

VODAFONE



Sir Peter Leitch Club

AT MT SMART STADIUM, HOME OF THE MIGHTY VODAFONE WARRIORS

17th July 2018

Newsletter #226



Vodafone Warriors v Broncos



Vodafone Warriors defence ready.



Blake Green running for it.



Issac Luke scores.



Simon Mannering on the burst.



Roger Tuivasa-Sheck barges through.



A Bronco gets taken down.

Photos courtesy of www.photosport.nz

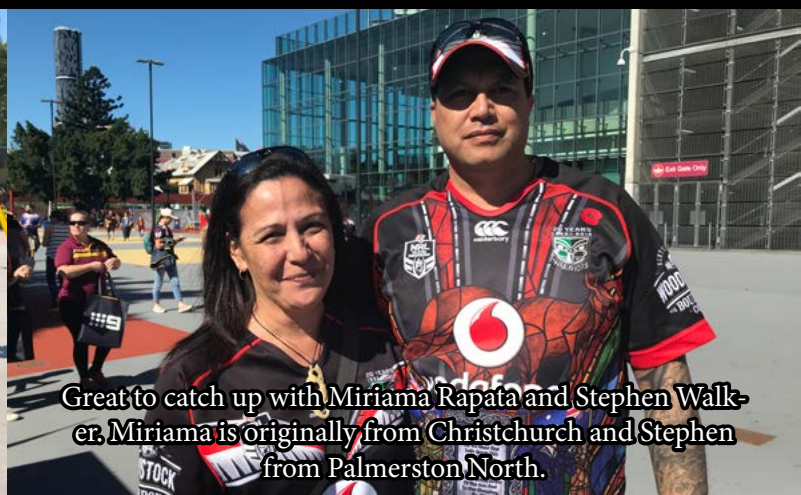


One thing I love about going to Aussie is being able to catch up with all the loyal Vodafone Warriors fans and members who live over there.

- Sir Peter



Noah, Jordan, Kane and Shane al from Christchurch



Great to catch up with Miriama Rapata and Stephen Walker. Miriama is originally from Christchurch and Stephen from Palmerston North.



Great to meet the Pitchers from little old Woodville Tararua now living in Brisbane.



I met these guys after the game they were pumped with the win.



Mata family from Griffin QLD.



Michael Simpson from Nelson & Kellie a Aussie with Daniel Rodeo also from Nelson. Both have been in Aussie for 11 years.



Brent Magill (from Auckland) with his son Noah a Vodafone Warriors fan at age 5 months.



Rob and Dylan from Logan. It was Dylan's birthday on the day.



Zeplen and his dad mark come to the captains run travelling 3 12 hours from Maclean NSW.



Shaun with all of his fans after the captains run on Saturday.



More Fantastic Fans in Aussie





Vodafone Warriors hosted our major sponsors in Brisbane for the Broncos game. We had sweepstake for the first try scorer. This was won by Mark Robinson from Autex one of our new owners and the first try scorer by Michelle Stanners wife of Russell the CEO of Vodafone. It's fair to say our sponsors were very happy with the WIN.

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



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OPEN MON-FRI 10AM-4PM + GAME DAYS



The Eight Is Within Touching Distance

By David Kemeys

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



CANBERRA FANS must have been over the moon when they beat the Cowboys 38-12, and everyone told them they were closing in on the eight, and that they could catch the Warriors, who were certain to lose in Brisbane.

But then we won, and Canberra had not closed the gap on us at all. They had though, put Brisbane in their sights.

The Green Machine might have been hailing a new hero in Michael Oldfield, who got three tries, but they are also sweating on the health of captain Jarrod Crocker, who suffered a knee injury. He is beyond big for their chances, and if they don't get him back they can kiss any chance of sneaking into the eight goodbye.

The race for the eight is alive after our upset, but I cannot see anyone who is not in the eight right now, making it.

Our win over Brisbane drops Bennett's boys into eighth, and they are now just four points ahead of Canberra and the Tigers.

Our 26-6 arse-kicking of the Broncos has them on 22 points – probably needing three wins to wrap up a spot.

Canberra and the Tigers are on 18 points. That means they would need to win five of their last seven. The Raiders flogged the Cowboys, and the Tigers fooled everyone by tipping over the Dragons 20-16.

Canberra has six games against top-eight teams to come. Not going to happen.

The Tigers face South Sydney twice and the Dragons again. Not going to happen.

But there is hope because Brisbane has Penrith and Cronulla, and hits the Roosters and Souths on the run into the finals. If they have a good run they could make the top four, but drop their bundle and they could get hunted down.

Our win and the Dragons' loss means the six teams occupying the places between second and seventh are separated by only two points.

Souths are clear on 28, Melbourne then the Dragons are on 26, the Roosters 24, Penrith and the Sharks are next, then us and Brisbane.

Running in seventh, we are looking good for our first finals appearance since 2011. Just take it where you can get it, and we will take those two points that is for sure.

Plenty said we were about to bottle it.

This side has undoubtedly frustrated us with losing performances that have left plenty to be desired, but they are a different mob than last year, when running up the white flag was pretty-much a default position.

It says a lot when we have come to expect our side to compete in every match, to win more than they lose, to play attractive footy, to win away from home...

How quickly we forget, and how far we have come.

Unbelievable

I missed it. I can't believe it.

I have had to rely on a replay.

Continued on next page...

Nipped down to see friends in Coromandel and the weather turned to shit, stranding people all over the peninsula, so I managed to be door handle deep in floodwater and wondering what on earth I was doing when the game was on.

That is just my luck, we produce a display like that and I manage to miss it.

After consecutive defeats for the first time this season, I have to confess I did not rate our chances in Brisbane, but the big Kiwi contingent in the crowd surely lifted the boys.

We desperately needed to put in a good showing, and we certainly did that, better than them for 80 minutes.

I tell you what though, knowing you are going to win makes watching a replay a lot more fun.

One for the refs here though, when Brisbane's winger Corey Oates couldn't score, spilling the ball as he dived for the corner, and then Adam Blair couldn't either, losing possession as he tried to force the ball, the man in yellow, Grant Atkins, got it spot on both times.

He was spot on too when he binned Chris Satae and Andrew McCollough, however galling it is to watch someone fire punches at one of our won and be unable to fire back.

Satae was binned for using his elbow on McCullough, who saw seeing yellow for retaliation.

Both were charged by the match review committee but are free to play this week.

Satae copped a grade one dangerous contact, McCullough a \$1200 fine and fellow Bronco Josh McGuire \$1800 for making contact with the ref.

Sign Up Luke

Issac Luke looks the player we thought we getting from day one.

No point going over old ground, but he failed to fire in his first years with us, but at the moment he is on fire.

No news out of Mt Smart though about where to next for Luke, who is off-contract at the end of the year.

Surely another year has to be the cards.

When he spun out of Milford's tackle to score he had already racked up 100metre from just five runs.

Coach Stephen Kearney is keen to re-sign Luke. "It's something we're working through with him at the moment. We'll see how it all pans out."

Kearney Stays Calm

Coach Stephen Kearney is getting a reputation for being a bit of a Wayne Bennett – never that happy, never that unhappy either.

He didn't blow up when we were awful against Penrith – just as Bennett has not blown up after his sides' loss to us.

Bennett says all sides have one of those games a year, and he's moving on.

Kearney says losing to the Panthers was not the end of the world, and beating the Broncos is just another step on the way to securing finals footy.

He must have had a sly smile though after listening all week to the bagging the boys took...chokers, all that stuff.

This has to be one of our best of the year, it was our first win at Suncorp in five years for goodness sake.

But Kearney already has only one thing on his mind – the visit of Melbourne this weekend.

"We've had that mentality all year, where we're confident if we prepare well we'll give ourselves an opportunity," Kearney said.

The way his forwards played must have pleased him though. We have failed to live with sides this year, but we were really good up front at the weekend.

I was especially pleased for centre Solomone Kata, because he had to offer more for mine, and has lifted his game considerably, and for Peta Hiku, who ran for 180m after being shifted to the wing, a really good response to his shocker against the Panthers.





Maumalo back, Gavet milestone against Storm

by Richard Becht

WING KEN Maumalo returns from injury and prop James Gavet ends a long wait for his 50th NRL appearance in the Vodafone Warriors' 19th-round NRL clash against Melbourne at Mount Smart Stadium on Sunday (4.00pm kick-off).

Rookie Kiwi international Maumalo is back from a knee complaint after missing last Sunday's 26-6 win over Brisbane while Gavet reaches his milestone almost six years since making his first-grade debut late in the 2012 season.

With the Michael Moore Trophy once again at stake, the 42nd match against the Storm will climax the club's busiest game day of the year when it stages 'The Great Vodafone Warriors Charity Day'.

Maumalo's reappearance on the left wing is the only change to the starting line-up used in the outstanding victory over the Broncos. Peta Hiku, switched to the left flank after originally being listed at right centre at Suncorp Stadium, has been moved to the interchange to make way for Maumalo. That sees Anthony Gelling out of the 17 but retained on the extended bench.

Another change among the extra players is the inclusion of front rower Bunty Afoa, who has recovered from the elbow injury which forced him off the field against Cronulla on June 29.

Gavet has had a significantly disrupted and prolonged journey to the 50-game mark in a career which has involved stints at four clubs.

His debut for the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs against Brisbane in round 23 in 2012 was his only NRL appearance in two seasons with the Bulldogs. Injury hindered him in 2013.

A one-year stay with Wests Tigers delivered 12 appearances in 2014 before he moved to the Broncos. After playing in the opening round of the 2015 sea-

son his campaign was cruelly ended by an ACL knee injury in a training session.

Released from the last season of his contract with Brisbane, the former Vodafone Junior Warrior returned to Auckland, first signed on a trial basis by the Vodafone Warriors and then picked up for the 2016 season.

After making his club debut in round one he finished the year with 10 matches and added 13 last year. Sunday's battle against the Storm will be his 13th this year.

The Vodafone Warriors sit seventh on the ladder with an 11-6 win-loss record, one of four teams on 24 points just two behind second-placed Melbourne.

The Vodafone Warriors have beaten the Storm 16 times with two draws and 23 losses. In games at Mount Smart Stadium, Melbourne is 10-9 ahead. The Vodafone Warriors' last win against the Storm was a memorable 28-14 success in Auckland in 2015 with Melbourne winning the last five encounters between the two sides.

Vodafone Warriors

- 1 Roger Tuivasa-Sheck
- 2 David Fusitu'a
- 3 Gerard Beale
- 4 Solomone Kata
- 5 Ken Maumalo
- 6 Blake Green
- 7 Shaun Johnson
- 8 James Gavet
- 9 Issac Luke
- 10 Agnatius Paasi
- 11 Isaiah Papali'i
- 12 Simon Mannering
- 13 Adam Blair

- Interchange:
- 14 Jazz Tevaga
 - 15 Chris Satae
 - 16 Joseph Vuna
 - 17 Peta Hiku
 - 18 Mason Lino
 - 20 Karl Lawton
 - 21 Bunty Afoa
 - 22 Anthony Gelling



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Charity Day And 'Be The Band' In Focus

THE SEARCH for the Vodafone Warriors' first resident house band kicks off on Sunday with 'Goat' featuring on the bill at 'The Great Vodafone Warriors Charity Day' at Mount Smart Stadium.

After launching the 'Be the Band' quest earlier this month, the list of entrants has been whittled down to three finalists.

As rugby league's answer to 'Battle of the Bands', 'Be the Band' is seeking to turn an undiscovered New Zealand band into a tour de force at our house on game days.

'Goat' has been drawn to set the tone first, belting out a set in the Entertainment Precinct between 2.30pm-3.30pm on Sunday. Look out for the five-piece band.

Another band will perform before the round 22 home game against Newcastle on Friday, August 10 with the last of the finalists on stage at the round 24 encounter with Penrith on Friday, August 31.

After the three finalists have performed, the club's official house band will be selected, earning the opportunity to play on the field at halftime in the Vodafone Warriors' last regular season home game of the year against the Canberra Raiders on Friday, August 31.

This Sunday will be the busiest game day programme of the season so far with a range of activities and attractions built around 'The Great Vodafone Warriors Charity Day' alongside a football triple header featuring the club's NRL, Intrust Super Premiership and Jersey Flegg Cup teams in action.

Members and fans attending the occasion will all be helping the Vodafone Warriors in their bid to fill the stadium. If it is sold out, the club will donate \$50,000 to be shared among the day's beneficiaries Shine, KidsCan, Paralympics New Zealand and Ronald McDonald House Charities. Sponsor Mitre 10 has also made a pledge on the basis of the attendance numbers while other sponsors and stakeholders are contributing in various ways.

Vodafone Warriors players and football staff have also climbed aboard by donating items and experiences which are being auctioned off or used in a monster game day raffle.

Suzuki has put up a Suzuki Vitara for a DROPIT auction at halftime in the main game while DROPIT will also auction a Vodafone Warriors fan pack during the break.

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The well-established Woodstock 'Kick for Cash' will be another halftime attraction.

Vodafone Warriors members and fans can keep topping up the fund-raising drive by using the Vodafone text-a-donation service. By texting WARRIORS to 4483 you'll be providing \$3.00 to the fund-raising campaign (you can text as many times as you like).

Dominating the day will be the Vodafone Warriors' battle with traditional rival Melbourne with the Michael Moore Trophy – held by the Storm – on the line once again.

GAME DAY DETAILS | v MELBOURNE STORM, SUNDAY, JULY 22

Match day theme | 'The Great Vodafone Warriors Charity Day'

11.30am | Gates open

11.45am | Jersey Flegg Cup | Vodafone Junior Warriors v Sydney Roosters

1.45pm | ISP | Vodafone Warriors v Wyong Roos

4.05pm | NRL | Vodafone Warriors v Melbourne Storm

Main features:

- 'Be the Band' | 'Goat' performing in the Entertainment Precinct 2.30pm-3.30pm.
- DROPIT auction for a Suzuki Vitara at halftime in the NRL game (valued at \$34,790 plus on road costs).
- DROPIT auction of a Vodafone Warriors fan pack at halftime in the NRL game (four tickets to Captains' Club for Newcastle home game on August 10, signed Vodafone Warriors jersey, one night's accommodation at SKYCITY in two twin rooms, \$250 food and beverage package, watch team's final training session and behind-the-scenes tour of Mount Smart Stadium).
- Look out for our regular Woodstock 'Kick for Cash' competition, which has recently produced a couple of winners.
- Presentation of the Michael Moore Trophy to the winning team after the NRL match.
- Corporate Lounge auctions in support of 'The Great Vodafone Warriors Charity Day' | Items include:
 - o Round of golf for two with Stacey Jones and Shaun Johnson.
 - o Signed and framed Simon Mannering jersey commemorating his feat in setting record for most appearances for the Vodafone Warriors.
 - o Kiwi captain Simon Mannering's signed jersey from the 2013 Rugby League World Cup.
 - o Gucci watch.
- Corporate Lounge raffle in support of 'The Great Vodafone Warriors Charity Day' | Items include:
 - o Dinner for two at SKYCITY with Roger Tuivasa-Sheck and Agnatius Paasi.
 - o Round of golf for two with Andrew McFadden and Blake Ayshford.
 - o Rehab game day experience for two for home game against Newcastle on August 10 including training with the rehab group, watching the game with the players and a food and beverage package.
 - o Training day experience for two including being water boy for a field session, lunch with the players and watching a gym session.
- Game day spot prizes in support of 'The Great Vodafone Warriors Charity Day' including:
 - o Panasonic Viera 55-inch LED television.
 - o Five \$100 Canterbury of New Zealand vouchers.
 - o Five SKYCITY vouchers.
 - o Four family passes to Rainbow's End and Kelly Tarlton's Sea Life Aquarium.
 - o Three Mitre 10 gift cards.

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- o Canterbury of New Zealand ultimate Vodafone Warriors kit bag.
- Monster game day raffle in support of 'The Great Vodafone Warriors Charity Day' (\$5.00 a ticket or three for \$10.00):
 - o Air New Zealand flights and accommodation including VIP experience for Vodafone Warriors' match against Canterbury-Bankstown in Sydney on August 19.
 - o Vodafone Warriors 2013 Heritage jersey (donated by Sir Peter Leitch).
 - o Signed Luke Brooks boot worn in Wests Tigers' win over Melbourne in SKYCITY Auckland NRL Double Header at Mount Smart Stadium on April 7.
 - o TNT remote control truck.
 - o Vodafone Junior Warriors 2013 NYC jersey (donated by Sir Peter Leitch).
 - o Signed Melbourne Storm jersey from SKYCITY Auckland NRL Double Header match against Wests Tigers at Mount Smart Stadium on April 7.
 - o Signed and framed Adam Blair boot.
 - o KidsCan 'The Starke' European technology bicycle.
- ACC Big Warm-Up and mini mod footy games in the build-up to the big game (Two games on simultaneously | Under-7s: Te Puke Tigers v Glenfield Greyhounds, Point Chevalier Pirates v Ngongotaha Chiefs).
- Keep your eyes out for Tiki.
- The Canterbury of New Zealand T-Shirt Cannon will be in business as usual.
- Vodafone Stadium Live app is a great in-game tool. Download it.
- Also play Grandstand Millionaire. Download Vodafone's Stadium Live app to play. Your challenge is to guess the try-scorers in exact order in the Vodafone Warriors v Melbourne Storm game.
- Free trains to and from Mount Smart Stadium for fans holding membership cards or pre-purchased tickets (remember to hold onto your ticket for the return trip after the game).
- No cheerleaders.

Entertainment Precinct:

- Make the most of the revamped Members' Clubrooms. Great place to meet before the game and afterwards. Members-only venue including MC and post-match interviews.
- The Woodstock Bar is also a big game day attraction. It's open to all fans every home game. Everyone is welcome so try it out.
- The food alley is a major game day attraction with an array of gourmet options in an area set off by an Astro-turf surface, fairy lights and places to hang out.
- The merchandise van will be on hand again. Look out for Vodafone Warriors Ugg Boots going on sale.
- Drums of the Pacific will be performing at Gate B and Gate C before the match and from the stage in the Entertainment Precinct throughout the contest.
- 2XU kicking challenge | Spot prizes for kicking a ball into the back of a ute.
- The Suzuki Swift Road Warrior will be on show. Make sure you register to go in the draw for your chance to win this great set of wheels at the end of the season.

For the kids:

- Harvey Norman Community Warriors Fun Zone:
 - o JP the Clown and juggler roaming.
 - o Smile Dealers and face painters.
 - o Ronald McDonald House | Giant Jenga, Connect Four and Bean Bag Toss.
 - o Shine | Canterbury of New Zealand tackle bag.
 - o KidsCan | Noughts and Crosses.
 - o Paralympics | Mini open day (long jump test, high jump test, ball throwing test).
 - o Carnival activities | Cup and saucer ride, Ferris wheel, climbing wall, cars, jumping castle.

[Buy Tickets](#) | [Click Here](#)

Origin Rules Again – But Billy Didn't

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)



DARREN LOCKYER must have experienced awkward flashbacks as he shared in the controversial decision to crown Billy Slater Man of the Series after Queensland gained a face-saving 18-12 victory in State of Origin III at Brisbane. NSW had already secured the shield through its wins in Melbourne and Sydney, though new coach Brad Fittler and his team were deeply disappointed they could not complete a rare clean sweep.

It was a pulsating encounter, proving there is no such thing as a dead rubber in Origin. The Queenslanders dominated the first half, yet fell behind at 8-12 when NSW was a man short. Eventually the NSW defence faltered and two Queensland tries clinched the result. NSW five-eighth James Maloney will long ponder why his team's 12 points were scored while he was in the sin-bin and Queensland's 18 while he was on the field!

But the biggest shock came during the presentations. Naming Slater as Man of the Match was debatable when halfbacks Daly Cherry-Evans and Cameron Munster had arguably more influence in achieving the result. But choosing Slater as recipient of the Wally Lewis Medal for Man of the Series was incomprehensible. Never before had it been presented to a player from the losing state and even Slater himself looked shocked.

Awards such as this and the Clive Churchill Medal for NRL grand final Man of the Match are usually decided by the Australian selectors. Lockyer and deposed NSW coach Laurie Daley – who recently replaced Bob McCarthy on the panel – did the job in company with Kangaroos coach Mal Meninga. A 4-3-2-1 points system was used. Slater obviously scored highly in his two games, while his NSW rivals were evenly splitting their votes.

I have the greatest respect for Lockyer as a person and a great footballer. But surely he must have recalled the embarrassment he felt when named Man of the Match after the Kiwis had rolled the Kangaroos 34-20 in the 2008 World Cup final, also at Suncorp Stadium. At least that howler was not the work of the Australian selectors, but of a four-man panel nominated by semi-finalists Australia, New Zealand, England and Fiji.

However, it does explain why overseas players are overlooked for the Clive Churchill Medal. Grand finals precede the naming of Kangaroos teams for post-season Tests and the Australian selectors are concentrating on that. So Brett Kimmorley was Man of the Match in 1999 when every Melbourne Storm player knew Tawera Nikau was most responsible for their victory. England's Sam Burgess (2014) has been the sole exception.

Slater deserved to go out a hero, captaining Queensland for the first time in his 31st Origin. But he did not even play at Melbourne when rival fullback James Tedesco was Man of the Match. Despite Slater's efforts in Sydney, NSW clinched the series and its captain Boyd Cordner received the individual award. Any of Cordner, Tedesco, Tom Trbojevic or Damien Cook would have been worthy Wally Lewis medallists.

Since three-match series started in 1982 (after two one-off games) there have been only seven clean sweeps. Queensland's win proves there will still be competitive contests in the future despite the retirements of Cameron Smith, Jonathan Thurston, Cooper Cronk and now Slater. Under new coach Fittler, NSW used 13 debutants over the series and they now face the prospect of approaching the 2019 series as last-start losers.

In the days leading up to Origin III even some of the staunchest supporters were expressing doubts about retaining its status as "Australia's greatest sporting rivalry". Veteran scribe Buzz Rothfield proposed each state be permitted a wildcard, nominating Jason Taumalolo for Queensland and Burgess for NSW. By doing that Rothfield ignored the loyalty Taumalolo and Burgess have to Tonga and England, respectively.

Not that the states, especially Queensland, have worried too much about eligibility rules in the past. Kiwis prop Craig Smith and Kumuls half Adrian Lam wore Maroon and "Aussie Jim" Tamou became a Blue. It's not State of Birth: current Queensland forwards Josh Papalii and Felise Kaufusi were born in Auckland and it rankles New South Welshmen that Greg Inglis was actually born in Kempsey on their side of the border.

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Nor is it parentage. Jonathan Thurston, Kalyn Ponga and many others have New Zealand heritage but chose Origin. It's supposed to be about where you play your first senior grade football. Inevitably, the definition of "senior grade" has been hotly disputed over the years. Despite a dip in television ratings for the last two games, Origin still reigns with a total of about 220,000 fans all but filling the three huge stadiums.

It annoys us the Aussies place Origin above international football despite their eyes having been partially opened during the 2017 World Cup and recent Pacific Tests. We should not forget, however, that Origin grew out of NSW's dominance under the old resident rules at a time when neither the Kiwis nor Lions could challenge the Kangaroos. Origin has become their Golden Rule – whoever produces the gold makes the rules.

But even the staunchest Origin backers must be increasingly concerned – especially with the simultaneous retirements of so many stars – that it will not always showcase "the best of the best". Taumalolo and Burgess represent the tip of an iceberg. As the percentage of NRL players with dual eligibility rises so will the number of top-liners who need to be "persuaded", at \$30,000 per match, if Origin standards are to be maintained.

Want to do a tour of Mt Smart this Sunday?

If you want to do a tour of Mt Smart Stadium go to the back of the Western stand and go to the Southern end. On the right hand side there is a lift. Tell security that you doing the tour of the Stadium and then take the lift to the Stacey Jones lounge and ask for Sir Peter. The tour will kick off at 2-30pm all welcome!

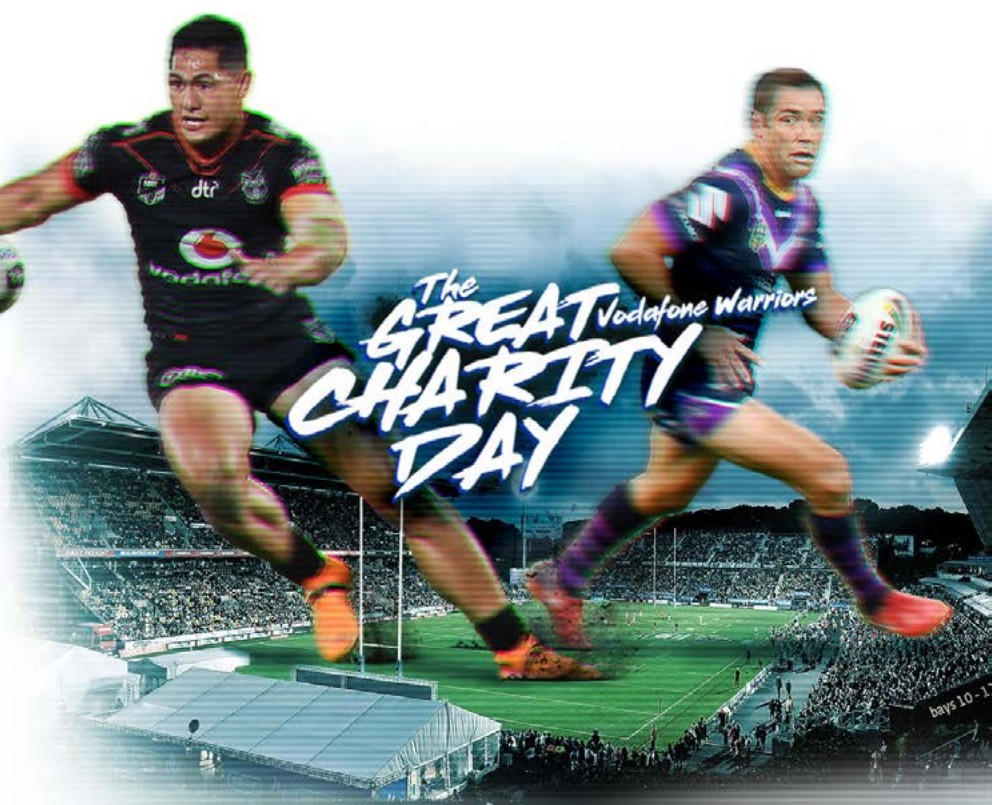


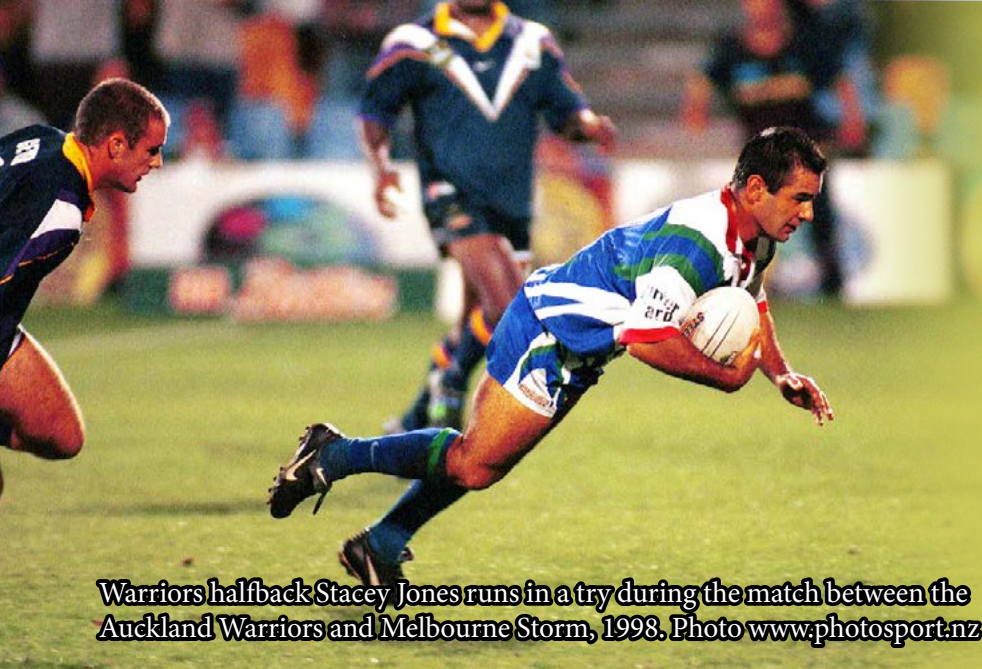
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PLAY YOUR PART AT MT SMART
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THIS SUNDAY





By Barry Ross

Memories

Warriors halfback Stacey Jones runs in a try during the match between the Auckland Warriors and Melbourne Storm, 1998. Photo www.photosport.nz

THIS SUNDAY afternoon is the 20th anniversary of the first Warriors-Storm game at Mt. Smart. The Storm entered the competition in 1998 and they began brilliantly, winning their first four games. They beat the Illawarra Steelers 14-12 at Wollongong on 14 March 1998, Western Suburbs 26-16 at Campbelltown on 22 March, Cronulla 26-18 at Shark Park on 28 March and North Sydney 24-16 at Olympic Park in Melbourne on 3 April. It all came unstuck when they flew across the Tasman for the game at Ericsson, as Mt. Smart was known in those days, on Friday night 10 April. Before a crowd of 14,500, the Auckland Warriors took the honours 16-12. Auckland 16 (Sean Hoppe, Stacey Jones, Tony Tatupu tries; Matthew Ridge 2 goals) beat Melbourne 12 (Marcus Bai, Paul Bell tries; Craig Smith 2 goals). The Warriors were known as Auckland in the early seasons.

It is interesting to look at both teams and coaches. The Auckland starting side from fullback was Matthew Ridge (captain), Sean Hoppe, Nigel Vagana, Kevin Iro, Lee Oudenryn, Gene Ngamu, Stacey Jones, Joe Vagana, Syd Eru, Brady Malam, Tony Tatupu, Stephen Kearney, Logan Swann with the bench Shane Endacott, Tea Ropati, Jerry Seuseu, Tyran Smith. The coach was Frank Endacott. Melbourne were represented by Matt Geyer, Craig Smith, Paul Bell, John Carlaw, Marcus Bai, Scott Hill, Brett Kimmorley, Glenn Lazarus (captain), Richard Swain, Rodney Howe, Ben Roarty, Robbie Kearns, Tawera Nikau with the bench Paul Marquet, Russell Bawden, Ben Anderson, Wayne Evans. The coach was Chris Anderson. Bill Harrigan was the referee. Current Warriors coach, Stephen Kearney was playing the third of his four seasons with the Warriors. Born on 11 June 1972, Stephen began his 264 first grade games career with Western Suburbs in 1992. After three years with Wests, he joined the Warriors for four seasons and finished with six years in Melbourne with the Storm.

In 1998, there were 20 teams in the competition. Auckland finished 15th, winning nine of the 24 games, while the Storm came in third with 17 wins and a draw from their 24 games. Ivan Cleary, who was then with Sydney City (the Roosters), was the season's leading point scorer with 248. Altogether the two clubs have played 41 matches, with the Storm winning 23, the Warriors 16 and two draws, both in Melbourne. In Auckland they have met in 19 games and things are about even. Melbourne have 10 wins and the Warriors nine, at Mt. Smart.

From the 20 teams in the 1998 competition, North Sydney and Adelaide were not part of the 1999 competition, while St. George combined with Illawarra to form St. George/Illawarra in 1999. Balmain and Wests merged for the 2000 Premiership.

After the Warriors impressive 26-6 win over the Broncos in Brisbane on Sunday afternoon, the stage is set for an entertaining game on Sunday. The New Zealanders certainly turned things around from the previous week. They made seven line breaks to the Broncos one, ran for 610 post contact metres compared to 539 and made just eight ineffective tackles to the Broncos 28. Hard, straight running will cause ineffective tackling.

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Statistics don't lie is an old adage and it is generally true. But in the Cronulla-Penrith clash at Penrith Park on Friday night, most of the stats showed the Panthers should have taken the two competition points. The match was in doubt until Matt Moylan put Valentine Holmes in for his second try five minutes from time. An examination of most stats from the NRL website illustrates how the Panthers had the better of play. They had 52 percent of possession, had the ball two minutes 12 seconds more than Cronulla, ran for 1,881 metres to 1,533, ran for 639 post contact metres to 515, made two more line breaks and 11 more tackle breaks more than the Sharks, had an average set distance of 50.8 metres to Cronulla's 42.6, made 221 metres in kick returns compared to 131, made 23 offloads compared to 12, missed less tackles than Cronulla, made 18 less ineffective tackles than their opponents and had an average play-the ball speed of 3.22 seconds to Cronulla's 3.66. The 24-12 win was important to Sharks, after their bye round and they are now in fifth position on the table. Returning to his old home ground, Moylan had an excellent game and scored his first try for his new club. He made one linebreak and 10 tackle breaks. This season he has made 14 try assists in his 15 games. Altogether, since making his first grade debut on 29 April 2013 for Penrith against Parramatta, the 27 year old Moylan has played 104 first grade games, scoring 27 tries.

Two Australian sporting legends made important announcements recently. Wallaby backrower, George Smith AM, farewelled his Australian fans at Brisbane last Friday night before the Queensland Reds-Sunwolves Super Rugby Union match. Smith played with the Reds this year but missed Friday night's game because of a leg injury. The durable Smith turned 38 on Saturday but will continue his remarkable career with the Bristol Bears in the coming northern hemisphere season. He has probably played the last of his 19 season of top class football in Australia, but who knows? Smith is the fifth most capped Wallaby with 111 Tests (9 tries), while he has also played 164 Super Rugby games, mostly with the Brumbies. He has also played club rugby in France with Toulon, Lyon and Stade Francais, in Japan with Suntory and in England with Wasps. Born on Sydney's northern beaches region, Smith has also played six games with the English Barbarians.

Australia Netball captain, Laura Geitz, has announced that she is stepping down from International competition. Born on 4 November 1987, the 30 year old defender had her first child last year, a son Barney. She played 71 Tests and has been Australian captain since 2013. Laura won Gold Medals at two World Cups - Singapore in 2011 and Australia in 2015 as captain. She also won Gold at the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games and two Commonwealth Games Silver Medals - at Delhi in 2010 and on the Gold Coast, earlier this year. In 2015, Laura captained the Queensland Thunderbirds to the ANZ Championship and she will continue to play with this club.



Just caught up with Bernie Lowther (ex kiwi rugby league international) and Larry Corwa (former Australian rugby league international) who have been part of a group starting up FORMER INTERNATIONAL GREATS (FIGS) check them out on Facebook Figs (former international greats)



Always great to catch up with the King Wally Lewis at Suncorp Stadium.

Check out my interview with these two and many more on my facebook page. <https://facebook.com/sirpeterleitch>



OVER A period of two hours last Thursday my body was sounding alarm bells. I felt sick in the stomach, every muscle was tense then my lungs felt like they'd been ripped and I had been kicked very hard in the family jewels. Should I call a doctor? Check out google to self-diagnose this obviously serious ailment?. No need, these were merely the symptoms of watching England get knocked out of yet another major tournament before making it to the big dance.

There are those who say that it's only a game but you try telling that to my body, or those of my sons and best mate who were also suffering. If you have the philosophy that it is just a game you are obviously not passionately invested in your team.

You would think that as you got older the side-effects of defeat would ease but the reality is that it hurts just as much each time it happens, no matter the frequency of such events. The only thing that improves is the healing time. For the whole of Thursday I did not want to communicate with anyone. I was like a wounded animal hiding under a house so that no-one could get near me while I licked my wounds. By Friday I was in a much better space and could comfortably go out into the world and face any stick thrown my way about England's demise without shoving that individual's teeth down their throat. In the old days it would have probably taken me a week before I would consider myself safe to be out in public.

Of course your team losing does not compare to a family tragedy but that does not mean it should be an event void of emotion. Surely a sentient human being can be passionate and care about many things? The upside of such passion is that the huge low when you lose is proportionate to the high you get when you win. Watching a big knockout game is not necessarily a positive experience and I sometimes wonder why we put ourselves through it. Isn't it meant to be something enjoyable? Perhaps supporting a team requires a reasonably high level of masochism. Unless of course you support the All Blacks and then most days are an absolute delight.

In all honesty I felt early on in the World Cup that England did not possess the weapons to go all the way. They lacked a quality play-maker in the middle of the park and tactically did not transition the ball quickly enough when going forward. A pedestrian build-up gives opposition defences time to organise and nullify your attacking threats. Having said that, nothing much was expected from the team. They were the 3rd youngest squad at the tournament and relatively inexperienced. For most fans making it out of the group would be considered a decent result.

A fortuitous draw and a history-making penalty shoot-out win saw them make it to the semi-final where they faced Croatia. England took an early lead and for the first half were in control of the game. After half-time however they started to sit back and surrendered the initiative to the Croatians. The equaliser was inevitable and when it moved into extra time there was only one team that was going to win. While Croatia looked stronger and more confident, England lost their way and ran out of ideas. Their inexperience showed, the Croatians smelt blood and deservedly went on to win 2-1 in extra time.

If you had given England the option of finishing 4th before the tournament started most fans would have ripped your arm off to accept it. But when you get that close to the big final your hopes start to rise and having them shattered brings a physiological and psychological blow as described above.

England's progress and effort reconnected them with their fans and has left the country in a positive mood but to there is a long way to go before they can consistently compete with the top nations. There are some good signs but overall performances were in reality no more than a 7 out of 10.

Continued on next page...

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The tournament has been a major success and I think has engaged many who would not consider themselves football fans. The final was an absolute cracker with the French, who got stronger each time they played, deserved winners. It was their 3 final in the last 6 World Cups and their second win. When you throw in their appearance in the 2016 European Championships Final there is some sort of a dynasty being established.

The Croatians will undoubtedly receive a massive welcome when they return home and put up a gallant performance in the 4-2 loss. The fact that they had played extra-time in their previous 3 games undoubtedly took a toll in the latter stages.

The Belgians could well have made the final and certainly have the personnel to have a serious tilt at the 2020 European Championships. The Germans didn't even make it out of their group and seem to have some internal issues that lessened their effectiveness as a team (strangely it was the 4th time in the last 5 World Cups that the reigning champions failed to progress from the group stage).

Now that World Cup 2018 is behind us I am already getting excited about the upcoming Premier League season and the prospect for my beloved West Ham United. A new manager, some very promising new signings, I can already see us making some real headway and can't wait for kick off. Of course the likely outcome is another season of disappointment with avoiding relegation being hailed as a success. But let's cross that bridge when we come to it. As for the moment I am full of optimism and can see us finishing in the top 4 perhaps even first. Surely 123 years of not winning it has to end sometime. I mean, any team can have a bad century can't they.



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JULY 22



AUGUST 10



AUGUST 24



AUGUST 31



High-Tackle Holloway... I'll give ya the tip mate!

The Mad Butchers Weekly NRL Tipping Comp.

By John Holloway

NRL Round 19

		Tarsh Ieremaia	Joe Vagana	John Coffey	Fast Eddie	Monty Betham	Neville Kesha	High-Tackle Holloway
		<i>Flava Star. Moving to the beat.</i>	<i>League Legend and Machine Lease King.</i>	<i>Newsletter Columnist and Veteran League</i>	<i>Devonport Dutchman - Takin it easy...</i>	<i>The Warrior Boxer - StepsForLife</i>	<i>Ex International Referee</i>	<i>Richmond Bulldog - Old School Richmond League</i>
Date/ Venue	Game							
Thur ANZ	Eels v Bulldogs	Bulldogs	Bulldogs	Eels	Eels	Eels	Bulldogs	Eels
Fri Sthrn Cross	Sharks v Raiders	Sharks	Raiders	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks
Fri Suncorp	Broncos V Panthers	Broncos	Panthers	Panthers	Panthers	Panthers	Panthers	Broncos
Sat McD Jones	Knights v Titans	Knights	Knights	Knights	Knights	Knights	Titans	Knights
Sat ANZ	Tigers v Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits
Sat 1300 Smiles	Cowboys v Dragons	Dragons	Cowboys	Drtagons	Drtagons	Dragons	Dragons	Drtagons
Sun Mt Smart	Warriors v Storm	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors
Sun Lottoland	Sea Eagles v Roosters	Roosters	Sea Eagles	Roosters	Roosters	Roosters	Roosters	Roosters
Picks last week		6/9	5/9	7/9	5/9	6/9	5/9	5/9
Total picks		84	78	84	79	77	94	74

We Didn't See That Coming...

ON THE 4 or 5 times this year that the Warriors have a bad day and got a hiding the hierarchy say the same thing... We didn't see that coming! Well against the Broncos at Suncorp I bloody well didn't see that coming. Don't get me wrong I am happy as a ref with 2 whistles but gob-smacked nonetheless. They may have been without a couple of important players but so were we, for Maumolo we had a bit of cover but the loss of Tohu and Bunty from our flukey forward pack had me seriously worried. No need mate the troops stepped up several cogs on A and D. Promising Papalii, big bear Paasi, Basher Blair, courageous Capt Mannering, the variety of Tevanga all of them hunting like a wolf pack all day and If we can do any kind of deal to keep The Lukestar another year or so let's do it, still a lot of life in that old dog. In the Outback Blake was big, Magic Johnson was active, RTS chimed in and Solomone smashed em, very cool. That's the Warriors mate just when you want to walk away they throw you the juicy curveball. Go figure. Around the grounds the Storm got very lucky with a late offside penalty that was accidental at worst to steal it 14/13 off the stubborn Sea Eagles. The Red V were red faced at Jubilee Oval getting burnt by the Tigers with old boys Robbie Farrah and Benjie Marshall back in tandem and back in charge. 20/16 to the visitors from out West. The much depleted Panthers dropped a ladder-spot to the visiting Sharkies 12/24 with Valentine Holmes continuing in unstoppable stellar form but with a full lineup of returning stars looming the Blue Mountain men will still give it a big shake. Rickys Raiders hit top gear at last gunning down the Cowboys 38/12. The return of clever Pommie rake Hodgson has ibnited the Green Machine. The far North Rustlers are looking at a new player bleeding process now.

Continued on next page...

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The Coaltown Knights got the medal just over the bottom-feeding Eels 18/16 and the Roosters with a lot of talent left on the sideline still beat the Titans 20/12. Souths went 9 on the trot with another win at the Bulldogs expense. Russell Crowes rampant Rabbitohs looking very ominous indeed.

TIPPINGeveryone made a reasonable fist of selections this week with the wily old head JC topping in at 7 from 9. The Whistleblower still so far in front I am not sure he is still with us. Its no wonder we have so much controversy around cheating refs!!...ok just joking.

Right come on the Mighty Warriioors back at home on Sunday with Bellamys Stormtroopers blowing into town. Great weather for the famous White Lady burger and a beer or two or four...Be there or be square.

Reader Mail

JUST WANTED to pass on our thank yous to Sir Peter for coming down to have a quick chat in the Warriors Supporters Bay in Brisbane on Sunday.

It was humbling to notice that you got out to make time to see the loyal fans at Suncorp Stadium and there were heaps of them too, More Warriors than Bronco ones.

Even tho your were on holiday with family, you still managed to make the effort to chat with everyone

Thanks for mentioning the Patea Warriors Masters Team in your news Articles as well as making announcements on the local radio stations back in Taranaki NZ

We are very humbled for this.

On behalf of the Patea Warriors: Management, Manager, Sam Broughton, Marketing Consultant, Renee Kepa and myself

A small gift from us as a token of appreciation

P. S Hope the shirt wasn't too big for you

Regards

Nev - Patea Warriors Management



Kia ora Mr Leitch,

IHAVE ATTACHED the photo as well as one more, my Wife Shantelle with our banners....

Have a great day and will see you all at the Captain's Run for the Titans, mauri ora....

Cheers, Rob Moke

Farrelly Photos Women's Premiership semi-finals

By ARL

Manurewa 20 Richmond 18

Manurewa survived a late scare to book their spot in the Farrelly Photos Women's Premiership Grand Final, and keep their unbeaten record intact. Down 20-6 with five minutes to go, Richmond came agonisingly close to pulling off a miraculous comeback, scoring two converted tries, but ultimately fell just short. Manurewa forward Tanika-Jazz Noble Bell scored a crucial second-half try on her way to Player of the Match honours. Richmond now play Otahuhu next week in an elimination semi.

Mt Albert 6 Otahuhu 10

Otahuhu triumphed in a double over time thriller at Fowlds Park, to stay alive in the competition. Locked up 6-6 at the full-time siren, the two sides still couldn't be split in the first period of added time, before Otahuhu's Onjeurlina Leiatua came up with the winning play, crabbing across field and then linking up with Kiwi Ferns halfback Kimiora Nati, who scored the deciding try. Otahuhu now play Richmond next week for a spot in the Grand Final.

Farrelly Photos Women's Pennant Semi-finals

34 Ponsonby Mt Wellington 10

Doubles to fullback Mazelina Haurua and second-rower Mele Toki helped Ponsonby past Mt Wellington, booking the central Auckland side a place in the Farrelly Photos Women's Pennant Grand Final. Up 14-4 at the break, the Ponies ran in 20 second-half points while leaking just one try in the final 40 minutes. Mt Wellington survive to play Mangere East next Sunday.

Pt Chevalier-Waiemata 18 Mangere East 24

Three tries from Lavinia Tauhalaiku, one of which was the game-winner with five minutes left on the clock, saw Mangere East advance to next week's major semi-final against Mt Wellington. Pt Chevalier-Waiemata led by two at the break, and for much of the second half scores were locked at 18-18, before Tauhalaiku struck the killer blow.



Stacey Jones lounge members Ian and Marcia with the view from their grass hut.

Check out the Vodafone Warriors' Trade Me page! They're auctioning off Stephen Kearney's original 1995 Warriors jersey. An iconic piece of Warriors history.

**A group of former internal players has set up this organization.
Check it out...**



FIGS

FORMER INTERNATIONAL GREATS

ACN: 620 542 243

ABN: 68 620 542 243

PO BOX 835, COOLANGATTA, QLD 4225

FIGS Mission Statement

The Former International Greats – FIGS - Organisation was formed to fill a void created when the NRL and ARL decided to abandon supporting the traditional Kangaroo Reunions. The organisation wants to continue the tradition of recognising and supporting the history of the International game of Rugby League whilst supporting the growth of the International game.

Objectives of the FIGS

The objectives of the FIGS are:

- To support and organise one FIGS Annual Reunion
- To support former Internationals who have fallen on tough times with health or financial burden
- To aid and mentor up and coming International Rugby League Players
- To raise funds for designated, men's wellbeing charities specialising in the treatment and research of Prostate Cancer and Dementia
- To actively mentor Indigenous people and communities
- To work collaboratively with other organisations within Australia who have similar purposes in order to promote these objectives.
- To apply the income of the Company solely to promote the above purposes and
- To do all such acts as are incidental and conducive to the furtherance of the above objectives.

History

In March 2017 four former internationals - Keith Campbell, Bernie Lowther, Larry Corowa and Geoff Starling were having lunch and were discussing how disappointed they were that the NRL had stopped inviting the other nations to the Kangaroo Reunions. They decided to canvas the popularity of them organising a reunion for all the nations to get together annually on the Gold Coast.

The positive response from many former internationals meant that they felt obliged to organise the initial Reunion and set about seeking sponsorships to assist in making it a reality. A working party was organised and a plan made to have the 1st reunion to be held at the Kirra Hotel, Kirra Beach on 22nd September 2017.

This group then implemented the formation of the FIGS (Former International Greats) as a Charity to help and keep in touch with all Former International Greats

Continued on next page...

The first reunion at Kirra Hotel had over 200 people attend and it was a huge success. After that event it was decided to have a Christmas function at The Dolphins Hotel, Tweed Heads on the 17th December 2017, with the aim of thanking everyone for their support. Once again that proved to be a huge success.

Since then support has been growing and fund-raising activities have begun. Friday and Saturday afternoon raffles have become popular with many local FIGS and supporters attending at the Dolphins Hotel.

A committee has now been voted and finalised for 2018. The current positions are:

- President: Keith Campbell
- Vice President: Bernie Lowther
- Directors: Larry Corowa, Geoff Starling, Bob Honan, Chris Close and Tommy Bishop
- Secretary/Treasurer: Wayne Gallard
- Media Manager: Graeme Laurence

The committee is planning on 2018 being more successful and anyone interested in sponsorship there are various packages available. Please also remember you do not have to be an International to attend any of our functions or join the Facebook page. Our supporters are just as important to us and we welcome you to our functions.

We will keep you posted throughout the year of the functions to come and if you need to contact us please leave a message on Facebook and we will respond.

Our Facebook Group Page can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/167872180664214/about/>



FIGS Directors - Keith Campbell and Geoff Starling.



Merv Hicks, Graham Eadie, Dolly McLean, Tommy Raudonikus.



Congratulations to Kiwi #535 Mark Graham - for vbeing the first Kiwi to be inducted into the NRL Hall of Fame

Read more about it here:

<https://www.nrl.com/news/2018/07/17/nrl-announces-six-new-hall-of-fame-inductees/>



Northern Stars Ready For Double Header



SOUTH AUCKLAND will host all ANZ Premiership teams for the first time in the competitions history in the final Super Sunday round.

All six teams will take to the court at Pulman Arena, but for the home team the Northern Stars, there's more than just competition points on offer.

On Sunday the Stars will take on the Northern Mystics in the final of the Barfoot and Thompson Northern Challenge trophy, after both teams have one win each in their previous two encounters.

The sides last faced each other two weeks ago with the Stars winning 58-55. Unfortunately for the Stars, the team lost key midcourt player Fa'amu Ioane through an ACL injury during the match.

With a 24 hour turn around, the Stars will take on competition leaders the Central Pulse on Monday night.

The sides have played twice already this season with the Pulse winning both encounters comfortably.

Northern Stars assistant coach Temepara Bailey is weary of managing players during the double header.

"We have looked at our team and plans are in place to ensure we are as fresh as possible for both games, that's right down to training and recovery throughout this week."

The Northern Stars is the newest national franchise team created in 2017, representing South and East Auckland.

Although the Stars have recorded only three wins this season, the team have picked up five bonus points in close loses to keep them in touch with the

top four teams.

Support from the local South Auckland community has not gone unnoticed by the team as home matches have been packed out this season.

Bailey is a South Auckland local from Manurewa and knows the importance of connecting with the local community.

"Our team decided early on that we wanted to connect more with our local community and really build that homegrown support. The players and coaches have been out to a number of community events, netball centres and taken many coaching clinics to build connections with locals."

Northern Stars Head Coach Kiri Wills echoed Bailey's comments saying, "we want to give people in our region something to aspire to. We too know that nothing comes easy."

A limited number of tickets are available for Super Sunday matches to see all six ANZ Premiership teams in action. Ticket for Monday night's match against the Central Pulse is also on sale. The game starts at 7.30pm, and with loads of entertainment taking place it's sure to be a fun, action packed evening for the whole family.

To get your tickets head to www.northernstars.co.nz now!



DIGGING THE DITCH



RIGHT AT HOME: Blair shares a laugh with his Warriors team-mates.

ADAM Blair isn't sure what was harder – leaving New Zealand as a 16-year-old or returning 15 years later.

As tough as it was moving away from home as a teenager to join the Melbourne Storm, Blair found it equally challenging to return this year. He always loved going back to his home country, but moving his family across the ditch and leaving Brisbane was a hard decision to make.

When Blair put pen to paper, the Warriors had lost nine straight games and had failed to reach the finals for the past six seasons – but the veteran forward saw something different in the Kiwi club.

“Even my close friends asked me, ‘Why are you going to the Warriors? They never win anything.’ I knew the Broncos would remain successful too, which made it a pretty tough decision,” Blair tells *Big League*.

“I felt there was something special starting at the Warriors. There are great young players at the club and I’ve really enjoyed my time here.”

The Warriors have now won 10 games and sit level with the Broncos on the ladder, much to the delight of Blair.

“I knew the Warriors would come good. There’s still a long way to go, but we’ve showed signs that we can be successful,” he says.

“One thing this club needed was experienced players and leaders, and I feel like I can share my leadership with the younger players.”

HEADING HOME

Throughout Blair’s 12 years of footy in Australia he didn’t expect to return to New Zealand, but it was always at the back of his mind to play for the Warriors one day.

“When I was over in Australia, I never thought I’d move back at any time in my career,” he says. “I was pushed away from home when I was 16. I had a choice, but my mum and grandad really wanted me to leave home. I made a life for myself in Australia and I started enjoying it.

“I always wanted to play for the Warriors. I had an opportunity, but I wanted to go away from home and experience something different – a different culture, a different way of living.”

As tough as it was to leave the Broncos, Blair says moving to the Warriors has been a great decision. On top of being



By **MICHAEL BLOK**
@michaelblok26



22 **Article courtesy of Big League Magazine. See what you miss when you don't read them? Purchase your copy at all good magazine stores in the North Island.**



Few people could understand why Adam Blair would leave the Broncos for a club with a history like the Warriors – but a confident team and a desire to return to his roots certainly made it easier.

presented a lucrative three-year deal, he's loved the opportunity to share his home country with his family.

"When you get older, you understand what life is about. I felt it was a good time to go home with my family and embrace my culture, where I grew up and the people around me," the 32-year-old says.

"It's great that I've been able to take my family home and show them how I grew up, involve them in my culture and get them to understand who I am and what I'm about. I'm enjoying being home."

The Kiwi forward was also up for a new challenge.

"I've moved from a couple of clubs now, and it's always refreshing getting a new challenge. I enjoy having a challenge in front of me and I play my best footy when that happens," he says.

"I'm enjoying the chance to play in my home country. We're playing well this year and that makes it easier, too.

"When you lose, it's hard to be enjoying yourself at home, but when you're winning, it's easy. I'm

having a lot of fun with this group and I'm enjoying the style we're playing. It's great seeing young players working hard to reach the same goal."

BACK TO BRISBANE

This Sunday, Blair will head back to Suncorp Stadium for the first time since turning his back on the Broncos. But it'll be far from a hostile homecoming and he can't wait to face his former team-mates in the city that still feels like home.

"I can't wait for the match," Blair says. "I'm looking forward to facing my old team-mates. I've still got a lot of friends at Brisbane because I had some great years at the club."

His family have also made the journey to the Sunshine State – not only to support him on game day, but to catch up with friends.

"My family still love Brisbane," Blair adds. "They're actually there now, because it's school holidays and they wanted to go back for a little bit."

Blair has had a successful start at the Warriors this season. Of the 15 games in which he's taken the field, they've won 10 – including their first five in a row.

However, the low point of his season came when he copped a two-match suspension for a dangerous tackle on Kyle Feldt during their Round 15 win against North Queensland. Not only did it cost Blair a club game, he was also forced to miss New Zealand's historic Test match against England in Denver, Colorado.

While some of his club team-mates didn't make the long journey to the US, Blair would have been there if not for the suspension.

"Of course I would've played – you never knock back a chance to represent your country," he says.

"I was keen to go over there, but when I got that call letting me know about the charge, the decision was made for me. It was a shame I missed that Test, because it would've been a great opportunity to play over there – but that's footy and I'll get another chance soon."

With two-and-a-half years remaining on his contract, the veteran forward – who's now played 281 NRL games – is set to achieve the big 300 next season.

"Is that next year?" he asks. "Wow, I didn't realise it was that close."

"Not many players have been able to achieve that, and I never thought I'd be able to play as many games as I have. If I could reach that

milestone, it'd be very special for me and my family."

Blair is also just six appearances off playing 50 Test matches for the Kiwis – something he'd also love to achieve.

At his age, though, Blair understands his career is likely to be drawing to a close sooner rather than later, and he's preparing for life after footy. While he's unsure if he'll remain in New Zealand long-term, he knows what he'd like to do.

"I've done some studies in psychology while in Australia, and I want to finish those because I'm passionate

about giving back to the kids at home," he says. "I'd want to get into a sport psychology role or something like that. I'm all about giving back and helping people be better."

'When you get older, you understand what life is about. I felt it was a good time to go home with my family and embrace my culture, where I grew up.'

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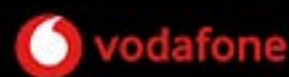
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The Newsletter Team

Here is the team that help me put together the newsletter each week. We have a number of fantastic contributors who send in content each week that along with my editorial gets wrapped up by our graphic designer and sent out by our distribution man to your inbox.

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