

It is a significant occasion that the Spinal Injuries Association marks its 50th anniversary this year.

Obviously while the diligence and work of the Association is to be commended; this acknowledgement is tinged with sadness that their efforts are required.

Unfortunately spinal injuries are a fact of life, and no amount of goodwill and preparation will entirely eradicate their occurrence from society.

Sadly Rugby Union as a sport has a greater association with spinal injuries than some other occupations.

While a significant amount of study on making the game safer to play has been conducted at both International Rugby Board and Australian Rugby Union level; the fact remains that Spinal injuries have, and will continue to happen; even if their frequency in the game is slowly being decreased by a combination of better preparation and greater understanding. As such, rugby union as a game is indebted to the Spinal Injuries Association for its noble and much appreciated efforts on behalf of those unfortunate enough to suffer spinal injuries.

The game in Australia shows its appreciation every year through the annual Classic Wallabies Rugby Luncheon in April, which is one of the Association's major fundraisers for the year.

We at the Qantas Wallabies are also frequently visited at trainings by supporters who have been unfortunate enough to suffer spinal injuries.

This includes members of the 'Steelers'; Australia's successful wheelchair rugby team, who have developed a close relationship with the players and management of the Qantas Wallabies in the last two years.

Our disabled visitors are always very welcome, and their presence both inspires the players, while also providing them with a measure of perspective and balance.

On behalf of the Qantas Wallabies, and the wider rugby union community of Australia as a whole; I would like to wish the Spinal Injuries Association all the best, both for its 50th birthday celebrations, and for all of the years ahead.

Robbie Deans
Qantas Wallabies coach