Cairns/Rest sides on May 16 to select a NQ Marlins representative team to compete in the state carnival.



Greg Sutherland is the new Northern Division chairman.

PHOTO: 110508/104

Keen coaches see some promising signs from young Cutters



PHOTO: PETER HOLT 291108/332

By CHARLIE PAYNE

charlie.payne@dailymercury.com.au

THE hard work starts now for the Mackay Cutters' new under 16 and under 18 squads.

The young players mixed on Saturday with the senior Cutters Queensland Cup squad during a kids' fun day at Magpies Sporting Club, and will begin regular training this week ahead of their 10-week competition starting in February.

The two sides will play teams from Townsville, Cairns and the Northern Territory in a concept similar to competitions for the same age groups in NSW.

Coaches Wayne Thomson (under 18) and Michael Baker (under 16) will be in charge of the squads.

Thomson was a coach for the Newcastle Knights NRL side's



Cutters player Bennett Smith dodges his opponent during a drill at the club's kids' fun day at Glenella on Saturday. ABOVE LEFT: Jake Wyper was one of many youngsters at the get-to-know-you training run during the kids' fun day.

PHOTO: PETER HOLT 291108/381

under 17 academy teams for the last three years. Originally from Darwin, he was at Newcastle for

the last six years.

"It looks very promising, I think there are some good players

among them," Thomson said of the under 18 squad of 25.

"They've done a good job of getting Mackay into this competition.

"It will be a challenge for the players, especially those who want to go on with it and try to go to a higher level; it's a good opportunity for them."

Baker was Wests Tigers' Mercury Cup coach for several seasons until three years ago, and recently spent a year in America.

He said many of those in the under 16 squad would have been members of the Mackay under 15 side which placed third in the divisional carnival last season.

"There are some good talented kids among them," he said.

"The idea is to keep them playing football, as long as they enjoy it.

"At this age group, it's about enjoying your football."



Young talent Dylan Bell.

PHOTO: PETER HOLT 291108/339



Cutters under 18 coach Wayne Thomson and under 16 mentor Mick Baker call the shots during a training run at Magpies on Saturday.

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