

VODAFONE



WARRIORS

Sir Peter Leitch's Mad Butcher Club

AT MT SMART STADIUM, HOME OF THE MIGHTY VODAFONE WARRIORS

10 March 2016

Newsletter

#112

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Give the Racism a Rest By David Kemeys



LIKE ALL Vodafone Warriors fans, I was pretty disappointed by the result against the Tigers. And I am no saint, and have said more than my fair share of negative things about the club as the frustration has built.

But I was deeply ashamed of the Warriors “fans” all over talkback radio on Sunday.

You know the ones... “there’s too many Polynesian players, we need some hardened Aussies.”

That’s awful, deeply offensive nonsense.

If you are trying to tell me Issac Luke missed a tackle because he is Maori, or that Manu Vatuvei dropped a ball because he’s from Tonga, you know what, I won’t miss you at Mt Smart.

I don’t believe Simon Mannering has more ticker than Ben Henry because of the colour of his skin.

To suggest that boys from Polynesian or Maori backgrounds are lesser players because of it is just racism of the filthiest kind.

So we need more hardened Aussies do we? Like Jake Lilyman and Ryan Hoffman, who seemed to be out there too when I was watching.

How come the Vodafone Warriors can lose and talkback allows this sort of rubbish? When the Cowboys lose a match, you don’t hear people immediately blaming “too many indigenous Australians”.

Bloody hell, I can understand the frustration of the fans, because it is the same frustration I am feeling.

But I have also been lucky enough to be around many of the players, first when I was in the media, then through the newsletter, and more recently because club members are ambassadors of Kidz First Children’s Hospital at Middlemore, for which I work.

Without exception, they have been fine representatives of the club, are friendly, approachable, and thoroughly decent people.

The important word is people.

They have earned the right to play, and they have certainly earned the right to basic human decency, which is that we see them as people, as Vodafone Warriors, and not as Polynesians and Maori.

I don’t care if we get our players from Aussie, PNG, Lebanon or Samoa. Just that they put a shift in and treat us long-suffering fans with respect.

And the least we can do is treat our boys with respect too – so leave the racism at home!

What A Shocker Of A Weekend

FIRST OF all my favourite rugby team – All Blacks aside – the Blues, got beaten by the Crusaders in the Super whatever number they are up to now competition.

Then the Vodafone Warriors NSW Cup team lost, the NYC team lost and my mood was darkening.

It did not get any better when the NRL side took to the field and played like busted cats, trailing badly at one point, and frankly, being as bad as I have ever seen them.

I have no idea what coach Andrew McFadden said to them at half time but it must have worked because they went up a gear in the second 40, putting on 22 unanswered points to trail by just two points, and looking like they would pull off an escape act Houdini would have been proud of.

Instead a mistake meant it was the Tigers who got the last word, and we were in the same old place we always seem to be after the first game of the season - played one, lost one.

I had gone to Sydney full of hope and left absolutely gutted, although I did take a lot out of our second half performance, and while I admit to being an optimist where the Warriors are concerned, I believe we will win more than we lose this season.

It won't be easy though, with the boys away again at the weekend, taking on the Brisbane Broncos, who are pretty-much everyone's pick for the title, and then a week later hosting the Melbourne Storm at Mt Smart.

While I was in Sydney at the game, club CEO Jim Doyle and Shantayne Hape and I decided to go and sit with the fans in the second half, and to be fair, they were disappointed we were beaten certainly, but most were very upbeat and buoyed by the second 40. I was very proud of the way our supporters stuck behind the team, especially when things were not going our way.

There has been an instant talkback radio reaction, with all sorts of things said, none of them positive. And the papers were no better. Pretty much everyone focused on the dreadful first half, and that is understandable. But there was no credit at all for a pretty decent comeback.

Then when I got back to New Zealand I got home as soon as I possibly could because I was determined

to watch the Breakers play the Perth Wildcats in the NBL decider.

My weekend just got worse, the Breakers soundly beaten by a superb Perth side 75-52.

While it was disappointing, you have to give credit to the Breakers. They were written off by the media after a terrible mid-season slump, but they stuck to their guns, battled hard and got the reward for that.

There is a long way to go this season, so that is something the Warriors need to learn a lesson from.

It Could Have Been So Different

There's no point rehashing how things went at the weekend, since everyone seems to have their own opinion.

But our second half comeback was in vain.

Despite trailing 28-4 at the break the first 25 minutes of the second half were totally different, as we scored four unanswered tries to be 28-26 down.

We all know by now that as we pushed for an unlikely win, it was the Tigers who grabbed a late chance, sealing the game 34-26 after Shaun Johnson's chip finished up in James Tedesco's hands and he went 50 metres to score.

The damage, as we know, had been done in the first half.

But while all the talk has been negative, are we – and I hope we are – not paying enough attention to the second half?

Simon Mannering went in, Bodene Thompson dotted down, Johnson got on the score-sheet and Solomon Kata did too. The momentum was with us but Tedesco and the Tigers had the final say.

Sure I am the Warriors biggest fan, but I do not believe there is any reason for all the negativity.

Mannering Shines

The captaincy a thing of the past, Simon Mannering was still among our best. He went into his 12th NRL season having shouldered a huge workload in 2015 that saw him make 1092 tackles in 24 appearances – an average of 45.5 a game – while missing just 27.

The bar went up against the Tigers when he made a game-high 55 tackles, 29 in the first half and 26 in the second while missing two in all.

Continued on next page...

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He also marked his 237th match with the try – the 54th of his career – that ignited the Vodafone Warriors' comeback, while he also produced a try assist to put Solomone Kata in.

The Vodafone Warriors' top metre makers were full-back Roger Tuivasa-Sheck with 200 from 14 runs and wing Manu Vatuvei with 158 from a team-high 17 runs, while James Gavet was the best of the forwards with 130 from 13 carries.

Spare A thought For Ben Henry

Vodafone Warriors second rower Ben Henry will need more scans to determine the full extent of the leg injury that forced him off midway through the first half.

Henry was playing his 52nd NRL match, his first since a season-ending ACL injury in the fourth-round against Brisbane last year.

He'd come through trials against Gold Coast and St George untroubled but his twice-operated-on left knee was caught awkwardly when he made a tackle.

You would not wish it on your worst enemy.

Ben is a hugely popular figure at the club, and widely liked and respected. I can tell you he is a fabulous young man and I am sure you will all join me in wishing him all the best.



Ben Henry carried off.
www.photosport.nz

Warriors A Good Buy!

I am no stranger to a good deal, but I was delighted to read that Manly fans pay the most, while Warriors supporters fork out the least, according to a Rugby League Week report.

Based on the price of admission tickets, four pies and four packets of chips, it costs families \$114 for a day at Brookvale Oval, \$45 more than it does for four at Mt Smart.

No surprise then that in 2015 the Sea Eagles had the worst average home attendance of all Sydney's teams.

Debut For Gavet

James Gavet was called into the starting line-up for

his first NRL appearance for the Vodafone Warriors against his former club. The 26-year-old was selected on the bench for his 15th career match but was in the run-on side and Ben Matulino came off the bench.

Gavet, a Kelston Boys' High School old boy, becomes Vodafone Warrior #208, having previously appeared at NRL level for Canterbury-Bankstown, the Tigers and Brisbane.

He played for the Vodafone Junior Warriors in the NYC in 2009, followed by two seasons with the club's NRL squad when he appeared only at New South Wales Cup level.

Five of our six newcomers all started, with Roger Tuivasa-Sheck, Blake Ayshford, Jeff Robson and Issac Luke, all debuting, and Nathaniel Roache making his NRL debut from the bench.

Tuivasa-Sheck becomes Vodafone Warrior #203, Ayshford #204, Robson #205, Luke #206, and Roache #207.

Intrust Comeback Falters

Just like the NRL side, the Vodafone Warriors had to stage a big comeback only to fall short against the Illawarra Cutters in the opening round of the Intrust Super Premiership on Saturday.

Down 24-4 at halftime, the Vodafone Warriors were 30-4 behind soon after the break but then fashioned a recovery.

Tries to Jazz Tevaga and Konrad Hurrell gave them a glimmer of hope, and when centre Matt Allwood added a third an unlikely win was a possibility at 30-22. But the Cutters put the match to bed to win 36-22.

NYC Beaten

Two Wests Tigers strikes early in the second half stymied the Vodafone Warriors' hopes of a recovery in their season-opening NYC encounter on Saturday. The Vodafone Warriors snared a 6-4 lead through a Junior Pauga intercept in the first half before conceding a 10-6 halftime deficit.

They were right in the contest, only to falter in the opening stages of the second half when the Tigers went across twice to claim a 22-6 lead.

We checked the Tigers' progress with a try to Isaiah Papalii and had a chance of grinding our way back but it wasn't to be, with the Tigers hanging tough to eventually win 26-12.

Youngsters On Fire

Counties Manukau has won all four of its matches in the first two rounds of the new Ruben Wiki Challenge Shield for elite under-16 and under-18 players.

After beating Akarana's two sides last week, Counties Manukau accounted for the Samoans in both grades on Saturday.

The Vodafone Warriors' two invitation sides went down to Akarana.

The last round of pool matches will be played at Cornwall Park on Sunday (March 13). In the under-16s (both 11.30am) Counties Manukau meets the Vodafone Warriors, while Akarana faces Samoa. The same match-ups in the under-18 competition kick off at 1.15pm.

The finals will be played at Cornwall Park on Saturday, March 19 (11.30am for the under-16s and 1.15pm for the under-18s).

Under-16s: Counties Manukau 46 Samoa 16; Akarana 38 Vodafone Warriors Invitation 18.

Under-18s: Counties Manukau 58 Samoa 14; Akarana 24 Vodafone Warriors Invitation 20..

Stuff That!

An interesting opinion piece on Stuff.co.nz from experienced league writer Dave Long.

Summarising it for you, he said it took just one game for coach Andrew McFadden to have selection problems, pointing out our 34-26 loss to the Tigers followed a 46-10 hammering pre-season by the Dragons - or in other words 80 points conceded in two games.

"Given the evidence so far, McFadden must feel sorely tempted to make changes for Friday night's game against the Broncos in Brisbane, which looms

ominously on the horizon," Long wrote.

"The worst possible scenario is for the Warriors to have their first home game, against the Storm in round three on the back of two dreadful performances."

Fair enough, can't disagree. So come on boys, let's pull off a massive upset and tip over the Broncos.

McGregor Returns To ARL

Auckland Rugby League's board of directors has announced Cameron McGregor has been elected the new chairman, effective from this Saturday. He replaces Evelyn Brooker, who acted as interim chair after the death of Wayne Urquhart.

McGregor says he is looking forward to returning to the ARL. "I'm very excited to be back and grateful clubs have the confidence to re-elect me."

McGregor, a chartered accountant, has been involved in the game for years. He was ARL chairman from 1998-2013 and has been awarded an MNZM for services to league.

Blues Get A New Look

NSW VB Blues winning Origin captains have unveiled the first-ever Winning Captains Training Jersey, to be worn during this year's State of Origin.

Steve Mortimer, Andrew Johns, Laurie Daley, Danny Buderus, Wayne Pearce, Geoff Toovey, Paul Gallen, and Brad Fittler united to launch the jersey in a bid to create a consistent winning culture ahead of Origin. Only Ben Elias (overseas) was not present. Printed on the training jersey are all nine winning captains in some of the most iconic Blues moments.

"It's a unique strip and a reminder of some of Origin's greatest players," said Daley, the current Blues coach.

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Ryan Hoffman leads the team out.



Manu tackled by Chris Lawrence.



Sam Lisone receives the ball.



Solomone Kate scores.



Simon Mannering on the burst.



Nathaniel Roache passing.



Shaun Johnson sprints away.



Tuimoala Lolohea runs for it.



Richard Morgan holds up the Warrior Nation flag!

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Not All Doom and Gloom for the Warriors

By John Deaker



WHILE IT seems some fair-weather ‘fans’ have written the team off after one match, here’s some reasons not to be too down in the dumps after Saturday night’s 34-26 loss.

- **The comeback:** We know there’s been a leadership change in the team and while the first half was a nightmare, the team showed some great character under Hoffman to come back the way they did in the second half.
- **We have a starting point:** Players and coaches alike all now have an NRL-match-intensity baseline they can study and ensure they make improvements from as the team looks towards the clash with Brisbane on Friday night.
- **Short turn-around:** Playing Friday night creates a 6 day turn-around for the team. This might not be ideal at times during the season but most of the team will just be hungry to get back out on the field ASAP and correct what they weren’t happy with on Saturday night.
- **James Gavet:** This was the first time many of us had seen Gavet and it appears he could be a good prospect based on this performance against the Tigers where the prop ran over 130 metres in just 38 minutes of gametime. Gavet had played NSW Cup and Under 20’s for the Warriors before signing with the Bulldogs for the 2012 season. This was his first NRL match for the New Zealand club.
- **No substitute for game-time when building combinations:** Particularly any new relationship in the halves will take time to build – and with 5 people starting their first match for the club against the Tigers there was always likely to be a tough period early on as players tried to settle in to some structures. Defence out wide is also about combinations and trust as much as it is about being mentally alert and strong and Saturday nights hit-out can only be good for developing those.
- **Leuluai isn’t far away:** Many of us also believe that if Thomas Leuluai returns in good shape he’ll be the best man to partner Shaun Johnson in the halves. Therefore his expected return in a month from his knee reconstruction could be a crucial time for the 2016 side’s title chances . Leuluai’s selfless style of play is exactly what the Warriors need to compliment some of the individual brilliance the other star-studded members of their spine possess.
- **Kicking will improve:** Shaun Johnson reportedly wasn’t goalkicking because of an injured quadracep muscle in his leg. Lolohea was average with the boot despite ending with 3 from 5. When Johnson’s fit it gives the team more confidence to take the 2 pointers when they are on offer. It’s also likely the injury would have restricted his kicking ability in the open field at the weekend.
- **Shaun Johnson’s fitness:** He’s obviously crucial to the team and unfortunately with no Leuluai the team needed him to turn up - even carrying the niggle to his quad. Who knows how much the quad injury restricted him at the weekend – but what we do know is if you’re favouring an area at the front of your body going in to contact then taking on the line isn’t always your favoured option. What we also know is that after a long time out of the game the match fitness will do him the world of good - and if he can shake off the quad injury we’ll see him getting more involved and taking on defences more in the coming weeks.

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



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At the Vodafone Warriors vs Wests Tigers Game



Thank you fans for all your loyal support.



Another great sign at the game.



What about this great sign held Tom Ratima and Tom Ratima Jnr (Rangi).



Go to www.warriorstore.co.nz for Vodafone Warriors merchandise...



Tom Ratima and Jim Doyle.



Another picture of Tom Ratima and Tom Ratima Jnr. holding their sign.



Frances Ratima and family.



I told Tee Kay that it's time to buy a new jersey.



Just caught up with these two big Warriors fans.



Was great to meet young Byron he is a huge fan and never stopped shouting the whole match!



Shontayne caught up with Selwyn Lloyd and Joshua Smith.



Nice to meet these fans. Jamie Luke, Elijah and Matilda.



Nick and Avril. Great Vodafone Warriors fans.

At the Vodafone Warriors vs Wests Tigers Game



When you arrived at the stadium this bouncy castle let you know that your in Tiger country!



Great catching up with former Kiwi David Kidwell, a great mate.



Just meet Benji Marshall's brother Jeremy Marhsall-King who plays for the Tigers



In the stand with Jim Doyle chilling out in the 36 degree heat.



Nice to catch up with Manaia Cherrington from the Tigers. I got to know Manaia on the Kiwis tour last year.



That loving moment.



Vodafone Warriors CEO Jim Doyle enjoying a hangi in the grandstand.



On the way to the game with Shontayne Hape.



It was great to sit in the stands with all our loyal fans with Shontayne Hape and CEO Jim Doyle.

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On the Warriors vs Wests Tigers

By Shontayne Hape



WE OBVIOUSLY didn't get the result on the field last Saturday in Campbelltown but off it, the day was far from a disappointment.

I travelled across the ditch last week with my old mate, Sir Peter Leitch, in order to meet with our loyal Vodafone Warriors members at our first game of the season.

Man, I'm glad I made the trip.

I have to say I was actually blown away by the level of support for the Vodafone Warriors at Campbelltown. We had a bloke there banging a big drum, plenty of chanting and the fans even did a haka for the boys after the game! Talk about Kiwi as!

Our CEO Jim Doyle joined Sir Peter and I in the stands with our members and while the first half was hardly anything to write home about, that second 40 minutes had the Kiwi fans pumping, us included!

On Friday I'll be on a plane again – this time bound for Brisbane.

We play the Broncos at Suncorp Stadium on Friday night and we all know that when it comes to road trips in the NRL, they don't come much harder.

That said, the boys have trained the house down this week and know they need to step up on Friday night.

As you can imagine, we have plenty of Vodafone Warriors members in Brisbane and I'm looking forward to meeting them.

We will all be sitting together in Bay 317 at Suncorp Stadium so please feel free to come and introduce yourself to me. The boys will also be sure to head over and acknowledge our loyal members there after the game.

Speaking of Brisbane, a few people based there have been asking me whether there will be an open training session they can attend this week to watch the boys in action.

Unfortunately, the schedule is so tight the boys basically land, head straight out to a quick training session – which the coach wants to be done behind closed doors – and then we hit game day.

I'm still hopeful we'll be able to put on a members' event when we are back in Queensland in round 22 to take on the Titans so all is not lost.

Watch this space.

Go the mighty Vodafone Warriors. I'm looking forward to meeting you.



Shontayne in the stands.



First Game Curse Strikes Again

By Barry Ross



THE FIRST competition game curse struck yet again at Campbelltown on Saturday. According to statistics given by Fox TV, the Warriors have now lost their last seven opening games and have been defeated in 16 of 22 such games in their history during their time in the Big League. No doubt the heat has something to do with this because when the game kicked off at 5.30pm on Saturday, the temperature was around 28 degrees (high eighties in the old format) after it had risen to 33 during the day. With daylight saving still in place, 5.30pm is not too far away from the hottest time of the day and we have had around three weeks of continual hot weather in Sydney with very little rain.

But maybe we have to analyse the Fox statistics a little closer. How many have these matches have been played in New Zealand and how many in Australia? I do not know these figures, but I do know that as well as Saturday's heat, things won't be cooler in Brisbane this Friday night. Also as the home team on Saturday, the Tigers had the choice of what jersey colours they used and the Warriors had to fall in line with this. There was plenty of white in the Tigers strip, while the Warriors' black jumpers would not have been too comfortable in Saturday's heat.

And what about drinks breaks? There was one in each half of the Souths-Roosters match on Sunday but none at either Campbelltown, where the temperatures were higher. From all reports, Tigers coach, Jason Taylor, did not want to have the breaks. He realised this would be an advantage for his Sydney-based team over the Kiwis. But this decision should not be in the hands of the coaches. For player safety reasons, the NRL should make the breaks compulsory on any high temperature day. On a sad note, I would like to wish Ben Henry well. He has had some terrible luck during his football career and deserves some good fortune in the seasons ahead.

Now to the football. The Sydney papers praised the Tigers players but made few mentions of any Warriors. But there were several positives to come out of the game. Despite being down 28-4 at halftime, they did not give up and powered home, adding 22 unanswered points before the Tigers picked up a lucky try at the end of the game. Shaun Johnson is on the way back to his best. He only ran for 74 metres on Saturday, but his brilliant individual try indicated he is still a major weapon. Simon Mannering made 55 tackles in the oppressive heat, while Issac Luke's

number was 33. Fullback, Roger Tuivasa-Sheck, ran for 200 metres. To be fair, although conditions and some other things favoured the home team, they were missing Robbie Farah and Luke Brooks. They started the game brilliantly but they did have second half staggers.

The NRL bunker seemed to please everyone and I believe it is a big plus for our game. But in life nothing is perfect and I was not completely convinced by the reasoning behind the awarding of the Tigers' late try. Still on the whole over the weekend, the bunker was interesting, informative and accurate. The guys working in this have a lot of Rugby League knowledge and experience. It is early days yet, but everyone I have spoken to have been very positive about the NRL's new toy. John Grant and the NRL deserve a lot of credit for their foresight in developing the bunker.

The Broncos and Melbourne were expected to win but there was doubt in the other six clashes. Melbourne did win 18-16, but they were helped by a 9-4 penalty count in their favour. Referee Grant Atkins made several mistakes, mostly in Melbourne's favour and one of which cost the Dragons six points. The bunker can't eradicate these refereeing blunders. Manly came back to earth with a bang against the powerful Bulldog forward pack. This win would have been especially gratifying to Des Hasler and he reminded everyone what a good coach he is. Trent Barrett and Bob Fulton will have their Manly team ready for the Tigers at Leichhardt next Monday night. Souths were outstanding against a poorly performed Roosters. Sure the Roosters have an excuse with several of their best men on the sideline with injuries and suspension. But many had tipped them to beat the Rabbitohs. Souths dominated all over the park, with big Sam Burgess, still only 27, doing the job up front, while Adam Reynolds and Greg Inglis were just as good out wide. At what cost to Souths came this win is yet to be seen. John Sutton looks like missing as much as 16 weeks, while if Adam Reynolds' jaw is badly broken, he will also be absent for many weeks. Ricky Stuart had the Raiders firing on a hot Canberra day and the Cowboys showed they intend to defend their Premiership vigorously. The Titans probably played much better than most fans thought they could. They were written off by the majority of pundits weeks ago, but with Greg Bird leading the way, they showed they will cause some problems during the season.

Getting to Know: Roger Tuivasa-Sheck

By John Deaker

Article courtesy of: Rugby League 2016 – www.oliverlee.co.nz



LIFE HAS changed a lot for Roger Tuivasa-Sheck since he moved to Sydney from Auckland 4 years ago as an 18 year-old. He returns to New Zealand's shores as the incumbent Kiwi fullback with a Premiership Medal from the Roosters and the security of a Multi-million-dollar 3 year contract with the Warriors. Recently he gave John Deaker an insight to what makes the man tick that many people are calling the best signing in the Warriors' history.

The best bits about being back in Auckland:

"I can't go past family. I've got my Grandmother here and heaps of cousins that I grew up around.

I missed that home feeling and you know where certain shops are when you go to get something. In Sydney it's so fresh and you don't know where places are because it's so big."

His personal life:

"I have moved with my partner Ashley to Meadowbank ... I grew up in South Auckland in Otara and I was born in Samoa. Ashley is a Kiwi and we've been together since school ... I met her when I was in the fourth form – she was living in Papatoetoe and I was in Otara.

Ashley's been a really big part of my support system. Even though we're both young it's crazy that she's already moved country twice for me.

She was lucky to pick up a job in Sydney and now to get an easy transfer from her job (to Auckland) so she's working here now."

His parents decision to stay in Australia:

"I moved over to Sydney for a year and stayed on my own. After a year (In Sydney) I moved my family over – my mum, dad , two sisters and my younger brother. We had long talks about whether they'd come back to Auckland or not. My brother has re-signed with the Roosters Under 20's – so mum had to stay because she couldn't leave the baby of the family... And Dad's a personal trainer so it suits him well the Sydney lifestyle."

Wanting to practice what he preaches:

"I definitely want to be doing what I say - that's the main part because with the culture round the boys it's always fun and games – it's always a good laugh with the boys – you can't get that wrong. But definitely you need to show professionalism and get your food prep and eat the right food and be stretching round the boys and doing all that stuff so they can then think that if he's doing that then it must work."

Having a point to prove to his peers:

"Sometimes it's pretty tough because I'm still young and want to crack jokes with the boys... But one thing I put on myself to show these guys on the training park is to prove that I didn't fluke my way up here – that I earned it – that's a big things for me."

Constantly improving his communicating on the field:

"Talking on the field is something that I really needed to improve. I've picked it up better now that I've had a few years doing it. I had

that shy mentality initially because I was still a kid and it was scary for me to shout at players like (Roosters and Kiwis team-mates) Jared Waerea-Hargreaves and Frank-Paul Nu'uauasala and demand for them to do something. It was hard for me to speak out to them – but after we sat down to talk about it they told me how much they liked me doing it."

Playing alongside a Warrior he grew up idolising:

"Growing up I was mainly a rugby fan but the main person I followed (from league) was Manu Vatuvei. Manu hates me telling this story but the first time I met him I was at Mayfield Primary School and he was our special guest of honor and he presented me with an award... so I'm pretty lucky he's still in the team."

Rugby Union connections:

"I was lucky enough to play alongside Ardie Savea in the New Zealand Secondary Schools. I liked players like Carlos Spencer – he was one of my favourites. Because I liked players where there was a system – but he'd then go outside of that to create something and do things like the pass under the legs... I'm an Auckland Blues fan."



Roger Tuivasa-Sheck during Vodafone Warriors v St George Illawarra Dragons. Photo courtesy of www.photosport.nz

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Lance Koro Hohaia - the Early Years

By Rex Hohaia

LANCE HOHAIA was born in Hamilton but raised in the coal-mining town of Huntly. He began his League journey in 1989 as a six-year-old with Huntly South, but the next year moved to the Taniwharau club, where he played his first senior game in 2001 at 17, and where he remained a financial member throughout his NRL career.

League featured through his junior years at Huntly Primary, until he attended Southwell School in Hamilton, where rugby was the chosen winter sport.

He was twice selected for the Waikato Rovers Roller Mills team (1996 and 97).

Moving to the rugby school of St Paul's in Hamilton, he began a cross-code sequence of rugby for the school on Saturday and league for Taniwharau on Sunday.

That forced a big decision when in 1999 as an under 16, he was invited to attend the Institute of Rugby, but was also picked for the NZ Under 16 league team.

The league was against the Australian Country Academy in Auckland on the same weekend as the rugby. So began the first of many national representative games.

A two-year scholarship offer came from the newly-formed DB Auckland Warriors, stating the player could remain at St Paul's to study but he had to play league for Taniwharau and any rep teams when selected.

Come the winter of 2001, Hohaia was finding the commitment to league and school a burden. Sport was the priority and the classroom suffered. Weekend footy for Taniwharau and rep selection for Waikato, were interspersed with national honours.

NZ Warriors head coach Daniel Anderson came to watch and departed after 20 minutes convinced a full NRL contract offer was in order.

After six premier games for Taniwharau, Hohaia was transferred to Bartercard Cup side the Manurewa Marlins.

Selection for the NZ U18 side's two tests against an England Academy followed, and then for the NZ Junior Kiwis.

A rep game for Northern Districts against France at Davies Park in Huntly in 2001 was to be the first of many international games, rounding out a busy year.

In October Hohaia signed his first basic NRL contract, and in April in 2002 - five days after his 19th birthday - he scored on debut in Townsville against the North Queensland Cowboys.

Hohaia signed an upgraded two-year NRL contract that year.

In 2011 at a farewell function at Taniwharau before leaving for a four-year deal with English Super League club St Helens, Hohaia was made an honorary life member for his contribution to both junior and senior football.

In 2015, as part of the club's 70-year celebrations, he was named Player of the 1st 70 Years.



Lance Hohaia. Super League - Wigan Warriors v St Helens 03/04/16. Picture by Alex Whitehead/SWPix.com. Courtesy of www.photosport.nz

Lance is coming home for a holiday! He will be at our first home game against the Melbourne Storm.

Behind the Scenes - Susan Turner

By Ben Francis



BEHIND EVERY club, there are a number of people working behind the scenes who make sure the fans have the best experience possible. One of the people working behind the scenes at the Warriors is Susan Turner. Susan has been working for the Warriors since 1995, working in a number of roles including finance, memberships, corporate ticketing and admin.

Susan loves her sports and working for a sports franchise is an unbelievable experience "It's very exciting working for the Warriors" Susan said "getting involved with community events and events the club hosts like the Warriors season launch are loads of fun to be a part of."

Just like the Warriors, Susan will be celebrating 21 years at the club this year and during the 21 years Susan has been there throughout all the changes at the club. Susan remembers back to 1995 when only a handful of people were working behind the scenes. "The increase in staff at the club over the years is amazing. When I first started it was quite small, a few of us did all the jobs." "As the times have changed a number of new job opportunities have come up and that has really increased staff numbers, like back in 1995 we did not have social media and now it's a massive tool to help engage with fans."

Despite all the positives of working for a team like the Warriors, Susan admitted the job can be hard at times when seeing the players have injury setbacks. "It's really hard to see players like Ben Henry who injured his knee again on the weekend. Working with the Warriors you get to know the players well and to see them have these setbacks is upsetting."

"I have kids who are the same age as some of the players and from a parents perspective it is very hard."

I would like to thank Susan for her contribution to the club over the years and helping it become the great club it is today.



Susan Turner hard at work.

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



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Northland Prospect Gets a Chance to Shine

By Ben Francis



NORTHLAND RUGBY league player James Fisher-Harris made his NRL debut on the weekend for the Penrith Panthers in their opening game against the Canberra Raiders. It was a late change made to the side at the expense of another Northland player Elijah Taylor.

The promotion to the match day 17 was meant to be a secret but the excited utility forward took to his Facebook page to share the news.

Fisher-Harris has spent the last two years with the Panthers Holden Cup team before signing a three year deal with the club.

Panthers new recruit Trent Merrin describes Fisher-Harris describe as "ruthless and relentless." "His work rate is incredible, and he's a name of the future. I have a lot of raps on him. He's calm and collected, but that changes when he's on the field." Merrin went onto say.

The Panthers hope Fisher-Harris continues to develop and become an enforcer on the field like fellow Kiwi Marty Taupau.

Fisher-Harris went on to play 18 minutes in his debut in which he had 4 runs for 32 meters, 1 offload and also 9 tackles (stats via NRL.com) in the Panthers 30-22 loss to the Raiders. He became the 557th player to wear the Panthers Jersey as the club celebrates 50 years in the NRL this season.

Panthers Head coach Anthony Griffin said post game Fisher-Harris was "outstanding in the trials, he played great and earned his spot." Griffin also added he didn't look out of place on the field.



New Zealand's James Fisher-Harris attacks during the match between the Junior Kiwis and the Junior Kangaroos on the Gold Coast, May 2, 2015. Photo Tertius Pickard

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A Traveller's Tale

By John Coffey QSM



BY THE time you read this column my wife, Shirley, and I will have driven most of the way around Tasmania in our little rental car. Since Fairfax Newspapers decided in 2007 that I should be among the first of hundreds of journalists who were surplus to their requirements we have done plenty of travelling, had a great time, and invariably returned home unscathed.

But I would never again under-estimate the value of insurance when travelling to the more exotic destinations after what our daughters, Gina and Nadia, experienced in China last September. They have also been bitten by the travel bug, especially Gina, who is a Jetstar flight manager and crosses the Tasman several times each week in the course of her work.

Gina is a fan of Contiki holidays for adventurous youngsters aged between 18 and 35. She has seen much of Asia, has camped throughout Europe, and travelled around the west, south and east of the United States. The latter trip was achieved in some discomfort, the result of fracturing two toes in Las Vegas very early on that tour. That was lesson one about insurance.

But China was something else again, and for the first time elder sister Nadia went along with Gina. Beijing was the initial port of call, and they visited the Great Wall. Then it was on to Xi'an, with its famous Terracotta Army. By then Gina was experiencing stomach pains but was reluctant to trouble the Contiki guide and perhaps disrupt the tour.

Her situation worsened and she was near collapse before being rushed to hospital. Xi'an is an ancient city in the north-west which has more than 8.5 million people and boasts at least five major hospitals. They naturally took Gina to the nearest of them. Unfortunately, no-one on the staff spoke any English. It transpired that Gina was their first non-Chinese patient.

Gina underwent surgery that evening before she and Nadia discovered the quaint customs of the Chinese medical service, at least in Xi'an. They were assigned a two-bed room, where the two sisters spent the next two weeks. Families are responsible for supporting and even feeding the patients and Nadia faced the daily problem of finding food for them both.

In most cases appendicitis can be treated quickly and efficiently with keyhole surgery and a minimal stay

in hospital. But this particular hospital still used old technology and there were complications. Because of the language barrier Gina did not find out until much later that her appendix had burst. A resident Contiki employee visited them as often as she could between her other duties.

Had Gina been on her own she would have been in considerable trouble. She needed Nadia's assistance to do anything and everything. Anxious parents in Christchurch received as much information as possible from Nadia and the girls were ever hopeful of an early release. But recovery was excruciatingly slow and the Chinese doctors were unable to explain why.

They discovered the surgeon wanted Gina to have a second operation, requiring another month of recovery in their little room and surviving on what food they could find. There were no hospital showers and it was not until Gina was more mobile that she could go out to even have her hair washed. They desperately wanted to come home. Gina felt if she could get from Xi'an to Shanghai and into the welcoming arms of Qantas she would be okay.

Permission to leave was finally granted and all the doctors and nurses assembled for an emotional farewell. The girls were presented with a huge bunch of flowers and tearful group photos were taken. The flights to Shanghai, Sydney and Christchurch were pretty painful and we took Gina into Christchurch Hospital on their arrival home.

Although released after a few hours, she was not free of pain for some weeks, and no wonder. When her insurance company translated her Chinese-language medical records Gina found she had also suffered from gangrene and peritonitis. Translating caused a long delay before the insurance was paid out but it was really no surprise what Gina and Nadia spent it on.

Among the highlights of their original itinerary was to have been Hong Kong, with visits to Disneyland and Ocean Park. In late January Gina and Nadia finally arrived in Hong Kong. They might have been four and a half months late but they made the most of their few days in the former British colony, where English is a common language and they were just one flight from home. And now Gina has booked a Contiki trip to Scandinavia and Russia in May!



THIS WEEK IN BIG LEAGUE'S HUGE ROUND 2 ISSUE...

Jam-packed with FEATURES and NEWS, plus columnist DAMIEN LOVELOCK and game analysis by BEN IKIN; plus NRL, HOLDEN CUP, NSW CUP, QLD CUP and RON MASSEY CUP team lists and a FULL NRL DRAW.

FEATURES

- **James Tedesco** and **Curtis Sironen** talk about the strong bond between the local juniors at the club and how the drive to do something special before the salary cap forces them to move on is spurring their on-field success this season.
- **Sam Williams** learned a lot from his tumultuous couple of years bouncing between clubs – but is hopeful he can show the Raiders just what he's made of in the absence of Blake Austin and Aidan Sezer and gain a new contract while he's at it.
- **Country Rugby League** talks of trialling a system of under-16s and under-18s in country NSW areas in the hopes of rolling out full competitions in 2017 – the goal being to prepare their players in the best way possible before they have to move away from home for their career.
- **Kodi Nikorima** may not be the best-known player at the Broncos just yet, but the super sub has quickly caught the eye of those at the top including Allan Langer, who calls him a match-winner.
- One of the Warriors' foundation coaches Frank Endacott urges the club to stand by the under-pressure **Andrew McFadden**, while **Anthony Milford** takes a patient approach to earning a pay rise at the Broncos.

PLUS... Damien Lovelock talks us through the biggest player signings of all time; Joe Williams door-knocks NRL clubs to try and help players with mental health issues and Luke Brooks is ready to unleash his voice on his return to the footy field after suspension.

AND: Little League, lower grade previews, Top 8 cases of second-year syndrome, news, The Analyst picks the best wingers for making the hard yards and a Greg Inglis poster.



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One Change for Brisbane Encounter

By Richard Becht



SECOND ROWER Raymond Faitala-Mariner replaces the injured Ben Henry in the only line-up change for the Vodafone Warriors' second-round NRL clash against the Brisbane Broncos at Suncorp Stadium on Friday night (7.05pm kick-off local time; 10.05pm NZT).

It's a selection which restores the first-choice back row combination used last year of Bodene Thompson and captain Ryan Hoffman in the second row and Simon Mannering at loose forward.

Thompson, who missed the Downer NRL Auckland Nines and the two trials, played 49 minutes in total after starting on the bench before replacing Henry just 20 minutes into last Saturday's season-opening 26-34 loss to Wests Tigers.

Faitala-Mariner started the 2016 campaign in the Intrust Super Premiership (formerly the New South Wales Cup) last weekend. He has been chosen for his 12th first-grade appearance after becoming Vodafone Warrior #200 when he made his debut against Gold Coast on Anzac Day last year.

Vodafone Warriors head coach Andrew McFadden was impressed with Thompson's return against the Tigers.

"Coming back from injury with no football behind him, he was outstanding," he said.

"He won our player of the day award in a close vote and he certainly deserved it."

McFadden called for a vastly-improved start from the players in the Suncorp Stadium cauldron on Friday.

"It's an exciting stadium to play in with a great atmosphere," he said.

"Our mindset wasn't right in the first half against the Tigers. We were far too passive, waiting to see what would happen.

"With the right mindset in the second half we saw what this team is capable of. We have to be a lot better from the outset this week.

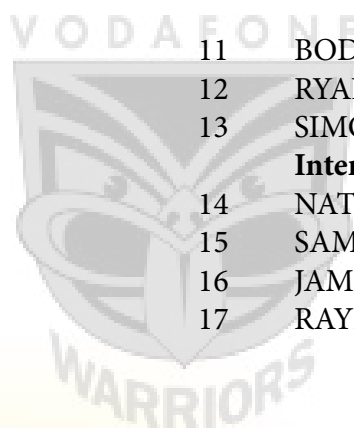
"While we could see signs of our combinations working it's still going to take a little time for them to really settle."

Apart from Faitala-Mariner the bench is the same as last week with Nathaniel Roache, Sam Lisone and James Gavet again named. In his first NRL game for the club, Gavet made the most metres of any of the side's forwards against the Tigers (130 from 13 runs).

Front rower Jacob Lillyman this week moves within three appearances of his 150th NRL appearance for the club while half Shaun Johnson is closing in on 50 career tries with his 46th touchdown last week.

Friday's match-up is the 37th between the two clubs with Brisbane holding a 21-15 edge in wins but in matches at Suncorp Stadium the Broncos have a 7-3 advantage. However, since beating Brisbane for the first time in 2001, the Vodafone Warriors have won 15 of the 27 encounters between the clubs.

| | | | |
|----|---------------------|----|-------------------------|
| 1 | ROGER TUIVASA-SHECK | 11 | BODENE THOMPSON |
| 2 | TUIMOALA LOLOHEA | 12 | RYAN HOFFMAN (c) |
| 3 | BLAKE AYSHFORD | 13 | SIMON MANNERING |
| 4 | SOLOMONE KATA | | Interchange |
| 5 | MANU VATUVEI | 14 | NATHANIEL ROACHE |
| 6 | SHAUN JOHNSON | 15 | SAM LISONE |
| 7 | JEFF ROBSON | 16 | JAMES GAVET |
| 8 | JACOB LILLYMAN | 17 | RAYMOND FAITALA-MARINER |
| 9 | ISSAC LUKE | | |
| 10 | BEN MATULINO | | |





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

The Mad Butchers Weekly NRL Tipping Comp.

By John Holloway

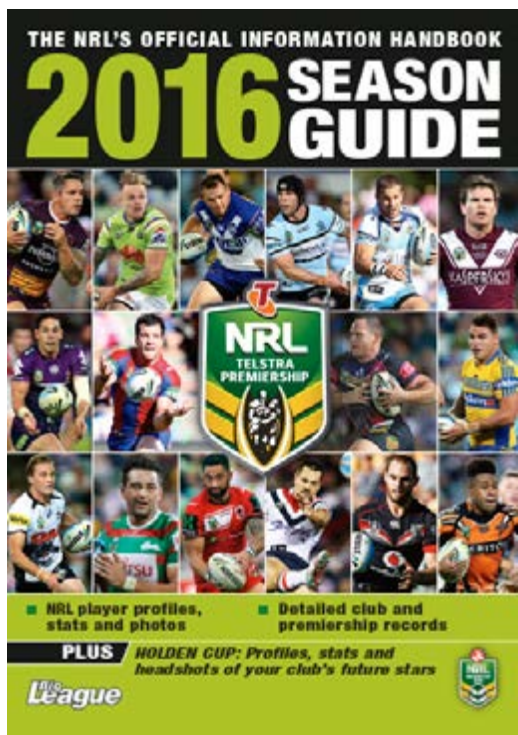
NRL Round 2

| | | Sue Phelan | Joe Vagana | John Coffey | Fast Eddie | Monty Betham | Bill Hayward | High-Tackle Holloway |
|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| | | <i>Maloney's Barber Shop</i> | <i>League Legend</i> | <i>Newsletter Columnist</i> | <i>Devonport Dutchman</i> | <i>The Warrior Boxer</i> | <i>Link Business</i> | <i>Richmond Bulldog</i> |
| Date/ Venue | Game | | | | | | | |
| 10/03 - Pepper | Panthers v Bulldogs | Bulldogs | Bulldogs | Bulldogs | Bulldogs | Bulldogs | Bulldogs | Bulldogs |
| 11/03 - Suncorp | Broncos v Warriors | Warriors | Warriors | Warriors | Warriors | Warriors | Warriors | Warriors |
| 12/03 - GIO | Raiders v Roosters | Raiders | Roosters | Raiders | Raiders | Raiders | Roosters | Roosters |
| 12/03 - ANZ | Rabbitohs v Knights | Rabbitohs | Rabbitohs | Rabbitohs | Rabbitohs | Rabbitohs | Rabbitohs | Rabbitohs |
| 12/03 - Pirtek | Eels v Cowboys | Cowboys | Cowboys | Cowboys | Cowboys | Cowboys | Cowboys | Eels |
| 13/03 - Shark pk | Sharks v Dragons | Sharks | Sharks | Sharks | Sharks | Sharks | Dragons | Sharks |
| 13/03 - AAMI | Storm v Titans | Storm | Storm | Storm | Storm | Storm | Storm | Storm |
| 13/03 - Leichardt | Tigers v Sea Eagles | Sea Eagles | Sea Eagles | Sea Eagles | Sea Eagles | Sea Eagles | Sea Eagles | Sea Eagles |

How they're traveling....

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|-----------|-----|-----|-------------|
| Correct picks | 4/8 | 5/8 | 6/8 | 7/8 | 4/8 | 6/8 | 3/8 |
| Comment | | | | Got lucky | | | Got unlucky |

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VS

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FROM THE left Harry, Ruby, Jack Davis-Rice and Cruze Luke (Issac's son) all waiting to go into the changing room after the game!



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