It’s Sydney’s answer to the Australian Institute of Sport. The Rugby Australia Building will house University of Technology Sydney’s research, allowing some of the industry’s best minds to operate alongside some of the harbour city’s biggest sporting clubs.

It’s an opportunity that UTS professor Aaron Coutts believes will change the status quo for athletes, coaches, students and scientists in the years to come.

“The big thing is positioning UTS with the partners of the SCG (and Allianz Stadium). If we want to do great work, we have to get in the jungle so to speak. We’ll be amongst the athletes and seeing the real problems that they face every day,” Coutts says.

“By doing that, we can partner with them and they can access our facilities and expertise to produce cutting-edge research. At present, we don’t see the main issues that coaches and their athletes go through in their lives.

“It will change the experience for the players because they’ll have researchers and PhD students working closely with club staff, who will be able to feed information back to the coaches to help solve their problems with evidence.”

One of the big-ticket items for Coutts and his team of experts is improving athlete monitoring systems that will help to reduce injury rates and improve the ability of athletes to ‘back-up’ week-in, week-out.

“We’re not trying to limit game time, we’re focused on optimising training and providing the right dose. It’s a little bit like drinking beer – not enough doesn’t work, too much is a problem and too much too quickly is a problem.

“Long-term I think it will make a big difference to on-field performance. We can also help clubs with their talent systems to build better pathways and monitor issues like concussion.”

The Rugby Australia Building will open its doors in October, marking a new era for the code and sports science.
Studying the life of a footballer will also be a focus area for Coutts and his team, with issues around mental health and retirement more important than ever.

"Athletes go through a challenging stage at the end of their career and for some, those mental health issues could be linked to concussion. American football, for example, has some pretty compelling evidence, but clubs and codes are managing the issue much better than they were five or ten years ago.

"We're simply looking to be a support system to help coaches and staff make the right decisions about their players, on and off the field."

"In the past, we've partnered with many sports but now we're at their doorstep. Students will have the opportunity to engage in practical experience. We believe that this prepares our research students for the work force and provides our partners with a real competitive advantage."

UTS researcher Mitch Henderson has embedded himself in the ARU's high-performance Sevens program at Narrabeen and believes the shift to Moore Park will help them to build on the knowledge they already have.

"As far as team sports go, Sevens has got one of the highest injury rates across the world so we're pretty careful with the way that we monitor and prescribe our players," Henderson says.

"I think we're doing a good job at the moment. Our rates compared to some of the other World Series teams are low. We have strategies in place to mitigate the challenges of flying around the globe for example.

"There's plenty to keep an eye on – which direction their travelling and how many time-zones they cross through. All of these factors impact how we prepare our athletes."

The ARDC will feature purpose-built UTS laboratories and classrooms for sport and exercise science and management courses as well as facilities for the university's postgraduate physiotherapy program, and will also be a new head office for rugby. Other features include a public café, museum, hirable rooms for the community, training and recovery facility and a rooftop running track.

"Being based in the precinct will be a massive drawcard for UTS to attract the highest calibre of students coming out of school. There's so many opportunities being in this environment with top-class athletes and sports administration staff," Henderson says.

"To be mentored by Aaron Coutts, one of the best sports researchers in his field, has been a great experience. The end goal is to ultimately be in charge of a high-performance program at a club or code one day. The networking opportunities this move creates is massive for me."

ARU General Manager of High Performance Ben Whitaker is equally excited about bringing athletes and support staff under the same roof.

"It's an opportunity to develop an identity and sense of belonging, which will definitely enhance the experience for not just the players but all of the staff," he says. "There's plans to introduce the facility to local junior, school and senior clubs so they can utilise the space and expertise of the staff moving forward.

"Is locating to the ARDC with UTS and within the broader SCG precinct advantageous? Absolutely. There's a whole lot of things lined up that we feel will strongly contribute to what we're all about - providing a quality game for everybody to play and to have teams that are winning consistently. That gets you excited."

The ARDC will celebrate its opening in October with students, athletes, administrators and researchers to take an exciting step forward in Australian sport.