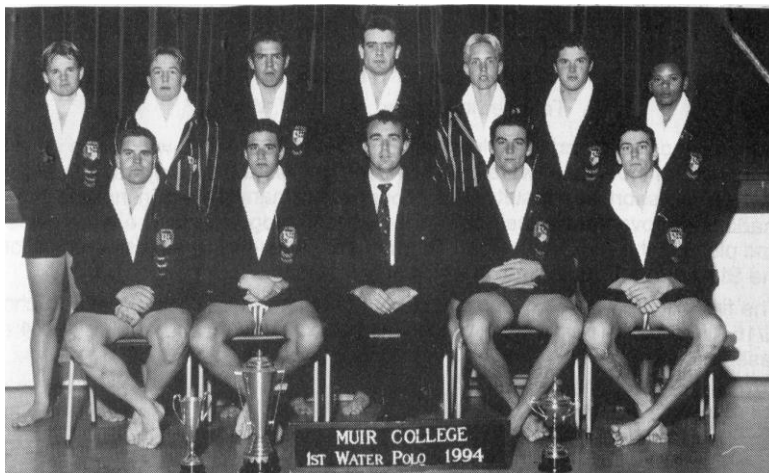


CHAPTER 58 Rebuilding and winding down: Water Polo 1990-2004

Placing more emphasis on the U/15 division in 1990 and beyond did pay dividends, with multiple Muir representation in the EP Colts team in **1992**, and the U/15 players dominating the EP League. Selections for the EP Colts side were E Loyson, C Francis, A Bakker, E Leonard, J Powels and A van Rooyen. Muir was placed 5th in the Selborne U/15 tournament attended by schools from the whole country, and won the EP U/15 tournament convincingly. E Leonard was voted 'Man of the Tournament' and was joined in the EP representative side by J Rafferty, C Francis and A Bakker. At senior schools level P Clements and D Hunter were selected for the EP A-side.



Coming back with a vengeance: 1st team winners of all the major EP High Schools' Trophies in 1994

**Back L to R: C Francis, G Höppner, J Ferreira, L Rudman, R Schreiber, J Rafferty, C Jooste
Front L to R: P Durant, E Leonard, Mr K Watson, M Chellew, B Bayman**

Despite all these successes at the more junior level, Muir had to wait until **1994** before once again scooping all the Eastern Cape's major water polo trophies, with some talented youngsters coming through. A foundation for this had been laid through events such as the tour to Natal in 1991. Representing EP at the SA Schools Waterpolo Tournament in Cape Town, the following were in the EP A-side: Eldon Leonard, Pierre Durant, Clifford Francis, Mark Chellew and Brandon Bayman; the boys who represented EP Colts were Jonathan Rafferty, Claudio Jooste, Regan Schreiber and Justin Ferreira. The U/15 water polo team won the EP Schools Waterpolo Tournament for the third consecutive year with victories over all opposition. Five Muir players were selected for the provincial U/15 side on the strength of this: Regan Schreiber, Geoffrey Höppner, Rory Buckley, Haydn Bayman and Steven Pogieter. This was a positive note on which Mr K Watson, in charge of water polo for the past several years, could depart. His place was taken by Mr A Jennings.

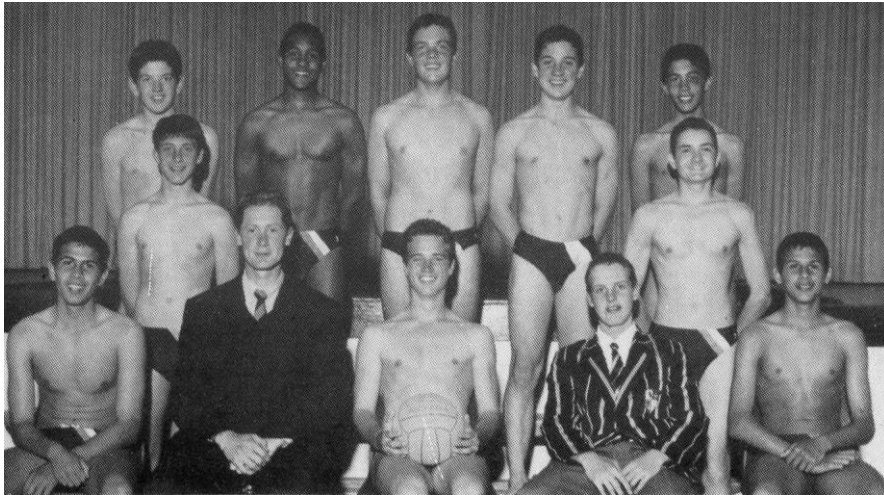
In the magazine report of 1995 new master-in-charge Mr A Jennings acknowledged the importance of 'courage and determination' on the part of Muir water polo players in the face of stiff competition from much larger schools that could field six to eight teams each. Muir participated as usual in some of the major national competitions such as the Vides Tournament at Selborne College in East London and the SACS Tournament in Cape Town. It did seem that Muir players were 'up against it' when competing with the best Water Polo schools in the country at this point.

Muir did better in the Eastern Province region, with a better spread of results and some individual achievements stood out. Brandon Bayman and Claudio Jooste were selected for

the EP U/19 A-team and Haydn Bayman for the B-side. Departing matric players were bound to be missed. The school's senior captain Clifford Francis was commended for his excellent play at centre forward where he placed top-rate opposition under severe pressure at times. It was heartening that Muir could look forward to younger players coming through from the U/15 to the senior ranks. Davron Swift, Gregory Höppner and Ryan Truelove were selected for the U/15 EP side. Despite a few selections for various EP sides at different levels, Muir water polo as a whole was undergoing a 'shrinking' process. Seniors were finding opposition even in the EP region increasingly challenging and by 1997 Jennings noted that fewer boys were now taking part in the sport. Nevertheless, Muir did manage to win the Alexander Road warm-up tournament in 1997.

Despite a doubling in the number of boys interested in playing water polo in 1998 – thanks to encouragement and support from new headmaster Mr Neil Crawford and parents, the loss in recent years of match-winning form and experience appeared to affect the confidence of players. There were nevertheless some good moments during the season in the local league, such as the 3-1 victory over St Andrew's at their tournament in Grahamstown. Failure to realise their potential in the season as a whole was a factor noted by new master-in-charge of Polo, Mr JP Botha in 1999. He was nevertheless impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment displayed by many boys, including the younger players. A really bright 'story' in 1999 was how well the Muir U/14 water polo squad fared in the Ken Short Shield tournament at Jeppe High School in Johannesburg. (Muir had entered a team at U/14 level for the past two seasons.) On their way to the semi-final against tournament winners St Stithian's, Muir accounted for Krugersdorp, Affies (Afrikaanse Hoërskool vir Seuns) and Crawford College with scores of 6-0, 5-0 and 5-0 respectively. The experience of travelling to and participating in tournaments of this nature could only do wonders for team spirit and confidence, as was clearly the case in this instance.

The following season Muir's junior players even improved on their performances at the Jeppe High School tournament. Participating as an U/15 team in 2000, the Muir players worked their way through the pool section with convincing victories over the likes of Grey (Bloemfontein), and KES (King Edward School). Defeating Selborne in the semi-final, the Muir team avenged their defeat by St Stithian's the previous year by beating the Johannesburg school 4-2 in the final encounter. Muir therefore won the tournament and the Ken Short Shield. The boys were brought back to reality two weeks later when losing 3-4 to Grey High School in the final of the St Andrew's Tournament. Happily for Muir's U/15 players, they turned the tables on Grey High during the EP Schools League twice, with victories of 2-1 and 4-1. In this part of the season, the U/15s won 12, drew 1 and lost 1 match. Some of the victories against traditional Port Elizabeth rivals were by large margins. Muir also accounted for the visiting Herzlia and Paul Roos teams. The first year of the new millennium could hardly have yielded better results for Muir at junior level. The 'cherry on the top' was Dane Leo's selection for the SA U/15A side to play in the Kramer League in December.



U/15 winners of the Ken Short Shield in 2000

Back L to R: M McClelland, D Leo, J Schneider, A Stark, K Duncan

Middle L to R: D Schmidt, L Muller

Front: L to R: H Mohamed, Mr N Rothman, J Candido (Captain), D Woods, H Mohamed



Dane Leo, SA U/15 A team player in 2000

Although the excellent results at U/15 level in 2000 could not be equalled in 2001, the sport was drawing larger numbers of boys. The second team enjoyed the best results in 2001, with victories over Alexander Road, Woodridge, and Graeme, Kingswood and St Andrew's Colleges. Teacher-in-charge of Water Polo in 2002, Regan Schreiber, was buoyed by the obvious enthusiasm and commitment shown by team players in general, but pointed to the need for consistency and hard work in order to keep repeating results such as the 4-1 defeat of Grey (Bloemfontein) in the Queens College Stayers Tournament. While applauding the first team's 'inspirational and motivational captain, Ross Candido', Schreiber concluded that the team did not fulfil their potential and 'deliver the goods'. Exceptions to this were what he termed 'memorable victories' against Grey (Bloemfontein) and Alexander Road. Clearly, however, there was a need for greater consistency throughout.

What did this mean for the future of Water Polo at Muir? Was pressure from the weight of superior numbers at much larger schools becoming so great that it was a steep uphill task to replicate good victories against strong opponents on a regular basis? Was interest in the sport entering another downhill phase? The answer to these questions appeared to be given briefly and unambiguously in Mr V Raepset's report on Water Polo in 2004:

Unfortunately, due to a severe lack of numbers, a decision was taken to discontinue playing water polo as a competitive sport at Muir. I am happy to report though that the love for the game and the competitive nature of the boys has meant that a social league now exists...

Followers and lovers of the sport in the Muir community would have good reason to feel that water polo deserved to be retained as a competitive sport, at least in the Eastern Province region. The school's decision to halt it on a competitive basis would be mirrored some years later when swimming became a social sport only. Both of these aquatic sports had had an illustrious history at Muir, and although the thirty-year span of competitive water polo was far shorter than that of swimming, it had achieved a long run of complete dominance in the Eastern Province league that was quite a rarity in school sport.