



# Sir Peter Leitch Club

AT MT SMART STADIUM, HOME OF THE MIGHTY VODAFONE WARRIORS

## Newsletter

21<sup>st</sup> November 2018

#245

### Back To Work

By David Kemeys

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



**A**S CHRISTMAS creeps ever closer and we all ponder maybe a few days off over summer, spare a thought for the Warriors, who are back in pre-season training.

To be fair, they are back in fits and starts, with some getting longer breaks, notably those who were on international duty.

Every year we hear “this has been the toughest pre-season yet” and I don’t imagine it will be any different this time, particularly with fitness guru Alex Corvo saluted all year for producing a team that left all the “bloody never fit” moaners wondering what to bitch about.

The youngsters were fist back in and there have been mumblings that being put through their paces was none too pleasant an experience.

Coach Stephen Kearney says preparations for 2019 are only now getting under way in earnest.

Everyone has had time now to digest and analyse this season, and see where we did better, failed to deliver and all the rest of it, something Kearney says is imperative to making real progress.

“That’s not only for the club, but also individually, for each player and where they can improve.”

I am told that pre-season often features a lot of strength and conditioning work but Kearney is in boots and all too.

“We want to start implementing the fundamentals of our structure.”

Captain Roger Tuivasa-Sheck is one of those back at work, and at least, having missed the Kiwis tour, he’ll get a full pre-season in.

More beer and Christmas pudding, or endless fitness sessions with Corvo, I know which I’d choose.

#### Welcome home Shaun

I’ve tended to try to stay out of the Shaun Johnson debate but you can bet that now he is home from the Kiwis tour there are some conversations going on at Mt Smart.

He has stayed pretty quiet but has said he is open-minded about his future – which is the same as saying moving is not out of the question.

We still haven’t made a new offer to retain Shaun, who has a year left on his current contract, and who, unless you have been hiding under a rock, you will know we have told to test his value on the open market.

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When he got back he told the Herald he was unsure whether he would see out the duration of his contract or extend his time.

“It’s a club that, regardless of if I’m here over the next few years, I’m always going to love.”

Then it was pretty-much the old time with my family thing, which is fair enough after a gruelling season, a kick in the guts, and a Kiwis tour.

### **Best wishes to prop of old**

Former Kiwis and Warriors prop Quentin Pongia is battling bowel cancer.

Pongia came from the old school – hardly surprising given he was West Coast boy – and played hard and direct, in a career that saw him earn 35 Kiwis caps.

Old buggers like me will recall watching him play for the Raiders, where he won a premiership before going on to play with the Warriors, Roosters and Dragons.

These days he is Manly’s Wellbeing Officer and works closely with young indigenous players.

All the best Quentin from those of us who remember you fondly.

### **Reggae boys make history**

Didn’t see this one coming the league world but Jamaica’s Reggae Warriors have qualified for the Rugby League World Cup by beating the United States 16-10.

Jamaica are the 11th nation to claim a spot for the 2021 event.

They have only been playing league in Jamaica since 2004 but they shot out of the blocks in the play-off with two penalties and two tries to put them ahead of the USA Hawks by 16 points.

The Hawks didn’t go down without a fight, two tries before half time putting the back in the game but the Reggae Warriors held tight throughout a scoreless second half.

The Hawks can still make it, because they play in a repechage competition next year.

## **FROM 5 TO 55 RUGBY LEAGUE NATIONS**

**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)



**W** E RUGBY league folk are often told our game is only played in the north of England, the east coast of Australia, the jungles of Papua New Guinea and the southern suburbs of Auckland. So the best news in a flurry of international announcements over the last week was RLIF development manager Tas Baitieri proudly announcing there are now 55 nations affiliated. As recently as 1985 there had been only five.

Australia, England, New Zealand and Tonga have been given top seedings for the four pools at the 16-team, 2021 World Cup in Britain. The second line of seeds, Fiji, Lebanon, Papua New Guinea and Samoa, were rewarded for reaching the last eight at the 2017 tournament. France and Wales recently qualified from the European championship, though Ireland and Scotland receive a second chance in 2019.

The World Cup draw will be announced on November 27, 2019, exactly two years out from the 2021 final. The Kiwis reached the final when Britain last hosted the cup in 2013 but were well beaten by the Kangaroos. The 2021 men’s tournament will be played in conjunction with an eight-nation women’s World Cup – which will start when the men reach their quarter-finals stage – and also a wheelchair World Cup.

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Significantly, this Thursday is the tenth anniversary of New Zealand's remarkable 34-20 victory over hot favourite Australia in the 2008 World Cup final at a sold-out Suncorp Stadium. It is a proud part of our game's history how the Kiwis surged back from conceding the first two tries to score six of their own. The sight of captain Nathan Cayless lifting the cup was our most momentous rugby league moment.

Canberra coach Ricky Stuart wore the green and gold with pride but has fallen out of love with the international game. Stuart was the beaten Kangaroos coach in 2008, losing the job after a run-in with match officials. In the last year his Raiders have been deprived of England hooker Josh Hodgson, Tonga halfback Ata Hingano and Kiwis wing Jordan Rapana because of serious injuries suffered playing for their countries.

The RLIF has awarded Golden Caps to those who have played 50 Tests and Ruben Wiki (55) was one of the recipients. The others were Darren Lockyer (59 for Australia), Cameron Smith (56 for Australia), Jim Sullivan (54 for Wales, England and Great Britain), Adrian Morley (53 for England and Great Britain), Petero Cioniceva (51 for Australia and Fiji) and Mick Sullivan (50 for England and Great Britain).

Fullback and goal-kicker Jim Sullivan fashioned a remarkable career after signing for Wigan from Wales as a 17-year-old in 1921. He played an incredible 774 games for Wigan (plus another 31 when guesting for other clubs) through to 1946, scoring almost 5000 points. The unrelated Mick Sullivan's professional career from 1952 to 1966 included nearly 400 games on the wing for five English clubs, scoring more than 200 tries.

Kiwis backrow forward Adam Blair might join this illustrious group in 2019. He played his 48th Test against England at Elland Road last week. Blair debuted in 2006 and was a try-scorer in the famous 2008 World Cup triumph. When one adds a match against New Zealand Residents at Greymouth in 2006 and another against the Leeds Rhinos club in 2015 that 48th Test was also his 50th match in a black and white jersey.

West Coast hooker Jock Butterfield, who played during an era (1954-1963) when the Kiwis made long tours to Australia and even longer tours to Britain and France, holds the record with 99 games, of which 36 were Tests. Blair is now second behind Wiki (55) on the Test chart, and ahead of Gary Freeman (46), Stacey Jones (46), Stephen Kearney (45), Simon Mannering (45), Issac Luke (43) and Thomas Leuluai (40).

England wing Tommy Makinson, whose three tries in the second Test at Liverpool clinched the series against the Kiwis, was awarded the Golden Boot for international rugby league excellence in 2018. The other finalists were England second-rower Elliott Whitehead, and fullbacks James Tedesco (Australia) and Dallin Wattene-Zelezniak (New Zealand). Jillaroos centre Isabelle Kelly won the inaugural women's Golden Boot.

Makinson was not a popular winner with NSW coach Brad Fittler, who reckoned Tedesco should have been given it for his State of Origin deeds.

Fittler was upset the prestigious trophy went to someone he had never seen play. Fittler apparently could not distinguish between international and inter-state football. And he obviously forgot Queensland fullback Billy Slater was given that particular trophy anyway!

Australia will play only two Tests, against New Zealand and Tonga, in 2019 after declining a chance to meet the touring British Lions. Current proposals have the Kiwis playing Tonga in June and Australia in October as part of the Oceania Cup, and then two home Tests against the Lions, who might also play Tonga, Fiji, Samoa and Papua New Guinea. The last three also meet each other in their Oceania Cup section.

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By Shane Hurndell  
Hawke's Bay Today  
Sports Reporter

## BAY'S FOMAI GETS CRACK AT WARRIORS CONTRACT

Neria Fomai (left) with Warriors captain Roger Tuivasa-Sheck at training earlier this month

**I**T'S BEEN more than two decades since a Hawke's Bay rugby league player has secured a Warriors contract.

Former Hawke's Bay Unicorns captain and centre Mike Doreen made some first grade appearances in the mid 1990s around the same time former Unicorns winger Charlie Kennedy jnr was shining for the Warriors under-20s. Come 2019 Neria Fomai could become the next Hawke's Bay league export to receive a regular pay packet from the Warriors.

If he does Fomai, 26, will have the Bridge Pa club to thank for his success. It was through playing for Bridge Pa at the national Maori Rugby League tournament in Rotorua at Labour Weekend that he earned a three-month trial with the Warriors.

"Put in the hard yards and play for us at the national Maori tournament and you never know where you may end up," was the message from Bridge Pa premier men's player-coach Ihaka Waerea at the club's recent prize-giving.

While Fomai couldn't attend the prizegiving because of his Auckland commitments he was well toasted in his absence.

Waerea told the function Fomai is competing for one of three fulltime contracts with the Warriors as well as one of three development contracts.

Centre Fomai is no stranger to the big time. He first played for the Samoan Sevens team in 2013 and earlier this year played at the Commonwealth Games after completing another World Series campaign under Sir Gordon Tietjens.

He has also played for Samoa in 15s and last year played Mitre 10 Cup rugby for the Southland Stags. The Hastings Rugby and Sports club rugby player was the Bay's club rugby player of the year in 2016.

Fomai and former Hawke's Bay Magpies and Manawatu Turbos rugby utility back Lewis Marshall were the only Bridge Pa players selected in the tournament team in Rotorua.

The sole Bridge Pa women's player who gained tournament team selection in Rotorua, outside back Tori Iosefo, has been named in an initial Maori squad from which a team will be selected to play against the Australian Indigenous 1st People Team in February. It will be a surprise if Iosefo does not make the final cut.

A former Kiwi Fern, Iosefo, was a key member of the Hawke's Bay Tui rugby side which reached the semi-finals in this season's Farah Palmer Cup Championship.

Meanwhile former Hawke's Bay Unicorns captain and utility player won the Bridge Pa premier men's MVP

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award at the club's prizegiving. Former New Zealand touch rep Candis Timms won the premier women's MVP award.

Timms is a daughter of former New Zealand touch rep and a former long-time manager of the Hawke's Bay Tui rugby team Honey Cardie.

Prizewinners at the Bridge Pa club's prizegiving were:

Premier Men: MVP, Colin Hokianga; Best Back, Jarome Mareikura; Best Forward, Ivan Bellamy; Iron Man, Teina Huia; Defensive Rock, Buffy Wainohu; Most Committed, Teira Cowan; Best Club Man, Raun Makirere-Haerewa.

Senior Development: MVP, Hemi Hokianga Junior; Best Back, Hemi Hokianga Junior; Best Forward, Te Wheturere Ferris; Most Improved, Connor Wells; Most Promising, Keanu Hapi.

Premier Women: MVP, Candis Timms; Best Back, Treyana Faulkner; Best Forward, Whitley Mareikura; Most Improved, Journey Otene; Most Promising, Tamia Edwards.

#### **NZMRL Tournament awards:**

Men's Team (Waka Grade): MVP, Jackson Waerea; Best Back, Colin Hokianga; Best Forward, Raun Makirere-Haerewa; Man of the weekend, Ike (Bull) Waerea; Final placing, 3rd / 19 teams. Tournament team selection, Lewis Marshall and Neria Fomai.

Women's Team: MVP, Tori Iosefo; Final placing, 5th/8 teams; Tournament team selection, Tori Iosefo.

## **Winning Venue**

By Barry Ross



**T**HE VODAFONE Warriors begin their 2019 campaign with a home game against the Bulldogs on Saturday 16 March. The Warriors have won 58 percent of their matches at Mt. Smart and will be hoping to collect their fourth successive win at the ground after defeating, Newcastle, Penrith and Canberra in the last three home games of 2018. According to the Rugby League project website, since joining the competition in 1995 as the Auckland Warriors, the Warriors have played 281 NRL games at Mt. Smart, winning 163, losing 117 and drawing one. In this period, they have met the Bulldogs at Mt Smart in 16 games and at the moment, it stands as eight wins each. The last time the two sides met at Mt. Smart was in 2017 when the Warriors won 21-14. Before that match the previous game between the clubs at Mt Smart was in 2012 when the Bulldogs took the honours 32-18. Obviously both teams will want to begin their new seasons with victories. The Warriors won 15 of their 24 games this year and came in at eighth position, while Canterbury finished 12th with eight wins. It is interesting to study the men who have played the most matches at Mt. Smart. The recently retired Simon Mannering has played

141 matches at the venue with 57 wins and 84 losses. He appeared as a winger, centre, second rower, lock and off the bench in these games while he crossed for 36 tries. The only other players to top the century mark are Stacey Jones and Manu Vatuvei. Stacey finished with 132 games at Mt. Smart for 58 wins and 74 losses. He played at halfback, five eighth, wing and off the bench, while he compiled 361 points from 41 tries, 95 goals and seven field goals. Manu won 37 and lost 63, while collecting 64 tries. The other players to reach 50 or more games at Mt. Smart are Logan Swann 98, Ben Matulino 93, Lance Hohaia 90, Awen Guttenbeil 87, Jacob Lillyman 84, Dane Koopu 80, Sam Rapira 78, Michael Luck 75, Jerome Ropati 71, Shaun Johnson 70, Clinton Toopi 66, Jerry Seu-seu 65, Joe Vagana 60, Nathan Fien 58, Francis Meli 54, Evarn Tuimavave 54, Steve Price 51, Ruben Wiki 50, Russell Packer 50. Some of these men appeared with several clubs while others played only with the Warriors. Lance Hohaias played fullback, centre, five eighth, halfback, hooker and from the bench, while Shaun Johnson has the most points in club games at Mt. Smart with 476 (33 tries, 170 goals, 8 field goals).

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Manu Vatuvei's 64 tries tops that list.

Warriors coach, Stephen Kearney, has played 49 games at Mt. Smart, while FOX TV commentator, Greg Alexander has played 29 matches.

Dean Ritchie wrote a nice piece in the Australian Daily Telegraph of Thursday 15 November. Head-lined, "Still Plenty Of Fight in The Old Cattle Dog Raudonikis," it discussed Tommy Raudonikis' second battle with cancer. Now 68, Tommy was involved in the famous "cattle dog," call, which the NSW team used in Origin matches when Tommy was coach in 1997 and 1998. Several years ago, Tommy had a problem with testicular cancer and recently he has had the horrible disease in the neck. He has completed seven weeks of chemotherapy but is still very vigilant and tries to have a short swim every day. In his 14 year career, Tommy played 29 Tests and 241 first grade games with the Wests Magpies and Newtown.

Although they were around 8,100 kms apart, Australia's favourite sporting couple did well last Saturday. Matt Toomua scored six points for the Wallabies in their much needed 26-7 win over Italy in Padua, while his wife, Ellyse Perry, although on the losing side, had an outstanding game in the women's cricket World Cup at Guyana in the West Indies. India 8 for 167 beat Australia 9 for 119, but the Australians will still make the semi finals of this World Cup. The game with India was Perry's 100th T/20 International and she is the only Australian, male or female, to reach the century mark in this form of cricket. Perry turned 28 three weeks ago, on 3 November. Against India she top scored for Australia with 39 not out from 28 balls, including a six and three fours. With the ball, she took three Indian wickets for 16 runs and also collected a catch.

She is 10 months younger than her husband whom she married in December 2015. Toomua played his 41st Test against the Italians and his six points, gives him a total of 50 Test points for Australia. He has been playing with the Leicester Tigers in English rugby for the past couple of northern hemisphere seasons. For the game with Italy, Wallaby coach Michael Cheika, brought back 34 year old Adam Ashley-Cooper who played his 117th Test in Australian colours as a winger. Will Genia, now 30, came off the bench to play his 99th Test against Italy and will reach his century next Saturday, against England at Twickenham.

Wallaby coach, Michael Cheika, 51, has now coached Australia in 57 Tests and has 27 wins, 28 losses and two draws. The win was Australia's fourth from 12 Tests this year.

As a sporting fan, I was delighted to see Ireland beat the All Blacks 16-9 at Dublin on Saturday. It was a great game and there is no doubt they are the two best teams at the moment in World Rugby. The result will make next year's World Cup in Japan a tremendous attraction. The attendance in Dublin was about 52,000, while there were 18,621 fans at Padua. The Japanese did very well against England at Twickenham in front of a crowd of around 81,000.

On a wet Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane, before a crowd of 32,922, the Australian Socceroos snatched a 1-all draw with South Korea, after a goal by Massimo Luongo in the fourth minute of extra time, which was the last play of the game. The Australians had to wait until the officials checked the VAR (video replay) before allowing the equaliser. It was an excellent effort by the Australians, as South Korea defeated Germany 2-0 at Kazan on 27th June at the World Cup in Russia earlier this year.



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**Sir Peter Leitch Club**

# Touching Tributes Have Been Paid After The Death Of Ex-Saints Forward John Mantle Aged 76 After A long Illness

By Alex Service

**H**E WAS one of Saints' greatest-ever signings from the Welsh valleys, a superb forward, who married a local girl, Lorraine, in 1966, and remained a resident of the St Helens area all his life, becoming a well-respected teacher and an ever-popular member of our community.

Born in Cardiff, South Wales, on March 13, 1942, he was a real all-round sportsman in his youth. An Under 19s national triple jump champion, John played international soccer for Welsh Boys Clubs and was his school's cricket captain before going to Loughborough College. He became shot-putt champion and captain of the rugby team, playing for British Universities, Leicester and Newport, where he was a team-mate of fly-half David Watkins and his future team-mate at Saints, scrum-half Bob Prosser.



Yet John was nearly lost to rugby altogether. As a centre half, he was a target for Wolverhampton Wanderers, who were still a powerful club in English football. "I played six trial games for them," he recalled recently. "I then had a chat with the manager, Stan Cullis, who said he wanted to sign me but he told me that being a soccer player was a somewhat precarious occupation.

"I decided to go to college and get my teaching qualifications, although I could still have gone back to Wolves when I had finished at Loughborough, but it was not to be."

Given his all-round athleticism, there is little doubt he would have been a success.

Essentially a number 8 forward in the 15-a-side code, he represented Wales on eight occasions, including the 1964 tour to South Africa. Despite losing to the Springboks 24-3 in Durban, John had been the most outstanding Welsh player. Rugby League clubs were taking note, with Saints showing particular interest.

"I can remember talking to one of the Directors at the time who wanted to know more about John Mantle and would he be good enough for St. Helens," recalls Peter Harvey, who had himself recently signed from rugby union. "John and I had played in the Loughborough First XV, so I knew exactly what he was capable of. I told him that they would be signing one of the fastest forwards the club had ever seen!"

Yet John knew all about the town of St. Helens, as he explained in his testimonial brochure some years later: "In all honesty, the decision was made easy by the fact that I had spent some time in St. Helens during my college years – I had become friendly with a St Helens lad [Roy Woods] whilst at college and we had talked a lot about the league game."

At over six foot and fifteen stones, he was seen as the ideal replacement for the legendary running second-rower Dick Huddart, who had joined St. George in Sydney in 1964. Mantle signed for the Knowsley Road club on January 1 1965, making his debut three weeks later at home to Whitehaven in a 16-3 victory.

John made rapid progress, developing into one of the greatest all-round second row forwards in rugby league.

"Wales lost a great player when Mantle turned professional and League gained a gem of a forward," wrote Robert Gate in his book *Gone North*. "Union forwards usually take a considerable time to adapt to League techniques and many simply do not make the grade despite impressive amateur pedigrees.

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John Mantle took to the game like a duck to water for unlike many Union packmen he was not a specialist.” He was a big strong lad, with tremendous stamina, who could devastate defences with his powerful long-striding surges. “He didn’t need to be taught the art of tackling,” adds Robert Gate. “There are precious few places to hide in top class rugby league and John Mantle was always to be found out there in the open.”

John could look after himself – and his team-mates – when the going got tough, making him ideal for Test Match football – especially against the Australians, who were more than aware of his devastating potential with the ball.

He was an integral member of the Saints’ side that won four trophies – Lancashire League, League Leader’s Bowl, Challenge Cup and League Championship – in 1965-66, when he showed terrific stamina, playing in no less than 48 matches during the campaign, relishing the emphasis on fitness that Coach Joe Coan had brought to the club.

Playing at loose forward, John displayed his power by crashing over for Saints’ first try in the Challenge Cup Final at Wembley, against deadly rivals Wigan, the result of a clever switch move involving Peter Harvey and Tom Van Vollenhoven. “He had great lines of running – straight and into the gaps,” remembers Peter Harvey. “And that try was straight from the training ground.”

On January 16 1966, he made his Great Britain debut against France in Perpignan and at the end of the Four Cups campaign he was an automatic choice for the Australasian Tour, together with his team-mates Tommy Bishop and Cliff Watson.

John played his first Ashes Test at Sydney on June 25, when Great Britain pulled off a fine 17-13 victory, although they later lost the rubber in the Third Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground by just five points. John had another crack at the Aussies during their 1967 tour, playing in the notorious 16-11 victory at Headingley and at the White City, where Australia set the platform for retaining the Ashes in a 17-11 success.

John decided not to go on the Lions’ tour in 1970, for personal reasons and made his thirteenth and final appearance for Great Britain at Headingley, in the Second Test against Australia on November 24 1973 when the Kangaroos won 14-6. It was a pity that the start of Mantle’s international career coincided with Britain’s decline as a major force, reflected in the dominance of the Australians – something that has continued to the present day!

John captained the re-formed Welsh team to victory against England at Salford in 1969, one of six St. Helens players, including Frank Wilson, Graham Rees, John Warlow, Kel Coslett and Bob Wanbon, in the side. John played 16 times for Wales overall during his rugby league career, captaining them on three occasions. He played his last game against England at Knowsley Road on May 28 1978, when the Welsh were heavily defeated to the tune of 13-60. The English full-back that day was his former Saints’ team-mate and another good friend, Geoff Pimblett.

By the early 1970s, John had won every honour in the game at club level. Despite showing the scars of battle, including the amputation of the middle finger from his left hand, he was still a major influence in the club’s Championship-winning sides of 1970 and 1971. Yet it was at Wembley in two Challenge Cup Finals that he is best remembered. John played in the 1972 Final against Leeds with twelve stitches in his head, as a result of a car crash, but it did not stop him playing a major role in the second row during the Saints’ 16-13 success. “I requested to the doctor not to put 13 in, for obvious reasons,” he recalled. “I decided to play wearing protective headgear. Fortunately, it was a gamble that paid off.”

By 1976, he had graduated to the front row in the famous ‘Dad’s Army’ team that defeated Widnes. His grin of self-satisfaction on the bench after being replaced in the final few minutes is one of the most enduring images in Saints’ history!

John, together fellow Welshman Kel Coslett, went on to play their last game for the club on British soil in the brilliant 15-2 Premiership Final victory against Salford – a fitting end to their careers at Knowsley Road. They then went on the club’s Australasian tour where they played against Eastern Suburbs in the first ‘World Club Challenge’ match.

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Overall, John had appeared in an incredible 19 major finals, with Coslett just one behind! This included the club's one-and-only First Division Championship [1974-75], three Championship final victories [1966, 1970 and 1971] and three Challenge Cup final successes [1966, 1972 and 1976]. He played 435 matches for the Saints, scoring 69 tries and also kicked two goals, for a total of 208 points – a proud record indeed.

John also enjoyed a successful Testimonial in the mid-1970s and was subsequently inducted into the St. Helens Player's Association Hall of Fame. "John was a good friend of mine," says fellow Welshman Kel Coslett. "He was a good fellow and a tremendous player with great ability. John would always listen to advice and was a good team man. Put it this way – he would always be in my team." Enough said!

Always an extremely durable character, as we have seen, John went on to play more games than any other forward to come out of Wales. His last match was on March 31 1982, when he scored a try for Blackpool Borough against Bramley. His post-Saints career had also taken him to Salford, Leigh, Barrow, Keighley, Oldham and the Cardiff Blue Dragons, where he met up once again with David Watkins.

John first taught Physical Education at Grange Park School when he graduated from Loughborough and later enjoyed a similar role at Rivington Road, where the likes of future Saints' great Neil Holding came under his tutelage. He also taught at Selwyn Jones high School and Briar's Hey School in Rainhill. John also enjoyed pastoral roles as a mentor for youngsters and loved taking school teams for football, cricket and rugby.

Daughter Janine tells of her father's caring and compassionate side, unlike his uncompromising demeanour on the rugby field. "He will always be our hero," she adds. "He was such a big family man and above all, a real gentleman." Amen to that.

Saints chairman Eamonn McManus shared the grief of Saints fans far and wide, penning this tribute:

"It's with great sadness that we hear of the passing of an all-time great Saint, John Mantle.

"He was from that era of magnificent players who moulded St Helens into the world famous rugby league club that it is today.

"He moved from Welsh rugby union, laid down his family roots in St Helens, and became a great player in one of our greatest ever sides.

"It's an abiding boyhood memory of mine watching him perform with such distinction for St Helens and for Great Britain. It was an equal pleasure, in later years, to get to know the absolute gentleman that he was. He will be greatly missed, but also fondly remembered, by all."

Everyone at the St Helens club sends their condolences to John's wife, Lorraine, son Kelvin, daughter Janine and grandchildren Ryan and Rhys at this sad time.

**John Mantle: Born March 13 1942 – Died November 18 2018.**



# LIONS RETURNING IN 2019

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)



**T**HE BRITISH Lions will make a welcome rugby league return to the Southern Hemisphere in 2019, though the itinerary will bear no resemblance to the 19 traditional tours made between 1910 and 1996. Several other Great Britain teams have also visited New Zealand for World Cup and other multi-nation tournaments. From 1920 until 1950 the Lions ruled the game, especially in Ashes series against the Kangaroos.

Traditionally, the Lions would travel up and down the east coast of Australia playing Test, state and country teams such as Far North Queensland at Cairns, Northern NSW at Tamworth and Southern NSW at Cootamundra. Only the two world wars interrupted their four-yearly cycle of tours. The British tourists would then come on to this country to play the Kiwis, New Zealand Maori and provincial sides.

But the 2019 itinerary will not include Australia, with the Kangaroos confining themselves to the Oceania Cup against New Zealand and Tonga. To their credit, the Lions are eager to promote international football with Tests against the Kiwis (possibly two), Tonga, Samoa, Fiji and Papua New Guinea. Approval has yet to be given by the notoriously insular NRL clubs and the players' association in Australia.

New Zealand's first two touring teams – the All Golds who played the original Test series against Australia and the Northern Union (Great Britain) in 1907-08 and the 1909 team in Australia – were both privately organised in the face of stern opposition from government and rugby union authorities. When the British agreed to tour Down Under in 1910 the New Zealand Rugby League was formed to host them.

Travel limitations meant the 14 Australian matches were played in Sydney (9), Brisbane (3) and Newcastle (2), with the Lions winning both Tests. Also included were two games against Australasia, for a draw and a loss. They won all four matches in New Zealand, 29-0 against the Maori at Auckland, 52-9 against Auckland, 54-18 against Rotorua and 52-20 against New Zealand in a Test at the Domain Cricket Ground.

It was not until the third tour in 1920 that the Lions suffered defeat on New Zealand soil, by 24-16 in the opening game against Auckland. Years later Auck-

land fullback Bill Davidson wrote that victory was achieved by "a perfect combination of beer truck forwards and racing car backs". It was also the first time the South Island was included, with a Test at Lancaster Park and games against Canterbury and West Coast.

Having retained the Ashes across the Tasman in 1924, the Lions were shocked to be twice beaten by New Zealand -- 16-8 in Carlaw's Test debut Park and 13-11 at Wellington -- before regaining some pride through a 31-18 win in Dunedin. That shock series result led to New Zealand being invited to tour Britain in 1926 ahead of Australia, a decision which upset the Australian Rugby League authorities.

The Lions won the 1928, 1932 and 1936 series before war intervened. No sooner was peace restored than the tour cycle resumed. The 1946 team became known as "The Indomitables" because they travelled to Perth aboard the aircraft carrier HMS Indomitable. They won the Ashes Tests 2-0 with one drawn but were pipped by the Kiwis 13-8 and suffered their biggest loss of the entire 27-match tour by 17-8 to West Coast.

A famous try by wing Ron Roberts in the third Test on a muddy Sydney Cricket Ground regained Australia the Ashes in 1950 to end three decades of British domination. Worse still, those tourists were also beaten in both New Zealand Tests, 16-10 at the Addington Show Grounds in Christchurch and 20-13 at Auckland's Carlaw Park. Our two nations have generally been evenly matched since then.

But there have been some exceptions. The 1962 Lions won the Ashes series but were leg weary and weakened by injuries when they arrived in New Zealand. The Kiwis won both Tests by record 19-point margins and Auckland hammered the tourists 46-13 in the final encounter of an exhausting 30-match itinerary. How they must have hated Carlaw Park, which was the venue for all three of those heavy defeats.

Captained by centre Frank Myler, the 1970 Lions were arguably the most talented of all time. Their only Australian loss was in the first Test and they made a clean sweep of the three Tests against the Kiwis. But two of our finest future Kiwis sides were to exact revenge.

*Continued on next page...*

The Graham Lowe-coached Kiwis won all three Tests in 1984 and Frank Endacott coached his 1996 Kiwis to an equally impressive treble.

When Lions captain Andy Farrell trudged off Lancaster Park after his team's 32-12 hiding in the third 1996 Test he could not have imagined how his sporting career would evolve. After a distinguished career with Wigan, Farrell switched codes as a coach. Last year he returned here with the rugby union Lions and last weekend he was Ireland's defence coach in the 16-9 victory over the try-less All Blacks in Dublin.

New Zealand's biggest home victory over Great Britain was achieved during the 2006 Tri-Nations when winning 34-4 at Wellington's Westpac Stadium. The 52-20 win by the original 1910 Lions at the Auckland Domain is still their most decisive on New Zealand soil. In 1954 Wingham Park in Greymouth became rugby league's smallest international venue when the Kiwis won the second Test of the series 20-14.

Since the 2008 World Cup Britain has been divided into separate England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales identities. Neither Ireland nor Scotland have ever fielded professional clubs and Welsh clubs play in semi-professional competitions alongside their English counterparts. While many Welshmen have toured with the Lions (for example, there were 11 in 1946), Englishmen will inevitably dominate the 2019 British Lions.



## Johnathan Thurston

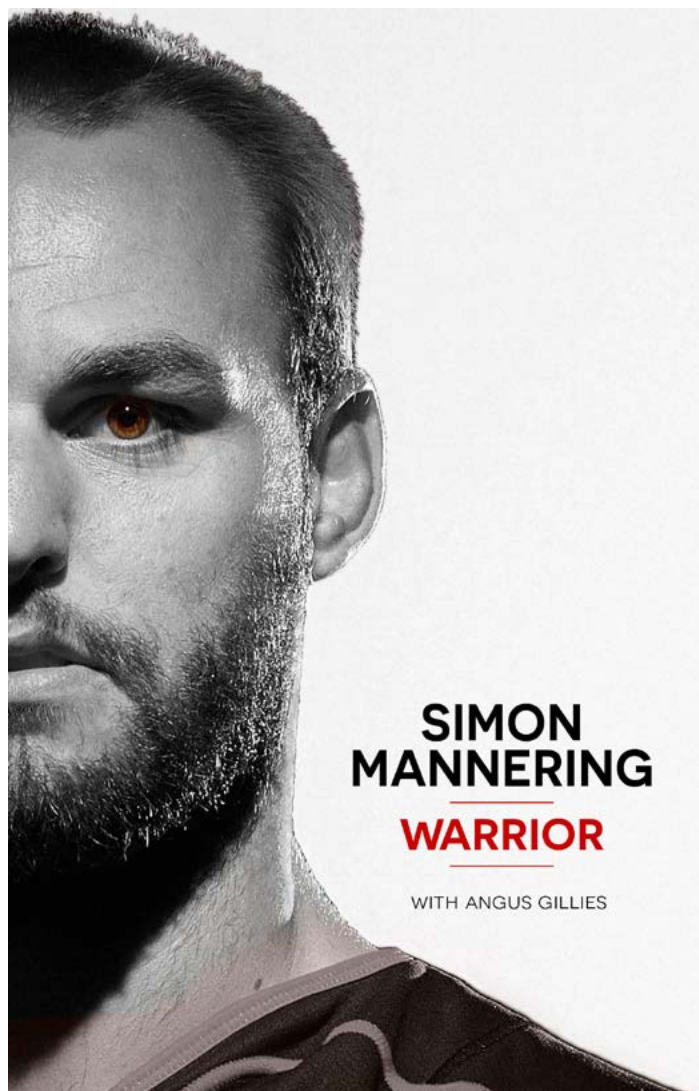
Photo [www.majoreventscompany.com](http://www.majoreventscompany.com)

Rugby league legend and one of the greats of the game Jonathan Thurston is coming to Auckland in the next few weeks to do a show it will be his only show in New Zealand we will have details in next week's newsletter just giving you a heads up Company promoting the show is [majoreventscompany.com](http://majoreventscompany.com)

Major Events proudly presents a unique opportunity to share an evening with rugby league royalty and likely future Immortal Johnathan Thurston. There are very few sportsmen who dominate at every level of their chosen sport; Johnathan Thurston is one of these rare commodities. From humble beginnings, JT as he is affectionately known, rose through the ranks to become arguably the most influential player in rugby league's 108 year history.

Enjoy a night at the theatre with Johnathan Thurston - live, intimate and personable. This family friendly event is sure to sell-out fast so don't delay. Johnathan will be talking about his childhood, culture, career and life on and off the field, in an intimate setting live on stage. He will be live on stage for 100 minutes with meet and greets taking place post show unless otherwise notified.





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## MEDIA RELEASE



### Tickets on sale for Magic Round Brisbane

A little bit of magic is heading to Brisbane in 2019, with tickets on-sale for Magic Round Brisbane, to be held at Suncorp Stadium across Round Nine of the NRL Telstra Premiership.

For the first time in NRL history, one round will be held at one ground – and fans can purchase tickets to all eight matches across four days for under \$100.

The Titans and Sharks will kick off the round on Thursday night (9 May) with ticket proceeds for this match going directly to a range of NRL aligned community charities.

NRL Chief Executive, Todd Greenberg joined NRL players in Brisbane today to celebrate tickets on sale and said Magic Round Brisbane would be a highlight on the NRL calendar in 2019.

“This will be one of our biggest events of the year and we’re planning for plenty of fan engagement and activities in the lead up to the round,” Mr Greenberg said.

“Then there are the games themselves. Four days of Premiership Round footy at one of the best stadiums in one of the best cities in Australia – it doesn’t get much better than that.

“Our partners in Tourism and Events Queensland and Brisbane Marketing, along with our NRL clubs are right behind what will be a history-making round for our game, and I encourage as many fans as possible to secure their tickets early and come and experience the fantastic hospitality Brisbane has to offer.”

Queensland’s Tourism Industry Development Minister, Kate Jones invited footy fans from around the country to witness magic in Brisbane.

“It’s no secret that Queensland is the home of rugby league and that Suncorp Stadium is the best rugby league stadium in Australia, so I know the atmosphere throughout the city will be magic for this event,” Ms Jones said.

“I invite footy fans from across Australia to come to Brisbane, explore our state capital’s unique tourism experiences, friendly hospitality, the vibrant precinct of Suncorp Stadium and make a long weekend out of it.”

Brisbane Lord Mayor, Graham Quirk said hosting the NRL Magic Round is a win for Brisbane – Australia’s New World City – with the city ready to welcome every NRL club for an action-packed weekend of rugby league.

“As a destination known for sporting events, Brisbane is the natural fit for the NRL Magic Round – a major event which will be a truly memorable experience, and something never-before seen in the Australian sport,” Cr. Quirk said.

“Magic Round Brisbane will further cement our city’s reputation as a destination for blockbuster sport, with a raft of exclusive major events set to be held across the city in the next twelve months.”

In addition to the matches, there will be a range of fan-based activities and signing sessions, along with a party atmosphere precinct around Suncorp Stadium.

A range of ticket options for Magic Round Brisbane are now available for club members and fans.

To reserve your seats across the round, head to [www.nrl.com/tickets](http://www.nrl.com/tickets)

Special deals on NRL Travel Packages are also available for local or interstate travellers, with information at [www.nrl.com/travel](http://www.nrl.com/travel)

Further information on Magic Round Brisbane will be available closer to the Round next year (Round Nine: 9-12 May 2019) at [www.nrl.com/magic](http://www.nrl.com/magic)

Magic Round Brisbane is supported by the Queensland Government via Tourism and Events Queensland and Brisbane City Council via Brisbane Marketing.

## **Magic Round Brisbane**

Round Nine of the 2019 NRL Telstra Premiership

Thursday 9 May – Sunday 12 May, 2019 – Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane

All 16 NRL clubs – One Round – One Ground

*Thursday 9 May*

Titans vs. Sharks

*Friday 10 May*

Tigers vs. Panthers

Sea Eagles vs. Broncos

*Saturday 11 May*

Bulldogs vs. Knights

Warriors vs. Dragons

Storm vs. Eels

*Sunday 12 May*

Roosters vs. Raiders

Rabbitohs vs. Cowboys





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- A membership pack which includes a CCC members' cap and training backpack, Vodafone Warriors 25th season travel mug, key ring, bumper sticker and Super Membership pass and lanyard
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- Vodafone | Super membership benefit to be announced shortly





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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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