## RLWC 2017

# Sir Peter Leitch Club Movember 2017 Movember 2017











Photos courtesy of NRL Photos



### Who Will Wind Up Owning The Warriors?

By David Kemeys





O AUSSIE won, what's next?

Back to the saga of the sale of the Vodafone Warriors then, and apparently the Auckland Rugby League is preparing to make another bid.

The first one, with the Waipareira Trust, collapsed faster than the Kiwis World Cup chances.

But according to the Sunday Star-Times the ARL has not given up and is said to be looking for a new partner, preferably one assumes, one with more money than sense.

And there is said to be competition from a group with Kiwi connections, and which includes former NFL players, and which might team up with the ARL.

There was endless back and forth about how much the club was worth – with \$15million seeming to be most often quoted number – and Waipareira walked away, proving its investment board, in my humble opinion, has its head screwed on.

Excuse me, but wasn't Waipareira formed to provide a voice for urban Maori in Auckland? I love the club but league is a long way from health, education and social programmes.

So we are told the ARL is confident it has the expertise to turn around the Warriors.

That's as may be, but the deal falling through means the ARL loses first dibs - a highly technical business phrase I won't bother to explain - and others can now come sniffing.

ARL boss Cameron McGregor is pretty well-regarded, and has stayed silent on negotiations, but not on the need for the club to have closer ties with the ARL.

"The Warriors haven't had much to do with the ARL. Anyone buying the Warriors is going to have to form some sort of association. Our issue is that we're losing 500 of our best juniors every year to Australia. We've got to provide pathways and enough money to keep those kids here."

Yes, yes, just get us a team that can win would you.

And with all eyes on the World Cup, I suspect a few might have missed the news of an important, and I sincerely hope a critical, signing for the club.

Super experienced NRL coach Brian Smith has been made our general manager of football.

He has three decades of experience that includes 601 games as an NRL coach. Only Mr Grumpy Wayne Bennett and Tim Sheens can boast more.

The bad news is that Smith arrives after a stint as technical advisor to the Kiwis, adn we all know how well that worked.

But he will drive our football operations, look to get our systems right, and have a big role in standards and accountability.

We have all bayed to put those areas right, so let's hope we can at last make some progress. If Smith can't pull it off, it is hard to imagine who could.

"In Brian we're securing a person who has lived and breathed it for more than 600 NRL games at multiple clubs and obviously knows what is required," Warriors chief executive Cameron George.

It is not a sexy signing, but it's a smart one given we are pretty much at rock bottom.

#### Australia Did What We All Knew They Would

And so, when all said and done, it was what most of us predicted, a Kangaroos win.

But few thought England would run them that close, and it was a pretty enthralling contest, even given the lack of points.

To be fair, and I don't want to be given it is Aussie, they were in control for most of the game, and England had chances and blew them all.

The Kangaroos were pretty bloody impressive, only giving up 16 points in the tournament.

The crowd of 40,033 was pretty disappointing though.

Big Mal Meninga made it 13 straight wins, and became the first person to captain and coach the Kangaroos to World Cup glory.

And it was news for our Kiwi Ferns too, beaten by the Jillaroos 23-16 in what was actually a better game.

The loss brings to an end the careers of two stalwarts in Kiwi Ferns captain Laura Mariu and try-scoring hero Honey Hireme.

Rugby and league international, Hireme finished the series with 13 tries after a double in the final, while Mariu – also a dual international (league and softball) carved off 130 metres from 15 runs, and added 28 tackles.

That shows how badly they will be missed.

#### **Land Ahoy**

Among the strangest wins in the Rugby league World Cup was the news Jason Taumalolo and Tuimoala Lolohea got givne land in Tonga in honour of Mate Ma'a's rise.

Taumalolo - who chose to play for Tonga instead of the Kiwis, was given land in his mother's village. Tonga coach Kristian Woolf said Lolohea got the samegrant in his family village.

"I guess it was a reward for what they have done."

Not too many Tongans would have been upset to get a public holiday either, for that matter, and that's exactly what happened when the players were guests of honour in Nuku'alofa last week.

Team members were awarded medals of honour by

King Tupou VI.

#### **Smith Calls For More Tests**

Say what you like about Cameron Smith, the victorious Kangaroos skipper, but he s dead on about the game needing to play more internationals,.

He reckons that can only happen if we shorten the NRL season-which is about as likely-given the huge broadcast deals – as the Kiwis winning the World Cup.

But surely there has to bean appetite for more games, especially ones featuring "emerging" nations like Tonga.

Smith is the president of the Rugby League Players Association, so is wary of the commitment.

"For me, that's the simplest way to do it. But at the moment, we've got commitments to broadcasters.

"The revenue is coming through a broadcast deal, which means we have to play a certain amount of games. The players understand that, so we're committed. But everyone needs to sit down and be creative about our schedule."

He has a supporter in his coach Mal Meninga, who urged decision-makers to prioritise test footy.

"They've got to sit down, and look at a schedule not only for us and the tier-one, but also the tier-two nations."

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## Back To The Tough Old Days

**USTRALIA'S 6-0** victory over England in the 2017 Rugby League World Cup final at Brisbane last Saturday night was a throwback to the tough old rivalry between those two nations – and not just because it was the first time since 1977 the Kangaroos had won the trophy on home soil. Clearly, the Australians had delved back into history and, despite their hot favouritism, were motivated for a rugged encounter and satisfied that the margin was of no consequence.

The Seventies was a decade when four (too many) world championships were played, and they invariably developed into wars between the traditional Ashes rivals. In 1970 Australia won a brawling final 12-7 at Leeds. The 1972 final was drawn 10-10 in Lyon but Great Britain was overall winner on countback. There was a round-robin in 1975 with Australia nudging out England by just one point. Australia retained the title 13-12 at Sydney in 1977.

Saturday's success at Suncorp Stadium was Australia's eleventh triumph from 15 World Cups but was never going to be the runaway victory so many had expected. Wayne Bennett has moulded this England team into an accomplished outfit – just as he did as assistant to Stephen Kearney when the Kiwis won the 2008 final at the same venue – but the Australian defence was just that little more watertight than the equally staunch line of English tacklers.

James Graham typified the England resistance. Battered and cut in the first gang tackle of the game, he joined with acting captain Sam Burgess and hooker James Roby to absorb so much punishment while also taking the fight back to the Aussies. Burgess was standing in for injured skipper Sean O'Loughlin at loose forward and Roby topped the tackle counts with 56 while playing the entire 80 minutes in the absence of injured starting hooker Josh Hodgson.

Most pundits expected the Kangaroos to assume control after second-rower Boyd Cordner capitalised on repeat sets to brush past England stand-off Kevin Brown and score in the 15th minute. But Cameron Smith's conversion ended the scoring. Michael Morgan had a try ruled out when English video referee Ben Thaler found an obstruction after 46 minutes, and late in the game Josh Dugan saved an equalising try by ankle-tapping rival centre Kallum Watkins.

Had Watkins not been stopped he could have forced the final into golden point time. But the scoreline was a fair result. Australia was marginally the better team, with hooker Smith and halves Morgan and Cooper Cronk running the show and fullback Billy Slater an ever-present threat that England did well to contain. England also made more late errors as fatigue set in. Smith and Slater were the sole survivors of the 34-20 loss to the Kiwis in the 2008 decider.

Smith completed a season which cannot be bettered. He led Melbourne Storm to the NRL premiership, Queensland to State of Origin glory, Australia to the World Cup, and personally won the Dally M Medal, the international Golden Boot award and broke Darren Lockyer's record for most NRL appearances. Unbeaten Kangaroos coach Mal Meninga became the first to win World Cup finals as captain (10-6 over Great Britain at Wembley in 1992) and coach.

It was the last time the magic trio of Smith, Slater and Cronk will play together. Smith intends to carry on at all levels but Slater said at fulltime on Saturday he is likely to retire after the 2018 NRL season and hand the green and gold number one jersey to someone else for Australia's only Test match. Cronk, who is leaving the Storm to join the Sydney Roosters, was more definite when he announced his retirement from all representative football.

Meanwhile, wholehearted Kiwi Ferns captain Laura Mariu just fell short of regaining the women's World Cup in her farewell appearance. Playing in her fifth tournament since 2000, Mariu topped the New Zealand run metres with 130, just ahead of exciting fullback Apii Nicholls-Puatua, while diminutive hooker Krystal Rota completed 40 tackles on the big Jillaroos forwards. It was not quite enough, though, as Australia retained its title by 23-16.

Ferns left wing Honey Hireme confirmed her standing as the game's most prolific try-scorer with a double taking her tournament tally to 13. It would have been 15 had she not twice passed the ball to team-mates after crossing the try-line during the big semi-final win over England. Her tries on Saturday gave the Ferns a 12-10 lead but they could not extend that margin while holding positional and possession advantages for much of the first half.

The Jillaroos made their winning break with two quick tries, the clincher coming from hard-charging interchange forward Elianna Walton, who was born in Auckland. Stand-off half Raecene McGregor got the Ferns back to 16-22 with a 68th minute try but Australian scrum-half Caitlin Moran was to have the final say with her field goal just before fulltime. It was a hotly contested, entertaining match which should do much to promote women's rugby league.

#### Scorers:

Men: Australia 6 (Boyd Cordner try; Cameron Smith goal) beat England 0. Halftime: 6-0.

Women: Australia 23 (Isabelle Kelly 2, Caitlin Moran, Elianna Walton tries; Moran 3 goals; Moran field goal) beat New Zealand 16 (Honey Hireme 2, Raecene McGregor tries; Kimiora Nati 2 goals). Halftime: 12-10.







By Barry Ross

#### **Success**

HAT A great finish to the World Cup. Two excellent and very competitive finals, showing our game at its very best. The organisers of the World Cup should be very pleased as it was a big success. Sure there were a few hiccups but these do not take any gloss from the many positives to come from the tournament. I am one of many who believe that referee Matt Cecchin should have gone to the video ref after the last play of the England-Tonga semi final at Mt Smart. I have no doubt about Cecchin's integrity but that was such a huge call and all avenues should have been explored. Another thing the organisers should discuss for the next time, is the use of neutral referees wherever possible. On 4 November, Tonga met Samoa at Hamilton, with Australian, Ben Cummins, refereeing, while in Sydney on the same day, England played Lebanon, with Englishman, Ben Thaler in control. Not everyone was happy with Thaler's performance but with a neutral whistle blower there can be no thoughts of any bias. Why not swap the two refs with Cummins working in Sydney and Thaler in Hamilton. Like my thoughts on Cecchin, I have no doubts whatsoever about Thaler's ability to control the game as he sees it. I wasn't the only one that saw the obvious benefit if Thaler and Cummins had been moved. On this theme, could the organisers have used an English referee for the Women's final, instead of Australian, Adam Gee?

Congratulations to the Australian Jillaroos for their 23-16 win against New Zealand in the women's final. Despite the Australians opening the scoring with a try from Isabelle Kelly, the first 35 minutes belonged to New Zealand but five minutes before the break, Cailan Moran's converted try gave the Australian girls a 12-10 halftime lead which they never surrendered. The passion and desire in both teams was fantastic. With nine minutes to play and only six points separating the sides, the efforts of three Australian girls to reach and then stop Kiwi centre, Shontelle Woodman, from scoring in the corner was a memorable moment. These three were fullback Nakia Davis-Welsh, winger Chelsea Baker and prop Stephanie Hancock. The daughter of 1982 Kangaroo forward, Rohan Hancock from Queensland, Stephanie, now 35, retired after the final. This was her fourth World Cup.

The New Zealand girls never gave up. They were down by 12 points with 24 minutes to play before five eighth, Raecene McGregor, scored a converted try with 11 minutes remaining. Only 18, McGregor from Greenacre Tigers, made her international debut in this World Cup. She was one of New Zealand's best and as well as the late try, caught the eye with a accurate cut-out pass to send Honey Hireme over for the first of her two tries. Honey finished the tournament with 13 four pointers. It was Australia's second women's World Cup success, while New Zealand have won three.

The Australians, as expected, took out the men's title in front of 40,033 fans. But the one try, 6-0 scoreline illustrated just how well England played. In fact, who knows what would have happened if Australian centre, Josh Dugan was not able to make a desperate diving ankle tap on English centre, Kallum Watkins. With 16 minutes to play, Watkins was away with just one Australian player to draw and talented winger Jermaine McGillvary inside waiting for a pass.

But Dugan's ankle tap brought him down and the try scoring chance was lost. If Watkins had remained on his feet, he probably would have sent McGillvary in under the posts and tied the scores. But it wasn't to be and the Kangaroos were saved. The Australians did scramble well and Dugan's effort was typical of their first class defending. But England too, were great in this department. The Australians did have a good tournament and are worthy winners. Congratulations also to Cameron Smith for taking out the Golden Boot award.

With less than three weeks to go before Christmas, there is plenty happening in Australian Rugby League circles. Kangaroo coach, Mal Meninga, will help Ricky Stuart at Canberra next year as a Raiders consultant. Souths new coach, Anthony Seibold, will this week host 14 or so players from the Port Adelaide Australian Rules club. These men will join South Sydney in three training sessions at Redfern Oval from 4 to 7 December. While he was an assistant with the Storm in Melbourne, Seibold became friendly with Port Adelaide's Head of Football, Aaron Greaves, who was then with the Melbourne Demons Aussie Rules club. Former South Sydney coach, Michael Maguire, could take on a role with the NRL referees in 2018, or maybe work as an assistant with Brad Arthur at Parramatta.

The Australian Socceroos are in the same pool as France, Peru and Denmark for next year's World Cup in Russia. This is not an easy draw, as all three of these countries are in the world's top 12 sides. France is currently rated ninth, Peru 11th and Denmark 12th, while Australia is 39th. Australia opened their campaign at the Kazan Arena on Saturday 16 June 2018, at 8pm Sydney time. Then they meet Denmark on Thursday 21 June at 10pm Sydney time and their last pool game is against Peru at midnight Sydney time on Wednesday 27 June.

There is plenty of tension between the Australian and English cricket teams, in Adelaide, after the first day of the second Ashes Tests. After winning the toss, English captain, Joe Root, surprised many when he sent the Aussies in the bat. At the close of play at the end of day one, the gamble did not appear to be working as the Aussies were four for 209. But only time will tell as to whether Joe was right. While the English sledging was directed at all Aussie bats, it was full on to captain Steve Smith. The two appeared to swap barbs after every ball late in the day, during an over, when Smith was the non striking batsman and Anderson was fielding at a short mid on, near the bowler's stumps and right next to the pitch. Smith was just a metre or less away from Anderson, as he waited to back up his team-mate for any chance of a run. No doubt the Australians will return serve with interest when England bat.





**TOW THAT** it is all over, and the predictable outcome has been achieved, it is time to bestow some quite unofficial awards and observations upon the 2017 Rugby League World Cup.

Team of the tournament: Mate Ma'a Tonga, whose players and supporters roused the event from its slumber and filled Mount Smart Stadium for the first time in more than 20 years.

Best game: Tonga 24 Lebanon 22. The Christchurch quarter-final was a superbly contested encounter between a Tongan team playing below its best and an over-achieving Lebanon.

Most significant game: Tonga 28 New Zealand 22. It lived up to all pre-match expectations as a tier-two nation beat a tier-one nation for the first time, and in a most dramatic fashion.

Biggest disappointments: New Zealand and Samoa. Amid the uproar following the Kiwis' early exit it tended to be overlooked that Toa Samoa also performed well below its potential.

Photo finish: Had Tonga's last seven minutes in the 20-18 semi-final loss to England been scripted from a movie it would have been classified as fiction. Had to be seen to be believed.

Player of the tournament: Tonga loose forward Jason Taumalolo, who carried on where he left off in the NRL and by doing so almost carried his island of heritage into the Cup final.

Line runner: Australian left wing Valentine Holmes scored five tries against Samoa and backed up with six more against Fiji, capitalising on a wealth of overlaps provided for him.

Best solo try: French fullback Mark Kheirallah fielded an Australian grubber kick near his own goal-line, evaded an onrushing Billy Slater and dashed 90 metres to score under the bar.

Best coaching performance: Brad Fittler turned his Lebanon part-timers into a professional team in almost making the semi-finals and was rewarded with the NSW State of Origin job.

Angriest coach: Ricky Stuart, again. His 2008 post-final outburst cost him the Kangaroos job. Now as Canberra coach he has lost England hooker Josh Hodgson to injury for most of 2018.

Ricky, yet again: There were no direct quotes from the Canberra coach, only reports he was far from happy with the condition of some of his Samoan players when they returned home.

Tiki tourists: England played in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Melbourne again and Auckland on its way to the Cup final in Brisbane, yet had one day less to prepare than the Kangaroos.

Stay at homes: Australia hardly left the eastern seaboard, playing in Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney and Darwin before being given two weeks in Brisbane for its semi-final and final.

Smartest role switches: England coach Wayne Bennett moving Gareth Widdop from stand-off to fullback, and Lebanon coach Brad Fittler using hooker Robbie Farah at scrum-half.

Most passionate fans: Much has been written about the Tongan army, and all of it deserved. But let us not forget the fanatical support given Papua New Guinea in three home sell-outs.

Smartest referee: Gerard Sutton might have been timid in over-using his video referees but that policy got him the final over Matt Cecchin, who made one on-field decision too many.

Media – the good: Sky Sport provided outstanding coverage of both the men's and women's tournaments. Host broadcaster Channel Seven deserved the outstanding ratings it received.

Media – the bad: Radio Sport claiming radio rights were too costly while blowing the budget on yachting in Bermuda, rugby union in Europe, soccer in Peru. Next up: cricket at the Basin.

Media – the ugly: Several radio and print journalists were watching a scoreless soccer draw while Tonga was turning over the Kiwis – yet still wrote comment pieces about the league!

The Rest: At some early World Cups the winner played a combined Rest team from the other countries. Here is my 2017 Rest team: Gareth Widdop (Eng), Jermaine McGillvary (Eng), Kallum Watkins (Eng), Michael Jennings (Ton), Suliasi Vunivalu (Fiji), Mitchell Moses (Leb), Robbie Farah (Leb), James Graham (Eng), Apisau Koroisau (Fiji), Sio Siua Taukeiaho (Ton), Sam Burgess (Eng), Elliott Whitehead (Eng), Jason Taumalolo (Ton). Interchange: Andrew Fifita (Ton), Manu Ma'u (Ton), Joseph Tapine (NZ), James Roby (Eng).

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THERE ARE some people that say winning is everything and there is no place for losers. Utter bollocks. Those who ascribe to that view are the real losers. They lack the maturity to accept defeat and the insight to understand that life is full of defeats and it is how you fight the fight and deal with losses that display your true worth as a human being.

To have that understanding not only helps you get more out of life but also out of supporting your sports teams. There are times when your team gets beaten but you still feel a sense of pride and fulfilment at the final whistle. I had two of those experiences this weekend.

The first of those was England's performance in the Rugby League World Cup Final. There wouldn't have been many league fans who would have given the Poms a snowball's chance in hell of getting anywhere near the Kangaroos but they were in it until the final whistle. For me it was as good a game as I have seen in a while. A classic game of Old School rugby league. A physical battle with no quarter given and total commitment to the cause from both sides. England really took it to the Aussies with some outstanding personal performances. James Graham and Sam Burgess showed how their game has improved by playing in the NRL and took every opportunity to hit their opposition hard both on defence and attack (they certainly let Cooper Cronk know he had been in a game). Warrington's Chris Hill was also a beast and I wonder if he has caught the eye of Australian talent spotters and will be fronting up in the NRL anytime soon. I could just see him in a Warriors jersey. In the second row Elliot Whitehead, another with NRL experience, gave yet another strong performance in what has been a good World Cup for him.

The backline also had its fair share of star performers. Gareth Widdop seems to grow every time I see him and made a good fist of playing at full-back instead of his usual stand-off position. There was also the attacking threat on the right hand side of England's attack with Kallum Watkins and Jermaine McGillvary keeping the Aussie defence honest all day. In fact it was only a desperate finger-tip ankle-tap that felled Watkins with McGillvary inside him and the try-line beckoning.

The Australians deserved their title but as a passionate Pom I felt nothing but pride for the efforts of the team in white and could not have asked more of them. I am already looking forward to the Kiwis tour next year and hoping for the visitors to similarly lift their performance and give us a classic series.

Another losing performance over the weekend that gave me a lift was that of my beloved West Ham United. My mob have been woeful this season and are lucky to only be 19th out of 20 in the Premier League. One gutless performance after another and the worst defence in the league. Not much hope in my house then when my two youngest sons and I got up at 4.50am to watch us play away at Manchester City. A side that had won 12 games on the trot, are 8 points clear at the top of the table and have scored 44 goals in 14 games. Most pundits were expecting a comfortable 5 or 6 goal win for City. Instead what followed was another gutsy, committed display that so nearly resulted in the upset of the season.

In fact the Hammers took the lead just before half-time and although conceded an equaliser 12 minutes into the second spell managed to hold on till 8 minutes before full-time before the inevitable dagger in the heart. In fact there were a couple of chances late on to grab an equaliser but it was not to be.

Normally when you get beaten late on like that it hurts for days (Ok I know that some of us take supporting our teams too seriously) but the unanimous feeling in our house was that although

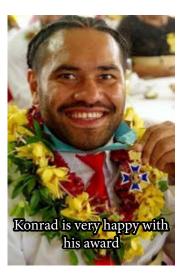
we were gutted at the nature of the loss we were uplifted by the nature of the performance. Especially that of 18 year old central defender (standing in for injured Kiwi skipper Winston Reid) Declan Rice who had a maturity well beyond his years and looks destined for a long career at the top level of the game.

As I said at the beginning, there will be those that would have viewed both those games as being disappointing losses with no value. I feel lucky that I have the outlook on life that occasionally there are is such a thing as a gallant defeat. I would have of course been ecstatic had both my teams been victorious and I would also have been an angry fan had both my teams not turned up and just laid down for the opposition. But the manner of their defeat has left me strangely uplifted and I can only hope that somehow the England cricket team will somehow find the cojones to make the despicable Australian cricket rabble work damned hard for a result. But I guess I will have to settle for 2 out of 3 which as Meatloaf said, ain't bad.

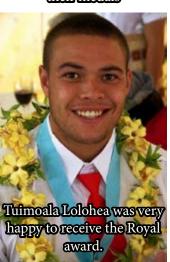
The Tongan team were recently honoured in Tonga with an award titled: Lord Chamberlain Most Illustrious Order of Queen Salote Commander Grade. Thanks to Konrad Hurrell, Ata Hingano and David Fusitu'a for sharing these pictures with us.















#### In Aussie



Caught up with Chris Heighington and Scott Taylor. Two really nice guys a credit to the game.



Check out my interview with Tongan player Antonio Kaufusi on my facebook page.



Congratulations to Cameron Smith named the rugby league player of the year.



England team staying at our hotel. All a credit to the English jersey.



Great catch up with the super coach the one and only Wayne Bennett on the job early at 6.30am.



Great to catch up with Sam Burgess. Bloody nice guy who has played 119 games for Rabbitohs plus England and Great Britain.



Great to catch up with these fantastic guys today Billy Slater, David Klemmer and Aaron Woods all bloody great guys.



Great to see some Kiwi Fans at the game early to support the Kiwi Ferns.



Great to see these two Rugby league greats; Garry Belcher and Wally Lewis.



Jamie Peacock MBE and myself. Check out my interview with him on my facebook page.



Just caught up with my mate from Greymouth, Smacker, proudly wearing his Vodafone warriors shirt and showing off his tats.



Managed to catch up with my mates (L-R) Alex Simmons, Alex's camera man, Wally Lewis, myself, Jamie Jones Buchana.

#### In Aussie



Sam Burgess' new fashion statement.



The Women's Rugby League World Cup.



The Men's Rugby League World Cup.

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While in Aussie I interviewed a whole bunch of league legends including Clint Newton, Wally Lewis, Antonio Kaufusi, Wayne Pearce, Jamie peacock and more. The Gordon Tallis interview has been viewed over 62,000 times!

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**ELL THAT'S** it, all done we are sat in the lounge at Brisbane waiting for the flight home, we are wiped out from our 5 week journey in Australia and New Zealand.

What a fantastic time we have had, it's an experience that will remain forever, we feel so lucky to have met so many fabulous people including the Legendary Sir Madbutcher, we can't ever forget the MMT even at the final the Tongans were still smiling and welcoming, Totally Awesome! Fantastic! Beautiful!

We love Rugby League, we love Engand RL we are so Proud and thrilled to have been part of an epic RLWC2017 the memories and new friends will remain special to us

and forever in our hearts.

Thanks for the champers Butch! touch of class as always, till next time, a big thumbs up and love from Gary & Paula







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