

VODAFONE



# Sir Peter Leitch Club

AT MT SMART STADIUM, HOME OF THE MIGHTY VODAFONE WARRIORS

29<sup>th</sup> August 2018

# Newsletter #232



## Win With ASICS NZ

ASICS NZ is partnering up with the #MadButcher - Sir Peter Charles Leitch this week to celebrate Simon Mannering's great achievement of reaching 300 games for the Vodafone Warriors. Tell us on facebook your greatest Simon Mannering memory to be in the draw to WIN a new pair of ASICS shoes and a pair of signed football boots by Simon himself. Competition closes 31.08.18 @ 5pm

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# CONGRATULATIONS SIMON MANNERING 300 NRL GAMES FOR THE WARRIORS







## Same starting side, Beale on bench

by *Richard Becht*

8.00pm, Friday, August 31, 2018  
Mount Smart Stadium, Auckland

**M**ILESTONE MAN Simon Mannering will be centre stage in an unchanged starting line-up for his historic 300th NRL appearance when the Vodafone Warriors face Canberra in their final regular season match at Mount Smart Stadium on Friday (8.00pm kick-off).

In his 14th and final first-grade campaign, one-club Mannering – who turned 32 today – will become the first player to appear in 300 matches for the club, just the 34th to reach the mark in the competition's 100-year history and only the 16th to do so for a single club.

He'll again be at loose forward with Tohu Harris confirmed to start in the second row after initially being listed on the bench for his comeback appearance in last Friday night's impressive 36-16 win over Penrith.

The backline includes Mason Lino in the halves with Blake Green again omitted as he recovers from a calf injury picked up in the one-point loss to the Bulldogs on August 19.

The only change comes on the bench where Gerard Beale is named in the 17. He was originally listed in the centres when the side was selected for the Penrith encounter but was subsequently ruled out with a hamstring complaint.

Mannering's achievement has become the natural focus as the Vodafone Warriors strive to improve their position in their last match before experiencing finals football for the first time since 2011.

After making his debut as an 18-year-old on June 26, 2005, Mannering is set to join Ruben Wiki (312 games) as the only other New Zealander to reach the mark.

Of the 33 players on the list ahead of him, he has played against or with 25 of them, the three he has had as team-mates being Wiki, Steve Price and Ryan Hoffman.

Mannering and Shaun Johnson are the only players in the 2018 side who have had previous finals experience with the Vodafone Warriors, Mannering being part of play-offs campaigns in 2007, 2008, 2010 and 2011.

The Vodafone Warriors go into Friday night's match still in eighth place but one of four teams on 30 points on a table which shows just four points between the eight sides and only two points covering second to eighth.

The Stephen Kearney-coached side has the chance to take its tally of wins this season to 15 with victory over the Raiders. That would equal the club's second-best regular season total achieved in 2003 behind the record 17 in the minor premiership-winning campaign in 2002.

For just the second time in their history – 2002 was the first – the Vodafone Warriors have gone through an entire season sitting inside the top eight every week.

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Wing David Fusitu'a is within reach of creating more history as the first Vodafone Warrior to top the try-scoring list for the regular season. His hat-trick against Penrith lifted him to 21 tries with Cronulla's Valentine Holmes second on 20. Manu Vatuvei (20 tries in 2010) is the only other Vodafone Warriors player to reach the 20-try mark in a regular season (Francis Meli had 23 tries in 2003 but five came in one finals match against the Bulldogs).

While the Raiders have missed the finals, they come into Friday's match on the back of a potent performance in their 24-12 win over South Sydney.

The Vodafone Warriors have won 18 of 39 matches against Canberra since the two teams first met in 1995 while they have an 11-8 edge in home encounters.

### Vodafone Warriors

- 1 Roger Tuivasa-Sheck (C)
- 2 David Fusitu'a
- 3 Peta Hiku
- 4 Solomone Kata
- 5 Ken Maumalo
- 6 Mason Lino
- 7 Shaun Johnson
- 8 James Gavet

- 9 Issac Luke
- 10 Agnatius Paasi
- 11 Adam Blair
- 12 Tohu Harris
- 13 Simon Mannering
- Interchange:
- 14 Jazz Tevaga
- 15 Isaiah Papali'i

- 16 Bunty Afoa
- 17 Gerard Beale
- 18 Leivaha Pulu
- 20 Anthony Gelling
- 21 Chris Satae
- 22 Karl Lawton

SM

HONOURING THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR

VODAFONE WARRIORS

CANBERRA RAIDERS

THIS FRIDAY  
MT SMART STADIUM  
KICK OFF 8PM

MANNERING

NRL  
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SKYCITY  
WOODSTOCK  
CSG dtv flava  
Harvey Norman  
SUZUKI  
TNT  
Wendy's



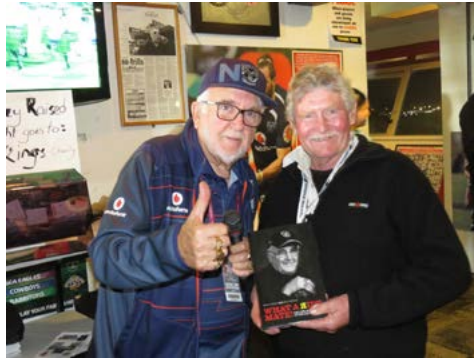


# In the Stacey Jones Lounge

Photos by Dave McKee (From Christchurch)



Andrew a Stacey Jones's lounge member wins the Panasonic headphones.



Bernard Scott flew up from Wairarapa receives a spot prize that best selling book What a Ride Mate.



Butch talks with Tea Ropati x foundation DB Bitter Warrior and former Kiwi.



Hayden Martin and Aimee Martin from Hastings.



Hayden Martin displays his Warriors tattoo.



It's always great to have the Vodafone Warriors CEO Cameron George visit the lounge to have a chat with the members.



Jeannie Preston-Hannah wins the William Aitken & Co grocery hamper.



Jo and Hannah Christini with Sir Peter.



John Young full back for Elleslie in the 70's buying a ticket of Lorraine McKee.



Lindsay Neilson, brother Devon, Peter, Sonya, Maria, Bill and Barb. All from Upper Hutt.



Maria, Sonya and Nathaniel.



Conrad a visitor to the lounge was very happy to win the Panasonic Shaver as he could do with a shave.





# In the Stacey Jones Lounge

Photos by Dave McKee (From Christchurch)



Mark wins the Selleys pack spot prize presented by lounge member Ingrid Preston-Hannah.



Michael Anderson wins the Panasonic Kitchen package wish he is going to give to his wife for a present.



Nathaniel Roache talks about his injury woes.



Nick from Panasonic wins a Vodafone Warriors key lucky bugger.



Olivia Marsh was very happy to win the Sealink prize.



Olivia Marsh who was looking fabulous in here jacket with Sir Peter.



Paul Barklay the butchers old school mate and great lounge member wins the Panasonic transistor.



Peter Herron from Timaru wins a spot prize.



Raewyn Neilson wins the TAB Voucher presented by Brendan Popplewell.



Rock Star Paul Cristini wins the Warriors ball.



Rosa Herron was stocked to win the Panasonic Baby Monitor.



Sonya from upper Hutt was stoaked to win the ASICS VOUCHER WORTH \$300.





# In the Stacey Jones Lounge

Photos by Dave McKee (From Christchurch)



Stacey Jones, Lindsay Neilsons from Waiheke, Sister Maria and friend Sonya both from Upper Hutt in Wellington.



Stewart and Jo Moses from Penrith who flew over for the game with Sir Peter.



Tara Wilson wins the Vodafone cell phone watched on by her fans.



The Castles visit the lounge Ben Castle, Jack Castle, Sir Peter, Tim Castle and Tom Castle.



The little General Stacey Jones talks about the Warriors great win on the night.



Zac McKee over the moon to win a junior pack & video game.



Was great to have the foundation chief executive of the DB Bitter Warriors Ian Robson in our lounge as our vip guest.



“Whoopie I won the blue water hotel voucher worth \$1000”



New Zealand and Warriors Rugby League legend hosted Wellington barrister in the magnificent Stacey Jones lounge high up at Mt Smart last Friday night. The Warriors had a great victory against the Panthers and are now in the playoffs for the first time in 7 years.

Tim Castle was the Chair of the Independent Review Panel for the very unhappy Kiwis 2017 Rugby League World Cup campaign. The Review Report was released in March this year; the NZRL Board accepted all its very robust and confronting findings and recommendations which are now being implemented

# Ye-hah, at bloody last

By David Kemeys

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



**M**ADE IT, after 11 agonising years we are playing finals footy. It was so long ago that last time we made it I could get it up without the help of a little blue triangle. I was worried I would go to my grave without ever seeing finals footy again. But here we are.

Anything else from here is an absolute bonus.

It is tempting to be smug and remind all the doubters that before a ball was even kicked we were highly-fancied to collect the wooden spoon.

Immortal Andrew Johns was among them, pretty-much every Aussie journalist, quite a few Kiwi ones, and more than a handful of long –suffering Warriors fans were convinced we were in for another year of misery.

What has been achieved is quite remarkable. And yes, I know that making the eight i a competition of 16 isn't perhaps the greatest yardstick, but credit where it is due, the boys done good!

I will give you 10 reasons for the turnaround.

David Fusitu'a. If you have a 20-try a year man, you are going to win more often than you lose. His form has been incredible. The best winger in the comp behind Addo-Carr, as voted by NRL players.

Issac Luke. This is the first year that he has played like the hooker we thought we were buying. Give him another contract and hope he does it again.

Agnatius Paasi. Plenty rolled their eyes when we recruited him. They aren't now though. He has given us some up-front grunt and his work rate has been exceptional.

Stephen Kearney. There were more doubters than backers but he stuck to his guns, laid a platform, listened to advice, and instilled belief.

Blake Green. Blake who? Described as an underwhelming signing, he added calm when needed, and has been an excellent addition. Any more like him you don't want Manly, send them our way.

Alex Corvo: Over-weight, over-fed, and over here. Not since the trainer arrived from the Storm though. We looked like we ready to play from day one, and few sides have gassed us.

Brian Smith. Our general manager of football keeps to himself but has a long history of rebuilding clubs. I'm guessing, but I have a sneaking suspicion his coaching experience has been called on by Kearney, and that's just smart.

Mason Lino. Take a bow young man. When called upon he was exceptional. Once when we had a half out injured and it was just a matter of how badly we would be beaten, Lino put a stop to that.

Tohu Harris, Roger Tuivasa-Sheck, Adam Blair. All have had their highs and lows but teams follow leaders, and we had three outstanding ones.

Jazz Tevaga. Played well from the off, and got better. Teams didn't seem to know what to do with him and he cashed in, scoring tries and setting up others. A revelation.

Every one of those 10 reasons is an individual, which is fair enough, but in truth if you want some more reasons, how about the fact that we played like a team. So many players came in when needed like Lino, and did not let us down.

The defensive efforts we showed game after game were remarkable. We at last have a defence after years of trying to win without one.

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Depth is worth a plug too. Bunty Afoa, Isaiah Papali'i, James Gavet, Ken Maumalo, Leivaha Pulu...all good value. Depth equals competition for places.

Better chuck in coming out of the blocks like scalded cats. The Dragons did too, and it's no surprise both sides made it to the eight.

Last year I disagreed with one journalist who argued we had to learn to win away from home, saying I didn't care, just win at home first. Turns out he was right.

Can we mount a run, who knows? But anyone who isn't happy – bar the odd hiccup - with what we have been served up must be very hard to please indeed.

### **300 For One Of The Best**

Writing this ahead of team-naming Tuesday, one assumes Simon Mannering will appear against the Raiders on Friday night in what will be his 300th NRL game.

That is an incredible achievement, and an even greater one to have clocked up the milestone as a one-club man.

He has been the ultimate professional, and I have said so many times, so it came as no surprise that with his milestone looming, he basically said he didn't care, and that the focus had to be on the side making the most of the opportunity of reaching the finals series.

Bring a mate, because if there is one guy who deserves to play his last home game in front a packed house, it is Mannering.

He and Shaun Johnson are the only players still around who were there when we made the grand final in 2011.

“I'm just happy for the young guys who will experience something that's pretty special in footy and it's been a long time coming for the club, so it's going to be cool to be a part of it again. It's just a different level and the more you can have that experience, you grow in confidence in your ability.”

The younger players in the side would do well to heed the 31-year-old. He has given his all and been a rock solid player for us for years, and there can be no doubt he knows his stuff.

“It's an opportunity. We can't just be happy with scraping in and seeing what happens. Let's really give it a good nudge.”

I am told management is working hard to ensure the five-time Player of the Year receives a hero's farewell.

After all he has given us, give him your Friday night and pack the park to send him off with an experience he will never forget.

### **Johnson On A high**

Last year at around this time halfback Shaun Johnson was the talk of the town after muttering something along the lines of, “you got what you wanted”, when we were awful and consigned to an early exit from the comp.

I mention this because it had never seemed to me he was the type of bloke to lack confidence.

But that remark was all the evidence you needed that the constant criticism of his own play, and the team, had sent his confidence spiralling- hardly surprising since he had also had to deal with terrible injuries.

So I was delighted to read after the Panthers win that Johnson says his confidence is sky high.

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I don't know enough about the game truth be known to know if it is true that he is a "confidence player", which I hear all the time.

But if he is, bring it on, because he was excellent on Friday, and if that means we can expect even more, so be it.

He is certainly in great form. On Friday he managed the game superbly.

"I am getting there," Johnson said. "I just keep working. There are always things you can work on."

It must be tough being the big name, and carrying that responsibility, which is where I think having players like Blair, Harris and RTS around him must have helped.

The expectation he can carry the side probably hasn't diminished, but at least he has others in the side that help.

### **And This Is Class Too**

If you want more evidence Johnson is in a different place this year, consider what he had to say after the Panthers.

He saluted Mason Lino, who was filling in for the injured Blake Green, saying the boys love playing with him.

He's hardly going to say, he's a numpty and I don't know why they pick him, but Johnson was not holding back on the praise.

"You can't replace someone like that, someone who is selfless."

Before the game, Lino admitted to feeling the pressure. It didn't show.

Green is likely to be back soon but, says Lino: "I'm not looking too far ahead. But hopefully we get another crack soon. With Greeny out it's big shoes to fill. I'm fortunate to have a good support crew. There's a wealth of experience there so that made my job a lot easier."

Lino lost his first nine NRL games across three years, but has now played a hand in four important wins this season. Seems fair to give Shaun the last word

"Mase had a rough start to his NRL career s. To see him winning games is very pleasing"

### **And All That Jazz**

Three NRL clubs are chasing Jazz Tevaga, who has rejected our offer to test the market.

Negotiations are continuing, thankfully, but apparently three clubs have expressed interest.

"I would love to stay but if things don't work out I might have to make the move," Jazz said.

And we would love you to stay mate!

### **Home And Away**

With the Dogs smacking the Dragons 38-0 suddenly losing to them by a late field goal does not look so bad does it?

But it also raises the question of what the final round means, because it opens the door for our chances of securing a home semi.

To get a home game we will need to beat the Raiders and have results go our way.

Here's how it sits – with my thoughts on the final round.

The Storm beat the Panthers to lock up the Minor Premiership with 36 points.

The Roosters prove too good for the Eels and finish second on 34 points.

The Sharks pinch third on 34 points when they end the Bulldogs resurgence.

Souths slump after a loss to the Tigers to fourth on 32 points.

The Warriors make it four of their last five and end on 32, sneaking ahead of the Broncos into fifth.

The Broncos dispense with Manly and finish sixth on 32.

The Panthers end on 30 at seventh.

The Dragons fall to 1-5 in their last six, beaten by the Knights, leaving them eighth.

Given that I could not tip wet cement out of a wheelbarrow, who really knows, but my scenario would leave us at home against the Dragons, and that would be fine by me.



# Message from Vodafone Warriors CEO Cameron George

**T**O ALL of our fans and members I hope you're enjoying the success of your team to date. This year was about winning back your respect and getting back to the basics in order to enhance our performances on and off the field. Across the our organisation, everyone, everywhere has worked hard to get to the point where we can now say WE ARE IN THE NRL FINALS. In a major way it's because you have showed up this year and supported the club through the good and bad times.

For us, it's not just about making the finals, it's about taking the chance to turn our common dream into reality. We have really good people leading us through what lies ahead and I have confidence they will get the best out of the situation.

This weeks marks a special and once in a lifetime occasion. Our greatest Warrior of all time Simon Mannering plays his 300 game for the Vodafone Warriors and possibly his last game at MT SMART. It's important you spread the word and get to the stadium on Friday night to acknowledge and salute a legend of your club.

Once again, I thank you for your support and please get as many of your friends to the stadium this Friday night to cheer on our boys and to salute a legend.

Cheers, Cameron George



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# Vodafone Warriors Celebrate Simon Mannering

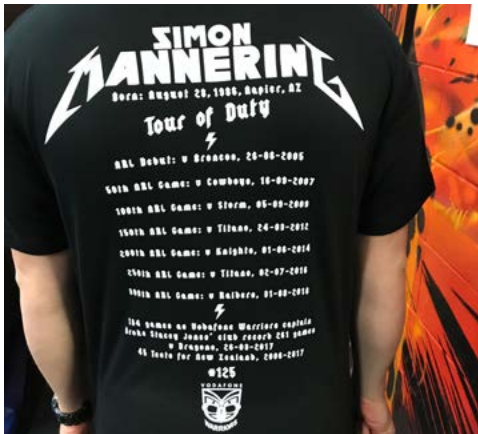


The club has done this outside the office to celebrate Simon's 300th game this Friday night.



On Tuesday the club had a luncheon to celebrate simons 300th game and had presentation of his special jersey for Friday nights game. Simons partner Anna made a short speech at the luncheon which was attended by all the staff and NRL players. During the lunch video clips from some of the greats of our game were played. They said some very kind words said about Simon.

The man of the moment as always very humble makes his speech.



The club Have haD limited amount of these T-shirts done for the staff to wear on Friday night.



Players all trained in these tshirts on Tuesday.





By Barry Ross  
Australian Correspondent

# Struggle

Matt Bailey with ball, playing for the Brooklyn Kings against the Connecticut Wildcats (now defunct) at Randall's Island, 2015.  
Credit Davey Wilson

**T**HE RECENT New Zealand-England Test in Denver on 24 June created plenty of headlines before it was played and it is still in the news more than two months later. Firstly there was criticism that players would be affected by the long flights to and from the venue and then there were problems at the game when the singer struggled with the anthems of both countries. If the reports are true, the New Zealand Rugby League are still to receive the promised fee from the match promotor. I am a firm supporter of international Rugby League and with this Test being played in the USA, I was interested in the standing of our game at grass roots level in America. The current chairman of the USA Rugby League is an Australian, Peter Illfield, who played 11 seasons in the Newcastle competition with the Maitland Pumpkin Pickers. After retiring, he worked in development roles with the Newcastle Knights, the Western Australian and Northern Territory Rugby Leagues. He then moved to the USA but has recently returned to Australia, so perhaps the USA League will appoint a new chairman in the near future.

Rugby League struggles in the USA. There are only around 500 players compared to 400,000 rugby union numbers. Despite the large number of players, the USA Rugby Union team has only won three of 25 games at seven World Cups. The USA Sevens Rugby Union team has improved over the past few years and finished sixth on the last world sevens circuit. American Rugby League is centred north and south of New York, as well as Florida and Georgia. The competition is played from late May until the end of August and the 2018 season was made up of 11 teams in two conferences. The seven teams in the Northern Conference were Brooklyn Kings, Philadelphia Fight, White Plains Wombats, New York Knights, Boston 13s, Delaware Black Foxes and the Northern Virginia Eagles. The Brooklyn Kings were undefeated in their six matches against the other teams, scoring 288 points to 100. They then won the Northern Conference Championship game on 11 August at their home ground, Bushwick Inlet Park at Brooklyn. Brooklyn Kings 34 (Jerome Easthope 3, Brandon Anderson 2, Seimou Smith tries; Reece Purcell 5 goals) beat White Plains Wombats 18. Hooker Jerome Easthope had a strong all round game for the Kings. The Brooklyn coach is Brent Richardson, who is the son of South Sydney general manager of football, Shane Richardson. Brent is working for Google in New York.

Down south, there are four teams in the Southern Conference. These sides are Jacksonville Axemen, Atlanta Rhinos, Tampa Mayhem and the South West Florida Copperheads. In the Southern Conference Championship game at Jacksonville on 11 August, Jacksonville 44 (Lachlan Bristow 3, Tyler McClain, Kevin Wathen, Jed Pearce, David Washington, Desta Bailey tries; Lacklan Bristow 6 goals) beat Atlanta 16. Hooker, Lachlan Bristow, finished with 24 points from his three tries and six goals. The Jacksonville coach is another Australian, Sean Rutgeron, who first coached the club in 2009 and then returned in 2016 and has coached for the past three seasons. He played 12 first grade games in 1998/99 with the North Sydney Bears and then 56 first grade matches in four seasons with the Canberra Raiders from 2000. He also played 74 games in three seasons with English club Salford. Rutgeron, aged 40 has just been appointed as Head Coach of the USA National team, with Richardson his assistant.

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While USA Rugby League is centred in the 11 teams in the two conferences, there is some interest in the game in Chicago, Los Angeles and Texas. On 11 August in Chicago, an exhibition game was played between the Chicago Stockyarders and an Ontario Provincial side from Canada. This game was organised by the Midwest Rugby League and won 24-12 by the Canadians. The Midwest Rugby League is aiming to join the USA National competition in 2020 and both the Stockyarders and Ontario will probably be the teams from this league. The week before the exhibition game, a Cleveland team beat Chicago in a Nines Rugby League game. Cleveland is a possibility of joining the Midwest League in the 2020 USA National League.

The 2018 USA Rugby League Championship game was played in Jacksonville at the University of North Florida Rugby Field under lights at 7pm on Saturday 25 August. The Brooklyn Kings had to find more than US \$6,000 to fund their trip from New York to Jacksonville.

Matt Bailey, who was born at Wollongong, 85 kms south of Sydney, is the founder of the Brooklyn Kings. In his late 20s, Matt, who has a Bachelor of Management in Sport and Exercise from Sydney's University of Technology, went to New York in 2013 on a whim with no job lined up. But he soon established himself in the tough job market of American Sport. He began working with the Brooklyn Sports and Entertainment body and founded the Kings in 2014. The club played its first competition game in late May that year. With hard work and plenty of drive, the Kings have several sponsors, including the Kent Ale House, Professional Physical Therapy, Nutrition Station, Pro Plaster, CrossFit Outbreak and the Nicole Fitzsimons Foundation. The Brooklyn Royals Dance team is the Kings cheersquad. None of the players are paid and around 80 per cent of them are American born, as each club is only allowed to have three imports.

In the USA championship game, the Jacksonville Axemen, who were formed in 2006, were too good, winning 58-16. But the Kings never stopped trying and scored two excellent second half tries. They will benefit from the experience and are set to again be one of the leading USA club teams in 2019. This was the Axemen's third title. Hooker Lachlan Bristow finished with five tries and nine goals for a total of 38 points. In the South Conference Championship game against Atlanta two weeks before, he scored 24 points. Jacksonville 58 (Lachlan Bristow 5, Tyler McClain 2, Will Fletcher, David Washington, Kyle Grinold tries; Lachlan Bristow 9 goals) beat Brooklyn 16.

What about the English Challenge Cup Final. Congratulations to the Catalans Dragons who beat the Warrington Wolves at Wembley Stadium on Saturday. Catalans 20 (Lewis Tierney, Ben Garcia, Brayden Williams tries; Josh Drinkwater 4 goals) beat Warrington 14 (Ben Murdoch-Masila, George King tries; Tyrone Roberts 3 goals). Crowd 50,672. The Challenge Cup was first played in 1896 and except for some war years, has been played every year since the first one. This was the 117th Challenge Cup and the lowest crowd since 1945. But with a French team involved and the costs for its supporters to come from the south of France to London, a below average crowd was expected. In its long history, the Cup has never left England and the win by the Catalans, will provide a real boost to French Rugby League.



**BROOKLYN KINGS RUGBY LEAGUE  
TEAM 2018.**



**BROOKLYN KINGS AND USA  
RUGBY LEAGUE BADGES.**

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Founded in 2000, the Catalans club is located at Perpignan, which is just 13 kms west of the Mediterranean and close to the Spanish border. Queensland State of Origin coach, Kevin Walters, was in charge of the Catalans for 57 matches in 2009 and 2010, while the Roosters head coach, Trent Robinson, was the club's head coach for 63 games in 2011 and 2012. Saturday's match was the Catalans second Challenge Cup final after they were well beaten by St. Helens in 2007.

Finally it was great to see the Warriors stand up on Friday night when it really mattered. The whole team was great all around the park and many in the Australian media are saying the New Zealanders will be a definite threat come semi final time. The Warriors' final game of the regular season, against the in-form Canberra Raiders, who have beaten the highly rated Roosters and South Sydney in their last two games, will not be easy. Congratulations to young Shark, Kyle Flanagan, 19, who made his first grade debut on Sunday in the Sharks good 38-12 win over the Knights. It is the first time, since John Lang coached his son Martin at Penrith in 2004, that a son has played with his father as coach, in the NRL.

## Round 25 Match Officials

GAME: WARRIORS V RAIDERS		DATE: FRIDAY 31ST AUGUST 2018	
VENUE: MT SMART STADIUM		KICK OFF: 8.00PM NZ (FOX)	
HEAD REFEREE:	Matt Cecchin	REVIEW OFFICIAL:	Bryan Norrie
ASSIST REFEREE:	Phil Henderson	SENIOR REVIEW OFFICIAL:	Jared Maxwell
TOUCH JUDGES:	David Munro		
	Tim Roby		
STANDBY TJ:	Chris McMillan	JERSEY COLOUR:	Red

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**AUCKLAND STRONGMAN SERIES**

**ROUND 3**

**17TH & 18TH NOVEMBER 2018**  
**ASB SHOWGROUNDS, EPSOM**

**BIG BOYS TOYS**





By John Coffey

## I'm Going To Miss Jonathan Thurston

Photo [www.photosport.nz](http://www.photosport.nz)

**T**HERE HAS probably never been a more inspiring rugby league rags-to-riches story than that of Jonathan Thurston, the spindly, ill-disciplined kid who no club wanted when he first came on the market before rising to claim four Dally M medals as the NRL's outstanding player and three Golden Boot awards as the world's best player. After over 400 club and representative games, he has just one game left before hanging up his headgear.

It is impossible to count the times I have cursed Thurston for his brilliance when inspiring the Cowboys against the Warriors or Australia against New Zealand, or the frequency that I have cheered him on for the Cowboys against other clubs – most notably in the 2015 Grand Final triumph over the Broncos – or for Queensland against NSW. Then, of course, there was the matter of his not choosing to pursue a career with the Kiwis.

Born in Brisbane of a Gunggari mother and a New Zealand-born father, Thurston showed promise as a young footballer in Toowoomba but was spurned by NRL scouts because of his slight physique. A number of clubs would not even sign him for free. Manager Sam Ayoub finally negotiated a deal with the Bulldogs, whose Belmore base was close to where he lived, after promising Thurston's mother he would keep an eye on him.

If that 2001 contract – with the playing fee listed as “nil” -- is still in existence it should be in the NRL Museum. Thurston's path to first grade was blocked by established halves Brett Sherwin and Braith Anasta but he made his debut in 2002 and two years later was signed by the Cowboys. Former Bulldogs board member John Brown has disclosed they could have kept him for as little as \$150,000. Instead, they retained Sherwin.

Thurston was perhaps then struggling to make his way on and off the field. But the Bulldogs made the 2004 Grand Final and he joined the interchange when an injury sidelined skipper Steve Price. It is history now that Thurston selflessly gave his winner's ring to Price. Clearly, there was something more to this kid. The club arranged for a replacement ring but his action was just the first example of his ongoing maturity and generosity.

Returning to Queensland and running his own team transformed Thurston into a super footballer. So much so that the often maligned Cowboys reached the 2005 Grand Final, only to be beaten by Wests Tigers and another brilliant youngster in Benji Marshall. It would take Thurston ten more years to carry the NRL premiership trophy back to Townsville, and by then he was being feted as one of the finest players of any era.

Queensland honours and his first Dally M Medal had followed his Cowboys debut and in 2006 he was called into the Kangaroos squad. The Kiwis were defending their Tri-Nations title in the final at Sydney with the teams locked at 12-12 after 80 minutes. For the first time a Test match entered golden point. Thurston pounced against a hesitant Kiwis defender, broke clear and set up Darren Lockyer for the try and a 16-12 victory.

*Continued on next page...*



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There were a few setbacks among Thurston's glittering career statistics. Queensland actually lost two (of the 13) Origin series in which he played, and his 39 Tests included losses to the Kiwis in the 2008 World Cup final and the 2015 Anzac Test, plus a draw in 2009. But his briefly triumphant opponents knew he would come back even stronger. In the 2013 World Cup he was Man of the Match in all four of his appearances.

I'm going to miss Jonathan Thurston weaving his magic on my television screen. I learned to understand his love and loyalty to his mother's Indigenous heritage rather than his father's Kiwi lineage. Not only was Thurston a brilliant attacker, a great tactician, an inspiring captain and a courageous defender but also a magnificent goal and field-goal kicker. He has scored 99 tries for his club and rep teams and laid on hundreds more.

Nor will I be alone. His team-mates, especially "wing man" Gavin Cooper, will also miss the man Kevin Walters calls "little Johnny". Thurston was first to respectfully hand his kicking tees back to his ball boys, while a generation of young fans have been shocked and ecstatic when the great man has walked over and handed them his distinctive head gear. "JT" might have arrived as a scrawny kid but he leaves as a giant of our game.

**There is no more room in the Stacey Jones lounge for this weeks game.**

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VODAFONE WARRIORS  
CANBERRA RAIDERS

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MT SMART STADIUM  
KICK OFF 8PM**

MANNERING



CSG dti flava

Harvey Norman







By John Coffey

## Catalans Show Warriors The Way

**T**HE CHALLENGE Cup has left England for the first time in its 122-year history following the Catalans Dragons' exhilarating 20-14 triumph over warmly-favoured Warrington Wolves in last weekend's final at Wembley Stadium. Accompanying it on the plane to Perpignan was the Lance Todd Trophy after fullback Tony Gigot became the first Frenchman to be named Man of the Match since the trophy's inception in 1946.

If the Warriors need inspiration on the eve of the NRL play-offs then they can look towards the south of France. Catalans was on the verge of relegation from Super League this time last year, having to win an all-or-nothing match to retain its status. Under the coaching of former England head coach and Warriors assistant Steve McNamara they regained credibility and even eliminated mighty St Helens in their semi-final.

But they were underdogs again in the final. Warrington is one of England's most formidable outfits and Catalans was not expected to do any better than in its previous losing Cup final in 2007, when it was captained by Stacey Jones. But this Catalans side led 14-6 at half-time, 20-6 soon afterwards and displayed great resilience as Warrington applied the pressure with a series of last-quarter goal-line assaults as the tension rose.

McNamara's team was a united nations captained by prop Remi Casty, who played 12 times for the Sydney Roosters in 2014. His other 263 club games have been for Catalans. Various team-mates have allegiance to New Zealand (former Kiwis prop Sam Moa and Levin-born Kenny Edwards), Fiji (Brayden Wiliame), PNG (David Mead), England (Michael McIlorum), Tonga (Samisoni Langi), Scotland (Lewis Tierney), Australia (Josh Drinkwater) and France.

Immediately after fulltime, Gigot, Casty and McNamara spoke of the boost it would give a beleaguered sport in France, where it struggles for survival. Millions of euros are poured into rugby union while rugby league has little government or media support. "This will show everyone we can play rugby league in France," said Gigot, whose Man of the Match trophy is a memorial to 1907-08 All Gold Lance Todd.

Catalans emphasized it had not gone to Wembley just to make up the numbers when wing Lewis Tierney scored in the second minute. His proud parents travelled Down Under for the 2017 World Cup and were befriended by Sir Peter Leitch on the day Scotland suffered a massive defeat by the Kiwis in Christchurch. Tierney later moved from Wigan to the Dragons and his folks will be mighty proud of the role he played at Wembley.

Sam Moa completed a rare international double. After making his name with Hull in the Super League he spent four seasons at the Sydney Roosters, where he played in their 2013 Grand Final victory. His typically dogged display in the front-row did much to subdue the big Warrington pack. Kenny Edwards, a sometimes controversial character when at Parramatta, joined in enthusiastically from the interchange.

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There was a price to pay for having an overseas finalist and for the absence of powerhouses Wigan, St Helens and Leeds, who invariably bring armies of fans when they make Cup finals. The attendance of 50,612 was the lowest since 1945. But hearing the La Marseillaise being played while one of Britain's most venerable trophies was presented would have warmed the hearts of rugby league romantics throughout the world.

Scorers: Catalans Dragons 20 (Lewis Tierney, Benjamin Garcia, Brayden Wiliame tries; Josh Drinkwater 4 goals) beat Warrington Wolves 14 (Ben Murdoch-Masila, George King tries; Tyrone Roberts 3 goals). Half-time: 14-6. Lance Todd Trophy winner: Tony Gigot (Catalans).



## **Tributes to Simon Mannering at this Friday's Game**

Gates: 6pm

Kick off: 8pm

We have 44 giant Simon Mannering heads that will be distributed throughout the stands

We are launching a Banners for Manners competition and encouraging fans to bring banners to the stadium to honour Simon

The giant Mannering mural in the carpark will be on display

We will have the number 300 instead of 30 on the field markings and #Mannering300 in paint under the NRL logo on the field

We have 17 giant Mannering flags around the venue

The club will be selling a limited number of special Simon Mannering t-shirts (the same one Blake Green gave him today)

RTS will lead the team out, they will then form a guard of honour and Simon will walk out on the field for kick off

Peter Beattie (NRL chairman) will present Simon with the ball post-match

We are also launching a ticket deal for Simon's birthday tomorrow where fans can pay whatever they want from \$5 up to purchase tickets to celebrate Simon's milestone. This is an NZ first.

We will also be playing tribute videos etc to Simon on the big screen

# Linwood Keas Complete Hatrick

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)



**A**NOTHER TRIUMPH for the Linwood Keas. Heartbreak for the Hornby Panthers. They were the contrasting stories from Sunday's dramatic Canterbury grand final in the last club match to be played at the Addington field we leaguies still call the Show Grounds or Rugby League Park. The Keas flew home with two converted tries in the last five minutes to win 20-16 and carry off the Pat Smith Challenge Trophy.

Linwood became the first club to win three consecutive grand finals – all of them at Hornby's expense – since Eastern Suburbs completed its treble in 1981. No one in the Keas camp, not even coach Andrew Auimatagi, was born then, though Hornby's two 38-year-old stalwarts, Corey Lawrie and Jonny Limmer, were probably eyeing up any oval shaped balls left lying around their romper rooms.

This was a showdown worthy of the last grand final before the Canterbury Rugby League moves its operations to the new Nga Puna Wai sports complex in 2019. The teams lived up to their pre-match billing. Linwood was unbeaten this season and is the last of the four original 1913 clubs still playing premier grade football; Hornby remains the most prolific championship winning club in the code's history.

The victory completed a come-from-behind double for the Keas. Their women's team was also playing in a third consecutive grand final, though they had lost in 2016 and 2017 to the Papanui Tigers. It seemed that sequence would continue, too, when the Tigers led 33-26 into the final quarter. But the Linwood women were to show the way for their male counterparts by scoring two more tries and winning 38-33.

Though dominating territory during the opening quarter of the men's grand final and forcing Hornby into three goal-line drop-outs, Linwood had no points to show for its hard work. Then the momentum began to change. Hornby gradually turned the arm wrestle in its favour to score a try after 30 minutes through fullback Pesini Tavake which, with James Baxendale's conversion, made the scoreline 6-0 at halftime.

In contrast to the points drought which had preceded it, the first seven minutes of the second spell were downright crazy. Firstly, Linwood scored a Daniel Hartley try for 6-4. But Hornby quickly struck back twice through tries to second-rower Lawrie, who really is an ageing but still much respected Warrior, and wing Charlie Charlie. After 47 minutes it was 16-4 and Hornby had its 28th title in sight.

It stayed that way for most of the second spell and one had to admire Hornby's commitment on defence. For 68 minutes it stayed firm, having conceded only a sole try from a dummy half flop-over and resisted everything else. But then Linwood stand-off Toi Sepuloni darted through a narrow gap to score and the mood changed among the large and boisterous crowd assembled to farewell the Show Grounds.

Representative centre Erwin Sauni brought Linwood within range at 16-14 with his try and Hartley's conversion. Referee Gary Smallridge crucially judged Hornby to be off-side from the kick-off and Linwood attacked again. The Panthers were all but out on their feet when Canterbury prop Alex Todd – later named Man of the Match – crashed over for the 78th minute try which, converted by Hartley, completed the scoring.

As Baxendale, the Hornby captain, said later, it was a devastating feeling to lead for so long and so late in the game before having the trophy snatched away from his players. But, like all Hornby teams since the club was formed in 1915 and entered senior football two years later, he pledged they would be back with a vengeance next season – and there is every reason to believe Lawrie and Limmer will be among them.

Coach Auimatagi and his Linwood squad have other milestones to pursue. Not since Papanui between 1971 and 1974 has a club won four consecutive grand finals. The record for the most championships in a row is held by Sydenham, which won the first six under the old round-robin system from 1913 until 1919 (there was no senior football in 1916 because of the First World War). Sydenham is no longer in the top grade.





Photo [www.photosport.nz](http://www.photosport.nz)



By Miles Davis

## Play-off Scenario

**G**ET IN!!!! With their convincing 36-16 over the Penrith Panthers on Friday night the Vodafone Warriors sealed their play-off place for the first time in 7 years. As I told you last week I had no doubt they would do it. Their loss to the Bulldogs was not as bad as some may have felt. Look at the demolition job they did on the Dragons, making it 4 wins in their last 5 games. The Dragons defeat moved the Vodafone Warriors even closer to them on points differential and there is a glimmer of hope that they can still make the top 4.

Here is what is needed. Obviously they need to despatch the Canberra Raiders in their last round-robin game. I for one have no doubt they will achieve that. The hapless Dragons are likely to lose at the Newcastle Knights which takes them out of the equation. The Panthers have to travel to table-topping Melbourne Storm and are surely going to come away with nothing from that trip. The Broncos are taking on the Manly Sea Eagles and although they are favourites to win that one they currently have just a points differential advantage of just 3 over the Vodafone Warriors. So if they get a slightly bigger winning margin than the Broncos this weekend that will also move them above the Brisbane outfit.

That just leaves the Cronulla Sharks standing between the Vodafone Warriors and the top 4. They travel to the in-form Bulldogs and are in no way guaranteed a win. The only downside is the 63 point advantage the Sharks have over the Vodafone Warriors at present. That could be a bridge too far but with Mt Smart likely to be full and pumping there is no saying what the lads can achieve.

Having crunched all the numbers I can see the Vodafone Warriors finishing 5th after the last round of games, missing out on the top 4 to the Sharks. I am however confident that they can go quite far in the play-offs. Could they win it? Of course they could. Will they? Ask me in another month.

NB: There is a good chance that my play-off calculations could be wrong. My abacus is missing some beads.

Beauden Barrett You Beauty

If there was any doubt left over who was the right man to wear the All Black No. 10 jersey then surely that was dispelled on Saturday night. Beauden Barrett's performance was up there with the all-time greats in the history of rugby union. Comparisons with Dan Carter at his best are in my mind premature but there is nothing wrong with living in the moment and enjoying the magic that Barrett is giving us. We should also celebrate the fact that there is such talented depth at the first-five position in New Zealand. Richie Mo'unga and Damian McKenzie would stroll into most other international sides and would certainly not let the All Blacks down should they be called upon.

A few years ago I was fascinated to learn that Barrett went to the same school as Conrad Smith. I persuaded Sky to let me go down to Francis Douglas Memorial College (aka Fung Dung) to film a story and find out a bit more about an establishment that produced two such stellar rugby players.

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A quick look in the school chapel gives you no doubt about the importance of rugby. Amongst the stained glass windows there is one with a Brother holding a rugby ball.

Their results showed how much their rugby programme had improved over recent years. Their annual fixture against New Plymouth Boys, started in 1996, had been dominated by NPBHS but recent times have seen that gap between the two colleges close with FDMC winning several encounters and being close in others.

One of the things that obviously helps build players of character is the discipline and respect instilled in most Catholic Schools and Fung Dung is no exception. Barrett was sent to the school as were his brothers and although the family lived not far from the college they were sent as boarders. Having been at a boarding school myself I can attest that this also builds character and gives one a sense of brotherhood and team ethic.

At school Barrett was so good at most things that he was given the nickname "God" which he apparently wasn't fond of. For me that shows the humility of the guy (I would have quite happily accepted that nickname had it been given to me. Unfortunately I only got nicknames that aren't printable in a family publication like this one). Another example of his humble nature is that he told me a few years ago that his younger brother would turn out to be the best rugby player of the lot. He wasn't lying about his little brother's talent but although Jordie is a top player I think he has a fair way to go yet before he tops big bro.

Rather than compare talents let us give thanks to Fung Dung for helping mould such All Black talent as Conrad Smith and Scott, Beauden and Jordie Barrett (and brother Kane who also played Super Rugby, All Black hooker Liam Coltman, Hurricanes hooker Ricky Riccitelli and former All Black coach and player John Mitchell). But we must also blame them for Patrick Gower of Newshub and NZ Herald fame. I was told that he was a bit of a handful at school and remains so till this day. Oh well there always has to be one I suppose (just joking Paddy).



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**vodafone**





By Shane Hurdell  
Hawke's Bay Today  
Sports Reporter



**HOT WHEELS** Bridge Pa speedster Jarome Mareikura races away for a try in his team's win against Dannevirke Tigers on Saturday. PHOTO: HAWKE'S BAY TODAY

## "Shabby" Display But Roll Continues For Bridge Pa

**B**RIDGE PA maintained their unbeaten run in Hawke's Bay's premier club rugby league competition with what player-coach Ihaka Waerea described as a "shabby performance" on Saturday.

"We were missing eight players from last week and it was only during the final 10 minutes that we were able to come from behind and take control," Waerea said after his troops third round 40-32 win against Dannevirke Tigers at the Hawke's Bay Regional Sports Park in Hastings.

Three players, hookers Tama Dunn and Benji Cowan and Maddison Trophy-winning Clive rugby prop Kereama Peni made their debuts for Bridge Pa who gave standoff Jackson Waerea a winning blazer game. Unlike in rugby when players receive their blazers for 50 games Bridge Pa have decided to have 25 games as the criteria for blazers as the league season isn't as long as the rugby season.

Nathan Ramsay, who had stints as a centre and back-rower, was Bridge Pa's player-of-the-match. Dunn, inside back Colin Hokianga and outside back Jarome Mareikura were others to make their player-coach's MVP list.

Fullback Waka Petera, prop-secondrower Tobias Allison and standoff Zion Clarke were among the Tigers best.

Despite losing player-coach Boy Waaka with a serious leg injury Kahuranaki beat winless Maraenui 34-20. The Bay's most successful premier club coach, 79-year-old Waka Leonard, coaches Maraenui who opted for premier grade play this season after finishing second in the reserve grade last season.

"It was always going to be tough for us. But it is tougher than I thought it would be because most of our players work night shift and we lost half of our team to Bay Bulldogs in reserve grade when they realised we weren't getting good turnouts at trainings," Leonard said.

Former Magpies rugby centre Karl Broughton shone at hooker for Maraenui. Prop Falcon Hooper and his cousin Pohatu Hooper who had stints at centre and in the second row also made Leonard's MVP list.

Defending champions Bridge Pa maintained their unbeaten run in the women's competition with a 36-22 win against Tamatea. Bridge Pa coach Alan Mason said his entire squad shone with fullback Nina Pineaha-Hyslop, standoff Whitley Mareikura and hooker Tanarsha Mason particularly prominent.

Veteran hooker Lisa Ropiha impressed with her defensive workrate for Tamatea and promising prop Ashley Palu was powerful on the carry. The other women's match saw Hastings Rugby and Sports beat improving newcomers YMP 38-12.

Bay Bulldogs handed the defending champions in reserve grade, Bridge Pa, their first loss of the season with a 32-16 victory. This match was an entertaining encounter and two late tries from the fitter Bulldogs saw the score blow out.

The other reserve grade match was also a thriller and it saw Flaxmere pip Omahu Huia 38-34.

# Trans-Tasman Showdown Home At Last

By Brooke Hurdell - NZRL

**R**UGBY LEAGUE superstars from New Zealand and Australia will face-off in a classic Trans-Tasman showdown of three back-to-back Test matches at Mt Smart stadium.

On Saturday 13 October, the Junior Kiwis will take on the Junior Kangaroos followed by the mighty Kiwi Ferns up against World Cup champions, the Jillaroos. The final clash of the night sees the Kiwis battle the Kangaroos for the first time on New Zealand soil since 2014.

Corporate hospitality tickets, including the Mad Butcher's lounge hosted by Sir Peter Leitch, will be on sale early September through Ticketek or Gordon Gibbons at the Warriors.

This will be the first time new Kiwis Coach Michael Maguire will be at the helm in front of a home crowd and says it's sure to be an unforgettable night.

"This is the start of a new journey with the Kiwi Rugby League team and we are looking forward to showing our families, the fans and our teammates what it means to represent the Kiwi jersey. Plus the fans have been waiting a long time to see this match-up on their home soil."

For the Kiwi Ferns, the prospect of some fresh faces to compliment the several seasoned veterans is giving Head Coach Kelvin Wright plenty to ponder ahead

of the final team selection.

"It's a new beginning for the Kiwi Ferns and Women's Rugby League, and what better way to start than at home in front of family, friends and future Ferns.

"It's a great opportunity to bring our elite women players together after experiencing their first taste of the WNRL, where we will have some tremendous talent competing to wear the black jersey," says Kiwi Ferns Head Coach Kelvin Wright.

"Sporting supremacy between neighbours is something both New Zealand and Australian sports fans thrive on. In one night at Mt Smart, the very best of men's and women's international rugby league is on offer between two great league nations for the first time in a long time," says NZRL CEO, Greg Peters.

Six teams, three Test matches, one place – Mt Smart, the home of rugby league.

All three matches will be on Sky Sport: Junior Kiwis v Junior Kangaroos 3pm, Kiwi Ferns v Jillaroos 5pm and Kiwis v Kangaroos 7.45pm.

Tickets are on sale now from Ticketek - Adult ticket prices from \$35 and children from \$15. Special family and multi-ticket deals are available. [Click here to view ticket deals.](#)

**TRANS-TASMAN TEST**

**SATURDAY 13 OCTOBER**  
MT SMART STADIUM

**GET TICKETS**

**NEW ZEALAND v AUSTRALIA**  
**3 TESTS 1 DAY**  
**IT'S TIME**





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

*The Mad Butchers Weekly NRL Tipping Comp.*

By John Holloway

## NRL Round 25

Date/ Venue		Game	Tarsh Ieremaia <i>Flava Star. Moving to the beat.</i>	Joe Vagana <i>League Legend and Machine Lease King.</i>	John Coffey <i>Newsletter Columnist and Veteran Leagueie</i>	Fast Eddie <i>Devonport Dutchman - Takin it easy...</i>	Monty Betham <i>The Warrior Boxer - StepsForLife</i>	Neville Kesha <i>Ex International Referee</i>	High-Tackle Holloway <i>Richmond Bulldog - Old School Richmond Leagueie</i>
Thur 30 Aug ANZ	Rabbits v Tigers	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits	Rabbits
Fri 31 Aug Mt Smart	Warriors v Raiders	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors
Fri 31 Aug AAMI	Storm v Panthers	Storm	Storm	Storm	Panthers	Storm	Storm	Storm	Storm
Sat 1 Sep McDonJames	Knights v Dragons	Dragons	Knights	Knights	Knights	Knights	Knights	Dragons	Knights
Sat 1 Sep CBus	Titans v Cowboys	Cowboys	Titans	Cowboys	Cowboys	Titans	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys
Sat 1 Sep AMZ	Eels v Roosters	Roosters	Roosters	Roosters	Roosters	Roosters	Roosters	Roosters	Roosters
Sun 2 Sep ANZ	Bulldogs v Sharks	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks	Bulldogs	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks
Sun 2 Sep Suncorp	Broncos v Sea eagles	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos	Sea Eagles	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos
Picks last week			5/8	7/8	6/8	5/8	5/8	6/8	7/8
Total picks			111	105	110	107	102	119	105

### Now We Can Say The F word...

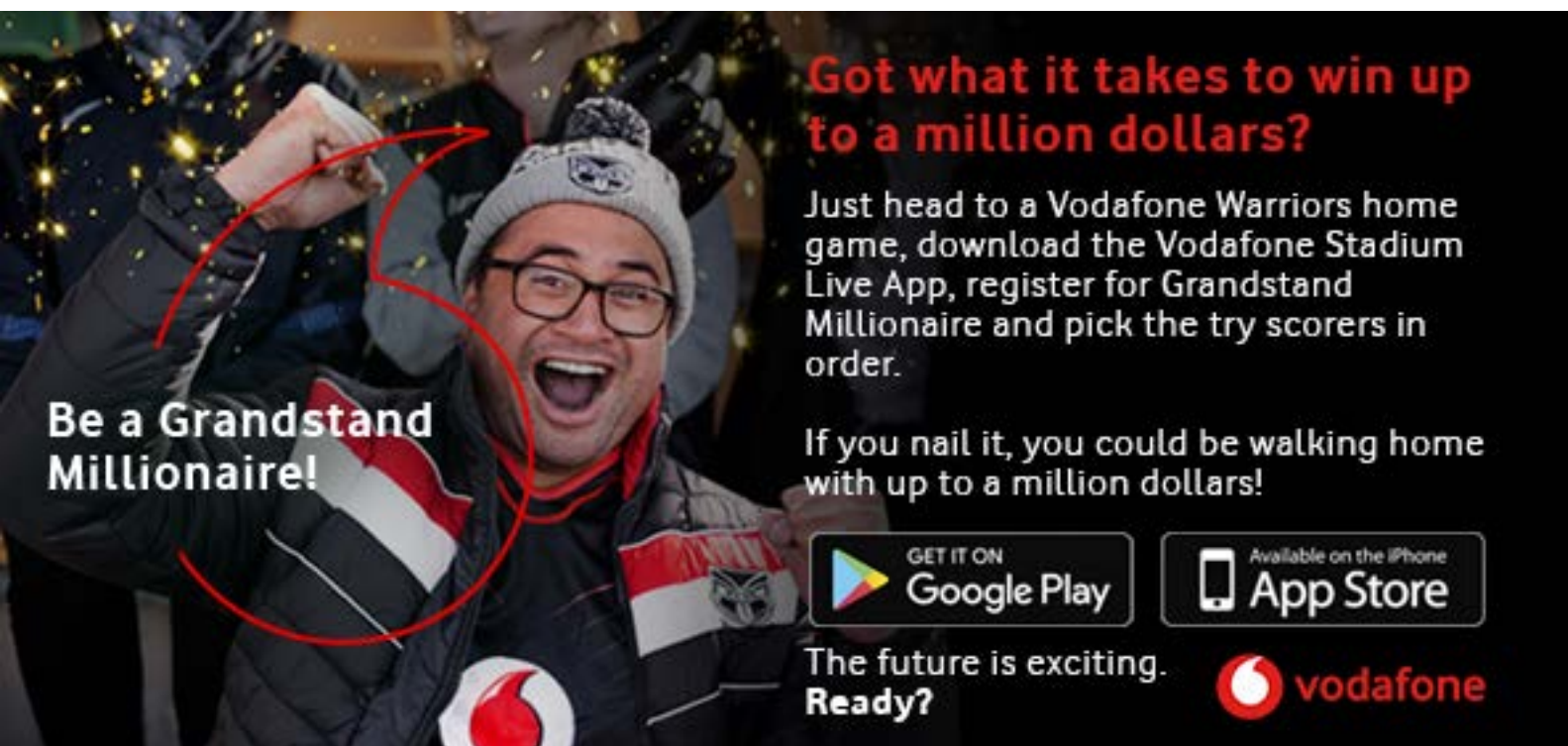
**A**FTER 7 long years we can embrace the taste of the Finals again. Kia kaha mighty Vodafone Warriors. For no real reason (apart from laziness probably) I rarely refer to the sponsor when naming our team but in this instance the unwavering support of Vodafone across the years of drought and dismay deserves recognition and its place in our Team title. We have been holding our collective fervent fan breath for a few weeks now but on Friday night we were able to exhale in exhilaration...as we realized there is a God of Footy and he finally smiled on the Warriors. While it was built on a team collective attitude I thought the understated hero was young Mason Lino, thrown in at the deep end yet again (earlier in the season for Shaun Johnson) this time in the guise of the unreplaceable Blake Green. Once again he was good...brave, elusive and a point of difference as he scored another important try off his own ability. Tohu Harris returned to turn the tide with an all action inspiring performance. Magic Johnson promised more expression and he delivered. Fus the Bus hit the triple try-scoring heights. Bulli and Blair and Iggy led the forwards with heart and purpose and everyone weighed in to the defensive loading. We have all noted many a Commentator here and from Oz praising the excellent top level leadership and solid structure provided at the Warriors by the old and new Management teams, Mooks, Stacey, Cappy and the wider coaching/support staff and head office support et al. On Friday night that all came to fruition and they can enjoy a thankful bow and congratulation from all of us. Yes there's a round to go jockeying for a better ranking and the sudden death preliminary Polka after that but hey on Friday night we did more than good, lets dance a little in the moonlight.

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Speaking of barrier positions the door for these was left widely ajar with the rd 24 results. Top 8 teams faltering at the final hurdles included the Roosters laid 22/8 by the bucking Broncos, The Rabbitohs who had their ears boxed 12/24 by Rickys resurgent Raiders and the declining Dragons on a losing streak were emptied out bigtime 38 zip by the also-ran but late blooming Bulldogs. Dean Pay like his old cobber Ricky Stuart gaining a measure of redemption with an upbeat ending to what had shaped as a terrible season. The incomparable JT looked as good as ever nother heading to the final showdoa happy ending the incomparable JT looked as good as ever as he heads toward the sunset of a great career, steering his good again Cowboys to a big win 44/6 over what his names wooden spoon bound Eels. Meanwhile the gathering Storm have slipped sedately back on top of the minor Prem race and face an out of sorts Panther outfit in Melbourne on Fri night, you would be bold to bet against Bellamy lifting that Title again. The Panthers, Dragons and Broncos hold the 3 spots above us on the same 30 points, our first priority naturally is to get past a very confident, winning streak Green machine. Secondly see how the cards fall with the Storm against the Blue Mountain gang and the Knights hopefully doing us a favour hosting the Red V. Bolshie Bennetts Bruise-brothers Broncos look a good bet against the embattled Manly mob who travel to Suncorp. A reasonable result all round would see us 6th with a very welcome home semi. A likely outcome then would see us host the Penrith Panthers again. With Maloney back and a thirst for revenge it would be a mighty big battle. Fingers crossed time brothers and sisters of the Homie struggle. Mt Smart Fri night, Burgers, Beers and Rickys worst fears....be there or be square.

TIPPING like the Raiders and the Bulldogs High-tackle is coming home with a wet sail. Top whack 3rd week in a row with 7/8 (bloody Dragons dicked me) Right by my side Big Joe Vagana with a matching pick. Nifty Nev and the wily JC had 6/8s, with steady 5/8s for Tarsh, The Devonport Dutchman and The main Man the Montz. The Whistle-Blower with an 8 point lead is unassailable on 119 points and is home and hosed as our 2018 Champ going into the Final Stanza. Well done old mate a very good performance leading virtually from the outset must be the only Ref I know that called it correctly all year!. Tarsh doing it for the girls and JC showing old school intelligence were the next cabs off the rank well done guys. The rest of us well we just fell victim to the most recurring upset results in any season in living memory. When a top-line talent like the High-tackle cant pick em believe me there's something going wrong.



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# Warriors' Centre Peta Hiku Gets One Back Over Panthers Nemesis Viliame Kikau

*By Jackson Thomas*

*Article courtesy stuff.co.nz*

Photo [www.photosport.nz](http://www.photosport.nz)

**H**E HAD to wait six long weeks, but Warriors centre Peta Hiku got his revenge in the best way possible over his former team with a resounding 36-16 win over the Panthers on Friday.

"The last time we played each other, that was probably the worst game of my career. So this one feels pretty good, yeah," said Hiku, as he sat in the sheds at Mt Smart Stadium icing the body.

And who could blame him. It's never an easy night at the office when you're an NRL player, but it's a job made even harder when you have the colossus that is Penrith back-rower Viliame Kikau running at you all night.

The last time the two sides clashed, Kikau had a field day terrorising the Warriors' right edge and ran for more than 150 metres in the Panthers' 36-4 win.

It was clearly the game plan again on Friday to send the big forward at Shaun Johnson and Hiku, but this time the pair were up to the task – restricting him to less than 100m on the night.

"Yeah it was a bit sore out there, big Kikau is not small. He's a bit of a handful," Hiku said.

"We knew he was going to be tough to contain and we tried to get numbers in on him a little bit more this time around and luckily it worked out."

With improved defence came some electric attack as the Warriors' right edge ignited, resulting in a David Fusitu'a hat-trick.

Hiku, playing back in his preferred position of right centre after two weeks coming off the interchange bench, said the showdown against Penrith was one he had his eye on since their round 17 encounter, and was "more or less" pleased with his individual performance.

"I was a little bit nervous. That last time we played them was probably the worst game I've played, we got slaughtered on our edge and I think that was playing on my mind a little bit coming into the game if I'm being honest," he said.

"I tried to just push it aside and the boys did a good job. Having all those special type of players around you, it just makes my attacking game come so much easier.

"Shauny is a natural runner, Tohu (Harris) is a skillful player and Fus I mean, he can do anything that guy. To get the win and do it with this club was more important to me and yeah, very pleased."

Coach Stephen Kearney was pleased with his side's overall performance, and that of his right centre.

"After his last performance against them (Penrith) he was preparing for them to come down his way, but Peta is quality," Kearney said.

*Continued on next page...*

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"He bounces back very quickly and nothing phases him too much.

"I thought he did a wonderful job for us tonight in his 100th NRL game.

"His dad came down and presented him with his jumper this week and reminded us all why we play the game and it was about having fun and doing it with a smile on your face and Peta certainly does that."

In what he described as "a good problem to have", Kearney now faces a selection headache at centre with both Hiku and Gerard Beale staking their claim for the spot.

---

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



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## **Former International Greats News** By Graeme Laurence

**T**HE FORMER International Greats – FIGS - is a charity that 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. We want to have a forum to continue the tradition of mateship that was generated through the Kangaroo and International tours and games.

The Kangaroo tours were extraordinary tours which provided some of the greatest moments for International Rugby League. Mateship and friendships were formed which have transcended generations and legendary stories of these tours have led to many a book.

Today the game of Rugby League has changed and the FIGS want to preserve the status of those who started and developed the game. Those who played when sacrifices were made to tour. The hardships of spending months away from home and work, but at the same time developing the game for the future.

The FIGS are holding their 2nd Annual Reunion on Friday 21st September 2018 and invite all Former Internationals to attend free of charge. We particularly encourage the younger FIGS to attend from whatever County they played for. Any supporters who wish to attend are invited at a small cost of \$80/head which includes food and drinks for the afternoon.

This day is a celebration for all these FIGS and provides an opportunity for supporters to rub shoulders and meet with some of the founders and greats of the game.

As stated early the FIGS is a charity and funds raised go to our two major selected charities – Prostate Cancer and Dementia. At our 2nd Reunion we will be having a presentation to Prostate Cancer.

Come along – enjoy the day and embrace the history of the wonderful game of Rugby League as it was.

FOR ANY INQUIRIES PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT EX KIWI BERNIE LOWTHER +61412145875 OR GRAEME ON gl2009@bigpond.com. All welcome to attend these functions.



# Last double header in Sydney for 2018

By Joe Williams - ISP Team Manager

**T**HE JOHN Teina coached Vodafone Warriors Intrust Super Premiership team head to Sydney in the final round robin sudden-death game for a chance to secure their place in the final series with a match against North Sydney Bears.

Despite losing their last six matches, they're still seventh on the ladder on 22 points thanks to a run of helpful results from the teams nearest them on the ladder. But, after failing to register success since beating the Mounties on June 30, they must now rediscover winning touch to make the finals starting the following weekend.

While the Vodafone Warriors Jersey Flegg team, coached by Ricky Henry, play their last game of the year, also against North Sydney Bears.

The games this weekend is at North Sydney Oval on Saturday 25th August with Jersey Flegg kicking off at 1.30pm followed by the Intrust Super Premiership team kicking off at 3.00pm.

**INTRUST SUPER PREMIERSHIP**  
VODAFONE WARRIORS v NORTH SYDNEY BEARS  
3.00pm, Saturday, August 25  
North Sydney Oval, Sydney

**JERSEY FLEGG CUP**  
VODAFONE JUNIOR WARRIORS v NORTH SYDNEY BEARS  
1.30pm, Saturday, August 25  
North Sydney Oval, Sydney

**VODAFONE WARRIORS**  
1 HAYZE PERHAM  
2 CHARNZE NICOLL-KLOKSTAD  
3 BLAKE AYSHFORD  
4 ANTHONY GELLING  
5 JUNIOR PAUGA  
6 CHANEL HARRIS-TAVITA  
7 SAM COOK  
8 LIGI SAO  
9 KARL LAWTON  
10 CHRIS SATAE  
11 MATIU LOVE-HENRY  
12 JOSEPH VUNA  
13 JAMES BELL (c)  
Interchange:  
14 REECE CHARLIE  
15 TOM ALE  
16 PATRICK SIPLEY  
17 KING VUNIYAYAWA  
COACH | JOHN TEINA

**VODAFONE JUNIOR WARRIORS**  
1 KAYAL IRO  
2 HARLEY MAYNARD  
3 LEWIS SOOSEMEA  
4 PATRICK ELIA  
5 EDWARD KOSI  
6 DAKOHTA TAIMANI  
7 PAUL TURNER  
8 PRESTON RIKI  
9 TAANE PAKI  
10 WESLEY VEIKOSO  
11 KAKOI TOGOIU  
12 TYLER SLADE (c)  
13 PHILLIP MAKATOA  
Interchange:  
14 ANTONIO POUA  
15 LOTU INISI  
16 JUNIOR PUA  
17 EIDEN ACKLAND  
18 CARLOS HENRY  
COACH | RICKY HENRY

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**MONDAY 8TH OCTOBER 2018**  
**MAUNGAKIEKIE GOLF CLUB**  
5 Anita Ave, Mount Roskill, Auckland

Arrive: 11.30am - Sign in  
Tee Off: 12.30pm Shotgun Format: Ambrose

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**COST  
PER TEAM  
\$400**

**HOLE  
SPONSORSHIP  
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BY OCT 1**

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**RAFFLE PRIZES | SPOT PRIZES • BBQ AT THE START AND FINISH**

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[league4life.co.nz](http://league4life.co.nz)





## Pulse overcome gritty Tactix to win Super Club final



**T**HE WĀNANGA o Raukawa Pulse weathered a tenacious Silvermoon Tactix challenge before claiming a hard-fought 61-56 win in the 2018 Super Club final in Nelson tonight.

The match between New Zealand's second and third-ranked teams produced a riveting contest, played in the more traditional style before the two-point shots took on greater significance in the final quarter.

The Tactix employed a stifling defensive through-court screen to deny the Pulse their preferred free-flowing style, the ever-present and dynamic Jane Watson providing the decisive last line of resistance in the circle. At the other end, the southerners attack line complimented the forceful defensive play with an immaculate stream of ball to towering shooter Ellie Bird.

That galvanised the home team who took plenty out of the first half, the Pulse pouncing just before the half-time break.

Absorbing all the early pressure, five goals on the trot handed the Pulse a 31-27 halftime lead and from that point, there was no looking back.

The senior players were key contributors with shooter Ameliaranne Ekenasio, midcourter Claire Kersten and defender Sulu Fitzpatrick getting through big workloads and dictating the run of play. Karin Burger continued her strong season with a telling presence in the crunch moments while Beko Netball League Player of the Year Maddy Gordon stepped into the cauldron for the last quarter with all the poise of a veteran.

Two-point shots were not as forthcoming as earlier matches but Ekenasio delivered when it mattered, the Tactix leaving their run a little late despite two late clutch shots from Kate Beveridge.

A patient and composed Ascot Park Hotel Southern Steel secured third place with a defence-orientated 54-45 win over the NSW Institute of Sport (NSWIS).

It was a dour and close struggle for much of the match, the Steel fending off numerous NSWIS challenges with their renowned doggedness. Not afraid to rotate their full team throughout, the younger members more than held their own.

Seventeen-year-old schoolgirl defender Taneisha Fifita got her hands to plenty of turnover ball while fellow teenager Jess Allan showed a cool head to sink two two-pointers at a crucial time in the last quarter.

Defender Te Huinga Reo Selby-Rickit and shooter Jen O'Connell were key figures for the Steel while a cameo final minute at goal attack for hometown girl Shannon Francois produced an unlikely two-pointer to the delight of the crowd.

A composed UWS Sirens grabbed fifth spot, producing a strong finish to fend off the combined Fiji/Samoa Marama Vou side 66-57.

*Continued on next page...*

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Relentless defence from Ella Gibbons and Emily Nicholl for the side from Scotland effectively shut down dangerous Samoa two-point shooter AJ Savelio in the final quarter. At the other end, Sirens shooters Monica Falkner and Bethan Goodwin were effective finishers from both scoring zones for the winning side.

Both teams entered the play-off for seventh as if their lives depended on it with Singapore's Sneakers grabbing a much-merited 60-57 win over the Gauteng Jaguars from South Africa.

Momentum swung throughout but the Sneakers, on the back of their preference for the two-point shot, prevailed. That was largely due to Amorangi Malesala's outstanding contribution from range, her pin-point accuracy converting a tournament high 20 successful shots from the two-point zone to help steer the Sneakers to their first win.

## **ARL Match Reports** By ARL

### **SAS Fox Memorial Premiership Major Semi-final**

Pt Chevalier 24 Howick 22 (Pt Chevalier through to Grand Final)

A storming final 20 minutes saw Pt Chevalier score three unanswered tries to down the Howick Hornets and advance to the 2018 SAS Fox Memorial Premiership Grand Final. Howick lead 10-6 at the break, before the Pirates mounted a comeback, led by a two-try showing from captain Sioeli Makau. It's the second year in a row Pt Chevalier will meet the Glenora Bears in the first division decider.

### **Crown Lift Trucks Sharman Cup Major Semi-finals**

Manurewa 24 Ponsonby 20 (Manurewa through to Grand Final)

Doubles to Isei Naqau and Malakai Tohi helped Manurewa book a spot in the 2018 Crown Lift Trucks Sharman Cup Grand Final and end Ponsonby's season. The first half was evenly-contested, with Manurewa trailing 8-10 at half time, before scoring 16 points to overcome the Ponies, with staunch goal-line defence sealing the win in the final 10 minutes.

Bay Roskill 28 Franklin 16 (Bay Roskill through to Grand Final)

Strong defence in the second stanza saw the Vikings keep their undefeated record intact and secure their spot in the 2018 Crown Lift Trucks Sharman Cup Grand Final. The scores were locked 10-10 at half time, before Bay Roskill ran away for the win. Chennoth Henry was a standout for his Vikings side, making 51 tackles.

### **Second-tier Crown Lift Trucks Sharman Cup Grand Final**

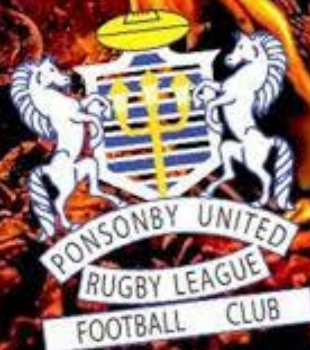
New Lynn 29 Te Atatu 24

A storming effort over the line from Samu Vaeagi lifted New Lynn to the Crown Lift Trucks Sharman Cup Championship title over Te Atatu. In a game where the lead changed on five different occasions in the second 40, Te Atatu came back from an early 13-0 deficit to lead 23-20 inside the final ten minutes, but it was Vaeagi who had the last laugh, scoring the winning try.



# ARL GRAND FINALS

## PREMIER 1ST GRAND FINALS



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GLENORA V PT CHEVALIER  
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**SHARMAN CUP PREMIER 1ST  
PONSONBY V BAY ROSKILL  
12:35PM KICK OFF**

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# Kelston Return To The Top

By ARL

**K**ELSTON BOYS' High School are the kings of Auckland secondary school league once again, after powering past Mt Albert Grammar School 14-6 to claim the 2018 SAS College Rugby League title.

The west Auckland school scored two converted tries in the first half and kicked a penalty in the second, to claim their first title in four years, in front of a vocal crowd at Mt Smart Stadium #2 on Wednesday night.

Centre Mark Rasmussen opened the scoring on five minutes, grabbing onto a looping Konrad Tu'ua pass to crash over in the corner, for a try which Tu'ua converted.

A well-constructed set play 10 minutes later then saw Tasi Lotima barge over from close range to double Kelston's lead at the break.

Mt Albert flew out of the gates in the second stanza, and within five minutes Uelese Levasa got onto the end of a pinpoint Emmanuel Kelly kick, with Sam Kamu converting from the sideline to halve the deficit.

Both sides traded blows over the ensuing minutes, with a number of dropped balls and periods of poor discipline meaning neither side was able to assume control of the contest.

With two minutes to go, a penalty just to the right of the uprights, from 20 metres out, presented Tu'ua with an easy two points, which he converted to put the result beyond doubt.

Post-match, Kelston fullback Connor Lopesi spoke of the joy of experiencing Grand Final success, 12 months on from a defeat at the hands of St Paul's College in the same game.

"It feels good, coming off last year we just knew what we had to do to win the game," he said.

"In that final ten minutes or so, I was thinking about last year, I'm just happy we did it."

Earlier in the day at Mt Smart Stadium #2, Southern Cross Campus won a golden point thriller 26-22 over St Paul's to claim the U15 title, before Sir Edmund Hillary ran away with the girls' title ahead of Aorere College, 30-8.

St Paul's College won the Senior A (second-tier) title 16-6 over James Cook High School.

Kelston 14 (Mark Rasmussen, Tasi Lotima tries; Konrad Tu'ua goals x3) def. Mt Albert 6

(Uelese Levasa try; Sam Kamu goal). At Mt Smart Stadium #2





# Kamu crowned at SAS College Rugby League Awards

By ARL

SAS Sport's Tim Connolly with 2018 SAS College Rugby League Player of the Year Sam Kamu

Mt Albert Grammar School's Sam Kamu has been named as the best Auckland secondary school rugby league player of 2018.

At an awards ceremony held in Auckland on Tuesday morning, Kamu - who played both as a winger and second-rower throughout the SAS College Rugby League campaign - was announced as the premier award winner, six days after taking the field for his school in a 14-6 Grand Final loss to Kelston Boys' High School.

The award caps a big year for Kamu, who also won the Auckland U18 championship with his Richmond club side in August, with the 17-year-old set to link up with the Newcastle Knights at the end of the current school year.

"The college competition this year has helped me develop in so many ways, especially that challenge of facing other schools, that's encouraged me to lift my own game," Kamu said.

"I'm going overseas next year to the Newcastle Knights, so I'm really happy about this, I'm over the moon."

In other major awards given out on the day, James Cook High School's Cheylen Davis was named Girls' Player of the Year, while Seamus Kelly (Whangaparoa College) and Charlie Salesa-Leumoana (St Paul's College) picked up the Player of the Year titles for the Senior A and U15 grades respectively.

Veteran match official Warren Clarke was recognised as the Referee of the Year, while Justyne Matangi-Lui became the inaugural recipient of the ARL-New Zealand Institute of Sport Scholarship, which offers a full free year of study at the NZIS, as part of a new partnership with the ARL.

## 2018 SAS COLLEGE RUGBY LEAGUE AWARD WINNERS

U15 Manager of the Year | Penny Fletcher (Westlake Boys' High School)

U15 Coach of the Year | Sam Tanielu and Geraint Tagalou (St Paul's College)

U15 Player of the Year | Charlie Salesa-Leumoana (Southern Cross Campus)

Girls' Manager of the Year | Ashleigh Heke (Green Bay High School)

Girls' Coach of Year | Courtney Punga (Papatoetoe High School)

Girls' Player of the Year | Cheylen Davis (James Cook High School)

Girls' 9-aside Team of the Year:

1. Tayla Yakas (Green Bay High School)
2. Jhana Magele (Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate)
3. Christine Faiga'a (Aorere College)
4. Chloe Tearikimana (Auckland Girls' Grammar School)
5. Cheylen Davis (James Cook High School)
6. Mele Finetoli (Papatoetoe High School)

*Continued on next page...*

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7. Charlie Kamuhemu (Auckland Girls' Grammar School)

8. Esther Henry (Alfriston College)

9. Oceaniah Leiataua (McAuley High School)

Senior A Top Try-Scorer | Tyler Loomes - 6 tries (Lynfield College)

Senior A Top Goalkicker | John Loto'atu - 11 goals (Lynfield College)

Senior A Manager of the Year | Loki Pauli (James Cook High School)

Senior A Coach of the Year | Fifita Hala (St Paul's College)

Senior A Player of the Year | Seamus Kelly (Whangaparoa College)

NZIS Scholarship winner | Justyne Matangi-Lui

Premier Referee of the Year | Warren Clarke

Premier Top Try-Scorer | Antonio Aufai - 9 tries (St Paul's College)

Premier Top Goalkicker | Jaelin Murray - 21 goals (St Paul's College)

Premier Manager of the Year | Daniel Lynch (Mt Albert Grammar School)

Premier Coach of the Year | Jamie Williamson (Westlake Boys' High School)

Premier Team of the Year:

1. Moala Graham-Taufa (Mt Albert Grammar School)

2. Ben Weatherall (Kelston Boys' High School)

3. Lani Graham-Taufa (Mt Albert Grammar School)

4. Jonah Palota-Kopa (St Paul's College)

5. Sam Kamu (Mt Albert Grammar School)

6. William Pompey (Wesley College)

7. Kadiyae Ioka (Kelston Boys' High School)

8. Tasimani Lotima Aivalu (Kelston Boys' High School)

9. Vaka Sikahale (Wesley College)

10. Antonio Aufai (St Paul's College)

11. Nitoa Kairau (Southern Cross Campus)

12. Elijah Ieriko (Mt Albert Grammar School)

13. George Smalley (Otahuhu College)

Premier Player of the Year | Sam Kamu (Mt Albert Grammar School)

**H**I EVERYONE, I'm Hitro Okesene and I am inaugural warrior #10. I was with the Warriors from 1995-97 before moving over to England to play for Hull Sharks (now FC). I then played for West Yorkshire outfit Featherstone Rovers the following year. An opportunity came along to play the English off-season in the south of France for Treize Catalan. So we moved there two weeks after our season ended in the play-off finals. I finished my career playing in Cumbria for Workington Town from 2000-2003 and retired due to knee problems.

I am married to Donna and have three children Shakayla(21), Giovanna(19) and Lerocco(14). I live in the North West of Cumbria and work for a bed company Sealy UK making Divan beds. After retiring, I have coached three amateur open-aged rugby league teams through the years and enjoyed it thoroughly. Nowadays, I try playing golf with my son and I'm also the (taxi driver) taking him to his sports fixtures and giving him some advice which hopefully he'll take on board.





# BIG LEAGUE

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ROUND 18

## BIG LEAGUE

Est. 1920

YOUR OFFICIAL MAGAZINE



Adam Blair  
How the Warriors  
form an

Relishing his return to the Shaky Isles and ready to take down form



RAKING IT IN  
Hodgson is back for a final's assault



BLACK CATS  
Will history repeat on Friday the 13th?

THE **ULTIMATE** NRL GUIDE

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Roger Tuivasa-Sheck's drive to succeed is helping propel his Warriors to finals glory. By **MICHAEL BURGESS**

**A**T the age of 10, Roger Tuivasa-Sheck learned an important life lesson. His father would always take him to footy training well before the scheduled start, but unlike the other early arrivals, young Roger was tasked with completing various physical drills.

"The others were joking around, playing touch [rugby] in their school uniforms, but I was there, ready to go, training and doing my own thing with Dad," Tuivasa-Sheck tells *Big League*. "I used to get a bit annoyed, thinking, 'I just want to go and play touch.'

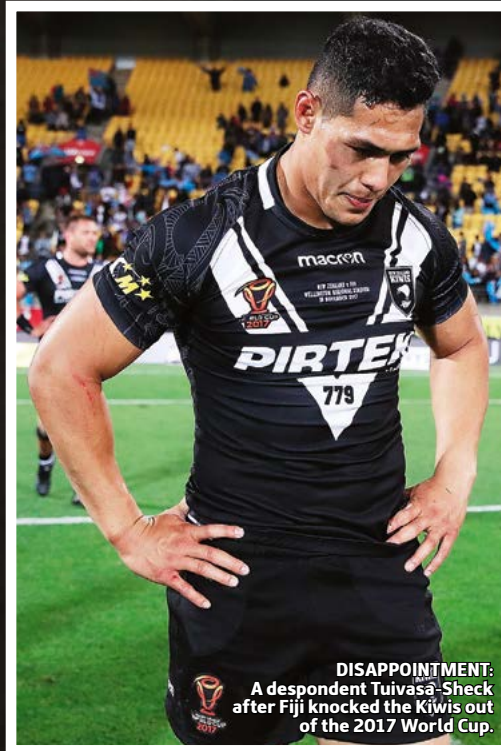
"At the time I didn't really know, but I just followed what Dad said. A few years later, it all clicked; he got me quicker and sharper and drilled into me everything about discipline. It's something I've never forgotten."

That appetite for hard work, and drive to succeed, has defined his career, and right now Tuivasa-Sheck is in a good place.

He's the local boy leading the Warriors in their most impressive campaign in years, and he's enjoying it. He's also a new father, with fiancée Ashley Walker giving birth to their daughter Amara three months ago.

**WARRIORS REVIVAL**

It's a massive turnaround from last year. The Warriors' campaign had spiralled out of control after a promising start, and their new skipper



**DISAPPOINTMENT:** A despondent Tuivasa-Sheck after Fiji knocked the Kiwis out of the 2017 World Cup.



**NEXT**

carried much of the burden. The team won just seven matches and dropped their last nine games, leaving Tuivasa-Sheck at the crossroads.

"It was very tough, that period," he reflects. "I was coming up to my last year and working out what I wanted to do. At the time there was a lot of talk about rugby union coming into the picture... and for me it was true.

"After the Warriors' season, I put all my eggs into the Kiwis' basket. I hoped a good World Cup would get me going, get the enjoyment back."

The depleted Kiwis made a reasonable start to the tournament, with wins over Samoa and Scotland.

"The first two rounds were good," he recalls. "But in the Tonga game, then the Fiji game, once again the pressure got to the team and we fell away. Again I was very disappointed, and after the way we'd finished up with the Warriors - nine and zero - I was pretty down."

**CHANGING GEARS**

Tuivasa-Sheck had made a huge call to leave the Roosters in 2015, but was sold on the idea of creating a legacy for league in New Zealand. Now he had to make an even bigger decision, one that would encompass the prime years of his career.

"I wanted to play on the big stage," he explains. "To compete against the best, because that's what excites me - the challenge of the big games. Over the years, we weren't putting ourselves in the position to go for that top spot, to play against the best.

"That's the only reason I started to look outside, and at rugby. I had seen the [British] Lions tour (versus the All Blacks) and I thought, 'These are the type of games that I want to be playing in.'"

Despite interest from New Zealand Rugby and several other NRL clubs, Tuivasa-Sheck

PHOTOS: Getty Images; Hannah Peters (Main; Kiwis); Fiona Goodall (Training)





felt loyalty to the Warriors, but had to be convinced that things were going to be different.

During the off-season, coach Stephen Kearney kept him updated on signings and new CEO Cameron George outlined his vision for the club.

"It all sounded great," he says. "But it was time to see some action, some follow-up."

That began when Tuivasa-Sheck returned to pre-season training in January.

"Alex Corvo was smashing the boys," he says "It felt so professional when I came back into the environment. The boys were like, 'No, you can't stand around, you have to get on the move, run to your next station. There is no resting bro.'"

Further evidence came during the subsequent fitness tests.

"In the last pre-season, I was always up the front in our running testing," he says. "Now I was in the middle of the group, fighting to cross the line. I thought, 'Wow, these boys have been putting in the work.'"

Another crucial step came during the team's pre-season camp in Mount Maunganui.

"We had a lot of stuff going on, a few honest discussions," he says. "That was when I thought, 'OK, these boys are finally starting to open up.' I could see that everyone had had enough of not making the finals. That was another moment where I figured these guys were serious."

Tuivasa-Sheck agreed a new four year deal in late February - "My gut feeling told me there was something special happening here," he says - yet he remained edgy.

"It all felt different," says Tuivasa-Sheck. "But you never really know until you play."

The emphatic 32-20 win over the Rabbitohs in Perth in Round 1 provided the answer.

"That was special," he says. "Especially because of what we'd been through [in 2017]. To sit in the changing room singing our team song was great - though a few of us had probably forgotten the words, it had been that long."

## ALL CLASS

In time, Tuivasa-Sheck's decision to recommit could go down as a landmark moment for the Warriors. Like the discovery of a 15-year-old jet-heeled Stacey Jones running around for the Point Chevalier Pirates in the early 1990s, Simon Mannering's switch to the 13-a-side code in his final year at Nelson College, or the recruitment coup of Steve Price and Ruben Wiki in 2004.

"Roger is developing into a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a club," Warriors boss George adds. "He's a great leader, a great player and a great human."

Tuivasa-Sheck has averaged 175 running metres this year, adding 13 line breaks, nine try assists and three tries. The improvement in his defence has also caught the eye, with a series of remarkable try-line stops.

"That sums up Roger, and his desire to be the best," Warriors assistant coach Andrew McFadden tells *Big League*. "Some people say that, but he really lives it. When he first got here, his defensive game was pretty average. He took that feedback on - tough feedback - and said, 'OK, I'm going to sort this out.' And he's been one of the best defensive fullbacks this year."

More than anything, it's the 25-year-old's constant drive to succeed, engendered on the dusty fields of South Auckland, that stands out.

# LEVEL



LEADING THE WAY:  
Tuivasa-Sheck and  
coach Kearney.

"There is a truckload of improvement left in him," says Warriors football manager Brian Smith, who gave Tuivasa-Sheck his NRL debut in 2012. "In the fullback position now there are multiple areas you can make a difference. Roger has worked that out and there's a drive, a compulsion that he has got, to find more and more, for himself, his team-mates and his club. He is living proof to everyone: if you work hard, you improve."

Even in the disappointing 26-27 loss to the Bulldogs last week, as some team-mates faltered, Tuivasa-Sheck delivered his usual relentless effort. He doesn't know any other way, as he hunts September football for a restless nation.

"We want to take this team to a place it hasn't been before," he says. "That's a big challenge, but one that I want to take on. That's all that matters right now."



# Reader Mail



Hi Sir Peter

Thankyou and your team for the wonderful signed Jersey which I won in your latest Jersey competition, this we be great to be used for a fundraiser for our junior club teams.

Many thanks and keep up your fantastic support of Rugby League.

Brad Tacon, Greymouth - West Coast



Hi Sir Peter

As requested photos of baby Cove (3 months) in her Vodafone NZ Warriors team kit. Thank you very much for sending the parcel she loves it.

Mum, Renee is a Paramatta supporter but i can confirm that along with her Dad we are stoked to see the Warriors back in the play offs.

We love the Warriors books you sent as well.

Kind Regards, Dave Gardiner



Rewi and Paula's grandson. Possibly the youngest supporter all the way from Invercargill.



Another fantastic night at the Fox&Ferret Palms Chch.

4 massive Warriors fans. Brando, Lloyd Craig and Steve all enjoyed the Warriors victory over Penrith.

Some of the lads are heading up for Simon's 300th (What an Nrl legend)

Remember if you can't get to Auckland get to the Fox.

Warriors live and loud on the big Screen.

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



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Malo Sir Peter

Thank you very much for the mean as jersey! And as hard core union supporter (Mt Wellington Rugby, ITM Auckland, Blues, All blacks) I am still 100% behind the Mighty Vodafone Warriors from day one!

Regards, Mike



Lovley to see Manu Vatuvei back around the club this week.

If you wish to **subscribe** to the newsletter go to:  
[www.sirpeterleitch.co.nz](http://www.sirpeterleitch.co.nz)

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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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**David Kemeys** - Editor at Large  
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