

RLWC 2017

**Sir Peter
Leitch Club
Newsletter**

28th November 2017

#198



TO FINAL



Get behind the Kiwi Ferns as they face the Australian Jillsaroos, as the opener for the Australia v England men's final, this Saturday!

**Send your message of support to:
bhurndell@nzrl.co.nz**

Photos courtesy of NRL Photos



Kiwi Ferns Off To Fifth Consecutive World Cup Final

*By James Coman
Rugby League World
Cup 2017 Reporter*

NEW ZEALAND will take part in their fifth consecutive Rugby League Women's World Cup Final after overcoming England Women's 52 - 4 at Cronulla Stadium.

New Zealand overcame a poor start in the first half completing just 35 percent of their sets to record seven tries in the second half to blow England off the park and become the first team to qualify for the Final on Saturday.

A hat-trick to Honey Hireme and a double to Krystal Murray helped the Ferns cause, while forwards Teuila Fotu-Moala and Lilieta Maumau both notched up over 200 running meters throughout the match.

England started the match with their backs against the wall after they knocked the ball on from the kick off gifting New Zealand with a great early attacking chance.

And true to their class, the Kiwi Ferns wasted no time finding a way through England's defence, scoring in the second minute of the match after executing a slick backline move through the hands for Maitua Feterika, who crashed over the line for the opening points of the game.

Then just four minutes later, the Ferns found themselves in attacking range once again and after a full set on the English line, the three-time champions opted to run the ball on the fifth for Shontelle Woodman, who ran through a gaping hole in England's defence for their second try after just six minutes.

Following two unsuccessful conversions, the score line remained at 8-0 as things started to look ominous for the lacklustre English side.

But after completing just 35% of their sets in the opening 40-minutes, the Ferns gave the English time to slowly find their groove and work their way back into the match.

And in the 21st minute, England found the breakthrough after halfback, Kirsty Moroney, put a beautiful cross-field kick into the Ferns in goal, bouncing favourably for Tara-Jane Stanley who quickly got the ball down for England's first points.

England's try would be the last points of the first half as unforced errors slowed the momentum of both sides before the break for New Zealand to walk off the field with a 14-4 advantage.

Looking to rebuild their uncharacteristically low completion rate, the Ferns started the second half much the same as the first, scoring early points to immediately put England on the back foot.

Winger, Honey Hireme, crossed over for the first of her three tries of the day after just six minutes of the second half, finding enough space down the side-line to plant the ball down as New Zealand started to look dangerous.

Following Hireme's four-pointer, New Zealand started to show why they haven't missed a World Cup final since the inception of the tournament in 2000.

Improving their completion rate from 35 percent to 68 percent, the Ferns ran in seven tries in the second half thanks to a second-half hat-trick from Hireme to streak away with the match and secure a spot in their fifth consecutive Rugby League Women's World Cup.

Kiwi Ferns 52 (Feterika, Woodman, Murray 2, Hireme 3, Fotu-Moala, Peters, Maumau, Mariu tries; Nati 4 penalty goals) England 4

A Tribute to the Tongan Fans Who Came Out to Support Their Team



At the Tonga v England Game



A pleasure to meet my friend the Rt Hon 'Akilisi Pohiva, Prime Minister of Tonga.



My mate Alex from the UK getting in amongst the crowd at Mt Smart.



Proud Tongan fans wave their signs.jpeg



Me and the mate Ma'a Tongan coach Kristian Woolf good bloke.



The Tongan fans had some great signs.



With Epalahame Lauaki who played for the warriors 69 game, hullfc 56 games, Wigan Warriors 35 game, Bradford Bulls 33 games and played for the Kiwis and Tonga. His late brother Sione played for the All Blacks.



Great to catch up with Leeds Rhinos legend Kevin Sinfield MBE.



I was in the company of some rugby league greats in the Stacey Jones lounge from left; Gary Schofield, Ken Stirling and Lesley Vainikolo have all represented their countries with distinction.



Some awesome Tognan fans.



Warrior and Tonga player Tuimoala Lolohea's father.



Santa even paid us a visit.

Close But No Cigar

By David Kemeys

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



ITHOUGHT I had enjoyed a terrific time in Hamilton when Tonga upset the Kiwis, barring the result of course.

I'd never seen anything like it, I thought, but Saturday night at Mt Smart eclipsed it.

A sell-out crowd of 30,003 – though how those three got in when the capacity was 30,000 escapes me.

A sea of red and white, bands, national costumes, thousands of people with their faces painted, good natured banter, singing, chanting, prayer...

Okay, so the result did not quite go the way of the Tongans. But I happened to watch with members of the England Rugby League, and it is fair to say they were mightily impressed.

When I left the ground the thousands and thousands of Tongan fans were clapping and cheering the England supports, and wishing them well for the final against Australia.

England fans stood and watched the Tongan fans remain in their seats, and several filmed the experience, commenting, like me, they had never seen anything like it.

There is no doubt the Tongan journey was a highlight of a tournament that failed to fire with the early demise of a woeful Kiwis.

It is a bit sad that there has been a load of commentary and controversy about the manner of the loss, though I will concede I did comment at halftime that England had enjoyed a very easy run from the ref.

If it could not be the Kiwis, I was delighted to jump on the Tonga bandwagon, but now it can't be them either, it's go England.

Anyone but Australia, please.

The English league fans deserve their big day. They were magnificent at Mt Smart too, regularly making themselves heard, no mean feat with the number of Tongans in full voice.

All this talk about a rip-off rather tarnishes what was a magnificent effort from the men in red.

I was a bit surprised that Matt Cecchin did not seek a video replay after the Andrew Fifita no try. In fact I was more than surprised. It was dumb-founding really, on such a crucial occasion.

Having said that, I would have been just as amazed if Tonga got anything, because it was a loose carry for me.

It will be terrible if it drags on and descends into a "we were robbed" nightmare, because those thousands pouring out of Mt Smart on Saturday were happy to take it on the chin. That's sport.

The passion around their campaign, the outrageous scenes inside and outside grounds, and beating us, were incredible and will live long in my memory, and in the memory of those England fans who made the trip.

Bashing the ref won't change the result, but it will sully a magnificent effort.

Much as it pains me to admit it, Tonga blew a couple of golden opportunities, and that has nothing to do with the ref.

Saturday night's match was brilliant. Tonga looked, frankly, down and out, but the amazing rally at the death was fantastic to experience, even if it did not quite provide the fairytale ending.

That's football.

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Let's look forward to what Tonga and other Pacific nations will do next, because they were the story of the tournament.

And let's look forward to England doing the unthinkable and beating Australia.

Being a Kiwi I am a sucker for the underdog and it is 45 years since Great Britain were world champions, and England last appeared in a World Cup final when they hosted the 1995 event.

To the Kiwis, thanks for the memories. I will be a long time forgetting how dismal we were, and an even longer time forgiving it.

And to Tonga, thanks for the memories. The most fun I have ever had at league without a doubt.

It is no secret I am not a huge fan of Andrew Fifita.

So credit where it is due. His response in the wake of the controversy was dignified, professional, and courteous.

The big fella is adamant he scored, but ref Matt Cecchin did not go upstairs after the ball came free, ruling a knock-on.

"I was happy with it as a try," said Fifita.

"To be honest, it's a game of footy, it was very hurtful at the end, but it's done now. I have to move on. I've been on the other end of that in a grand final and got it on the day. This one hurts, but we've had our opportunities and we had to capitalise."

Fifita did go on to say he was delighted with the Tongan performance throughout the tournament.

"We're just proud Tongans for what we achieved."

Gary Schofield Shoots From The Hip

I had the great pleasure of meeting and chatting with a legend of Gt British league, and I say that rather than England, because Gary Schofield is a firm supporter of restoring Gt Britain.

"It was a huge honour to go on four Gt Britain tours. I love being English, and I will England, but Gt Britain had something special about it. Can you imagine British rugby doing away with the Lions?"

He did not hold back about the Kiwis. "I could not believe it when they played so poorly and then came out and talked about building a culture.

"What a load of nonsense. Every time you pull on an international jersey you should already know you are playing for pride, playing to represent the best your country has to offer, and know that you are following in the footsteps of everyone who has worn it before you."

An outstanding stand-off, Schofield also turned out for Balmain, and remembers it fondly.

"This game has given me enormous opportunities, and that culture thing I was talking about, when I went to Australia, I adopted the team culture from day one. There was none of this 'we don't do it like that in England,' or 'I'm a bit homesick'.

"You just got straight into it. You had to fit fast because that was the best way to be accepted."

We also talked about my having watched him play for Gt Britain one night many moons ago in Palmerston North.

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“We came out with a very young side, lots of guys did not want to tour because we also went to Papua New Guinea.

“We were supposed to get flogged but we won that night 11-10 in a game that’s gone down in history more for the fans being unwilling to return the ball when it got kicked into the crowd.”

You should check out Pete’s Facebook video of Schofield, who raves about how well the Butch treats him every time he sees him.

“He’s had us out on Waiheke, he’s spoken to all our tour groups, he’s a great man and one whose friendship I really value.”

https://www.facebook.com/pg/sirpeterleitch/videos/?ref=page_internal

And Then There Were Two

This is only the second time Australia and England have met in a World Cup final.

On the other hand, it is the third straight women’s Australia v New Zealand clash.

The last time the Kangaroos and England met was in 1995 when England - captained by former Warrior and now England assistant coach Denis Betts - lost 16-8.

Australia played Great Britain in the final in 1970, 1972, 1977 and 1982 (Australia winning all of them except 1970), but England as a stand alone have faced Australia only 15 times for 12 losses, two wins and draw.

It’s going to be a tough one for our friends from the north because the Australians smashed Fiji 54-6 to reach the final, barely getting out of a canter.

Wayne Bennett English side had it a lot tougher against Tonga.

The two sides have already met of course, Aussie winning 18-4 in the tournament opener, and they will be pretty much unbackable favourites.

The Kiwi Ferns and Australia both had four dominant wins on the way to the final.

The Jillaroos are the World Cup holders after their 22-12 victory over the Kiwi Ferns in 2013 in England, and they too are hot favourites.

The Jillaroos qualified after a 58-6 win over Canada, while the Kiwi Ferns were just as impressive, smashing England 52-4, winger Honey Hireme scoring four tries to take her tally for the tournament to 12.

Hireme is one of three players shortlisted for the Rugby League Women’s World Cup Player of the Tournament. She’s up against team-mate Teuila Fotu-Moala and Australian playmaker Ali Briggins.

The Golden Boot award for men is going to come from Cameron Smith (Australia), Jason Taumalolo (Tonga), Jermaine McGillvary (England) and Suliasi Vunivalu (Fiji).

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



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By John Coffey

The Case Of The Running Referee

Andrew Fifita of Tonga fends against Sam Burgess of England.
Photo www.photosport.nz

WHY DID Australian referee Matt Cecchin immediately rule out a possible match-winning and World Cup Final-qualifying try to Tonga prop Andrew Fifita and hastily blow full-time on England's 20-18 semi-final victory at Mount Smart Stadium last Saturday? Why did he not consult video referee, Englishman Ben Thaler? I have never been an advocate for rugby league match officials being required to attend post-game press conferences, but those are questions Cecchin needed to answer. Even if his decision was dead right.

After all, Cecchin had exposed his own vulnerability earlier in the game. He had indicated "no try" when Gareth Widdop rolled out of a tackle and over the goal-line for England's second try. Thaler over-ruled Cecchin and awarded his countryman the try. Had Cecchin gone upstairs for Fifita's last-minute charge through Elliott Whitehead's desperate attempted tackle to clarify how the ball spilled clear he would surely have been vindicated by Thaler ruling "no try". No way would Thaler have over-ruled that one!

Pardon the conspiracy theory, but England did seem to receive most of the 50/50 calls from Cecchin, who was also quick to rule out a try to Sika Manu after the Tongan outside backs had carried the ball almost the length of the field in the 14th minute. The resulting penalty for Michael Jennings passing from a tackle led directly to Widdop's try at the other end. Such are Cecchin's erratic tendencies. The previous day fellow Australian referee Gerard Sutton had his video mate working overtime as Australia walloped Fiji 54-6.

It was an incredible finish to arguably the most spectacular fixture in the 63-year World Cup history. The capacity crowd of 30,003 provided the most remarkable backdrop to a game at Mount Smart since the Warriors' 1995 debut against the Broncos. The atmosphere matched that of the much smaller but exquisitely ramshackle Carlaw Park a decade earlier. Surely Cecchin did not look at the sea of red surrounding him and fear a potential pitch invasion while Thaler was left to ponder his own fate if he ruled against Mother England!

Despite Tonga's surge from a 20-point deficit to score three converted tries between the 73rd and 78th minutes, England was overall the better team. For 70 minutes anyway. The Lions fell into error late in both halves, firstly by fumbling chances to increase a 12-0 halftime lead, and later by almost tossing it all away in the closing stages. The staunch English forwards had repulsed all the Tongan battering rams had thrown at them and the outside backs were outstanding on both sides of the ball. Fullback Widdop was a worthy Man of the Match.

Tonga committed too many errors and wasted scoring opportunities which had to be taken. Down on possession and forced to make many more tackles, the Mate Ma'a still mustered the energy and determination – spurred on by inspiring encouragement and singing from their supporters – to have England fearing a repeat of the 2013 semi-final at Wembley when Shaun Johnson's last-minute converted try snatched the game away. This time Cecchin did not prolong the agony and England will play its first final for 22 years on Saturday.

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Ironically, the World Cup will again be won and lost at Brisbane's Suncorp Stadium, where the Kiwis upset the Kangaroos 34-20 in 2008. The second of the 2008 Kiwis' comeback tries was scored by Jerome Ropati after the ball had been stripped out of Benji Marshall's hands by Australian tackler Anthony Laffranchi. On-field (English) referee Ashley Klein ruled "play on" and video referee Steve Ganson, another Englishman, awarded the try. Up in the grandstands thousands of "neutral" England fans cheered the Kiwis to victory.

We will never know how Tonga would have fared against Australia in the final. What we do know is the Mate Ma'a suffered a slump against Lebanon after beating the Kiwis. It would have been tough lifting again for the final, particularly as the draw gives the Kangaroos, who were already in Brisbane, an extra day to recover from their own much less punishing semi-final. England lost 18-4 loss to Australia in Melbourne a month ago but it was only 10-4 late in the game and both teams have improved considerably since that encounter.

No matter which nation is crowned 2017 World Cup champion on Saturday – and Australia is an odds-on favourite to retain the trophy -- there is no doubt Tonga has been the Team of the Tournament. There are challenges ahead for international officials to show some authority and maintain the momentum of the last few weeks. Meanwhile, Toa Samoa needs to lift itself to the heights achieved by Tonga and Fiji, while the Kiwis must regain the respect of their supporters by rebuilding their reputations, probably without Jason Taumalolo and company.

I had the honour of taking the ball out on Saturday night. It was a very humbling and exciting experience, so I had to share some photos with you!



When Butch Meets Butch

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)



DURING THE Rugby League World Cup Sir Peter Leitch hosted fans throughout the country, making their game-day experiences even more memorable when the Kiwis did well and lifting some of the gloom which accompanied their surprisingly early exit. Sir Peter told many stories and had many others told to him. One of his guests in Christchurch was West Coast and Kiwis legend Tony Coll, who, like Sir Peter, is widely known by the nickname of Butch. Coll's tale of his Test debut at the 1972 World Cup was one of the more notable.

Anthony Peter Coll was undoubtedly New Zealand's most committed, most consistent and most celebrated forward of the 1970s. It was a tough time for the Kiwis, with no long tours between 1971 and 1978 to develop players. Instead, they were tossed into a series of world championships and expected to step up from amateur club football to combat their very professional British and Australian opponents. Coll played 30 Tests from 1972 to 1982 and never took a backward step in any of them. He was our World Cup captain in 1977.

But Coll's debut was unusual, to say the least. It was the opening match of the 1972 World Cup tournament (then limited to Australia, Great Britain, France and New Zealand) at the vast Stade Municipal in Marseilles. The Kiwis were up against France, and up against a French referee. In those days teams were permitted only two reserves, who were mostly used as injury replacements. Coll was named as forward reserve and expected to spend most, if not all, of the game on the bench alongside back reserve Graeme Cooksley.

Also making his debut was Mita Mohi, a 33-year-old prop who had represented Canterbury as long ago as 1960 and should have been a Kiwi earlier in his career. Unfortunately, Mohi was too enthusiastic in his role of haka leader, so much so that he damaged a calf muscle. He gamely attempted to play through the pain but after about 10 minutes it was evident he would need to come off. Coll replaced Mohi and will forever have the distinction of making his entrance into international football because a team-mate was a casualty of the haka.

That alone would have been enough to make the occasion memorable. But Coll, who played many of his 58 matches for West Coast and 227 games for his Marist club at Greymouth's Wingham Park was also awed by the sheer size of the stadium – and the scarcity of spectators. At kick-off there were only a few thousand dotted around a facility capable of holding more than 40,000. At halftime Coll noticed the crowd was still growing. Curious, he thought. Back home they usually managed to get to Wingham Park in time for kick-off.

By fulltime the crowd had built further, probably to 20,748, the official attendance listed in World Cup history books. It was a commendable number for a city not known as a rugby league stronghold. But spectators were still pouring through the gates as the two teams left the field. Only then were the Kiwis told they had been curtain-raiser to a major soccer match in this football-mad area! By the time they had showered and changed the playing field and goal-posts had been transformed and the stadium was nearly full. Truly a debut to savour.

France won 20-9, despite both teams scoring three tries. Referee Jameau was obviously an admirer of Bernard Guilhem's goal-kicking skills and gave him the opportunities to kick four penalties from between 35 and 50 metres. France also dominated the scrums 23-12. Wings Phillip Orchard (two) and Mocky Brereton scored the Kiwis' tries but Brian Tracey could not land the difficult conversions. Tony Coll was to be an automatic selection for the Kiwis until he retired 10 years later. In 2011 he was elected to the Grey District Council.

Mita Mohi recovered to play three games against British clubs after the 1972 World Cup and retired a year later. He was a lovely guy, a non-drinker and non-smoker so keen on his footy that for two years he travelled to Christchurch from Blenheim to play after being transferred in his work. He later moved to Rotorua and began working with Maori youth in conjunction with Sir Howard Morrison. He was a member of the New Zealand Parole Board and a Justice of the Peace. His selfless deeds were recognised by many awards, including an MBE in the 1995 New Year's Honours. Sadly, Mita Mohi died on November 20 last year, aged 78.



By Shane Hurndell
Hawke's Bay Today
Sports Reporter

Fantastic Occasion... Tongans Stand Proud Again

Elliott Whitehead of England getting tackled.
Photo: www.photosport.nz

KNOCK ON or strip ... it doesn't matter, a decision was made, let's move on. And let's remember England's 20-18 semifinal win against Tonga at Auckland's Mount Smart Stadium on Saturday night for the fantastic occasion it was and not just for the controversy at the end. Yes Tongan enforcer Andrew Fifita may have been ripped off by referee Matt Gecchin but didn't the Tongan supporters do their nation proud again.

Just as they did in Hamilton a fortnight earlier when Tonga beat the Kiwis in pool play the Tongans dominated the 30,000plus crowd. A long-timer Red Badge security guard reckoned about 26,000 fans in the crowd would have been Tongan supporters and he would be close to spot on.

As I made the 30-minute walk to my car after the game all of the Tongan supporters I spoke to were gracious in defeat. They congratulated the England team's supporters and posed for photographs with them.

They agreed England were the better team for 72 minutes of the match and deserved to be taking on defending champions Australia in the final. For the first 72 minutes Tonga made too many errors, lacked discipline and were limited with their last play options.

In sharp contrast England made the most of their opportunities, defended well and were systematic until the 73rd minute mark. England's first 72 minutes were exactly what we come to expect from teams coached by Wayne Bennett.

If England can defend for 80 minutes against Australia like they did for the first 72 minutes against Tonga they could finish 14 points behind the Kangaroos in Brisbane this Saturday night. That will be as close as they will get if they play well.

We must remember Saturday night's Mount Smart encounter attracted the biggest crowd for a league fixture at the venue since the Warriors first season in 1995. The challenge for Warriors fans as well as Kiwis fans in the future is to match the level and quality of support produced by those Tongan fans.

That will definitely help both teams lift their standard of play to the levels we expect of them. It has been an awesome experience attending World Cup fixtures in Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington during the past month and watching the Kiwi Ferns dominate their World Cup fixtures during live coverage of their matches across the Tasman.

With their 52-4 semifinal win against England on Sunday the Kiwi Ferns proved they have the necessary ammunition to wrestle the world championship trophy off defending champions Australia in the curtainraiser to the men's final in Brisbane. They just have to improve their completion rates on attack and they will go close.

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It's no secret secondrower Teuila Fotu-Moala is the best forward in the women's game. Prop Lilieta Maumau and super sub Krystal Murray also have the potential to outplay their Aussie opponents in the battle of the engine rooms.

Centre Maitua Feterika has improved with her defensive reads in each game. Fullback Apii Nicholls-Pualau always returned with purpose against England and if she can do the same against the Jillaroos the Kiwis Ferns should have the necessary territory to give winger Honey Hireme plenty of opportunities to add to her tournament try tally of 11.

Scrumhalf Kimiora Nati who was again tenacious on defence against England wasn't as consistent with her goalkicking against England as she was earlier in the tournament. But there was a tricky wind and it's better to have an off-day in a one-sided semifinal than in what has the potential to be a cracker of a close final.

Waiting at the Airport for my flight to Brisbane for the RLWC2017 final I caught up with these two:



Great to catch up with David Fusitu'a with his minders as they head off to Tonga. Thanks for bringing the RLWC to life in NZ.



Just caught up with John Schuster former All Black and also played Rugby League for New Castle Knights and Halifax RLFC. He's one topman and now part of the coaching staff of Samoan rugby team.

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



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By Barry Ross

Atmosphere

Photo www.photosport.nz

WHAT A great atmosphere at Mt Smart Stadium on Saturday. Although the small band of English supporters in amongst the sea of red where probably overawed by the emotion of the Tongan supporters, they must have been impressed with the occasion. Watching on television, the emotion flooded through and the quicker the powers that be can arrange another meaningful Test match for the Tongans at the same venue, the better for Rugby League. It has already been announced that there will be a Pacific Test match double header at Campbelltown Stadium on 23 June next year. Campbelltown is about 50 kms south west of Sydney's centre and at the double header, Papua/New Guinea will take on Lebanon and then Tonga will clash with Samoa. This is a good decision but the league bosses should also work on bringing a Tongan Test back to Mt. Smart. Could there be a window somewhere next season, where England could meet the Tongans? What a re-match this would be.

With just the finals to be played, the World Cup has already been a success. To see the best crowd for 22 years, 30,003, turn up at Mt Smart was terrific, but the attendance has also been good at many other venues such as Port Moresby and Darwin. The Port Moresby fans are hungry for our game and regular home Tests for the Kumuls should be another priority.

Statistics show that Australia should have a comfortable win in the Mens Final in Brisbane this Saturday. In their five World Cup games to date, the Aussies have scored 204 points to their opponents 16. England has totalled just 125 in their five games to 58 against. Aussie coach Mal Meninga is playing down Wayne Bennett's claims that England have a little chance of success. But while I believe the Aussies will win easily, England do have a chance in a one-off game. In the opening match of the tournament in Melbourne on 27 October, England were very competitive for 70 minutes or so before losing 18-4 to the Kangaroos.

Today (Wednesday 29 November) at a lunch in Brisbane, the 2017 Golden Boot winner will be announced. The four candidates for this honour are Cameron Smith (Australia), Jason Taumalolo (Tonga), Jermaine McGillvary (England) and Suliasi Vunivalu (Fiji). All four have been stand-outs in the World Cup and all four are worthy winners. Now 34, Smith will play his 56th Test match in the final. He has played a record 358 club games, all with the Melbourne Storm, scoring 2,185 points (4th on the all-time list) and has 42 State of Origin games for Queensland on his CV. This season he captained the Melbourne Storm to the Grand Final win, captained Queensland to the State of Origin success and is now the skipper of the Kangaroos.

Only 24, Jason Taumalolo is already one of our game's biggest names and he still has plenty of success to come. This season he topped the running metres for all players with 5,350 which is 768 metres more than second placed Paul Gallen (Cronulla). The Cowboys rely heavily on his powerful running and this will also be the case in 2018. Jason has now played 139 first grade matches, scoring 27 tries.

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Talented English winger Jermaine McGilvary, 29, from the Huddersfield Giants, has had an outstanding World Cup. He has run for 1,024 metres and made 13 linebreaks, as well as collecting seven tries. Although he is 29, it would not surprise me if he receives an offer to play NRL football next season.

Fiji's Suliasi Vunivalu turned 22 on Monday (27 November). The Melbourne winger certainly knows the way to the tryline, scoring 46 tries in 47 games with the Storm. He picked up nine tries in the World Cup, ran for 821 metres, made nine linebreaks and 30 tackles.

The Women's World Cup will be an interesting battle. The Aussies won the last World Cup but apart from that setback, the New Zealand girls have had the wood on the Jillaroos over the years. In their four World Cup games, the Australian girls have scored 184 points to four, while the Kiwis have 164 points to four. The female player of the tournament will be one of three girls and will be known after the final. The three are 28 year old Australian, Ali Briggins, 24 year old New Zealander, Teuila Fotu-Moala and 36 year old New Zealander, Honey Hireme. Ali, turns 28 the day before the final on 1 December and plays for the Ipswich Brothers club in Queensland. She has been playing five eighth for the Australians in the World Cup, but is at home anywhere in the backline. Backrower Teuila turns 24 today (Wednesday 29 November) and is with the Otahuhu Leopards, while winger/centre Honey, is with Papakura in Auckland. Honey has 11 tries so far in the World Cup and is the tournament's top scorer with 44 points. Another Kiwi, 29 year old Kimiora Nati from the Manurewa Marlins has scored 42 points from 21 goals. Caitlin Moran, 21 from the North Newcastle club, is Australia's highest point scorer with 34 (3 tries, 11 goals). She has been playing halfback in the World Cup but can play in all other backline positions.

Being an Australian, I was delighted with Australia's convincing 10 wicket win in the first Ashes Test at Brisbane. The Test finished on Monday, 27 November and this was the date that Phil Hughes passed away three years ago. The Australian players wore black arm bands to honour Phil Hughes. The second Test, which is a day/nighter with a pink ball, begins this Saturday in Adelaide. The Australian Women's soccer team is on a high after their two-nil series win over China. The girls won the first match, 3-0, in Melbourne on 22 November and then at Geelong on Sunday, they won 5-1. Sam Kerr, 24, who is one of the top six women players in the world, scored two goals in each game. The win moves the Australian Matildas into the world's top five womens teams. Things were not so good for the Wallabies who suffered a record breaking 53-24 loss to Scotland on Saturday after having prop, Sekope Kepu, sent off two minutes before halftime. Murrayfield was certainly not a happy place for Australian hooker, Stephen Moore, who was playing his 129th and last Test match for his country.

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By Miles Davis

World Cup Aftermath

New Zealand's Danny Levi after the loss.
Photo www.photosport.nz

THE KIWIS miserable World Cup campaign has not only left its fans downcast but also a lot of questions that need to be answered.

Make no mistake about it, New Zealand Rugby League has a lot of work to do to revive its fortunes and regain the belief of its fans. The Warriors have come off yet another disappointing season and the Kiwis had arguably their worst World Cup ever. A lot of soul-searching needs to be done and steps taken to lift league and all aspects of the national game must be examined and held accountable.

Obviously a lot of focus will go on the coaches. Stephen Kearney at the Warriors looks to be in a stronger position than David Kidwell with the Kiwis. Kearney needs to be given more time having had just one season with the Warriors and with 2 years still left on his contract. However should the Warriors have another poor season in 2018 then the last year of his contract may be paid out and another coach installed.

Kidwell's situation is dire. His record of 3 wins in 11 games is poor enough but the disastrous results at the World Cup where his side lost to 2 second tier nations surely means his tenure as Kiwis coach is at an end. The modern era sees player power at an all-time high which makes managing a side even tougher. The number of high profile defections from the Kiwi squad prior to the World Cup indicates that Kidwell has struggled to get players onside and that badly damaged his campaign. Having said that he still had a squad of players that should have performed better but instead let their coach and themselves down. It would seem a foregone conclusion that Kidwell will not remain as Kiwis coach but stranger things have happened.

Another concern for the NZRL is last season's performance from the Warriors Juniors in the Holden Cup. In recent years they have been outstanding and provided many players to the NRL which has given more depth to the pool available to a Kiwi coach. Last season however they were woeful finishing bottom of the table by some distance, winning just 3 of 24 games. This may just be a blip but their dramatic drop in form will be a concern.

It is vitally important that the leadership of New Zealand Rugby League have a hard look at themselves and take responsibility for failings where appropriate. Too often those at the top point the finger and make others accountable without taking any blame themselves.

I asked former Warriors and Kiwis coach Brian McClennan how he saw the campaign and what changes did he feel were needed. Bluey is a man who is deeply invested in and cares about New Zealand rugby league. He was brought to tears by the Kiwis failure against Fiji. Not for himself but for all those who have worn the Kiwi jersey, for the fans and also for the players involved. He appreciated that they were going to cop some flak for the performance and felt for the young men out there that had tried hard to engineer a positive result but were found lacking.

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Bluey felt that the performances were the culmination of a couple of years of poor performances and results. These had resulted in fans having low expectations. Those low expectations were evident in fans' pessimistic view of the Kiwis chance of success at the tournament. Sadly those views turned out to be on the money.

McClennan feels that several things have to happen to resurrect the fortunes of New Zealand Rugby League. Firstly the Kiwis have to select the best players available. The defections prior to the tournament meant that a weakened side had to be picked. To make sure the best players pick New Zealand to play for there has to be a culture created that encourages that decision. This has been made harder by the amazing effort of the Tongans and the passion they engendered in their fans. Bluey feels it will be hard now for any of those players to choose another country over Tonga. He also feels that Samoa are not far away from replicating Tonga's success and that will further diminish the pool of players available for the Kiwis to pick from.

Whilst he feels it is unlikely that David Kidwell will continue as Kiwis coach. He does however feel that Adam Blair is the right man to continue as skipper. He feels that Blair's post-match statements were just a blip. He made them at an inappropriate time but he does not doubt his commitment to the black jersey and his ability to lead his side to a better future.

When I asked him about changes needed at NZRL he could not make a definitive comment but did say he felt that nowadays there were too many cooks and that perhaps was spoiling the rugby league broth rather than enhancing it.

Changes will undoubtedly be made but the NZRL face a huge challenge. Not only to lift performances but to raise them to such a level that it encourages fans to turn up and make the sort of noise that has endeared the Tongan faithful the rest of the rugby league world. To create an atmosphere that makes all up and coming players choose New Zealand over any other when it comes to international representation. A big ask indeed.



Kiwi Ferns v England
Photos courtesy of www.photosport.nz

In the Sir Peter Leitch Club

By Tony Feasey

WHILST SIR Peter was tied up on official duties in the RLWC2017 box - I had the pleasure of hosting some of the Mad Butcher Club members and guests in the Stacey Jones Lounge for the Tonga v England game. We had a small but intimate crowd who knew their rugby league and were relishing the battle that lay ahead. Despite Tonga's slow start they came back with a mighty finish and this had our guests out of their seats and cheering loudly. On one side of the room we had the "Pommie Bastards" who had been confident that the game was in the bag with only 10 minutes to go - but Mate Ma Tonga - lived up to their catch phrase of 'Die for Tonga' and gave it everything, and this had the opposite side of the room with the 'Ice Man' - Sir Michael Jones and Eroni Clarke cheering loudly. What a wonderful group of people - some legends of both rugby union and rugby league and some of our fantastic regulars - I hope you all enjoyed the game as much as I did... see the photos below.



The Pommie bastards showing off their winnings from the raffle.



3 Legends of rugby & rugby league - Gordon Smith, Mark Broadhurst & Sir Michael Jones.



Former all black & all round nice guy Eroni Clarke with lounge manager Bubs Campbell and another all round nice guy - Sir Michael Jones the ice man.



L To R - Gary Schofield, Ken Stirling & Leslie Vainikolo.



View of the ground from the mb club - a sea of red & white as Tonga comes to Mt smart.



The pommie bastards - before kick off happy & smiling, lost their smiles in the last 3 minutes.



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THESE FORMER Kiwis caught up for breakfast on Sunday morning no doubt to discuss the state of NZRL. Im told "that" try was discussed at length.

Fred Ah Kuoi, Dane O'Hara, Nolan Tupaea, Hugh McGahan, Graeme West, Kevin Tamati, James Leuluai and former kiwis coach Graham Lowe.



Congratulations to the Black Sticks on finishing second in the Hockey World League.

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