

Sir Peter Leitch Club

AT MT SMART STADIUM, HOME OF THE MIGHTY VODAFONE WARRIORS

Newsletter

Kangaroos v Tonga







24th October 2018

#241







Photos courtesy of www.photosport.nz



THE TONGAN community have shown the world a sea of red and fan celebration like none before, in our great game of rugby league. Great Britain, France, Australia, Papau New Guinea or our own New Zealand Kiwis have never had such an overwhelming majority of fans turn out to support them in a test match let alone the amount of colour, flags and costume on show for one team.

From a sports fans' perspective there is a saying 'sport is like a religion', well the Tongan singing made the game a spiritual experience for many. When I think of other world class sport where stadiums are full with home team passionate supporters what springs to mind are the likes of the Boca Juniors Argentina football club where the stadium shakes because of the fans jumping, the riot crazy fans of Montreal Canadiens NHL Hockey who go crazy win or lose, the Pittsburgh Steelers and their famous yellow 'terrible towel' waving or the Chicago Cubs baseball fans 'loveable losers' tag. These are professional sport franchises each with their own unique long history, tradition, rituals and customs and for mine the Yanks do it like no other when it comes to a national anthem. However, what the Tongan community demonstrated last Saturday is right up there with the best of what I have seen from fans in world sport.

In 1985 George Mann Snr (the God Father of Mate Ma'a Tonga) requested permission from King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV to introduce the game of rugby league to Tonga and so the 'evolution' occurred in 1986 when the very first Mate Ma'a Tongan International team was established to compete in the inaugural Pacific Cup held in Rarotonga. In 1988 through hard work and sacrifice he then formed rugby league in both clubs and schools back in the Kingdom of Tonga.

George Mann Snr had two great passions which were fishing and music and to our family he will always be the 'hawaiian cowboy'. However, his two greatest loves were always his family and the Kingdom of Tonga. We know the motivation for my late uncle George in giving the name Mate Ma'a Tonga (die for Tonga) was never just about rugby league. It was always about serving his people, giving back and love.

Fast forward 32 years and to witness the amazing scenes of Tonga's World Cup games against the Kiwis and England and then last Saturday's historic sold-out game against Australia, we thank and acknowledge the vision of George Mann Snr and the many that helped him; also an important story to be told another time. I can't imagine even Uncle George could have dreamt of the scenes and atmosphere we witnessed on Saturday night or the juggernaut that Tonga Rugby League has developed into.

It is without doubt, the selfless decisions led by visionary players such as Jason Taumalolo, Sika Manu, Andrew Fifita and David Fusitua that have given rise to the Tongan 'revolution'. This current group of Mate Ma'a Tongan players are motivated by the same values and dreams as those before them. For them it was about more than rugby league, or a pay cheque, it was about honouring their families, giving back to the people of Tonga and providing avenues for Tongans to unite and celebrate their culture.

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Why did the Tongan community come out and display such powerful emotion in national pride and unity?

It has very little to do with rugby league. I would guess many in the crowd do not even attend nor watch many rugby league games at NRL or local club level or even rugby union for that matter.

The masses turned out because Mate Ma'a Tonga has reminded Tongan's abroad of their roots and they belong to a Kingdom. They have reminded us of the sacrifice of loved ones leaving Tonga for foreign lands for a better life. It was always about serving their people, giving back and love.

There is a line in the Sipi tau "Koe Otua Mo Tonga Ko Hoku Tofia"… "God and Tonga are my Inheritance." This is what it means to be Tongan.

My father Don Mann Snr was born in Vava'u, Tonga and my mother Elaine Mann (nee Hema) was born in Wairoa (Ngati Kahungungu/Tuhoe).

My brothers and I are grateful we were raised equally connected, belonging and having a strong sense of identity to both our Maori & Tongan families and culture. It has never been about choosing one over the other and I am incredibly grateful that throughout my playing and coaching career I am able to represent NZ and Tonga.

I applaud the Mate Ma'a Tonga players and community for never 'calling out' players such as Felise Kaufusi (NZ/Tonga/Australia) or Tyson Frizell (Wales/Tonga/Australia) or Josh McGuire (Samoa/Australia) over their representative decisions.

The Tongan 'revolution' must be the catalyst for change that helps the major Pacific Island teams to all compete with financial parity on the international stage. This in turn will ensure our game at the grass roots level will survive and flourish to more than just a sea of red.

Arohanui – Ofa Atu

Good luck to the Kiwis and Michael Maquire for the test against England at Kingston Upon Hull. GO THE KIWIS!

The game will be broadcast at 2am this Sunday morning live on Sky Sport 2 then replayed later at 7.30 am Sunday morning then again at 9 pm on Sky Sport 4.





By John Coffey

Tonga Justifies Its New Status

Andrew Fifita from Tonga leads the Tongan players as they perform the Tongan War Cry-Sipi Tau. Photo www.photosport.nz

ATE MA'A Tonga more than justified its challenge to the world champion Kangaroos at Mt Smart Stadium last Saturday. Despite almost all the pre-match trump cards being held by the Australians, the spirited performance of the Tongan players – and the amazing support given by their New Zealand and overseas-based communities – proved they are worthy of playing regular Tests against the traditional tier-one nations.

The Kangaroos enjoyed the benefit of having played the Kiwis a week earlier, topping up match fitness already honed by most of their players having gone deep into the NRL season or playing for the Prime Minister's XIII against Papua New Guinea at Port Moresby. In comparison, most of the Tongans had not played for at least six weeks and could have done with a warm-up game against strong opposition.

Because of that the Tongans were very much at a crossroads late in the first half when the Kangaroos romped to a 20-point advantage, dominated possession and were threatening to run riot. There were visions of an eventual embarrassing scoreline and the Australians shutting the door on further encounters. Instead, Tonga responded to a 30-10 halftime deficit by "winning" the second spell 6-4 for a respectable 34-16 result.

That was in spite of losing courageous halfback Ata Hingano, who dislocated his shoulder in the fifth minute and bravely soldiered on for another twenty. But the Kangaroos capitalised on his inability to tackle and the Tongans suffered from losing a playmaker when rare scoring chances presented themselves. Tuimoala Lolohea and back-up hooker Sione Katoa did their utmost to compensate against all odds.

Bitten by the loss to the Kiwis, the Kangaroos made the most of their first-half opportunities. They pounced on the errors which dropped Tonga's completion rate to 58 per cent and on any hesitation in the Tongan fringe defence. James Tedesco stamped his mark on the number one jersey vacated by Billy Slater and three-quarters Valentine Holmes and Tom Trbojevic did not waste their try-scoring chances.

After halftime Tonga responded to a potentially dire situation, its international credibility at stake. The completion rate was lifted so impressively that the Kangaroos were forced to make five goal-line drop-outs and Tonga finished the game with more possession (53 per cent), more run metres (1751 to 1440), more off-loads (19-5) and a share of the line breaks (5-5). The Kangaroos had to make 398 tackles (to 275).

Wholehearted captain Sika Manu topped the Tongan tackle count with 38. While fullback Tedesco was a deserving Man of the Match for his try, two line breaks and 171 running metres, the efforts of Tongan front-rower Sio Siua Taukeiaho was even more startling. A premiership-winning Sydney Roosters club-mate of Tedesco, Taukeiaho carted the ball up for 200 bruising metres into the Aussie forwards.

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All of the side stories around the historic Test were promising for the future – from the NZRL confirming the Mate Ma'a would play the Kiwis at a venue still to be decided next June 22, to Tongan hopes of also playing the Kangaroos, Great Britain and Toa Samoa in 2019, to hearing youngsters on both sides of the Tasman were pledging their allegiance to Tonga to continue the production line of quality players.

Coach Kristian Woolf and players Andrew Fifita and Jason Taumalolo were the catalysts for Tonga's outstanding 2017 World Cup campaign and the amazing scenes at Mt Smart last weekend. Can Samoa now find its own leaders so it, too, becomes a Pacific rugby league powerhouse? Only four years ago Samoa came within four minutes of beating the Kiwis in a memorable Four Nations match at Whangarei.

Current Kiwis Isaac Liu and Leeson Ah Mau and Kangaroo Josh McGuire were in that Samoa team, which also lost narrowly to England. Could McGuire or recent Kangaroo Josh Papali'i be the Samoan version of Fifita, and Liu or Ah Mau fill the role of Taumalolo? The Kiwis would again suffer more than the Kangaroos but they did okay without Taumalolo, Taukeiaho and David Fusitu'a earlier this month.

We need a settled Test programme to capitalise on the Tongan revolution. Unfortunately, our sport might never be free of the NRL clubs' hold on most of the best players. But the fact Tonga fielded an almost identical team to that which all but upset England in the 2017 World Cup semi-final testified to their determination to put their nation first. In showing that loyalty to their country they are already leading the world!





AN MICHAEL Maguire continue his winning ways with New Zealand this Saturday at Hull? Rugby League fans world wide will be keen to see if the Kiwis can begin their three Test campaign against England with a victory. They were impressive at Mt Smart just over a week ago when they defeated Australia and will be keen to upset Wayne Bennett and his team. Maguire is an experienced and talented coach with a NRL Premiership under his belt and he will have his men prepared for anything the Poms can throw up. According to my research, New Zealand have won just one Test match at Hull but that was against France in a 1970 World Cup game when they defeated the Frenchmen 16-15 on 25 October. On the negative side, I dont think they have ever beaten Great Britain or England in five attempts in the city. New Zealand first played Great Britain at Hull on 13 November 1926 and were beaten 21-11, while they first played England at Carlaw Park during the 1975 World Series. This result, on 21 June, was 17-all. From the early 1900s, England had played matches against Wales, France, Scotland and Other Nationalities etc. But when they met the southern hemisphere nations, it was as Great Britain. Over the last 10 years or so it has been England, although this has fluctuated. At Hull on 3 November 2007, New Zealand were beaten by Great Britain, but fours years later on 12 November 2011, England beat the Kiwis. Hull is located on the Hull river near the Humber Estuary, 40 kms inland from the north sea. It has existed for more than 800 years and was built on whaling and seafaring. Ferries sail from Hull to various European ports and over the last few years, they take more than one million passengers a year to the continent. The population of Hull is around 260,700 and it lies 80 kms east of Leeds and 250 kms north of London.

Saturday's Test will be played at KCOM Stadium, which is also known as the Hull City Stadium. It was previously named the KC Stadium but was renamed in April 2016, as part of a major rebrand by the sponsors. The stadium was completed in 2002 at a cost of 44 million English pounds and its capacity is 25,400. The Four Seasons might have written their song, " Oh, What A Night " with Mt. Smart Stadium last Saturday in mind. I watched the TV coverage and the whole thing was tremendous. The game was first class and the crowd of 26,214 was a great boost to international Rugby League.

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As several of the Australian players said in interviews after the very physical 80 minutes, they will need time to rest their sore bodies. The atmosphere could be felt through the television coverage and the fact that most of the crowd remained long after the final whistle was amazing. Although the 34-16 scoreline suggests a comfortable win for the Kangaroos, they had to defend strongly for the victory. On the NRL website, it says the Kangaroos had to make 398 tackles compared to Tonga's 275, while Mate Ma'a Tonga made 555 post contact metres and the Australians only 425. While James Tedesco deservedly won the Man of the Match Award, Valentine Holmes wasn't far behind him. With his 18 points from two tries and five goals, the 23 year old Sharks player now has 86 points for Australia from his 13 Tests. He has scored 17 tries in these 13 Tests which is better than Billy Slater who had collected 16 tries from his first 13 Tests. Holmes is approaching a century of tries in first class football. He has 66 for in 105 games with the Sharks, eight in five State of Origin matches for Queensland and 17 in his 13 Tests. That is a total of 91 tries in 123 games.

The 2019 season will begin with some attractive first round games. On Thursday night, 14 March, the Broncos play the Storm in Melbourne, while the next night begins with the Knights meeting the Sharks at Newcastle, followed by the Roosters-Souths clash at the Sydney Cricket Ground. The Warriors begin the new season on Saturday 16 March at Mt. Smart against the Bulldogs. After the game at Mt. Smart, the Tigers are at home at Campbelltown against Manly and then St. George/Illawarra travel to North Queensland to take on the Cowboys. The two Sunday games are Penrith at home to Parramatta and then the Titans play the Raiders on the Gold Coast. All the games in the first round of any season are attractive, but there is some extra spice in most of next year's opening games. With the 2019 fixture list to be officially released next week, I would like to see more games taken to country towns than have been scheduled so far. The Panthers will play a game at Bathurst which is 200 kms west of the Sydney Business Centre and 147 kms west of Penrith. The Raiders will travel to Wagga, which is around 240 kms west by road and St. George/Illawarra will go to Mudgee, which is about 325 kms north west of their Wollongong training venue. The Warriors will play a game in Wellington and this should be an attraction in the New Zealand capital.

Stories have surfaced recently that the NRL referees want a pay increase and the amount mentioned in some quarters is a figure of around \$300,000 a season. That is ridiculous, as on many of their displays in 2018, they should have their salaries decreased not improved. I hear the NRL will give the whistle blowers an increase but it won't be anywhere near \$300,000.

The Wallabies play the All Blacks in Tokyo this Saturday and I hope Michael Cheika and his team can stay close to the New Zealanders. Cheika has been under, what I believe, is some unfair criticism over the last few months because the Australians have won just three of the nine Tests they have played in 2018. Apart from their recent hiccup against South Africa, the All Blacks have been outclassing all nations for many years now. Australia play New Zealand more than any other country.



I want to pay tribute to my good mate Shaun Wane who coached Wigan. He is now leaving the club to coach rugby union. - Sir Peter

Shaun Wane. Wigan Legend.

- Longest serving Wigan coach in Super League (2011-2018)
- Three Grand Final rings
- One Challenge Cup
- One World Club Challenge
- One League Leaders Shield
- SL Coach of the Year 2018
- Chairman Award 2018
- Club Life Member

Bring on the Dogs

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

TWEEK 40 or so I confess I am running out of steam, particularly with the off-season upon us, and just the Kiwis in England to look forward to.

Tonga v Australia is being covered off by better people than me elsewhere, so there is not that much on the horizon.

I was excited though to see details of the draw, which does not come out until Thursday, leaked in the Aussie papers.

They say we start our season against the Bulldogs, notably no longer coached by Des Hasler, who has returned to Manly, and if that is not a case of "all is forgiven" I do not know what is.

So mark you diary for March 16 when the boys will take to Mt Smart and get us under way again.

I have not forgiven the scummy Dogs for tipping us over 27-26 when they had absolutely no right to play well, having been crap all year.

But for that we would have secured a home semi, and who knows what could have happened.

It will actually be something of a rare, and I hesitate to use the word treat, but I will, to have the Dogs in Auckland because we have made a habit of meeting them at foreign venues, so much so that it will be only the second time the Bulldogs have played at Mt Smart since 2012.

They have played in Wellington twice, having taken a home game to the capital, and frankly the Windy City is welcome to the Dogs.

They have barked in Hamilton, Dunedin and at Eden Park too.

The season, the papers say, will kick off in Melbourne on a Thursday night, with the 2018 grand finalists hosting the Broncos. All we can hope for is a significant number of injuries.

Champions the Roosters face the Rabbitohs on the Friday, apparently at the Sydney Cricket Ground though who knows why? Hasler's Manly have the Tigers on the Saturday, and the Cowboys the Dragons. The big plus for us is that we hardly ever seem to get a home game in round one, in fact we have only had one since 2010 – although we did in 2011 and again in 2012 but those were at Eden Park, which is as far as I am concerned is not playing at home – and certainly best forgotten.

We can no longer use the slow starter excuse, after flying out of the blocks this season, so a win will be important.

A positive result in round one is always a morale booster, but it does seem a long way off.

Chuck in a few more hoodoo-busters like being able to win in Perth was this year, and I will be a happy boy.

There are 11 games set for Mt Smart in the coming season, and one home encounter in Wellington.

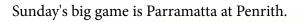
What we won't see, and I cannot for the life of me figure out why given its success this year, is a double-header.

Instead there is a Magic Round in Brisbane in May when all 16 clubs play at Suncorp across three days, which is one of the dumbest ideas I have ever heard, but is a concept borrowed from England's Super League, where it has been part of the calendar for a decade or so.

And the trouble with having too much time on your hands with no Warriors to go to is that it leaves you plenty of space to worry about shit you can't influence, like who will replace Mason Lino, now he is s a Knight.

Chanel Harris-Tavita and Hayze Perham are works in progress, so I suspect a replacement will be on the shopping list, because surely you would not go into the season with no cover on hand if you had to deal with injuries to Blake Green or Shaun Johnson.

I really need to get a life.





Kiwis in Dubai

Martin Taupau taking a selfie



The boys chilling in the desert.



Did you see the interview the Mad Butcher did with Joseph Manu on his facebook page?





Jared Waerea-Hargreaves enjoying the view





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Kiwis in England

PIRTE

Adam Blair looking fired up.

Assistant coach Stacey Jones in a training mood.

Brandon Smith the boy from Waiheke.



Big Marty Taupau stretching out during training.



Jared Waerea-Hargreaves who is on fire.





Joseph Manu originally from Tokoroa.



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History Beckons 2018 Kiwis Tourists

Photo NZRL

THE COACHING and captaincy partnership of Michael Maguire and Dallin Watene-Zelezniak is only one game old (and what a game that was!) but they have a rare chance to claim a proud place in Kiwis rugby league folklore over the next three weekends. Sixteen touring teams have played against Great Britain or England in three-Test series over the last 111 years, but only three of them have returned victorious.

After the original, privately-organised 1907-08 All Golds won the second and third Tests of their series New Zealand fans had to suffer through two world wars (the second of which forced the cancellation of the 1939 Kiwis tour after just two club games) and six losing series before celebrating again with the 1971 Grand Slam Kiwis. The most recent triumph was in 1998, which was twenty years and three tours ago.

Not that it has been all-way traffic against the others. The 1980, 1985 and 2002 Kiwis all shared their series with one win, one draw and one loss. They were tantalisingly close to achieving outright victory. Five other teams experienced the satisfaction of one Test victory in losing series by 1-2, and the 1965 Kiwis drew the third Test after losing the first two. The 0-3 whitewashes were in 1926, 1951, 1993 and 2007.

Until the 1950s, travelling to Britain involved long sea voyages in both directions. The All Golds twice played in Australia (under rugby union rules in 1907 and rugby league rules in 1908) and were away for nine months. Maintaining fitness on board ship was just one of the many hurdles to overcome. Those 1950s Kiwis faced up to 40 matches in England and France, slogging their way through harsh northern winters.

In addition to Test and county fixtures, every British professional club could bid for a game against the tourists, who – in an era before manicured pitches and floodlighting – were usually required to back up twice every weekend and for one or two midweek matches. Injuries and illnesses were an ever-present threat and there were no replacements available. Teams consisted of 26 players, two for each position.

New Zealand amateurs were pitted against hardened British semi-professionals, and many other factors favoured the home sides. Every one of the three major rugby league nations had their own rule interpretations and variations. And they all had their own notorious referees – Britain with "Sargent-Major" Eric Clay, New Zealand with John "10-yards" Percival and the Aussies with any number of questionable characters.

Deryk Brown, the mild-mannered school teacher who refereed the three 1971 Tests and then publicly praised the Kiwis for their sportsmanship and fair play, was never appointed to another Test match. During the 1980s, when Australian whistle-blowers were invited to act as neutral referees, their rulings fluctuated wildly. By the end of a three-Test series some of the Aussies were more English than the English themselves!

When the All Golds sailed from New Zealand in 1907 they did not even have a rule book for the 13-a-side game which evolved from the Northern Union breakaway in Britain 12 years earlier. Organised by young Wellington sportsman Albert Baskerville, they had no designated coach (just Harry Palmer as manager) and were captained by Hercules (Bumper) Wright. But champion wing George Smith led them in their two Test victories.

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Roy Christian, a silky smooth centre from Otahuhu who had begun his international career on the wing, was the inspirational captain of the 1971 Kiwis. There has never been a nicer guy to pull on a Kiwis jersey, nor a more determined competitor when wearing it. Christian perfectly complemented coach Lory Blanchard, a grizzled old front-rower from Christchurch who had first toured Britain and France with the 1951-52 Kiwis.

In 1998 the unlikely winning captain was Warriors prop Quentin Pongia, a West Coaster who represented Canterbury prior to his professional career. Pongia (like Watene-Zelezniak) had captained the Kiwis in only one previous Test after an injury forced Matthew Ridge into early retirement. Another Cantabrian, Frank Endacott, was then in his fifth year as Kiwis coach and had also coached the Warriors that year.

Maguire and Watene-Zelezniak have deservedly received praise for their roles in the Kiwis' stunning 26-24 victory over the Kangaroos. Back in 1907-08 the All Golds beat their fellow Australian "rebels" at rugby union on the first leg of their tour; the 1971 Kiwis thrashed Australia 24-3 at Carlaw Park to ignite their Grand Slam; and Endacott's men won the 1998 Anzac Test at North Harbour before their tour.

It still brings a rare frown to "Happy Frank" Endacott's face when reminded how close his Kiwis were to another clean sweep, having beaten Great Britain in all three 1996 Tests at home. They opened the 1998 series with wins at Huddersfield (22-16) and Bolton (36-16). A 3-0 whitewash seemed certain when they led 23-16 at Watford only to concede a converted try and field goal in the last three minutes to draw 23-23.

So the 2018 Kiwis can surpass the deeds of all their predecessors by beating England 3-0 at Hull, Liverpool and Leeds. But the fact so many outstanding Kiwis coaches, captains and players have produced a modest overall record of 14 Test victories, five draws and 29 losses says it all. When World Cup and other tournament results are added the record is 18 wins, five draws and 37 losses. It's going to be tough; it always has been.

Footnote: England beat France 44-6 (halftime 38-0) at Leigh last Thursday morning (NZ time). The match was designed to give NRL and Super League players not involved in the later stages of their club competitions match practice before the Kiwis series. No Wigan or Warrington squad members were considered. Wakefield wing Tom Johnstone scored three tries on debut but is no certainty to play against New Zealand.

MAXRaft Queenstown Rugby League 9's Carnival

N ITS fourth year, the Maxraft Queenstown Rugby League 9's Carnival is happening in Queenstown on Saturday 10 November 2018, 9am – 5pm at the Queenstown Recreation Grounds in the heart of Queenstown.

Go along to see eight high quality teams from across the South Island (Queenstown, Cromwell, Dunedin, Christchurch and Invercargill) contest the 1 day event to vie for the title of Queenstown RL 9s Champions.

The tournament is a family fun day event and is hosted by a committee that is driven and passionate about league. They have great support from awesome sponsors and it offers a chance to for talented players to showcase the skill and excitement of the great game of rugby league 9s.

Take your family along to watch the fun.

If you are interested in playing in next years competition, their Chair, Taika Brooks, can take expressions of interest from your teams on <u>queenstownrl9s@gmail.com</u>.





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Please come and visit us to celebrate our NZ league heroes - both past and present at the *New Zealand Rugby League Museum*

Meet former Kiwi stars and check out memorabilia dating back to 1907 Historical game day footage, team photos, match and test programmes, trophies, jerseys, the original signed contract for the 1907 All Golds **PLUS lots more**.



Museum Opening Hours: MON, WED & FRI 11am – 3pm and other times by appointment

Located at:

League House, 7 Beasley Avenue, Auckland, New Zealand (right next door to Mt Smart Stadium)

Phone: 09-571 3857 Email: museum@nzrl.co.nz Web: www.nzrl.co.nz/about-us/history



Yesterday's league legends inspiring the fans and stars of tomorrow



Warrior Agnatius Paasi ready for our team dinner out in the desert with the Kiwis in Dubai.

Good luck to the All Blacks playing Australia in the third Bledisloe cup match of the year at Yokohama Stadium in Japan. Broadcast on Sky Sport 1 at 6pm



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