

NEW ZEALAND  
RUGBY LEAGUE™

# Sir Peter Leitch Club

AT MT SMART STADIUM, HOME OF THE MIGHTY VODAFONE WARRIORS

23<sup>rd</sup> November 2016

# Newsletter #149

## Four Nations Grand Final Kiwis v Kangaroos



Photos courtesy of [www.photosport.nz](http://www.photosport.nz)



**W**ELL IT was not the result we wanted, second-best against the Kangaroos, going down 34-8. The atmosphere at Anfield, the home of Liverpool FC, was amazing. More than 40,000 fans in attendance.

The Green and Gold machine was on fire and down 24-0 at half-time, all you could hope was that the Kiwis would show some grit and pride.

We at least did that but you have to admit Australia were fabulous. I wish it had not been so, but credit where it is due, they were magnificent.

Every cloud has a silver lining, and mine is that it has been a great experience touring with a good bunch of men, and I am also going to say new coach David Kidwell worked as hard as any man could. He was professional, committed and I watched him do everything that could be expected of him.

The other good thing is that I get to come home. I will confess I am ready. It is a long time away and I defy anyone not to miss the comforts of home, and their loved ones.

It's a cliché sure, but it is just a football game.

There are people coping with the loss of loved ones after the earthquakes and watching the situation unfold from the other side of the world has been awful.

Let's end on a positive. Congratulations to the All Blacks for their fine win against Ireland.

The All Blacks are back in the winning circle, the Kangaroos are too good for the Kiwis. Normal service has been resumed.

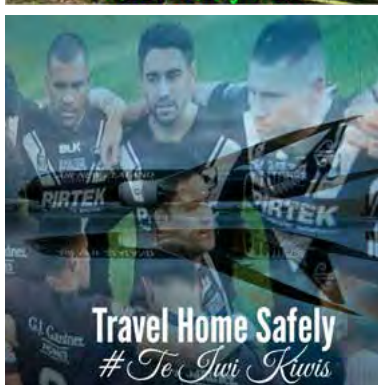
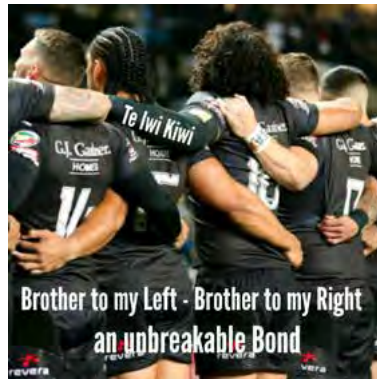
But next year is the World Cup, and I love this game, and the Kiwis. We live to fight another day, so go the Kiwis.

See you at home!

- Sir Peter Leitch



## Kiwis Artwork by Joyce Putohe





**W**ELL SOMETIMES you just have to put your hand on your heart and admit that the better side won.

Such was the Four Nations final, and the better side not only won, they did it in a clinical and professional way that left us totally outplayed 34-8.

We are well-used to keeping the faith, at Mt Smart and where the Kiwis are concerned, but it was obvious early that this was a ruthless and efficient Kangaroos outfit determined to grab the title.

Behind after just three minutes, then nearly over, then blown chances, then watching the green and gold click into gear and tear us to pieces.

They utterly savaged us, so much so, I am going to live to my dear old mum's motto: If you can't say anything nice, say nothing at all. So I'll change tack and go to the Vodafone Warriors.

Last week we heard all about how the club expects a major change in attitude from the players, and that it has a structured plan to make it happen.

Now we hear they are working on correcting something every Warriors fan hates – the fact that we are terrible at the start of the year.

We are notorious slow-starters, and there is no good reason for it.

Rubbish start – good through Origin – there or thereabouts - fall apart.

Sound familiar...it has been our story for way too long but apparently club management have spent a lot of time examining why it happens.

More importantly, they are also looking at why it happens so often.

According to head honcho Jim Doyle, you have to take the NRL Nines into consideration.

I have a problem with that. We were terrible at the start of the year before the Nines came along.

“If you go back and look at the last 14-15 years, the Warriors have always started poorly, so it's not just that, we have got to look at everything, the preseason, how we start, the intensity of our trials.”

We have a trial game – as yet against an unnamed

team - the week after the Nines and one against the Titans in Palmerston North the week after.

It seems logical that if you stick a good side out for the Nines, top players are going to get rested for one of those trials, limiting the team preparation in terms of continuity and working combinations.

We all know a lot of the clubs – regardless of the hype – don't take the Nines too seriously, whereas, and it's understandable given it's played in our backyard, the Warriors have tended to put out a decent smattering of quality players.

I don't claim to speak for the fans. But here's where I am at. I don't give a fat rat's arse about the Nines, I do care that we start our year like busted cats.

We've made the semi, we've made the final, but we have never won the thing – or sort of, since the Eels got stripped of the title they won by beating us.

Ryan Hoffman says we are keeping our eye on the prize of the NRL premiership. “We know what our priority is and our priority, I'm not ashamed to say it, is the NRL season.”

Hallelujah.

### 2017 Downer NRL Nines Pool Draw

Waiheke pool: Sharks, Titans, Panthers, Bulldogs.

Rangitoto pool: Knights, Tigers, Broncos, Storm.

Hunua pool: Cowboys, Roosters, Raiders, Rabbitohs.

Piha pool: Dragons, Eels, Sea Eagles, Warriors.

Tickets are still available from [ticketek.co.nz/nines](http://ticketek.co.nz/nines)

### What A joke

The prize for bare-faced cheek ahead of the Four Nations final undoubtedly went to Kangaroos coach Mal Meninga, who called on referee Ben Cummins to keep an eye on the 10-metres, so concerned was he by the shortness of the pitch.

The famous Anfield, home of Liverpool FC, was nine metres shorter than regulation, organisers opting to keep a three-metre gap between the in-goal and the fence.

*Continued on next page...*

Meninga said before the game that it was no problem, as long as the players were kept the 10-metres back. What he really meant was the Kiwis were kept back, because I have never seen an Aussie volunteer to go back 10 in my life.

### Johnson Opens Up

Best league story of the week – because it wasn't people interviewing their keyboards about the Four Nations final, was the excellent Michael Burgess piece with Shaun Johnson, pointing out that the playmaker, and the man so many seem to love to hate, will soon have to decide whether to sign on again at Penrose or go elsewhere.

You'd have to wonder why he would want to stay, when he is constantly blamed for every defeat, derided as too slow, too selfish, lacking vision, you name it, by the detractors - most of whom, I assume, have never thrown a pass in their lives.

Johnson is off contract at the end of next season, and most often clubs lock up their big names early, and the club is in discussions with Johnson's management.

"I'd like to stay," Johnson told the Herald on Sunday's Burgess.

"But one thing I have learned since being in the NRL is that it's a business. I've seen players who have sat next to me in the locker room one day and they are gone the next. Things can change very fast."

Johnson turns 27 next year – hardly ancient. But a player is only ever a horror injury away from being discarded, and this is, at the end of the day, a business. So I don't get too exercised when players look to see what the best deal on the table is.

Good enough for the goose, and all that.

This was the really ominous sentence: "I don't want to rule out anything."

Sure we would all like him to be more consistent, but I'm fairly confident he wouldn't mind not playing with some of the donkeys we have had on board either, and would give his back teeth for forwards who actually dominated a game.

You can read the full interview here, if you missed it: [Click here](#)

### Liverpool Face The Haka

Pete gave me a call from England last week, as excited as a dog with two tails. He wanted to rub it in, knowing I am pretty keen on my English football, that he had been in the company of Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp.

The German impressed Pete no end, being exactly Pete's kind of man –down to earth and not someone with his "head up his own arse".

What Liverpool made of welcoming the Kiwis to their Melwood training base ahead of the Four Nations final is not recorded, but they were certainly mightily impressed when the boys did the haka for them.

The boys presented Klopp with a Kiwis shirt and Reds goalkeeper Simon Mignolet, who is 1.93m tall, admitted he felt "very small" next to some of our boys. He must have been blown away because he later uploaded a video of the haka to his Facebook page, saying it was an honour but "frightening".

Kiwis back-rower Joseph Tapine admitted to being a bit star struck."You only really hear about them or see them on TV so to be there in real life, we were buzzing."

### The Hoff Wants Another Go

Ryan Hoffman wants to be captain again – must be a sucker for punishment.

You'll recall Hoffman took over when Simon Manering wanted to step down, and now the Aussie veteran says he wants to keep the captain's stripes.

"I got better throughout the year, but it took me a bit to get used to," Hoffman said.

Fair play to the bloke – he did not hide his feelings much did he.

He regularly had a face like thunder at the press conferences and he was not afraid to tell it how he saw it – which most of the time was exactly how the long-suffering fans had seen it too.

I can't imagine new coach Stephen Kearney would go past him. They go back a long ways, through the Storm.

Might want to dial back on giving referees gobfuls though Ryan, doesn't work, although we understand the frustration.



## More Than One Way To Skin A Cat

Did you see the story on Stuff about Kieran Foran, pointing out he can't actually get paid from the player budget because he is not officially on the books, so instead he is doing membership and community department work?

He has been mixing training with work for the other departments. Discussions about getting Foran registered are still ongoing, although big boss Jim Doyle says we're getting closer.

### Ben's A Sorry Boy

Ben Barba has apologised to his former Cronulla team-mates for his cocaine use, which led to him leaving the NRL club. Sharks winger Valentine Holmes said the players got a message from Barba, who was released by the Sharks to seek treatment for a range of issues in Thailand after his second positive cocaine test in less than two years.

### Franks An Eel

I might have to stop ragging on the Eels, because they have signed Frank Pritchard. The 33-year-old former Bulldog joined Hull in the English Super League and won the Challenge Cup at Wembley in August. Parramatta coach Brad Arthur said: "Frank has played at the highest level and I am sure our members and fans are pleased we have secured Pritchard as we lead into 2017." He replaces retired prop Danny Wicks.

### Ponga A Knight

Remember last week I was telling you about Kalyn Ponga, the hottest property in the game at the moment, and how he was set to star for the Cowboys.

A week later I can tell you he isn't, because he has signed for the Knights.

And why wouldn't you – a five-year deal for the 18-year-old at \$3.6 million.

Remember, this is a guy who has only played two NRL games.

The Knights want Ponga at No 1 next year, but they might be in for a bit of a squabble.

Cowboys coach Paul Green says he's "not too sure" if Ponga has asked for an early release but his Cowboys contract doesn't expire until the end of 2017.

"He's part of our plans for next year and as such he's expected to play for us."

### Bennett Looks To Basics

Having more English players in the NRL won't help the country's problems, coach Wayne Bennett says.

He said fixing problems like competing under pressure and positive game management, would.

"The NRL won't fix the problems. There are some quality players here and we just need to be better in some areas. They have to make those changes. They know what they are. I can't do it. England are capable of being a lot better than they are. I know that."

### Bateman Staying At Wigan

Bloody good player that Englishman John Bateman. There was lots of talk the Wigan back-rower would be at the Raiders or Knights next year but the 23-year-old says he's not leaving Wigan any time soon. But since he was never coming to us, I don't care.

### Europe Finds Champions

Who says we are not growing our game? A penalty six minutes from time ensured Dragons Krupka won their first Czech Grand Final, defeating Slavia Hradec Kralove 20-18. The Dragons also won the inaugural U18 title.

Meanwhile underdogs Dorcol retained their Serbian Rugby League crown with a 26-10 win over favourites Red Star. Astonishingly, it was their 14th win in 15 seasons since the re-establishment of the sport in the country.

To see how much traction the great game of league is gaining in Europe, take a look at [www.rlef.eu.com](http://www.rlef.eu.com)

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*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)

## Winding the Clock Back to 2013

*Australia captain Cameron Smith and team-mates celebrate with the trophy.  
Photo [www.photosport.nz](http://www.photosport.nz)*

**W**ATCHING THE Four Nations final was like winding the clock back to the later stages of the 2013 World Cup in Britain. In both tournaments some Shaun Johnson brilliance eliminated the host nation and propelled the Kiwis into the final – where they were hammered by the Kangaroos. The major difference was a 40-4 quarter-final victory over Scotland three years ago, compared to an embarrassing 14-14 draw this time.

The 2016 Kiwis, whether under Stephen Kearney at Newcastle or David Kidwell at Perth, Coventry and Liverpool, have started so slowly against Australia that they have seldom still been in contention by halftime. In total, the Kangaroos scored 90 points and the Kiwis 22. Last Monday's result, 34-8, was the worst of the four as the Aussies effortlessly regained both the Four Nations trophy and top international ranking.

For some reason the Kiwis seem to drain all their aggression in the haka and take a long time to find any rhythm. There have been past Kiwis coaches who abandoned the pre-match haka, replacing it with a victory haka once the important business was out of the way. They were far more satisfying, as immortalised by the 1983 Rugby League Week front page banner headline -- "Kiwis Dance on the Graves of the Invincibles" -- from Lang Park.

But, even if it is a distraction, no-one can blame the haka for the rash of basic handling errors which provided Australia with 64 per cent of possession and 69 per cent of territorial advantage in the first half at Anfield. As disappointed Kiwis captain Jesse Bromwich said later, they might as well have handed the ball to the Kangaroos and invited them to score. By the interval it was 24-0, and soon after the restart they claimed a fifth try.

No-one was surprised when Kidwell preferred versatile second-rower Tohu Harris ahead of rookie Te Maire Martin at stand-off half to replace the injured Thomas Leuluai. Least of all Kangaroos coach Mal Meninga and his playmakers. They employed fullback Darius Boyd to occupy Harris on defence and expose his inability to stay with Boyd. Four of Australia's six tries came down that flank, the first of them in just the third minute.

At the press conference Kidwell explained the decision to replace long-serving wing Jason Nightingale with the inexperienced David Fusitu'a by saying the only one way to get experience was by playing. That apparently did not apply to Martin, who, admittedly, was laid up with injury for most of the NRL season. He would at least have offered another option to lift some of the tactical kicking and playmaking burden from Johnson.

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Of course the Kiwis are not the only ones to suffer from the brilliance of a Kangaroos spine consisting of full-back Boyd, halves Johnathan Thurston and Cooper Cronk, and, especially, dummy half and captain Cameron Smith. NSW coach Laurie Daley is another who cannot wait for the day they collectively retire from representative football. Now Smith, at least, is thinking of playing on beyond the 2017 World Cup.

Years ago Wayne Bennett was in Christchurch with his Brisbane Broncos staff to look over the young talent at Aranui High School. When asked why Australia had been so dominant, he answered “heroes and history” and said each generation of players was educated about the deeds of their predecessors. That seemed to slip away towards the end of Tim Sheens’ tenure as Kangaroos coach but has been restored by Meninga and Smith.

At least the Kiwis came up with a couple of second-half tries, both to fullback Jordan Kahu. But one had the feeling the Kangaroos were doing little more than defending their lead, even conceding deliberate penalties (the final count was 12-8 to the Kiwis) and backing their goal-line defence in the knowledge referee Ben Cummins would not be reaching for the yellow card. As if to prove it, they cranked back into gear for Boyd Cordner’s late try.

The Kiwis obviously need to be at full strength in 2017 if they are to be serious contenders for the World Cup. Roger Tuivasa-Sheck, Dean Whare, Peta Hiku and Kieran Foran would obviously strengthen a backline which struggled to contain the powerful Australian three-quarters, and Simon Mannering’s work ethic was sorely missed in midfield. Longer term, the lack of depth at hooker and in the halves was again cruelly exposed and Johnson, Kahu and Issac Luke all kicked poorly for goal.

Dare we spend the off-season ruminating that the 2008 World Cup triumph followed a record 58-0 hammering from the Kangaroos in Wellington a year earlier? Or that the 34-2 pasting in the 2013 World Cup final was a prelude to an unbeaten campaign in the 2014 Four Nations tournament? Or should we be feeling some trepidation about our return match with Scotland at Christchurch during the World Cup qualifying rounds next November?

Four Nations final at Anfield: Australia 34 (Josh Dugan 2, Blake Ferguson, Trent Merrin, Darius Boyd, Boyd Cordner tries; Johnathan Thurston 5 goals) beat New Zealand 8 (Jordan Kahu 2 tries). Halftime: 24-0. Referee: Ben Cummins (Australia). Crowd: 40,042.

## Four Nations Reflections

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)



**Winging it:** Have we seen a changing of the guard on the flanks of the Kiwis backline? Manu Vatuvei did not make the Four Nations squad after a troubled NRL season with the Warriors and Jason Nightingale was missing from the line-up which played the Kangaroos in the final. There is no doubt both have been among the most effective wings to have graced the black and white jersey but it is unusual for two such experienced internationals to go missing simultaneously.

Vatuvei proudly sits atop our list of Test scorers with 22 tries in 25 matches and hopefully he will roar back into World Cup contention next season. Nightingale’s strike rate might not be as impressive -- 17 tries in 32 matches – but he is equal third with Sean Hoppe on the all-time list behind only Vatuvei and Nigel Vagana (19). Nightingale has long been regarded among the most consistent and reliable players in the NRL, in any position. At 30 years of age and after 221 games and 92 tries for the Dragons, he is far from finished.

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Nightingale made his debut against Australia at Sydney in 2008 and played against England as a member of that year's winning World Cup squad. He was soon an automatic selection. His finishing skills were never more evident than in the triumphant 2010 and 2014 Four Nations series, crossing for tries in both finals against the Kangaroos. Strangely, he has not scored in eight appearances since his prolific 2014 campaign, perhaps a reflection on those inside him as much as on Nightingale himself.

List of most Test tries: 22, Manu Vatuvei (debut 2005); 19, Nigel Vagana (1998-2006); 17, Sean Hoppe (1996-2002), Jason Nightingale (debut 2008); 16, Stacey Jones (1995-2006), Kevin Iro (1987-1998), Hugh McGahan (1982-1990); 15, Richie Blackmore (1991-2000), Tom Hadfield (1956-1961), Phillip Orchard (1969-1975), Ruben Wiki (1994-2006).

**Unfair criticism:** Kiwis coach David Kidwell was the subject of some criticism by Radio Sport hosts when he announced a squad, rather than listed his starting team and bench, for the Four Nations final. Kidwell was in fact following international rules by naming 19 players on the Thursday before the game, following the lead of new England coach Wayne Bennett, who had done just that in each of the qualifying rounds.

The Kiwis coaching staff explained they were simply leaving their options open as long as possible and, with a couple of perplexing problems to be solved after Thomas Leuluai was injured in the disappointing draw with Scotland, who could blame them? The Kangaroos, in contrast, had only to promote another forward to fill the vacancy left by the injured Sam Thaiday. Unbeaten and in form, their starting line-up was never in any doubt.

What Kidwell's ploy did, however, was expose the lack of rugby league knowledge among the Radio Sport staff, and an appalling inability to count. Someone at Radio Sport miscounted Kidwell's alphabetical list and announced he had named 20 players. For the next three players a bunch of other hosts repeated the error in parrot fashion. None of them was able to analyse the names and comment on them.

**Coaching contest:** Never have the coaches been more in the spotlight than during this Four Nations tournament. That was probably inevitable after Stephen Kearney's sudden withdrawal from the Kiwis to take over the Warriors in 2017, handing up to former assistant David Kidwell, and veteran Australian Wayne Bennett's decision to throw his lot in with England after missing out to Mal Meninga for the Kangaroos job.

Meninga then threw a can of petrol on the flames in a newspaper column accusing Bennett of trying to undermine him, saying they were "not friends" despite having had a 30-year relationship going back to Meninga's days at a Queensland police college. Of course, all that was part wounded pride and part newspaper beat-up and eventually they made up. But it did add spice to the Kangaroos' clash with the Lions.

Meanwhile, Kidwell, who did not have the benefit of an all-star coaching staff that Meninga brought with him or Bennett sought to assemble, was thrust into the spotlight in the Perth Test, his first experience as a head coach at senior level. Since then his every move, and especially his interchange rotation, has been under the microscope, often by commentators who might never have even seen a live rugby league game.

The quiet achiever has been Scotland's Steve McCormack, whose players improved with every match and earned their draw with the Kiwis. Born in Wigan, McCormack has coached Scotland in 35 games since 2004, winning 12 and drawing two. He was a Super League coach at 28 in 2001 but his stay at Salford was short. Since then he has worked with six clubs in the lower leagues while making Scotland increasingly brave.

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# Good Weekend for Australia

By Barry Ross



**I**T WAS a good weekend for both Australian Rugby teams. The Kangaroos took out the Four Nations trophy, while across the English channel, the Wallabies defeated France. The Kangaroos won back the world's number one Rugby League ranking and this was a solid motivation for them right throughout the tournament. They were worthy winners at the famous Anfield soccer ground on a cold Sunday afternoon, scoring six tries to New Zealand's two. With their 24-0 halftime lead, the game was won at the break. New Zealand made too many unforced errors in the first 40 minutes and statistics showed this. The Australians enjoyed 64 percent of possession and had nine repeat sets to the Kiwis three. New Zealand's completion rate was 67 percent to Australia's 90 percent and this resulted in the Kiwis having to make 77 first half tackles to the Kangaroos' 53, which is 45 percent more. The Australian forwards had the measure of their opposition six, while the Kangaroo backs, particularly in the first half, were generally too classy for the Kiwi seven. The Final was Australia captain, Cameron Smith's 49th Test and even though he will turn 34 on 18 June next year, he will want to reach the 50 Test mark and beyond. He has 120 Test points to his credit from nine tries and 42 goals.

Johnathan Thurston landed five goals from eight attempts and he now scored 372 (13 tries 160 goals) points for Australia in his 37 Tests. Thurston, who turns 34 on Anzac Day next year (25 April), has said that he will be available for next year's World Cup, if his form warrants selection. He has also said that if selected for Australia next year, he would retire from rep football at the end of 2017 and so the Four Nations final at Anfield was his final game for the Kangaroos on English soil.

New Zealand did improve a little in the second half but it was too late. With the season now done and dusted, New Zealand coach, David Kidwell and his selectors, will have to look forward to next year's World Cup. No doubt Roger Tuivasa-Sheck will be back in the frame, but will Kieran Foran be available remains to be seen. Probably some new and younger men will also put their hand up.

Australia took out the 100,000 pounds first prize for their win, while the crowd of 40,042 was also satisfactory, considering England were not playing.

The Wallabies continued their unbeaten record in England on their current European tour. They have

now defeated Wales, Scotland and France. Although they were lucky to hang on for their 25-23 win in the final five minutes against the Frenchmen, they were the better side. Australian captain for the Test, David Pocock, had a superb game in his 64th Test. Between Pocock and number eight Sean McMahon, they pilfered 10 of France's 14 turnovers. Halfback, Will Genia (73 Tests) was another to shine and he is fast approaching his rating a couple of years ago, as the games' best player. While the Australian scrum had its moments, the lineout was sound, thanks mainly to Rob Simmons (69 Tests). Kyle Godwin, 24, who will join the Brumbies in 2017 from the Western Force, made his Test debut in Paris at inside centre and he was the Wallabies 13th debutant in 2016.

The big talking point in Australian sport this week, is the decision of the Australian cricket selectors to make six changes for the third and final Test of the current series against South Africa. The six new players are Matt Renshaw, 20 from Queensland, Nic Maddinson, 24 from NSW, Peter Handscomb, 25 from Victoria, Chadd Sayers, 29 from South Australia, Matthew Wade, 28 from Victoria and Jackson Bird, 29 from Tasmania. The first four are new to Test cricket, but wicketkeeper Wade has played 12 Tests and fast medium swing bowler Bird has played five Tests. The selectors reacted after the Australians were crushed in the first two Tests at Perth and Hobart, giving the South Africans a two-nil lead in the best of three series. The third Test begins this Thursday 24 November, at Adelaide Oval and is a pink ball, day-night match.

In the fallout so far this cricket season, Chairman of Selectors, Rod Marsh MBE, resigned last week on 16 November, after the Hobart debacle. Now 69, Marsh, who played 96 Tests and made a then world Test record of 355 dismissals, had been Australian Chairman of Selectors since May 2014. Queenslander, Trevor Hohns, 62, has been brought back as Interim Chairman of Selectors by Cricket Australia. Hohns, who played seven Tests, was Chairman of Selectors from 1996 to 2006 when Australia had plenty of success, winning the 1999 and 2003 World Cups and were the world's number one Test team for most of his 10 years. Greg Chappell, 68 and 87 Tests, has also been brought in as an Interim Selector. Mark Waugh, 51 and 128 Tests, plus Australian Coach, Darren Lehman, 46 and 27 Tests, make up the Selection Panel of four.

# Kangaroos Outclass Kiwis in Four Nations Final

By Grant Chapman - NZRL Communications Manager



**A**USTRALIA HAVE turned on a rugby league masterclass to dispatch the NZ Kiwis in the Four Nations final and grab the world #1 ranking from their rivals.

The Kangaroos stamped their authority with an impeccable first-half performance and held on for a 34-8 victory at Anfield, the famous home of Liverpool FC.

Winger Josh Dugan scored twice, as the Kangaroos bullied the Kiwis' inexperienced left-edge defence, while his team ran in a total of six tries through a combination of power, skill and speed.

Australia wasted no time establishing their dominance, taking advantage of Jordan Kahu's handling error to put centre Blake Ferguson across untouched in the corner.

Jordan Rapana split the Aussie defence with a long run, but when it broke down, the Kangaroos counterattacked, with fullback Darius Boyd providing the last pass for Dugan's first try.

A botched play-the-ball between Shaun Kenny-Dowall and Issac Luke provided Australia with the opportunity for Trent Merrin to bullock his way over near the posts, while Dugan outpaced the defence to gather a kick-through from Johnathan Thurston for his second try.

Ahead 24-0 at half-time, Australia enjoyed the lion's share of possession and territory, racking up nine repeat sets and completing 90% of their sets. New Zealand had just three repeat sets and finished 67%.

If the Kiwis hoped to mount a comeback, they were rocked soon after the restart, when Boyd barely reached the try-line to extend the Australian lead.

There were more hopeful signs for the black-and-white jersey through the second half though. In the 56th minute, Jordan Kahu capitalised on some extended pressure with a try and then secured a double, when he spun and lunged across the line.

But there was no denying Australia their triumph, with second row Boyd Cordner providing the icing on the cake in the final moments. Boyd was named Man of the Match.

"It was one of those nights," conceded Kiwis veteran Adam Blair, "We worked really hard this whole tour and this week, but we were very disappointed with our effort in the first half.

"Collectively, as a group, we let ourselves down and our ball-handling was terrible.

"Then we came out in the second half and tried to play some footy in what we believe is the Kiwis style, but they were a class outfit tonight and cleaned us up."

New Zealand must now regroup under coach David Kidwell and prepare for their next challenge, the trans-Tasman test early next year and Rugby League World Cup 2017 on home soil.

Australia 34 (Josh Dugan 2, Blake Ferguson, Trent Merrin, Darius Boyd & Boyd Cordner tries; Johnathan Thurston 5 goals) NZ Kiwis 8 (Jordan Kahu 2 tries)

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# Letter from a Mum

**UNDERSTAND THERE** is a lot of negativity being aimed at the team due to the loss this morning but I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for being my son's inspiration. My son Taimana is 6. He has just completed his 3rd season of league and got to play in the Pacific Series in Christchurch 11&12 November for the Bro XIII. We had our prizegiving for it on Saturday and he walked away with the Tikanga award due to his commitment and passion for the game. He has his favourite players and teams of course but overall he doesn't care who plays or wins as long as he gets to watch a good game of league. He loves to go down to the league field and practise kicking the ball over the posts (adult size) and for Christmas all he wants is more cones for training and a 9s jersey we cannot find but that's beside the point. I would just like for the team to know despite the losses as a Kiwi or in your NRL team you are all still someone my son aspires to be. So stay proud. You are where some many others could never be. Thank you.

Karen Smith

## Shaun Johnson's Act of Kindness

**WE MAY** have lost the match but here is Shaun Johnson act of kindness after the game. Shaun gave Lee Johnson, who suffers from Asperger's syndrome, the pair of shorts he played in, signed! Plus some other kit from the tour. I am humbled by Shaun's generosity and the giving of his time.



Watch the video on my Facebook page:  
[Click here](#)

### A Message From Lee's Mother

**OMG HOW** amazing what you did for my son today. You have made my boy the luckiest and happiest boy I no. He's posted his happiness all over Facebook. You are one top bloke and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. It was the best day of his life and ours too. Could you please Shaun for giving us this very special day and giving my son his shorts and some other kit

Also if you get chance could you upload the video you took on Facebook for us so we can share it around please. X

Love from Adele Johnson



By Ben Francis

# Aaron Smith Should Not Have Been Selected for the All Blacks Tour

Aaron Smith after being shown a yellow card. Photo ©INPHO/Dan Sheridan from [www.photosport.nz](http://www.photosport.nz)

**A**T THE beginning of 2016, All Blacks halfback Aaron Smith was without question the best in the world at his position, and some even considered him the best player in the world.

We are now in November and things are completely different, in large part due to Smith and the 'toilet-gate' incident at Christchurch Airport.

Let's face it, Aaron Smith is not even close to the player he was at the beginning of 2016, or even the player he was six months ago or even six weeks ago. Usually Smith is the first name on the team sheet, but now fans don't even want him on the field.

That takes its toll on players going from being one of the most loved to one of the most hated just like that!

It's clear that since the 'toilet-gate' incident, Smith is not the same man or person. He is trying not to show how much this has hurt him, but you can tell based on his body language and his performances that something is bothering him.

His latest performance against Ireland on the weekend has arguably wrecked his reputation as the best halfback and even the best player on the world.

During the tour, his clearance kicks have been off, he is not clearing the ball quickly like we usually see, he is giving away silly penalties.

I respect the All Blacks coaching staff selecting Smith to go on the Northern Tour despite what had happened but I would have personally left him in New Zealand and selected Brad Weber or Augustine Pulu instead. This way, Smith could have had the rest of the year off to try to clear his head and come back a better man in 2017, or alternatively he could have gone on tour with the Māori All Blacks.

But what makes the decline of Smith more hard is the rapid rise of Tj Perenara. At the backend of the Super Rugby season, Perenara in my opinion was the best player in Super Rugby and he carries that form onto the All Blacks. Every time the 24-year old has started or come off the bench he has been incredible.

Perenara should start because he deserves it in the last Test of the season and Tawera Kerr-Barlow should be on the bench. Smith needs a break.

I have no doubt Smith will bounce back in 2017, but he is on his last chance. He can not afford to risk doing something stupid for his playing career. Smith should be considered lucky that he was not given the flick after 'toilet-gate' because it was his third incident since being in the All Blacks.

But right now, Tj Perenara is the best halfback in New Zealand and till Smith shows signs of his old self, the Hurricanes star will be the first choice halfback for the Lions series in 2017.



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# At Liverpool FC



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Great to meet Spanish play maker Pedro Chirivella.



Caught up with Jürgen Klopp again. He's the coach of Liverpool FC.



The two coaches together. Good buggers.



Signing session at the club.



Just caught up with Jordan Henderson.



Great to catch up with James Milner Vice Captain of Liverpool FC. Met him last year and sent him a Warriors jersey for his charity.



With the Rehab and Fitness Coach at Liverpool FC, Jordan Milsom.



Team photo at Melwood (Liverpool FC training ground).



The guys were so friendly. A credit to Liverpool FC, a great club.



Greg Eastwood was in paradise.



Laurie Hale the Kiwis Football Manager was stoked to get a signed shirt of the Captain.



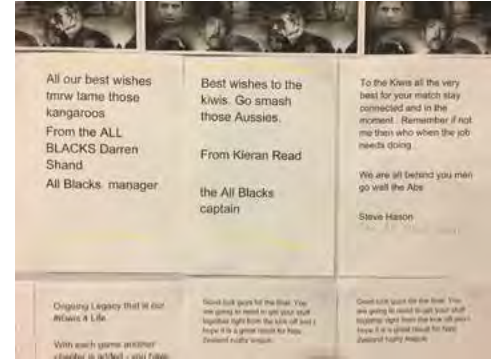
# On Tour in the UK



Me and my Granddaughter Kristin at Anfield. That special ground.



Thanks for all your emails to the Kiwis.



Some of the messages we received.



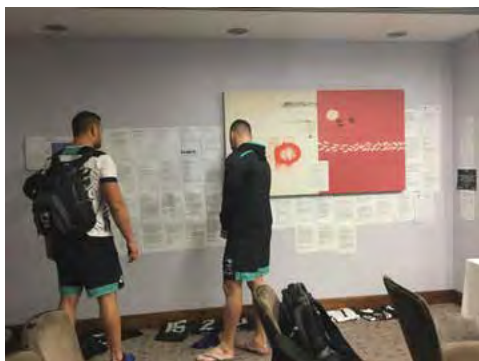
Some of the nice weather we encountered.



The three Kiwi medics who follow the team around.



The Kiwis touring group.



All the players took the time to read your messages.





**R**UGBY LEAGUE is very popular in the South Waikato, so when the world cup came to town understandably there was a bit of excitement. On Tuesday 8 November, the cup visited various schools throughout Tokoroa including Tokoroa North School, Strathmore School, Tokoroa Intermediate, and Tokoroa High School.

Tokoroa Intermediate deputy principal Brian Fisher said the school felt honoured to be part of the cup's New Zealand tour. "We've had the Rugby World Cup here and now it is a pleasure to have the Rugby League World Cup," he said.

"It is a great opportunity for our kids to see something they have seen on television, in the flesh, and they can say 'hey I saw that and had my photo taken with it'," he said.

Fisher said it was extra special because the cup was the real deal. "With the Rugby World Cup there were five and we didn't know which one was which, but this is the actual Rugby League World Cup," he said.

The fact that New Zealand will be hosting two games during the tournament at Waikato Stadium will no doubt be a drawcard for many locals. The first game will be held on November 4 between Samoa and Tonga and the second will be held on November 11 between New Zealand and Tonga.



*Students from Tokoroa Intermediate*

## **World Cup Touches Down In Christchurch**

The Rugby League World Cup visited by Christchurch for Canterbury Anniversary Weekend on Friday 11 & Saturday 12 November.

There was lots of activity across the city for the long weekend. Despite poor weather outdoors, thousands headed to Westfield Riccarton the A&P show to take a photo with the Cup.

This was a great opportunity to spread the word about the Rugby League World Cup, with Christchurch hosting two matches next year; NZ v Scotland on 11 November, and then a blockbuster quarterfinal on 18 November.

The World Cup also made an appearance at the Pacific Series Rugby League Tournament at Wainoni Park, Aranui. This was the first time this event also made an appearance at the Pacific Series Rugby League Tournament at Wainoni Park, Aranui. This was the first time this event was held, and was attended by some notable Rugby League talent including NRL Superstar Andrew Fifita.

Series spokesman Sol Smith said the inaugural event was a resounding success and would become an annual fixture.

"I looked at it as event, it was more an opportunity for the community to come together with rugby league as the vehicle," he said. "It's a grassroots sport and very much a community sport and was the right vehicle to bring people together."

Eight teams of Canterbury-based players from the Tongan, Maori, Papua New Guinea, Fijian, Cook Islands, Samoan and Pakeha communities took part in the two-day tournament.

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Samoa's Malie Sharks team were the first winners of the Marsden Mateni Tuli Memorial Shield after winning a gripping final, 20-14, against the Canterbury Maori side led by player-coach Jaye Pukepuke, a former Bulls and New Zealand Residents forward.

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*Young locals brave the rain for a photo with the Cup*



*Canterbury and Kiwi Ferns Squad Members Charntay Poko, Corrisa Whiley and Daisey Lavea-Timo with the Rugby League World Cup*



*Canterbury Tonga Team with the Rugby League World Cup*

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**M**E AND Rugby League Bill Whitehead QSM. I'll be catching up with Bill on the 2nd of December at the South Island Kiwis Association meeting hosted at ex Kiwi, Gary Clarke's museum in Christchurch.



Blown away at training today at Wigans. Sam Tomkins had a Mad Butcher Doll in his locker.



Shaun Johnson catching up with Sam Tomkins

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