

**THE ACTION KICKS OFF THIS SATURDAY
NIGHT**

RLWC 2017

**It's 4 days until the Kiwis play
their first game of the 2017 RLWC**

**Sir Peter
Leitch Club
Newsletter**

24th October 2017

#193

Back The Kiwis By Enjoying Lunch

By David Kemeys

Former Sunday Star-Times Editor, Former Editor-in-Chief Suburban
Newspapers, Long Suffering Warriors Fan



WE ARE only days from the kick-off of the 2017 Rugby League World Cup, with Australia and England – in what will be a hell of a match - doing the honours on Friday night.

Of course the Kiwis take on Samoa on Saturday night at Mt Smart, and that one should be a good game too. League legend Olsen Filipaina is taking the ball out, which is pretty cool given he has represented the Kiwis and Samoa.

The game I am looking forward to is the Kiwis v Tonga in Hamilton, because there is not going to be a lot of love lost when those two sides meet, after everything that has gone on.

Before a ball is kicked I have the Kiwis lunch at the Ellerslie Events Centre to look forward to on Friday.

When Pete asked if I would take it on with Gordon Gibbons and Tony Feasey, I foolishly said yes, not wanting to let Pete down.

But in truth Gordon has been amazing and we have an incredible line-up of Kiwis greats taking to the stage, and players with a long history of World Cup and test glory in attendance.

I have been to several of Peter's Kiwis lunches and enjoyed every one of them.

Where could you hope to have the chance to mix and mingle with greats of the game. And the thing that most amazes me about all those lunches I have been to, is that the Kiwis treat everyone equally. They have always had times for ordinary old folk like me, who have never achieved a damned thing in the game, let alone at test level.

It is one of the things I love most about league. There is not the stand-offishness found in some other sports.

For men who have become legends of the game, it is enough that we are fans, people who just want to be there to honour them and celebrate their place in the game.

There is still time to be there.

Just visit www.ellerslie.co.nz/ticketstore to grab a ticket, you won't regret it. You can also call Charlotte on 09 522 3824 too. It's \$100, but where else could you get a deal like that – a meal, entertainment, drinks – and a \$52 ticket to the test against Samoa the next day?

It's your last chance to secure your spot! Get in quick!

The patron of New Zealand Rugby League, Sir Peter Leitch, invites you to join him and other league fans at...

Rugby League World Cup 2017

Rugby League Greats Luncheon

Date: **THIS** Friday 27th October 2017 **Location:** Ellerslie Event Centre
Newmarket Room **Doors Open:** 11.30am **Buffet Lunch:** 12.15pm
Includes Beverage Package Until 3.00pm

JOIN former Warrior and Kiwi great Jerry Seuseu as your MC and a host of former Kiwi legends as we kick off the 2017 Rugby League World Cup in style and join us the next day at Mt Smart as we support the Kiwis when they take on Samoa in the opening game. There will be interviews with former Kiwi legends and a number of fantastic items up for auction.

DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS RARE OPPORTUNITY TO MIX AND MINGLE WITH LEGENDS OF THE GAME!

Tickets: \$100

Which includes ticket to the Kiwis v Samoa game the next day, plus a buffet meal and drinks package.
Included category A ticket valued at \$52.50.

To purchase tickets, which include a ticket to the game the next day, visit:
www.ellerslie.co.nz/ticketstore

For other enquiries contact: **Charlotte** - 09 522 3824

Sponsors:



Jerry Seuseu - MC
Former Kiwi, Samoa
International and Warrior

These are the former **Kiwis who are attending the luncheon...**

Together they have played over **1200 games for the **Kiwis**!**



Also included in this prestigious list are several former coaches.

Fred Ah Kuoi

Richard Bolton

Richard Blackmore

Peter Brown

Nathan Cayless

Bruce Castle

Shane Cooper

Roy Christian

Murray Eade

Henry Fa'afili

Olsen Filipaina

Louis Anderson

Gordon Gibbons

Ben Henry

Stacey Jones

Stephan Kearney

Gary Kemble

Wairangi Koopu

Graham Lowe

Don Mann Senior

Duane Mann

Mike McClennan

Brian McClennan

Hugh McGahan

Tawera Nikau

Dane O'Hara

Lyndsay Proctor

Gary Prohm

Francis Leota

Jerome Ropati

Jerry Seuseu

Ken Stirling

Logan Swann

Nigel Vagana

Lesley Vainikolo

Shane Varley

Brent Webb

Graeme West

Dennis Williams

Jason Lowrie

Draw Throws Up A few Challenges

How do they work this shit out, because it is beyond me?

Our 2018 draw is out, and we have only one home match on a Sunday, what's that about?

Just to make things a bit tougher, three of our four opening games are in Australia, although I suppose you argue that makes your run-in a bit easier.

And we have a nightmare draw during the State of Origin too.

We've copped two games against the Storm, Cowboys, Broncos, Roosters and Panthers, and we start against the Bunnies, who we struggle with, in Perth, where we never win – so that's something to look forward to on March 10.

Our once-only opponents are Cronulla (home), Newcastle (home), Tigers (home), Manly (away), Parramatta (away) and Doggies (away).

We don't get a home game until the Titans visit on Saturday, March 17. I'd dearly love something different than an indifferent start and a mid-season rally, which is just as well, because our mid-season sees us with six consecutive games against top eight sides, starting with Manly (Christchurch) on June 9, Cowboys in Townsville on June 15, Cronulla at Mt Smart on June 29, away to Penrith on July 6, Brisbane on July 15, and Melbourne in Auckland on July 22. Bugger.

That run of games is broken up by Origin II, Sunday, June 24.

We get 12 home games, six against top eight clubs, six on Saturdays, five on Friday nights and one on a Sunday. Friday night football in Auckland, give me strength.

2018 Draw

March 10: Rabbitohs (Perth); 17: Titans (Mt Smart); 24: Raiders (Canberra); 31: Roosters (Sydney).
April 7: Cowboys (Mt Smart); 14: Broncos (Mt Smart); 20: Dragons (Mt Smart); 25: Storm (Melbourne).

May 5: Wests Tigers (Mt Smart); 12: Roosters (Mt Smart); 18: Eels (Sydney); 26: Rabbitohs (Mt Smart).
June 9: Sea Eagles (Christchurch); 15: Cowboys (Townsville) 29: Sharks (Mt Smart).

July 6: Panthers (Penrith); 15: Broncos (Brisbane); 22: Storm (Mt Smart); 29: Titans (Robina).

August 4: Dragons (Wollongong); 10: Knights (Mt Smart); 19: Bulldogs (Sydney); 24: Panthers (Mt Smart); 31: Raiders (Mt Smart)

Bodene Is UK Bound

Good to see Bodene Thompson has found a new home.

He leaves Mt Smart for the Leigh Centurions on a two-year contract, where Leigh coach Neil Jukes reckons his signing will prove a bit of a coup.

Leigh actually drop into the second tier – The Championship – for the upcoming season because they lost to the Catalan Dragons in Super League's Million Pound Game.

"Bodene is a hard running, tough-tackling edge player, which is pretty much everything you want from someone in that position," Jukes said.

Hard to argue with that, though plenty would.

Thompson had his fair share of critics during his time with us, and he was unfortunately never far from a headline he didn't want.

But after making his NRL debut for the Gold Coast Titans in 2009, he moved to the Wests Tigers in 2013 and in 2014 made New Zealand's Four Nations squad, although he never played.

He headed to us in 2015, and made 58 appearances across three seasons, and I don't care what anyone says, his first season in particular was excellent, and I never quite understood all the criticism because he tended to give well of himself, which is not something you can say about all his teammates.



Get Behind Kidwell

WE ARE just days away from the 2017 Rugby League World Cup and I would hazard a guess that one man more than any other has nerves right now.

Kiwis coach David Kidwell has not enjoyed a great time at the helm – though I would argue many of his problems he could have done little about.

It is not going too far to say it is make or break time. He could be a hero in a few weeks, or he could be facing the chop.

He is only contracted to the end of the tournament, and you do not have to be a league genius to know that failure will not help his cause.

A new deal depends on success, though what that means is anyone's guess, given that everyone says Australia will walk to the title.

All those defections to Tonga must have him thinking he has no kind of luck except bad.

But despite pretty much everyone having low expectations, I remain fabulously optimistic, especially given we have our games at home, where I expected our solid record to continue..

I have enormous sympathy for Kidwell, because everyone moaned when Jesse Bromwich and Kevin Proctor went a bit troppo. The couture was wrong, blah, blah, blah, and Kidwell acted, standing the pair down.

Now he is being crucified for doing the right thing.

Say what you like, but he has courage – just ask hooker Issac Luke.

His bad luck has also seen him lose Tohu Harris, and assistant coaches Steve MacNamara to the Catalan Dragons, and Garth Brennan to the Titans.

The next six weeks will be Kidwell's chance to prove the critics wrong.

I for one will be delighted if he does.

Why not send the boys and David an email telling them you are supporting them, just email nadene@nzrl.co.nz

Get Behind the Kiwis!



Email your message of
support to: nadene@nzrl.co.nz



Nations Unite for Rugby League World Cup 2017 Launch

Photo Grant Trouville / NRL Photos

THE 2017 Rugby League World Cup is just four days away and captains and coaches of all 14 nations gathered in Brisbane today to officially launch the tournament that will be played in 13 cities cross Australian, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

Tournament CEO Andrew Hill, chairman Dr George Peponis, OAM, and Queensland Minister for Education and Minister for Tourism, Major Events and the Commonwealth Games, Kate Jones, were on hand to launch the 28-game series that culminates with the final in Brisbane on Saturday, December 2.

The 15th Rugby League World Cup, which was first played in France in 1954, will kick-off in Melbourne on Friday night with the clash of century-old rivals, England and Australia, coached by iconic Queensland league figures Wayne Bennett and Mal Meninga.

The tournament will be contested by Australia, England, France, Lebanon (Pool A); New Zealand, Samoa, Tonga, Scotland (Pool B), Papua New Guinea, Wales, Ireland (Pool C), Fiji, Italy and United States (Pool D).

The new international eligibility rules are expected to ensure RLWC2017 is the most competitive and most watched World Cup in history.

Matches will be telecast by the Seven Network in Australia, Sky TV in New Zealand and EMTV in PNG.

“The World Cup is huge for our game, we don’t have fond memories of the last World Cup in Australia in 2008 so we want to turn that around,” Australian captain Cameron Smith told the launch.

“It’s a celebration of our game and I think everyone who gets involved with this tournament and comes out and sees all the matches is going to be for a treat. There is going to be some great football played and there are some wonderful players on show throughout this tournament so I can’t wait.

“All the guys are really looking forward to getting out there on Friday night, they are excited about this campaign.

“I think a lot of the focus and a lot of the talk from Mal [Meninga] and from myself is going to be about playing a good game of footy on Friday night because if you get beaten in that first game you put yourself into a tricky position heading into quarter finals and semi-finals.”

England captain Sean O’Loughlin said the English players were looking forward to playing in the tournament under master coach Wayne Bennett.

“I think he just puts the boys under pressure to do the basic things well,” O’Loughlin said. He has a heap of experience and I think the boys are feeding off that.

Continued on next page...

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“From our point of view we want to get off to a good start but we also want to be building towards the knock out rounds and getting better week in and week out. “

RLWC2017 chairman George Peponis said the World Cup would not only be the best ever but would leave a legacy for the game, with matches spread across Australia, New Zealand and in Papua New Guinea.

“There has been plenty of hype around the eligibility rules which have shown that the Rugby League World Cup 2017 will be the most competitive World Cup,” Peponis said.

“I would like to thank all our corporate partners as well as our government partners. In particular I’d like to thank the Queensland Government for their support, with Brisbane set to host a semi-final and the final, which for the first time in history will feature the men’s and women’s World Cup finals.”

Next weekend’s opening round matches are (local times):

Friday, October 27: Australia v England, Melbourne Rectangular Stadium (8pm).

Saturday October 28: PNG v Wales, Oil Search NFS, Port Moresby (3pm); New Zealand v Samoa, Mt Smart Stadium, Auckland (8.10pm); Fiji v USA; Townsville (7.40pm).

Sunday, October 29: Ireland v Italy, Barlow Park, Cairns (2pm) and Scotland v Tonga (4pm) in a double-header; France v Lebanon, Canberra Stadium, Canberra (4pm).



Kiwis captain Adam Blair talking to the media on the day.

Keep up with Sir Peter Leitch! Click the icons to follow him on:



Facebook



Instagram



Twitter



**I'm ready for the
kick off of the**

RLWC2017!

Are you?



THE WORLD'S BEST ARE COMING ARE YOU?

AUCKLAND

NZ V SAMOA
28 OCTOBER
SEMI-FINAL
25 NOVEMBER

CHRISTCHURCH

NZ V SCOTLAND
4 NOVEMBER
QUARTER-FINAL
18 NOVEMBER

HAMILTON

SAMOA V TONGA
4 NOVEMBER
NZ V TONGA
11 NOVEMBER

WELLINGTON

QUARTER-FINAL
18 NOVEMBER

FOR TICKETS & ALL YOUR RLWC2017 INFORMATION GO TO RLWC2017.COM

#RLWC2017 | [f](#) | [t](#) | [@](#)

*NZ pool matches only, subject to allocation selling out. Transaction & booking fees may apply.

FAMILY TICKETS
FROM
\$45



GET YOUR RLWC2017 TICKETS IN PERSON FROM THESE TICKETEK OUTLETS ACROSS NEW ZEALAND

Auckland, Birkenhead	Highpoint Temptation Lotto, Highbury Shopping Centre, Birkenhead Hours: Mon-Fri 9:30am-5:30pm and Sat-Sun 10:30am-4pm
Auckland, Henderson	The Trusts Arena, 65-67 Central Park Dr, Henderson Hours: Daily 8:30am-8pm
Auckland, Mangere East	Mangere East Post Shop, 353 Massey Road, Mangere East Hours: Mon-Sat 9am-5pm
Hamilton	i-Site, Garden Place, Hamilton Hours: Mon-Sat 9am-5pm and Sat, Sun & Public Holidays 9:30am-3:30pm
Hamilton	Take Note Dinsdale Shopping Centre, 44A Whatawhata Road, Hamilton Hours: Mon-Sat 9am-5pm
Hawera	South Taranaki i-Site, 55 High St, Hawera Hours: Mon-Fri 8:30am-5pm and Sat, Sun & Public Holidays: 10am-3pm
Lower Hutt	Paper Plus, Lower Hutt, 228 High Street Hours: Mon-Sat 9am-5pm
New Plymouth	TSB Showplace, 92-100 Devon Street Hours: Mon-Fri 9am-5pm and Sat 10am-1pm
Palmerston North	Regent Theatre, 64 Broadway, Palmerston North Hours: Mon-Fri 9am-5pm
Porirua	Helloworld Porirua, 16 Hartham Place, Porirua Hours: Mon-Fri 8:30am-5:30pm and Sat 9:30am-12:30pm
Stratford	Stratford i-Site, 56 Miranda Street, Stratford Hours: Mon-Fri 8:30am-5pm and Sat-Sun 10am-3pm
Waikanae	Waikanae New World (Lotto Counter), 5 Parata St Hours: Mon-Fri 9am-5pm and Sat 9am-4:30pm
Wellington, City	Wellington i-Site Visitor Information Centre, 111 Wakefield Street Hours: Mon-Fri 8:30am-5pm, Sat-Sun 9am-5pm
Wellington, City	Railway Metro New World, 2 Bunny Street Hours: Mon-Sun 8am-7pm
Blenheim	ASB Theatre Marlborough, 2 Hutcheson Street, Mayfield Hours: Mon-Fri 9am-5pm, Sat 10am-1pm
Christchurch, Shirley	The Palms Shopping Centre, Customer Services Booth Hours: Mon-Wed 9am-6pm, Thu & Fri 9am-9pm, Sat & Sun 10am-5pm
Nelson	Beggs Music Works, 246 Hardy St, Nelson Hours: Mon-Fri 9am-5pm, Sat 10am-4pm
Timaru	Newmans MusicWorks, 117 Stafford Street, Timaru Hours: Mon-Fri 9am-5pm, Sat 9am-12pm



Tournament Opens With Strong Line-Ups In Key Clashes

MELBOURNE FULLBACK Billy Slater will return to the Australian team for the first time in 30 months, while Storm forward Jordan McLean and Cronulla utility Wade Graham have been chosen to make their Test debuts in Friday night's opening Rugby League World Cup 2017 match against England at Melbourne Rectangular Stadium.

England coach Wayne Bennett has also named a strong line-up for the clash, with Super League's Man of Steel Luke Gale to partner St George Illawarra captain Gareth Widdop in the halves and a powerful forward pack led by captain Sean O'Loughlin, Sam Burgess and James Graham.

Parramatta centre Brad Takairangi will make his debut for New Zealand in Saturday's match against Samoa at Mt Smart Stadium, along with Melbourne prop Nelson Asofa-Solomona and Newcastle hooker Danny Levi, who have been named on the bench. Wigan utility Thomas Leuluai was named to start in the dummy half role.

Samoa will field a giant forward pack, featuring captain Frank Pritchard and Josh Papalii in the second row and Junior Paulo in the front row.

Tonga coach Kristian Woolf named all his big names, headed by Jason Taumalolo and Andrew Fifita, in a strong line-up to face Scotland at Barlow Park, Cairns on Sunday.

The teams to open the tournament are:

Australia v England Melbourne Rectangular Stadium, 8pm Friday

AUSTRALIA

- 1 Billy SLATER
- 2 Dane GAGAI
- 3 William CHAMBERS
- 4 Joshua DUGAN
- 5 Valentine HOLMES
- 6 Michael MORGAN
- 7 Cooper CRONK
- 8 Aaron WOODS
- 9 Cameron SMITH (c)
- 10 David KLEMMER
- 11 Boyd CORDNER
- 12 Matt GILLET
- 13 Jake TRBOJEVIC
- 14 Wade GRAHAM
- 15 Jordan MCLEAN
- 16 Joshua MCGUIRE
- 17 Tyson FRIZELL
- 18 Reagan CAMPBELL-GIL-LARD

- 19 Ben HUNT
- 20 Tom TRBOJEVIC
- 21 Felise KAUFUSI

ENGLAND

- 1 Jonny LOMAX
- 2 Jermaine MCGILLVARY
- 3 Kallum WATKINS
- 4 John BATEMAN
- 5 Ryan HALL
- 6 Gareth WIDDOP
- 7 Luke GALE
- 8 Chris HILL
- 9 Josh HODGSON
- 10 James GRAHAM
- 11 Sam BURGESS
- 12 Elliott WHITEHEAD
- 13 Sean O'LOUGHLIN (c)
- 14 Alex WALMSLEY
- 15 Chris HEIGHINGTON
- 16 Thomas BURGESS
- 17 James ROBY
- 18 Ben CURRIE
- 19 Kevin BROWN

- 20 Mark PERCIVAL
- 21 Scott TAYLOR

Papua New Guinea v Wales Oil Search NSF Stadium, Port Moresby, 3pm Saturday (4pm AEDT)

PNG

- 1 David MEAD (c)
- 2 Justin OLAM
- 3 Kato OTTIO
- 4 Nene MACDONALD
- 5 Garry LO
- 6 Ase BOAS
- 7 Watson BOAS
- 8 Stanton ALBERT
- 9 Wartovo PUARA
- 10 Luke PAGE
- 11 Rhyse MARTIN
- 12 Rod Griffin
- 13 Paul AITON
- 14 Kurt BAPTISTE
- 15 Willie MINOGA

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- 16 James SEGEYARO
- 17 Enock MAKI
- 18 Lachlan LAM
- 19 Stargroth AMEAN
- 20 Wellington ALBERT
- 21 Moses MENINGA

WALES

- 1 Elliot KEAR
- 2 Rhys WILLIAMS
- 3 Michael CHANNING
- 4 Andrew GAY
- 5 Regan GRACE
- 6 Courtney DAVIES
- 7 Matt SEAMARK
- 8 Craig KOPCZAK (c)
- 9 Steve PARRY
- 10 Philip JOSEPH
- 11 Rhodri LLOYD
- 12 Ben MORRIS
- 13 Morgan KNOWLES
- 14 Matty FOZARD
- 15 Sam HOPKINS
- 16 Ben EVANS
- 17 Chester BUTLER
- 18 Josh RALPH
- 19 Dalton GRANT
- 20 Christiaan ROETS
- 21 Matthew BARRON

New Zealand v Samoa
Mt Smart Stadium, Auckland,
8.10pm Saturday (6.10pm
AEDT)

NEW ZEALAND

- 1 Roger TUIVASA-SHECK
- 2 Dallin WATENE ZELEZNIAK
- 3 Gerard BEALE
- 4 Bradley TAKAIRANGI
- 5 Jordan RAPANA
- 6 Kodi NIKORIMA
- 7 Shaun JOHNSON
- 8 Martin TAUPAU
- 9 Thomas LEULUAI
- 10 Adam BLAIR (c)
- 11 Kenny BROMWICH
- 12 Joseph TAPINE
- 13 Simon MANNERING
- 14 Nelson ASOFA-SOLOMONA

- 15 Russell PACKER
- 16 Isaac LIU
- 17 Danny LEVI
- 18 Jared WAEREA-HARGREAVES
- 19 Peta HIKU
- 20 Te Maire MARTIN
- 21 Addin FONUA-BLAKE

SAMOA

- 1 Young TONUMAPEA
- 2 Peter MATA'UTIA
- 3 Timoteo LAFAI
- 4 Joseph LEILUA
- 5 Ken MAUMALO
- 6 Joseph PAULO
- 7 Ben ROBERTS
- 8 Junior PAULO
- 9 Jazz TEVAGA
- 10 Sam LISONE
- 11 Joshua PAPALII
- 12 Frank PRITCHARD (c)
- 13 Leeson AH MAU
- 14 Pita GODINET
- 15 Herman ESE'ESE
- 16 Suaia MATAGI
- 17 Bunty Afoa
- 18 Zane MUSGROVE
- 19 Ricky LEUTELE
- 20 Frank WINTERSTEIN
- 21 Fa'amanu BROWN

Fiji v USA
Townsville Stadium, 7.40pm
Saturday (8.40pm AEDT)

FIJI

- 1 Kevin NAIQAMA (c)
- 2 Suliasi VUNIVALU
- 3 Taane MILNE
- 4 Akuila UATE
- 5 Marcelo MONTOYA
- 6 Jarryd HAYNE
- 7 Henry RAIWALUI
- 8 Ashton SIMS
- 9 Apisai KOROISAU
- 10 Kane EVANS
- 11 Viliame KIKAU
- 12 Korbin SIMS
- 13 Tui KAMIKAMICA
- 14 Joe LOVODUA

- 15 Jacob SAIFITI
- 16 Eloni VUNAKECE
- 17 Petero Benjamin NAKUBU-WAI
- 18 Brayden WILLIAME
- 19 James STORER
- 20 Junior ROQICA
- 21 Pio SECI

USA

- 1 Corey MAKELIM
- 2 Ryan BURROUGHS
- 3 Junior VAIVAI
- 4 Jonathan ALLEY
- 5 Wing Bureta FARAIMO
- 6 Kristian FREED
- 7 Matthew WALSH
- 8 1 Eddy PETTYBOURNE
- 9 David MARANDO
- 10 Mark OFFERDAHL (c)
- 11 Danny HOWARD
- 12 Matt SHIPWAY
- 13 Nicholas NEWLIN
- 14 Sam TOCHTERMAN-TALBOT
- 15 Andrew KNEISLY
- 16 Steve HOWARD
- 17 Gabriel FARLEY
- 18 Charles JOSEPH CORTALANO
- 19 Joe EICHNER
- 20 David ULCH
- 21 Joshua RICE

Ireland v Italy
Barlow Park, Cairns, 2pm Sunday
(3pm AEDT)

IRELAND

- 1 Scott Grix
- 2 Shannon McDonnell
- 3 Ed Chamberlain
- 4 Centre Michael MORGAN
- 5 Wing Liam Kay
- 6 Api Pewhairangi
- 7 Liam Finn (c)
- 8 1 Brad Singleton
- 9 Michael McIlorum
- 10 Kyle Amor

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- 11 Louie McCarthy-Scarsbrook
- 12 Oliver Roberts
- 13 George King
- 14 Tyrone MCCARTHY
- 15 James HASSON
- 16 Joe Philbin
- 17 Anthony Mullally

- 18 Joe Keyes
- 19 Will Hope
- 20 Jack Higginson
- 21 Matty Hadden

ITALY

- 1 James TEDESCO
- 2 Mason CERRUTO
- 3 Justin CASTELLARO
- 4 Nathan MILONE
- 5 Josh MANTELLATO
- 6 Terry CAMPESE
- 7 Jack JOHNS
- 8 Paul VAUGHAN
- 9 Ryan GHIETTI
- 10 Daniel ALVARO
- 11 Joel RIETHMULLER
- 12 Mark MINICHIELLO (c)
- 13 Nathan BROWN
- 14 Colin WILKIE
- 15 Brendan SANTI
- 16 Shannon WAKEMAN
- 17 Jayden WALKER
- 18 Christophe CALEGRI
- 19 Christopher CENTRONE
- 20 Joe TRAMONTANA
- 21 Gavin HISCOX

Scotland v Tonga

**Barlow Park, Cairns, 4.15pm
Sunday (5.15pm AEDT)**

SCOTLAND

- 1 Lewis TIERNEY
- 2 Matthew RUSSELL
- 3 Ben HELLEWEL
- 4 Lachlan STEIN
- 5 Will OAKES
- 6 Danny BROUGH (c)
- 7 Danny ADDY
- 8 Luke DOUGLAS
- 9 Kane BENTLEY
- 10 Ben KAVANAGH

- 11 Frankie MARIANO
- 12 Dale FERGUSON
- 13 James BELL
- 14 Callum PHILLIPS
- 15 Andrew BENTLEY
- 16 Sam BROOKS
- 17 Johnny WALKER
- 18 Alex WALKER
- 19 Jarred ANDERSON
- 20 Kieran MORAN
- 21 Brandan WILKINSON

TONGA

- 1 William HOPOATE
- 2 Daniel TUPOU
- 3 Michael JENNINGS
- 4 Konrad HURRELL
- 5 Manu VATUVEI
- 6 Tuimoala LOLOHEA
- 7 Mafoa'aeata HINGANO
- 8 Andrew FIFITA
- 9 Siliva HAVILI
- 10 Sio Siua TAUKEIAHO
- 11 Manu MA'U
- 12 Sika MANU (c)
- 13 Jason TAUMALOLO
- 14 Sione KATO
- 15 Sam MOA
- 16 Peni TEREPO
- 17 Ben MURDOCH-MASILIA
- 18 Joe OFAHENGAUE
- 19 Solomone KATA
- 20 David FUSITUA
- 21 Samisoni LANGI

France v Lebanon

Canberra Stadium, 4pm Sunday

FRANCE

- 1 Mark KHEIRALLAH
- 2 Fouad YAHA
- 3 Bastien ADER
- 4 Damien CARDACE
- 5 Ilias BERGAL
- 6 Theo FAGES (c)
- 7 William BARTHAU
- 8 Antoni MARIA
- 9 Eloi PELISSIER
- 10 Julian BOUSQUET
- 11 Benjamin GARCIA
- 12 Benjamin JULLIEN

- 13 Jason BAITIERI
- 14 Clement BOYER
- 15 Nabil DJALOUT
- 16 Thibault MARGALET
- 17 Lucas ALBERT
- 18 John BOUDEBZA
- 19 Olivier ARNOUD
- 20 Mickael ROUCH
- 21 Romain NAVARRETE

LEBANON

- 1 Anthony LAYOUN
- 2 Travis ROBINSON
- 3 James ELIAS
- 4 Jason WEHBE
- 5 Abbas MISKI
- 6 Mitchell MOSES
- 7 Robbie FARAH
- 8 Timothy MANNAH
- 9 Michael LICHAA
- 10 Alex TWAL
- 11 Chris SAAB
- 12 Ahmad ELLAZ
- 13 Nick KASSIS
- 14 Mitchell MAMARY
- 15 Elias SUKKAR
- 16 Jaleel SEVE-DERBAS
- 17 Andrew KAZZI
- 18 Adam DOUEIHI
- 19 Bilal MAARBANI
- 20 Jamie CLARK
- 21 Danny BARAKAT



KIWIS V SAMOA



**MT SMART STADIUM
This Saturday Night**

6pm Gates open

8pm Pre-game show

**featuring Patea Maori Club, Kiwis great Olsen Filipaina
and NZRL President Howie Tamati**

8.15pm Kick-off

**EX KIWI OLSEN FILIPAINA WHO PLAYED 50 games for
the kiwis will take the match ball out on the field**

**Tickets can
be brought at
ticketek.co.nz**



**Kids/Students
Tickets from \$10**

**Adult
Tickets from \$20**

**Family
Tickets from \$45**

TEAM WELCOME



Auckland
Tourism, Events and
Economic Development



Rugby league stars on Auckland's waterfront

**Tomorrow, Wednesday 25th October, midday to 4pm
Karanga Plaza, Wynyard Quarter**

Auckland will welcome the New Zealand and Samoan teams here for the Rugby League World Cup 2017 at a special event tomorrow.

There will be live performances, haka, siva tau, player signings, skills and drills, chances for fans to get selfies with players, face painting and more.

Waka races kick off from 2.45pm, featuring former players, media personalities and competition winners.

The Team Welcome is part of the build-up to Auckland's first Rugby League World Cup 2017 match, at Mt Smart match on Saturday.

Highlights:

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 12pm | Event opens with live music on stage, face-painting and stalls open |
| 2-2.30pm | Teams arrive
Samoan team introduced on stage
New Zealand team introduced on stage
Haka and siva tau
Player Q&A |
| 2.30-3.30pm | Players take part in fan activities (skills and drills, signings and selfies) |
| 2.45-3.45pm | Waka races, with Sir Peter Charles Leitch KNZM QSM as official starter
Waka paddlers include rugby league's Ali Lauitiiti, Lesley Vanikolo, Logan Swann and Wairangi Koopu; Black Ferns Captain Fiao'o Faamausili; Newshub's Ryan Bridge; Stuff's Jackson Thomas; Petrina Hall and Junior Masefau NiuFM on-air team; TVNZ's Brodie Kane; Miss Samoa - Natalie Toevai and Miss Universe NZ - Harlem Cruz Atarangi Ihaia. |
| 4pm | Event ends |



By Barry Ross

Johnny Raper

Johnny Raper at Kogarah Oval in Sydney where he played well over 100 home games for the St. George Dragons.

THE LEGENDARY Johnny Raper played his last Test in the 1968 World Cup Final. The match was at the Sydney Cricket Ground on 10 June 1968 and Australia defeated France 20-2. Johnny captained the Australians and they were undefeated winners of the fourth Rugby League World Cup. It was a powerful Australian team that took the field that day with four players who went on to become Immortals and five who were named in Australia's Team of the Century in 2008. The four Immortals were Raper, Graeme Langlands, Bob Fulton and Arthur Beetson, while Ron Coote joined these four men in the Team of the Century. Half-back Billy Smith, along with the five Team of the Century players, were also named in Australia's Greatest 100 players list in 2008. The Australian team, with the number of Tests played, for that 1968 final was Eric Simms (8 Tests), Lionel Williamson (11), Graeme Langlands (45), John Greaves (12), John Rhodes (10), Bob Fulton (35), Billy Smith (26), Ron Coote (23), Johnny Raper (39) captain, Dick Thornett (14), Arthur Beetson (28), Fred Jones (3), John Wittenberg (10). Second rower Elton Rasmussen, who played 18 Tests, was used off the bench in the second half. That is an amazing tally of 282 Tests in the 14 Australians used.

A good crowd of 54,290 turned up and New Zealand whistle blower, John Percival, controlled the game. Percival was a highly respected referee, who officiated in 26 Test matchers between 1964 and 1980. He was one on the inaugural Legends of League in New Zealand in 1995 and that same year, he was an Auckland Warriors board member.

New Zealand were scheduled to hold the fourth World Cup in 1965, but it was called off because the standard of the French team had dropped. But after the Frenchmen had won two and drawn one of the three Tests against the 1967 touring Australians, it was decided to stage the Cup in 1968, with games in both Australia and New Zealand. For the first time a World Cup final was scheduled and the 1968 World Cup began in Auckland on 25 May with the New Zealand-France clash and at the Sydney Cricket Ground on the same day, when, before a great crowd of 62,256, Australia outclassed Great Britain 25-10. These two teams were expected to meet in the final but the Aussies were never in danger of losing, scoring three tries by Raper Coote and Smith to two by the Brits.

Australia also beat New Zealand 31-12 at Brisbane's Lang Park on 1 June and then France 37-4 on 8 June at the same venue. On that same day, 8 June, at the Sydney Cricket Ground, Great Britain beat New Zealand 38-14 in front of 14,105 fans. Why this game was not played in Auckland is bewildering but who knows why this was arranged almost 50 years ago. Probably the Australia-New Zealand match should have also been played in Auckland, especially as the fourth World Cup was originally scheduled for New Zealand. Obviously crowd numbers and thus money, played a major role in decisions.

Continued on next page...

At Carlaw Park in Auckland on 25 May, France defeated New Zealand 15-10 before more than 18,000 people. Australian referee, Col Pearce did not please the local fans when he sent off Auckland forward Brian Lee after only 11 minutes for a high tackle. Lee's team-mates claimed that French winger, Andre Ferren, was acting when he rolled on the ground supposedly in pain and they pointed out how quickly he recovered when Lee had left the field. But the damage had been done and then 10 minutes later, prop Oscar Danielson had to be replaced because of a shoulder problem. In the other match in Auckland, on 1 June, France upset Great Britain 7-2 on a very wet and muddy field in front of 15,760.

The final was played just two days after Australia and France had met in Brisbane. The 20-2 scoreline suggests the Aussies always had it under control and they did, although the Frenchmen generally defended well. In his last Test, Johnny Raper had an outstanding game, controlling things from dummy half and around the ruck. His first Test was at the Sydney Cricket Ground on 13 June 1959 in the tight 9-8 win over New Zealand. His first Test try, came in the second Test of that series in Brisbane on 27 June when Australia defeated the Kiwis 38-10. Now living in Sydney's southern suburbs with his wife, Carol, Johnny turned 78 last April. He captained Australia in eight Tests, was awarded an MBE for services to Rugby League and won eight Grand Finals as a member of the great St. George club.

The Australians were coached by Harry Bath, who was 43 at the time. Born in Brisbane, Bath was a clever second rower who played around 350 games with English club, Warrington, from 1948 to 1956. He coached Australia in 20 Tests for 12 wins, a draw and seven losses. The 1968 World Cup saw the emergence of Bob Fulton, who at 20 years of age, made his Test debut in the game with New Zealand in Brisbane on 1 June. Another young Australian to do well in this World Cup was Arthur Beetson, who was then 23 and played just his second Test in Australia's opening game.

This coming weekend will provide plenty of excitement with a lot of interest in all seven games. How will Wayne Bennett's England preform against Australia against Melbourne on Friday night? What will the Papua-New Guinea clash bring in Port Moresby on Saturday and what awaits us when New Zealand take on Samoa? The Mt. Smart stadium playing field will be no place for the faint hearted with both sets of forwards ready to rumble. The next day Scotland play Tonga in Cairns. Everyone will be keen to see how the Tongan forwards perform with Jason Taumalolo and Andrew Fifita in their ranks.

Legends Of New Zealand Rugby League To Be Honoured At Games During Rugby League World Cup

Match	Date	Venue	Ball deliverer
New Zealand v Samoa	28 Oct (This Saturday)	Mt Smart Stadium	Olsen Filipania
New Zealand v Scotland	4 November	Christchurch Stadium	Frank Endacott ONZM
Samoa v Tonga	4 November	Waikato Stadium	Tawera Nikau
New Zealand v Tonga	11 November	Waikato Stadium	Duane Mann
Quarter final	18 November	Christchurch Stadium	Brendon Tuuta
Quarter final 1	8 November	Wellington Regional Stadium	Kevin Tamati
Semi final	25 November	Mt Smart Stadium	Sir Peter Leitch KNZM QSM



By John Coffey



Samoa captain Frank Pritchard.

Photos: Grant Trouville//NRL Photos

Samoa's Proud Rugby League History

SAMOA DID not field its first fully representative rugby league team until the Pacific Cup was revived and expanded in 1986. By then there was already an increasing Polynesian influence on the sport in Auckland which filtered through to New Zealand senior and junior teams. The game was obviously a comfortable fit for the people of Polynesia. But the first player of Samoan heritage had actually made his international debut as long ago as 1935.

Alf Mitchell, born in Samoa of an English father and Samoan mother, was the first Pacific Islander to play for New Zealand, on the wing against the touring Australians. He was to be followed by his brother George, a Manawatu rugby union forward until he transferred to Auckland and was persuaded by Alf to change codes with the Richmond club. George had been born in Rarotonga in 1914 and moved to New Zealand with his family in 1929.

George Mitchell completed a proud family double when he joined Alf on the Kiwis Roll of Honour as a member of the 1939 New Zealand team. Unfortunately, their tour of Britain was limited to just two matches by the outbreak of the Second World War. George Mitchell is also credited with initiating a proud record of Polynesian players being included in Maori representative teams, sharing in a memorable 16-15 victory over the 1937 Kangaroos.

A paragraph in the match programme when the Maori played the United States All Stars in 1953 defined, in answer to a reader's question, "the qualification for membership of a Maori representative team". The official ruling read: "Any player who can justly lay claim to having any Maori or Polynesian blood in his veins." In that Maori backline was Tongan-born Bill Sorensen, who went on to be a great Kiwi player and highly respected Auckland coach.

From 1986, Western Samoa (as it was then known) was runner-up to New Zealand Maori in two Pacific Cups and won the next two. Still vividly remembered by all who were there was the 18-14 victory over Tonga after double extra time in the 1992 final at Carlaw Park. It was arguably the most memorable Pacific encounter of all time. Three members of the Tuimavave clan, Paki, Paddy and Tony, played that day and were chosen in the tournament all-star team.

The 1995 World Cup in Britain was another step up for Western Samoa in particular and the Pacific Islands region in general. It was a glittering event and the Samoan squad, coached by Graham Lowe, supplied its share of those stars. All Blacks John Schuster and Va'aiga Tuigamala were joined by Kiwis Mark Elia, Sam Panapa, Willie Poching, Tea Ropati, Se'e Solomona, Tony Tatupu, Tony Tuimavave and the Vagana cousins, Joe and Nigel.

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But even that array of talent was not enough for Western Samoa to advance past the pool stages. After thrashing France 56-10 at Cardiff, a Welsh side packed with rugby union converts and tough rugby league professionals won 22-10 at Swansea's Veitch Field. I was there that night as more than 15,000 fervent Welshmen cheered on their heroes. Wales had also comfortably accounted for France and went on to play England in a semi-final.

In the 2000 World Cup, Samoa played its pool games in three different British countries, losing to Ireland 30-16 at Belfast before beating Aotearoa Maori 21-16 at Workington and Scotland 20-12 at Edinburgh. That was enough to qualify for the quarter-finals, but the mighty Kangaroos were waiting and hammered home a 66-10 scoreline. That Samoan side was coached by former Kiwis and Manly utility back Darrell Williams.

Samoa, now coached by John Ackland, captained by Nigel Vagana and boasting a powerful looking squad, slumped to a ninth ranking at the 2008 World Cup in Australia. But the results were not that bad. In pool play Samoa beat Tonga 20-12 at Penrith and lost to Ireland 34-16 at Parramatta. It was the margin of that loss, causing a poor points differential, which forced Samoa into the playoff for ninth and tenth, where it overwhelmed France 42-14 at Penrith.

Back in the north in 2013, Samoa regained its lost ground by finishing fifth. A rousing second half comeback in a 42-24 loss to the Kiwis at Warrington preceded a 38-4 victory over Papua New Guinea at Hull and a 22-6 defeat of France at Perpignan. Within sight of making the last four, Samoa stumbled against Fiji and lost their quarter-final 22-4 at Warrington. Australian Matt Parish had started his coaching reign and Wigan forward Harrison Hansen was captain.

Since then Parish has inspired Samoa to give New Zealand an even bigger scare in a tense 2014 Four Nations fixture at Whangarei. Down 12-6 at one stage, the Kiwis needed a Jason Nightingale try (64min) to get within range and then a Shaun Kenny-Dowall try (76min) to save face in a tournament they eventually won. In his day jobs Parish has been assistant coach at several NRL clubs and to Laurie Daley for the NSW State of Origin team.



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By Miles Davis

1960 World Cup

Austin Rhodes (Great Britain) holding the ball after a dust up. The Aussie with the bleeding eye to the right of the photo is Aussie Captain Keith Barnes.

The third Rugby League World Cup was held in England in 1960 with New Zealand, Australia, France and Great Britain taking part. The format of the competition was a league format with each side playing each other and the team finishing top becoming World Cup winners.

All games were held in the rugby league heartland of the North of England with Station Road (Swinton), Headingley (Leeds), Central Park (Wigan) and Odsal Stadium (Bradford) being the venues.

Great Britain were captained by centre Eric Ashton, a Wigan stalwart who played almost 500 games for the club. Outside him was his club-mate Billy Boston who also amassed almost 500 games for the Lancashire club.

New Zealand were led by Auckland forward Cliff Johnson and included in their squad Legends of League Mel Cooke, George Menzies, Ron Ackland and Cyril Eastlake among others. Johnson had represented the Kiwis at the two previous World Cups and was to retire at the end of the 1960 version after picking up a then record 34 caps.

The Kangaroos skipper was Balmain's Keith Barnes (nicknamed Golden Boots due to his laser-like kicking accuracy). Also in their side were the legendary names of Johnny Raper and Reg Gasnier.

The underdog French were led by Jean Barthe who had been a rugby union International who had toured South Africa in 1958 and had only switched to league the season before.

The first fixtures saw Great Britain take on the Kiwis in Bradford and Australia play France in Wigan with both games attracting crowds of over 20,000. Great Britain took early honours with a 23-8 win over the Kiwis which left them needing to win both their remaining games to have a chance of winning the tournament. The Australians were pushed hard by the French winning by the smallest of margins 13-12. In fact the French had several chances of causing an upset missing a penalty and four attempted drop goals.

Next up for the Kiwis was a game against their fierce rivals Australia at Headingley. An even contest this game was widely regarded as the most entertaining of the tournament. The Kangaroos eventually triumphed 21-15 with winger Brian Carlson scoring a hat-trick of tries as well as nabbing himself the same number of goals. The highlight of the game however was a miracle try by Kiwi George Menzies. The try was so spectacular that it was even applauded by referee Eric Clay.

Over 22,000 were on hand at Swinton's Station Road ground to watch Great Britain take on France. Whilst the game ended up in a comfortable 33-7 win for Great Britain it was an ugly incident on the field that attracted most of the headlines. A blow up between Vince Karalius and French skipper Jean Barthe saw both men dismissed by referee Edouard Martung, a police Inspector from Bordeaux. It was the first double sending off in World Cup history. Karalius was renowned as one of the hardest men ever to play the game and is still revered wherever the game of league is played.

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The final game for the Kiwis was against France and played at Wigan's Central Park. Although it was a dead rubber as far as the World Cup was concerned there was a lot of pride at stake. The game was marred by overly aggressive play and French second-rower Robert Eramoussepe became the second Frenchman dismissed at the tournament when he was given an early bath for reckless kicking. The Kiwis came out on top 9-0 with West Coast front-rower Tom Reid scoring a try and Cyril Eastlake adding 3 goals.

With Great Britain and Australia having both won their first two games the fixture between them doubled as a World Cup final. The game was held at Bradford's Odsal Stadium in front of an expectant crowd of 33,000 (which produced record gate-takings of 9,113 pounds). In keeping with many of the games in this tournament it was once again a violent affair although referee Martung decided to keep both sides at full complement rather than send anyone off. In between the sporadic bouts of fighting there was some football played and it was the home side that put down a marker in the first half with tries to Billy Boston and Mick Sullivan (Sullivan was to make 46 test appearances for Great Britain which still remains a record today although tied with Garry Schofield. His record of 41 tries still stands.) Stand-in fullback Austin Rhodes added two goals to give Great Britain a 10-0 lead. A late try to Brian Carlson was not enough to turn the tide in the Kangaroos favour and Great Britain laid claim to their 2nd World Cup crown.

As with many other British sporting achievements the victory was to prove a false dawn with the Great Britain side winning just one more World Cup, in 1972. The gap of 35 years between drinks is unlikely to end with this year's tournament held in New Zealand and Australia with the host nation's likely to once again contest the final as they have done on the last 3 occasions.

1960 World Cup Final Great Britain v Australia <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4PIMtRX2FM>

Sydney Morning Herald report of the 1960 World Cup Final (where unsurprisingly all the blame for the violence gets put on the Poms) <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=cuoiAAAAIBAJ&sjid=O-YDAAAA-IBAJ&pg=3176,1559211>

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The Phantom Team Returns!

By John Coffey QSM

Author of ten rugby league books, Christchurch Press sports writer (44 years), NZ correspondent for Rugby League Week (Australia) and Open Rugby (England)



WHEN COURAGEOUS New Zealand rugby league pioneer Albert Baskerville was organising his trail blazing All Golds tour to Britain in 1907 he had to overcome serious opposition from rugby union authorities, the national government and influential newspapers. There were also strong forces seeking to undermine his plans at the other end of their long sea voyage too.

A well-connected, and well-paid, chap named Cecil Wray Palliser used his contacts at The Times newspaper to label the All Golds “a phantom team”, claiming Baskerville was only hoodwinking the British public. Wray Palliser was both the New Zealand Government’s agent general in London and the New Zealand Rugby Union delegate to the English Rugby Football Union.

History now testifies that the All Golds were far from a phantom team as they spread rugby league from its foundations in the north of England and launched it as an important sport in both Australia and New Zealand. But in recent years Kiwis fans could hardly be blamed if they had not repeated Wray Palliser’s description of the national team. The Kiwis have been nowhere to be seen.

It has been more than 1000 days since the Kiwis beat the Kangaroos in the 2014 Four Nations final at Wellington. For almost three years they have been harder to find than the nocturnal creature after which they are named. In the meantime there have been sightings in Brisbane, Hull, London, Wigan, Newcastle, Perth, Huddersfield, Coventry, Workington, Liverpool and Canberra. But never on home soil, not even a World Cup warm-up game.

In most of those foreign locations they have failed to prosper. The number one international ranking the Kiwis captured through three consecutive victories over Australia in 2014-15 has become a fleeting memory. Since that treble was completed at Brisbane in the 2015 Anzac Test the Kiwis have lost seven Tests (five to Australia, two to England), won two (both over England) and drawn one (with Scotland).

The World Cup has long been regarded as an opportunity for the Kiwis to reassert themselves in front of their supporters and the sporting public. But so many of the principal figures have indeed become phantoms, starting with 2008 World Cup winning coach Stephen Kearney’s signing by the Warriors. Since 2015 the Kiwis have had three captains, one of whom was temporarily co-captain with a fourth player.

In the last five months the “phantoms” have multiplied. Jesse Bromwich and Kevin Proctor were suspended. Kieran Foran, Jordan Kahu and Tohu Harris are reportedly injured. Issac Luke was dropped. Jason Taumalolo led a Tongan revolt involving David Fusitu’a, Sio Siua Taukeiaho and Manu Ma’u. Assistant coach Steve McNamara ghosted off to France and replacement Garth Brennan morphed to the Gold Coast.

Kiwis head coach David Kidwell was indeed astute at choosing his assistants – he did so well that others wanted them too. Now it remains to be seen whether Kidwell and his co-selectors have done as well in assembling 24 players who have pledged to give their all for the jersey. Their campaign begins against Samoa at Mount Smart on Saturday and hopefully will flow through to Christchurch, Hamilton, Wellington (quarter-final) and Auckland (semi-final).

There is no doubt this is a weaker team on paper than we anticipated would be available. But rugby league’s history is full of tales of players lifting themselves, and those alongside them, to previously unattained levels. The 2008 World Cup triumph was not achieved without a late change of head coach, the appointment of a new captain and the unexpected defection of our most celebrated forward.

Despite Wray Palliser’s propaganda, the All Golds were greeted by a huge crowd at Leeds railway station when they showed themselves to be anything but a phantom team 110 years ago. Hopefully, the 2017 Kiwis will similarly be backed by big numbers of fans during their World Cup campaign. That, in turn, would encourage the New Zealand Rugby League to host more international fixtures in future years.

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Now that the Anzac Test has been discontinued, and State of Origin II will be played on a stand-alone weekend free of NRL fixtures, is there scope for the NZRL to stage a mid-season Test in Auckland? NSW and Queensland meet in Sydney on Sunday, June 24. What is to stop the NZRL bringing the Kiwis home for a Test match against England, Tonga or Samoa on the night of Friday, June 22, or on the Saturday afternoon?

Opposition would no doubt be mounted by selfish NRL clubs, which would provide most of the players for both teams. Super League might object if it believed too many England-based players were called up to travel to Auckland. But now that there are no Monday NRL games, the Kiwis and their rivals would have the same five-day preparation as has been the custom with Anzac Tests. At least give it a go!

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Site Launching Thursday Morning!





New Zealand captain Adam Blair.
Photos: Grant Trouville / NRL Photos



By Ben Francis

Northland's Adam Blair 'Honoured' To Lead Kiwis At World Cup

WHANGAREI-BORN PROP Adam Blair has been given the honour of captaining the Kiwis at this year's Rugby League World Cup, something he never thought would happen.

The experienced forward has previously co-captained the Kiwis along with Issac Luke during the 2015 tour of England, but after Jesse Bromwich was not considered due to off-field issues, Blair was given full reins.

The 31-year-old, who made his Kiwis debut back in 2006, is one of four players who were a part of the squad that shocked the Rugby League world winning the 2008 World Cup.

Blair missed out on the 2013 World Cup squad and has been working hard to ensure he doesn't miss out this time around.

He has now established himself as the leader of the team and is excited to add to his 41-Test Caps.

"Every time you get to wear the jersey, it is an honour and a privilege and it is never guaranteed," explained Blair.

"It has been a cool little journey. I have enjoyed most of it on my way through - I have had ups and downs, been out of the Kiwis couple of times, been back in it.

'I know how people feel when you lose out on selection and how disappointed when you don't get picked but I guess that has all matured me into the person I am today.

"I always thought I'd play for my country but to be able to lead the Kiwis into a World Cup on home soil is obviously a massive honour and privilege."

Along with leading the team on the field, Blair will also continue to lead the Kiwis haka before matches.

"As a leader, you have to be cool and calm under all circumstances, including the Haka.

"It is something I hold close to my heart because of the opportunity to lead it is great.

"You have your teammates behind you, so it is like you are going into battle and you are protected either side of you."

Keep up with Sir Peter Leitch! Click the icons to follow him on:



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NOT QUITE A UNIQUE OCCASION

Not too long ago the very thought of staging a rugby league World Cup final at Eden Park would have been summarily dismissed by both the sports' officials and the stadium's administrators.

There was simply no crossing of the line which divided the playing fields of the two codes. Happily, attitudes have changed and it is possible that rugby league tests could be allocated to Lancaster Park, Christchurch, and the International Stadium, Rotorua, when Australia tours next winter.

But the Lion Red World Cup final is not the first occasion that 13-aside football has been seen on the hallowed turf of Eden Park.

Indeed, the Auckland Rugby League had the regular use of the ground before the Auckland Rugby Union became the winter tenant.

That was back in 1912, when the season opened with a Lower Waikato team consisting mainly of players from Ngaruawahia defeating City Rovers 12-10 in "a bright and open game" before 2000 spectators.

Two weeks later a reported 5000 people turned out at the park for the Auckland Provincial Rugby League's four senior games. City was once more a loser, by 13-9 to North Shore, in the feature match.

It has also been recorded that Auckland's 38-13 defeat of Hawke's Bay in August, 1919, occurred at Eden Park.

The history of the park can be traced back to its official opening in November, 1903, when the Eden and Grafton clubs met at cricket.

After taking over responsibility for the ground, the Auckland Cricket Association raised a loan to pay for improvements. It was beset by financial and flooding problems in those formative years.

From early 1913 negotiations were held between the cricket and rugby union bodies with the upshot that a lease was negotiated on August 1, 1914, for the union to have a 21-year tenure in the winter seasons.

Of course, Eden Park had very sparse facilities in those days. Major improvements have been



Eden Park, venue for today's Lion Red World Cup final.

made in recent decades and will continue during the next few months.

Cricket tests since 1929-30 have produced wildly fluctuating results. In 1954-55 the England bowlers dismissed New Zealand for a world record low of 26 runs; only 12 months later New Zealand enjoyed its first test victory at the expense of the West Indies.

Eden Park became Auckland's rugby union test venue when the Springboks toured in 1921 and has never since been challenged for that status.

In 1950 the opening ceremony and track and field events of the Empire Games were staged at Eden Park. New Zealanders cheered

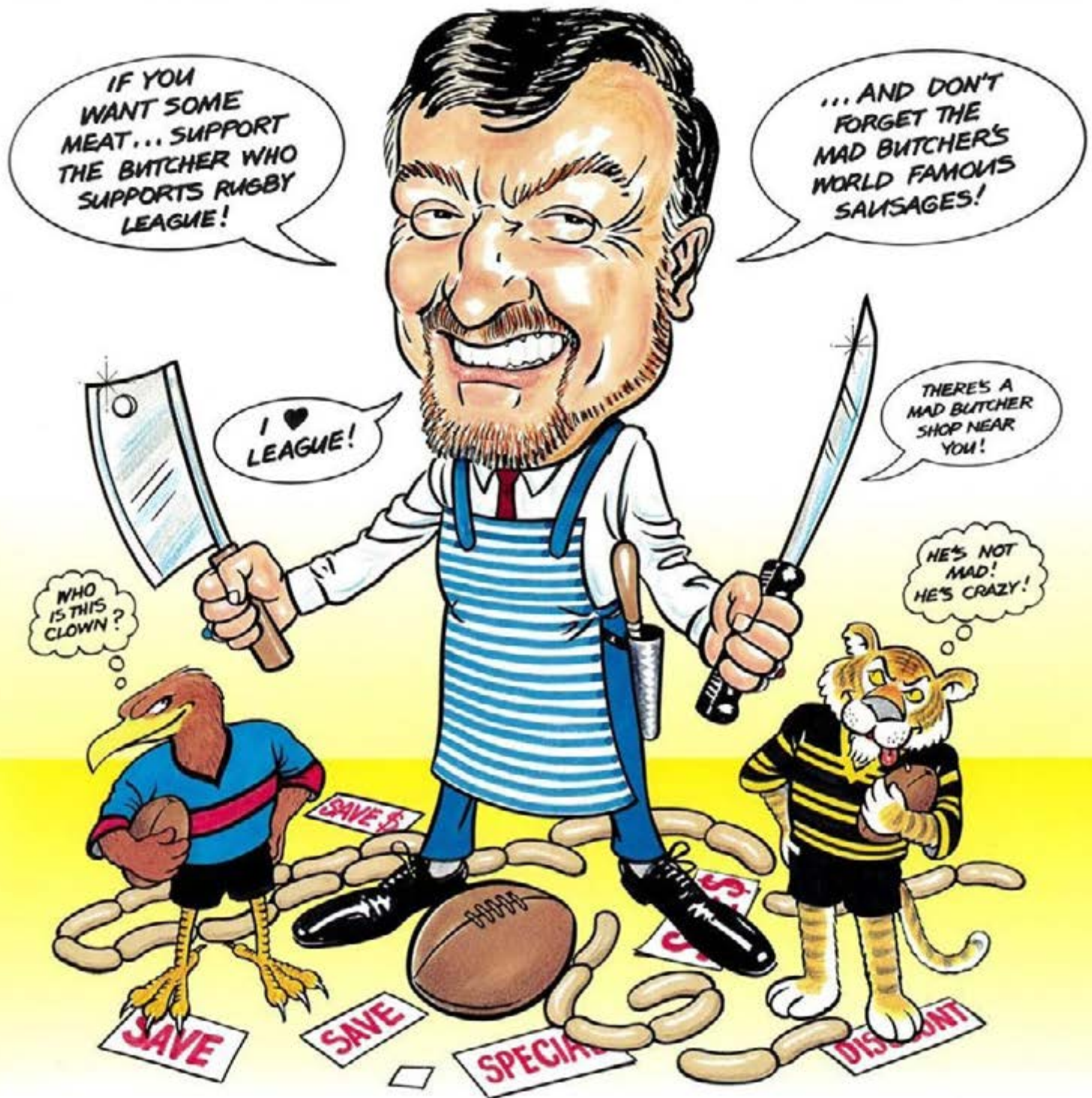
their hometown heroes, Harold Nelson (six miles) and Yvette Williams (long jump), to gold medals; among the silver medallists was a New Zealand rugby league wing and springheeled long jumper, Bevan Hough.

Another Kiwi, Verdun Scott, spent much more time on Eden Park — as a right-handed opening batsman for Auckland between 1937 and 1953. In averaging 49.13 from 128 first-class innings, Scott earned a reputation as the hardest man in New Zealand to get out. Sadly, this skilled utility back's 1939 rugby league tour to Britain was curtailed by the outbreak of war, after just two matches.

Peter Brown is taken high by Papua New Guinea second rower Tuyo Ewei in the World Cup qualifier, Carlaw Park, July 1988.



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Arrival

Reader Mail



Dear Sir Peter

HI SIR Peter. I'm sending you a photo of my grandson Aston Wilson that was the West Coast Rugby League junior school of the year and most valuable player in the West Coast under 12 Rep side that played Canterbury. Mate I am so proud of him and he has a future in our great game. **Cheers Barry.**

WHAT A terrific competition you held recently! We admire the effort you go to to encourage more and more people to follow the Kiwis and the 'great game' of rugby league. We were fortunate enough to win one of your jerseys & caps. Here is our Schoolboys Rep, Gene Wilson showing off the gear. Thanks so much!!! GO THE KIWIS!!

Regards, Kirsty Wilson - HRLC Secretary



HI MY name is Harry Pratt I am 8 years old, from Leeds England. I play for Hunslet Club Parkside, I love the New Zealand Warriors. For my 8th birthday Sir Peter sent me these gifts. I would like to say a massive thank you! I hope to see you all one day when I come and play for the Warriors

Sir Peter,

IT WAS great to catch up with you and Lady Janice the other day. I had something really special happen on Oct 8. at the Variety Artists of NZ Awards. I won the 2017 Benny Award, which is the NZ Entertainment Industry's highest honour. Voted on by your peers in recognition to your contribution to the industry and an outstanding career. It makes it even more special for me that 41 years ago, in 1976, my dad and your friend Rusty Greaves, won the same award, making us the first father and son to do so. We aren't in the business to get awards, but it's a great feeling to be recognized now and then for what you do. I'm just a country singer that does a little comedy to put a smile on a few faces, which believe it or not is as much reward as I need. I give you some of the credit also, because I learned from you, that the most valuable thing you can give is your time. And I try to carry on that legacy, from you and my dad, of helping my fellow artists, both young and old. (mostly young)

My 7 year old son Lukas pictured here holding the Benny Award, drawn on whiskers and all, is getting ready for the World Cup. Looks like his first Rugby League match will be the Kiwi's v Tonga in Hamilton. GO THE KIWIS

Regards Kevin Greaves - Warriors Fan



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