

EASTERN RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB



Eastern Rugby Football Club was formed in 1905 by a splinter group from Winter Rose. Its founders were African players, who had been refused game time in the 1st team. Instead they were confined to the 2nd team, but they believed that they were better than the 1st team. To prove that they were better, they challenged the 1st team to a game. They won that game by 3–0, and thereafter went on to form their own team, Eastern. They adopted a Rhino as their insignia, which was an indication of their former link to Winter Rose, whose insignia was an elephant.

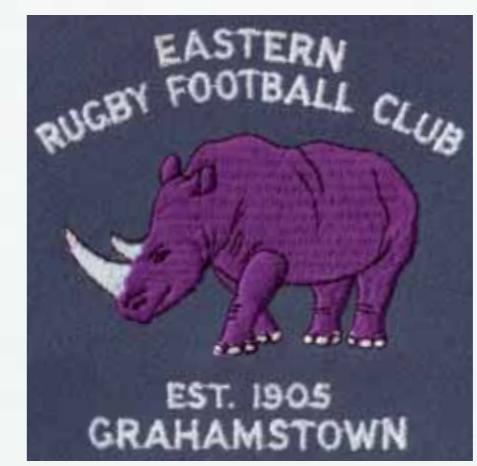
The President of Eastern was Mr Mjamkama who lived at 4 D Street, Grahamstown, where the first meeting was held. Mr Dumo was the 1st Captain he was also elected for Eastern Province. Kelekethe was one of the many families that formed part of the club. One of the Kelekethe family members, whom survived the sinking of the *Mendi* during the 1st World War in 1917, went back to rugby. The Mangele family, which lived on S Street, was another founding family of the club.

In 1907, the club made huge strides, they won the Chithumzi trophy against Wanderers. But Eastern was never handed the trophy because of some dispute that was manufactured to deny the club of the trophy. This misfortune followed Eastern. Once again, after winning the league in 1914, they were not awarded the trophy. The dispute ended in a court of law, but the case did not end conclusively. Eastern never received the trophy, once more.

Eastern played a number of memorable games against local opposition. One such game was a championship contest against Winter Rose, played in Port Elizabeth, but ended in a draw. The game was taken to Grahamstown. Unlike the usual game time, the game was played mid-week at six o'clock in the morning. The pitch, which was what is now referred to "eparkini", was still covered with frost.

Eastern produced players that were selected for the nation and provincial sides. They included Nkebeza Koliti, also known as "Sodumangashe", Khuselo Faku, Thembisile Quntu and Batela Fubata were selected for Eastern Province side; who played with Eric Majola for the black Springboks.

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Major Fuku, secretary of Eastern under the presidency of Mr. Milton Roxo propagated the change to non-racialism. The idea caused conflict between Mr. Roxo and Mr. Fuku. The club split into two. Milton Roxo and a number of First Team players decided to continue with the status quo, i.e. to play in racially constituted Eastern Province Rugby Association (EPRA). Major Fuku, Thembani Qoko, Donny Nqikela and others decided to break away and joined the non-racialism movement under South African Rugby Union (SARU), which was mostly constituted by the coloured people. Most of the first team players decided to remain with Milton Roxo.

The clubs' 3rd Team and few 1st Team players joined the non-racialism group under Major Faku. The 3rd Team was the champions that year. They boasted very good players such as Humphrey "Sugar" Nojoko, Tunise Vani, Mnyamezeli Kepe, Mthuthuzeli Tyelbooi, Patrick Yako, Bunny "Golden" Khelekethe, Ndyebo Fuku, Mabhulu Mawaba, Hemisie Matomana, Polly Qoko, Sizwe Qoko, Zilindile and Mvuleni Mvula Boy-Boy Dyeshana and others. The few 1st Team players that broke away were Master Mvula, Mountain Gaika, Lindy Nqikela, Donny Nqikela, Louis Dickson, Koko Mona Toro Matyhoheni, Mr Magopheni, "A" Maquana etc. Together with the 3rd Team they made up a formidable 1st Team. In 1973 they became the new non-racial SEDRU champions.

The idea was play before people went to work. In the late 1970s, especially after the 1976 uprising and the death of Mr. Steve Biko in 1977, most of the group that remained with Mr. Roxo joined the non-racial fold. Most of them realized that by supporting EPRA, they were supporting the apartheid system. From 1979 Eastern became a formidable team again. Another highlight of the team was in 1980. The team took all the trophies except the Maxaghana trophy. But, it won that trophy in the following year.

Eastern and Winter Rose officials organized an end of season rugby match. The match was played in front of thousands of Grahamstown rugby lovers. It took place at J.D. Dlephu Stadium and the spectators were kept on their feet by skillful moves. Eastern won that match by 19-4.