

VODAFONE



Sir Peter Leitch Club

AT MT SMART STADIUM, HOME OF THE MIGHTY VODAFONE WARRIORS

8th February 2017

Newsletter #156



Downer NRL Auckland Nines



Tanika-Jazz Noble of the Kiwi Ferns scores a try



Isaah Yeo makes a break for the Panthers



Sam Cook of the Warriors on the run

Photos courtesy of www.photosport.nz

I'm Confused

By David Kemeys

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



YOU COULD not have had a more appropriate sponsor for the Nines - Downer.
It was.

In fairness, I don't much care who wins, I go for the event.

Now Pommy Steve – known to most who frequent Mt Smart – is not likely to get a phone call any time soon to become a league pundit, but he needed just the one word – shit.

It was not pretty, that's for sure.

In 2016 Shaun Johnson said what most of us fans were thinking: “We were all disappointed we couldn't get the final result. We put in so much effort.”

In 2017 coach Steve McNamara says: “We get it's been important before, but it isn't now.”

The trouble with the McNamara approach is that he's right.

The Warriors make no secret of the fact the NRL is a priority.

In August when the comp is as tight as a fish's bum, no one will care about the Nines.

We have suffered through many seasons of mediocrity, and it has to stop. If sacrificing the Nines is one of the costs, so be it.

We might not like it, and the boos that ran around the stadium on Saturday made that pretty clear, but I am willing to take the flak and tell you I think it was exactly the right approach.

And that brings us to the Nines being taken out of Auckland.

I will go out on a limb, because having no time for Duco seems to be a national obsession, but I'd be gutted for them. Regardless of results the Nines is a great fun, a terrific atmosphere, and brings in a load of people from Australia.

I'd be gutted for Pete, who works hard to ensure people who turn up in his lounge have a great time.

And I'd be gutted for me too, because at the end of the day, it's just a bit of fun and not something we should all be taking too seriously, and I love it.

It would be sad to see it go, but the numbers are falling – something the Sevens in Wellington know about - and performances like the Warriors this year won't help.

“We had to do what we did for the good of the club and what we want to achieve,” McNamara said.

Yep, couldn't agree more.

I didn't like watching us get eliminated, but if it is the price to be paid for being ready, courtesy of our upcoming trials, I'm willing to pay it.

But don't be surprised if someone reminds us all of that later in the year, and given our notorious slow starts to a season, sooner than you think.

If we beat the Knights in round one it will be forgive and forget. But it will get brought up pretty bloody quickly if we are on the wrong end of the scoreboard.

Bunker Overhaul

The much-criticised bunker has had an overhaul that has trimmed its powers – and thank goodness (nearly said something else there) for that.

It was supposed to make sure we got the right decisions in a timely way, but in point of fact it took forever and frequently got it wrong anyway.

The NRL Bunker will rule on point-scoring plays (this is the one that ensures the Warriors get lots of tries ruled out, and their opponents get the benefit of the doubt), in-goal restarts, and reportable foul play.

There was, and no one will be surprised given how terrible the bunker was, an “extensive review”.

NRL Head of Football Brian Canavan said the Bunker was a significant step forward in 2016.

Which is code for, we know it's crap, you know it's crap, but it's crap we thought of.

“That said, we will continuously review the performance to ensure we keep improving.”

Here's an idea. Give the referee a whistle, let him decide.

Here's another idea, but this one is from Mr Canavan: “As we all become more accustomed to the technology, we will look to refine the system to ensure the Bunker serves the fans, clubs and players in the best way possible.”

That would be a major change then, because it serves virtually no one, except the broadcasters, now.

Let's be fair, the system was supposed to deliver improved accuracy, efficiency, consistency and transparency.

So that's a fail.

“We are extremely confident we will deliver on those key pillars again,” Mr Canavan said.

Hard to see why we'll get anything other than more of the same.

Now I did not have a lot of time for Tony Archer, who I considered a complete muppet, but these days he is NRL General Manager Officiating.

Archer says the NRL Bunker will “continue to improve officiating”.

Yeah that's why you've put some restrictions on it is

it?

But I did love this bit, after cutting the Bunker's scope back: “In all other aspects of officiating, the on-field officials will make the call.”

I'll say it again, give the ref a whistle.

If you want the facts, a referral in 2015 took more than a minute on average – a staggering 64 seconds. Last year they got it down to 55 seconds.

The NRL claims there were five errors out of 709 referrals in 2016, described only as a “significant improvement on 2015”.

To which I can only add, bullshit, and, at the risk of repeating myself, give the ref a whistle.

Parkers Next Fight

Joseph Parker has never made any secret of the fact that his goal has never been to simply win a heavyweight championship, but defend it over and over again.

News over the weekend that Duco Events has secured the rights to host his first WBO heavyweight championship defence is a major psychological blow to his next opponent, Hughie Fury, who is the mandatory challenger to Parker's title.

The younger cousin of former champion Tyson, Hughie Fury's camp made it clear in negotiations over the last month they did not want to come to New Zealand because they saw how crucial home advantage was to Parker against Andy Ruiz in securing the championship by majority decision.

The Parker/Fury fight is set down for April 1, however, just where this defence will take place is still unclear with a Singapore casino making things interesting by offering money to stage the bout in Asia.

Wherever it is held, Parker has the chance to make a major statement against an unbeaten, credible, British opponent. Knock Fury out, and the doors will open to an even more lucrative bout in the middle of the year. A Deontay Wilder unification is being rumoured or maybe Tyson Fury will want to restore pride in the family name.

The stakes are high and the riches even higher, for the winner of Parker v Fury on April 1.



Joseph Parker with his title belt.

On The Downer NRL Auckland Nines

By Sir Peter Leitch

THE VODAFONE Warriors failed to fire a shot at the Downer NRL Nines at Eden Park, but I had a ball regardless.

We had visitors from as far afield as Bluff and Invercargill, and from across the ditch, guests flying in from all over Australia.

Stars of the game like Craig Bellamy, Manu Vatuvei and his new Vodafone Warriors captain Roger Tuivasa Sheck, Andrew Johns and Gordon Tallis all dropped by our lounge, and everyone had a terrific time meeting new people and watching some quality games.

Sure it was disappointing the Warriors did not make more of an impact, but that's life. The most disappointing thing is listening to people saying the tournament should be taken away from Auckland. I'll be gutted if it is. It's a great weekend.

My league highlight was not actually the Nines, it was the naming of the Rugby League World Cup community ambassadors.

As the chief ambassador I am pretty keen for the tournament later this year to be a huge success, and I could not be more chuffed that the ambassadors who are joining me are good South Auckland league people.

Jim Doolan is a great grassroots man. You can find him down at the Otara Scorpions, where he might be busying himself setting all the fields up to have the grounds ready for a weekend of footy.

He has been a player, a coach, a manager and a trainer.

And he is by no means a newcomer, having been involved in the game since 1986.

He's also a member of the Physical Disability Rugby League, growing paths for disabled athletes in New Zealand, so much so he is organising a New Zealand team to play a three test series against Australia in July.

And as I often say, women play a huge part in league, as players, coaches, administrators and a million and one behind the scenes roles.

So how good is it that two of my three new colleagues are women.

Nicole Manihera is a diehard Papakura Sea Eagle.

She's been involved with the club for 15 years or so, so must have really enjoyed the success the club enjoyed last season.

Nicole is one of those people that every sports club needs. She's diligent, hard-working and at the moment is responsible for co-ordinating more than 20 junior football teams in her role as Junior Chair.

She is really passionate about football, and the role league can play in bringing the community together.

The third ambassador is Annie Chan, who is a very well-known face at the Otahuhu Leopards. She's been part of the club since 1995, starting out as a player, and graduating to management roles.

She so loves her league that last year the women's team was a bit short of players, so she dusted off the boots, threw on the shirt, and took to the field.

That's my kind of commitment.

She's the Leopards' secretary and main point of contact for the club, and has great ties to her community.

There is more league on the agenda for me, with my good mate Dexter and I off with our lovely wives to the Sunshine Coast for a spot of rest and recreation – and to catch the Warriors playing in a trial against the Melbourne Storm.

The season is inching closer. Bring it on, and go the Mighty Vodafone Warriors.



From left to right: Annie Chan (Otahuhu Leopards), Me, Nicole Manihera (Papakura Sea Eagles) and Jim Doolan (Otara Scorpions).

At the Downer NRL Auckland Nines



Demetrius Longdin, Hayden Steele, Scott Allison and Nate Hope.



Fynn and Geordie Greshon from the North Shore enjoying the NINES.



Hula Hawaiian NINES Fans. From left to right Shareen Lacey, Victoria Salter, Joe, Kim Ferguson, Inesa Ragle and Andrea Craig.



Izzy and Ararina Bennett from Pukehina.



Dan Adams, operations manager for The Mad Butcher, meet young Tyson Frost over the weekend. Tyson is a massive Warriors fan.



Jamie Sione, Yuri Tuuta, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Logan all from Christchurch.



Lee Austin, Grayson Flavell and Jayden Austin. All massive Warriors fans. Lee and Jayden are from Hokitika and Grayson is from Kaikoura.



Nikau, Alizay and Niwa from Bombay.



Orange Colleen Faamoe, Green Fallon King (Tui Lolohea's partner) Purple Anna Saito (Mason Lino's partner).



Sam Wihapi, Jim Maui and Hare Nikola all drove up from Hamilton.



Season members Rashidah Hudson, Milah Hudson, Pania McGrath, Alice O'Neill, Laura Sio, Josie Desmond.



This group of young guys went to the Nines as the Mad Butcher.png



Miles chats to Motu Tony (Former Warrior, Kiwi, Hull FC, Castleford and Wakefield player) who is now GM of football at Full FC Rugby League club in the UK. A top bloke!



Miles Davies chats to Gordon Tallis in our lounge.



Troy Carpenter, Craig Stokes, Mana Ashford and Karl Mcghee have been coming to the Butchers lounge (the place to be) at the Nines since 2013.



Was great getting to interview Craig Bellamy the head coach of the Melbourne storm over the weekend watched by my mate Dexter.



Roger and Manu hold up Andrew Jones' boy for the lounge crowd and they loved it!



Steve the Pom won the silent auction for the signed NINES shirt signed by all the captains with the money going to charity.



Having fun with my old mate Andrew Johns a legend of rugby league.



It was great getting to interview Kieran Foran I'm my lounge he really opened up to me and the crowd.



These lounge members dressed up as Where's Wally. These guys are huge league fans and have come to the lounge for every Nines tournament!



Junior Pauga watches football.



James Bell warms up.



Ruben Wiki with Isaiah Papalii.



Suaia Matagi and Ruben Wiki.



Ruben watches from the sideline.



Team walk out for first game.



Warriors fan.

Photos by Bodie Friend

VODAFONE



WARRIORS

Bye Bye Benny

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)



THE NRL, and especially the Cronulla Sharks, will be much better off without Ben Barba in the upcoming season. Sharks fans no doubt retain rosy memories of the leading role the dashing fullback played in their club's maiden premiership triumph last year. But they should also be breathing hearty sighs of relief that they got home only four days before Barba's latest brain explosion in a shameful career-long history of drug taking, binge drinking, gambling and allegations of domestic violence. French rugby union club Toulon is welcome to him.

Barba, at 27, has compiled one of the worst records imaginable, culminating with the tame 12-match suspension that he was to serve from the start of the NRL season. That was until his managers contacted Toulon – fast becoming a home for wayward NRL players – to arrange a short-term deal so he could return to Australia about the time his suspension expired. To their shame, Duco officials subsequently invited him to play for Toulon in this weekend's Tens tournament in Brisbane. The Australian Rugby Union backed the NRL and put a stop to that.

Surely his management was aware ploys to avoid suspensions by playing overseas had been tried and failed in the past (see footnote). NRL boss Todd Greenberg, who has been all too aware of Barba since he himself faced an investigation of allegedly covering up allegations of domestic violence involving Barba and his partner while chief of the Bulldogs, agreed he could go to Toulon because he was not currently contracted to a club. But Greenberg then lowered the boom by ruling Barba would still serve his 12-match stand-down on his return.

Cronulla was initially prepared to welcome Barba back into the fold for the second half of the season, whatever the consequences. But when the Barba bluff was parried by Greenberg, and his managers persuaded Toulon to extend its offer to two and a half years, the Sharks speedily moved on and extended their deal with rising star Valentine Holmes. After making his Test debut on the wing for the Kangaroos last year, Holmes is now poised (in Roger Tuivasa-Sheck fashion) to switch roles and fill Barba's fullback position at Shark Park.

Born in Darwin, Barba moved with his family to Mackay in central Queensland when he was a youngster. He signed for the Bulldogs at 17 and in 2012 won the Dally M in their colours. It might now be seen as ironic he made his first grade debut the week that Sonny Bill Williams defected from the Bulldogs to French rugby union in 2008! The Bulldogs were to be the first of three NRL clubs tainted by Barba's habit of hitting the headlines for all the wrong reasons. He might now have played the last of his 168 games and scored the last of his 99 tries.

In his sixth season at the Doggies, while sitting out an injury, he asked for a release to join the Brisbane Broncos in 2014, claiming he needed to be closer to his family in Queensland. He lasted just one season at Suncorp Stadium before returning coach Wayne Bennett told him he was not wanted. While the Sharks' grand final victory painted a rosy picture of Barba's 2016 contribution, Cronulla officials cannot have forgotten his mid-season altercation with team-mate Sosaia Feki, followed by a leave of absence and another threat to quit the game.

The current Barba sob story is that he must go to Toulon (for a reported \$2.5 million) to provide food for his wife and four daughters. Us mere mortals are wondering how he could be skint after Cronulla paid him more than \$500,000 for his 2016 season. According to one Australian newspaper, if Barba returns to the NRL he will be required to pay a fine of five per cent of his contract before he can play. The maximum fine in such circumstances is apparently 15 per cent. He also needed to undergo specified rehabilitation programmes.

Continued on next page...

Continued from previous page...

Billionaire Toulon owner Mourad Boudjellal must be losing what would be a fortune to most people, given recent reports of big signings and small crowds attending his club's matches. But it is likely Boudjellal will sign more discontented rugby league players, given that his new coach is Mike Ford, a former England rugby league international now infamous for signing Sam Burgess in 2015 when he was at Bath. Fellow loose cannon Semi Radradra and former Wigan and Saracens wing Chris Ashton are among the other recent Toulon recruits.

Although Barba's management toyed with the idea of offering him to Australia's Olympic sevens campaign, he has no rugby union experience. He might have problems finding a spot in a Toulon backline which already includes a Welsh international fullback and a French Test five-eighth. Barba must also adjust to a very different lifestyle and language, and his family refuge in Queensland will be a long way away. Poor old Todd Greenberg must already be rueing the day when Barba comes knocking at his door pleading for another "last" chance.

Footnote: In 1988 Balmain prop Steve (Blocker) Roach was sent off for a high tackle on Penrith's Chris Mortimer on the eve of the semi-finals His four-match suspension ruled him out of the grand final. After two weeks Blocker tried to beat the ban by flying to England, where Warrington agreed to list him in its reserve and first grade teams over one weekend. That, in Blocker's mind, constituted four games missed. But the NSWRL told him he was dreaming, and big Blocker listened to Balmain lose the grand final over a crackly radio connection in Warrington.

ELVIS IN THE GARDENS

WITH

Magic
AUCKLAND 702AM
104.9FM

Sunday 26th February

11:30 – 6:30pm

AUCKLAND BOTANIC GARDENS
MANUREWA

ALL CHILDREN ACTIVITIES ARE FREE



TOP USA,
AUS & NZ
PERFORMERS



WIRI TRUST

TRILLIAN TRUST

Auckland Council

Manurewa Local Board

Charity Collections:

WWW.ELVISINTHEGARDENS.CO.NZ

Winning is a Habit

By Barry Ross



ROOSTERS COACH Trent Robinson was quoted in a Monday morning Sydney newspaper as saying “winning is a habit. “ The hardworking mentor said this after his side’s tight 10-8 win over the Panthers in the final of the Auckland Nines. No doubt there is some truth in his statement but Nines football is totally different to the tough week to week grind of NRL football. We all know the Roosters had a disastrous season last year which began with the infamous Australia Day incident involving their halfback, Mitchell Pearce. After finishing second last in 2016, the win in Auckland was an early season tonic for Robinson, his players and his club. Realistically form and results at the Nines in early February mean very little in September.

I watched the Nines on television and I was impressed with most of the matches I saw. Of course there were mistakes made but generally entertaining football was served up. Apart from Jonathan Thurston’s comments on the crowd size, I did not see or hear any negative comments in the Australian media.

Probably Thurston and others have a point in suggesting the venue be moved to Australian cities, but if this is done they should look at the heat factor. Sydney has just experienced 10 successive days of extreme heat and the rugby union people at the Sydney Sevens last weekend, played in gut busting conditions. All three days were very hot with Sunday the worst. The temperature in Sydney at 2pm on Sunday was 35 plus degrees while the humidity was about 80 percent. Young sporting people just get on with the job and there were no complaints. But I spoke to a couple of well known sporting doctors and they suggested that playing top level sport in such conditions could have some effects down the track. Not only does Sydney have high temperatures at this time of the year, but so does Brisbane, while Melbourne can also experience heatwaves. This probably won’t be considered when a decision is made about the venue for next year’s Nines, but maybe the Players’ Association could be concerned.

This Friday night in Newcastle the Indigenous team takes on the World All Stars in both mens and womens matches. In the mens match, there have been several changes from the originally selected sides due to injuries and other reasons. But whatever the makeup of the two teams, the game will be hard fought and of a high standard. Sam Lisone from the Warriors, is a reserve for the All Stars side.

The Rugby Union Sevens in Sydney went well. As usual the crowd was happy and there were no reports of any major problems. Saturday and Sunday were sellouts but there were empty seats. Probably the extreme temperatures had a bit to do with the no-shows. Both Australia and New Zealand were disappointed with the final results. Although they finished third, the Kiwi men did not reach the Cup Final, while the Olympic Gold medal winning Australian women were also beaten in the Cup semi finals. New Zealand beat the Australians in both mens and womens play-off games for third place.

On the cricket scene the Aussies suffered further disappointment when they lost the Hadlee-Chappell trophy on Sunday. The New Zealanders were just too good at Wellington, although some of the Australians left at home for a rest, such as David Warner, could have made a difference. I said it several times last year and I will say it again. What a great, world class bowler Trent Boult is. He is one of my favourite cricketers from all countries and his 6 for 33 at Wellington on Sunday was a just reward for him.

What a great Super Bowl. The Atlanta Falcons led 28-3 at one stage but the New England coach, Bill Belichick, 64 and his quarterback, Tom Brady, 39, can never be discounted. Before a crowd of more than 71,000 at Houston Texas on Sunday (Monday morning in our part of the world), they clawed their way back to 28-all at fulltime and took the championship 34-28 in extra time. That is an extraordinary five Super Bowl wins to Brady and Belichick working together. Next year’s Super Bowl will be held on 4 February 2018 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where the stadium holds around 70,000. Minneapolis at that time of the year will be freezing. But the stadium, named US Bank Stadium, has a fixed roof and opened in July last year.



By Miles Davis

Lack of Supporting Culture



The All Blacks players perform a celebratory Haka on their lap of honour. 2015 Rugby World Cup Final. Photo www.photosport.nz

NEXT TIME you see empty seats at a New Zealand sporting fixture, blame the All Blacks. Now it may sound harsh to point the finger at one of the world's greatest sporting entities for low crowd numbers but let me explain.

For over 125 years the All Blacks have been the main focus for the Kiwi sports supporter. They were the first team to draw the country together in a spirit of sporting camaraderie and they also set the benchmark. Generations of Kiwis have grown up expecting to turn up at the stadium and see their team win. They have not been exposed to the reality of most overseas sporting fans of going through decades of pain and disappointment. Those experiences have lowered the expectations of the fans and given them a more realistic perspective of what it is like to support a team through downs with an occasional up. In other words, Kiwi sports nuts have been spoiled.

Teams such as the Vodafone Warriors, Wellington Phoenix and NZ Breakers, as well as all of New Zealand's Super Rugby franchises have come into this environment and have struggled to live up to the unrealistic expectation. When things are going well or a play-off game is being hosted the stands are full, but when the results start going south they rapidly empty. Most franchises have a core of fans who turn up every week but that number is never enough to create financial security.

Take the Vodafone Warriors for instance. How often do you hear fans and media complain that they still haven't won a title and use that as an excuse for waning support? Let's get real, the team have only been going for 22 years. I support a team that has been going for 122 years and still hasn't won the title yet wouldn't dream of not going to watch them every chance I get. That is because I, like millions of others, grew up not expecting victory but seeing each win as a magnificent bonus in a mostly miserable landscape of sporting failure. Turning up is a matter of duty to the club we are devoted to. The form of the team, the weather and what is on TV doesn't come into the equation. You go along and suffer with the rest of your clan.

Thanks to the constantly winning All Blacks, New Zealanders have been unable to fully develop a true sport-supporting culture. One where loyalty to the team is the most important virtue and pain a major part of belonging.

This culture of unconditional support is soon to be amply displayed on these shores when the British Lions tour kicks off. 11 previous tours have resulted in just one series win yet the country will be awash with red shirt-wearing invaders who will sing their hearts out all the way to the final whistle in a 3-0 series loss. New Zealand could have had that culture had it not been for those bloody unbeatable All Blacks.

Graeme West

By Miles Davis

New series about former players and where they are today.



HAWERA, SOUTH Taranaki, 1953. A little boy is born who will transform into a 6'5" beast terrorising rugby league players all over the world. Introducing Graeme Leonard West.

After learning his league trade in Taranaki and having already played for the Kiwis for several years, West picked up a contract at top English league club Wigan at the relatively ripe old age of 29. Before too long he was made skipper of the Lancashire club and went on to make 202 appearances, scoring 49 tries. A highlight of that period being the 1985 Challenge Cup Final v Hull in front of 100,000 at Wembley which still ranks as one of the best finals in rugby league history (a game featuring many Kiwi and Kangaroo greats as well as a few legendary Poms).

As the years of rigorous contact took their toll, West joined Wigan's reserve side as player coach for 6 years before taking over the reins at first team coach in 1994 after the sacking of Australian John Dorahy. As coach he mentored players such as Jason Robinson, Dennis Betts, Martin Offiah and Va'aiga Tuigamala. In his first full season in charge Wigan achieved an unprecedented Grand Slam of all 4 domestic trophies as well as winning the World Club Challenge in Brisbane against a powerful Broncos side.

In 1997 he was offered the opportunity to move upstairs and take over from Joe Lydon as Wigan's manager of football. The always pragmatic West turned the offer down preferring to leave the club and take his chances in the outside world. "Joe left because of his frustration at not being able to manage and I feel I have already had enough frustration as coach," West said. "I have been accused of being negative when I have complained about the strength of the squad so I have shut up about it, but I have found it frustrating." West added "I'm disappointed to be going, but the world keeps spinning round, I've had some great times at Wigan as well as some disappointing times."

After a short period at Widnes, West got back to doing what he'd always done, hard work. He had bought himself a taxi and soon became Wigan's favourite cabbie. He'd got the idea many years before when he had been picked up in a cab driven by former NRL coach Roy Masters who said it was a great way to make a living.

After spending over 30 years in Wigan, West returned home to New Zealand and settled down in Karaka. He now earns a living keeping the lawns of South Auckland in pristine condition and spends a month of the New Zealand winter back in Wigan so he can catch up with his 3 children who still live there.

I asked him recently why he had taken so long to make the journey home and he told me that he wanted all his children to be settled down before he made the move. His daughter was the last to do so at the age of 37. When Graeme asked her why she had waited so long she informed him that for 20 years all her suitors had been too frightened to come round and front up to her Dad. Having seen the man play league I can't say that I blame them.

NB: If you want to find out more about Graeme and his amazing life and career you can get his book "From Hawera to Wigan - A Life in Rugby League" from Amazon:

<http://bit.ly/2kJ7Hdu>

1985 Challenge Cup Final Wigan v Hull: <https://youtu.be/2b3IbRSI1io>

1994 World Club Challenge Brisbane v Wigan: <https://youtu.be/mUaiqiBxdMM>



Graeme West Lifts Challenge Trophy 1985.



Graeme West with Howie Tamati - to the right.



By Ben Francis

Greatest Sporting Comebacks

New England Patriots Quarterback Tom Brady (12) celebrates after the winning touchdown in overtime. Photo www.photosport.nz

THE NEW England Patriots pulled off one of the greatest comebacks in sports history with a 34-28 win over the Atlanta Falcons in Super Bowl LI on Monday (NZ time). Trailing by 25 points midway through the third quarter and 19 heading into the fourth, Tom Brady led the Patriots to their fifth Super Bowl in style.

The win has all ready been talked about as the greatest comebacks in sporting history, but we have all witnessed a number of great comebacks in the past. So here are four great comebacks in sport you can reminisce about.

America's Cup 2013 - It's a moment many New Zealanders would rather forget, but what Oracle achieved was magical. Team USA was trailing 8-1 in the 34th edition of the Cup, and somehow turned that around to secure victory. With New Zealand only needed one win to claim back to Cup, America stormed back to win eight races over seven days to retain the oldest prize in world sports. Team New Zealand will be hoping to win back the Auld Mug in Bermuda this year.

NBA Finals 2016 - This is one of the more recent great comebacks in sport, but the Cleveland Cavaliers were trailing the Golden State Warriors 3-1 in a best of seven series, to eventually come back and win Cleveland's first sporting title in over 50 years. It was the first time in NBA history a team had come back from a 3-1 deficit in the finals to win. The Warriors headed into the finals looking invincible after breaking the Chicago Bulls 72-10 regular season record, but LeBron James and Kyrie Irving elevated their games and ultimately won the series on Golden State's home court.

Muhammad Ali - Ali's comeback is of a different kind, but one which should be remembered. Ali is well known for refusing to fight in the Vietnam war, and because he refused to fight, Ali was stripped of his boxing licence for almost four years in this mid-to-late 20s, which we all know to be your prime years during sport. Once Ali got his boxing licence back in 190, he returned to ring, and eventually won back his World Heavyweight title.

Champions League Final 2005 - In football (soccer) when a team leads 3-0 you could say its all but done, but that wasn't the case in the 2005 Champions League final between AC Milan and Liverpool in Istanbul. Milan scored in the first minute of the game, and added two more just before halftime to extend the lead. Liverpool looked down and out, but surprisingly they launched a comeback and scored three goals in a dramatic six-minute spell to level the scores. The Reds went on to win the game in a penalty shootout.

Northland Announce Head Coach For 2017 Mitre 10 Cup

By Ben Francis



A FAMILIAR FACE will be coaching the Northland Taniwha in 2017 Mitre 10 Cup, and that is former All Black and Northland coach Derren Witcombe.

Witcombe will be replacing Richie Harris as coach. Harris has coached Northland for the past two seasons.

The five Test hooker was delighted to be returning to coach Northland.

"I am very grateful of having the opportunity to coach the Toll Northland team again, and I am excited about the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead," Witcombe told NRU.

Along with playing for the All Blacks, He played 53 times for The Blues, 30 times for Auckland in the NPC and 20 times for the Taniwha.

Witcombe coached Northland in 2013 and 2014, leading the team to the Championship semi-finals, and was the assistant coach in 2012 and 2011.

For the past two years Derren has been coaching in Japan as the Assistant Coach for the Mitsubishi Dynaboars in the Japan Top East Competition.

Former All Black and current Chiefs five-eight Stephen Donald has previously played for the Dynaboars, along with Welsh great Shane Williams.

Derren is currently completing his coaching duties in Japan and will commence with Northland from the 1st of April. Dale McLeod has also been reappointed as assistant coach.

Witcombe will be hoping his Super Rugby players can bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the Taniwha with seven Northland based players taking part in this year's Super Rugby competition.

Dan Pryor will be a part of a deadly loose forward trio down with the Highlanders while Jone Macilai returns to the Crusaders for his third season.

The Blues will feature halfback Sam Nock, flanker Kara Pryor, lock Josh Goodhue and hooker Matt Moulds.

The Chiefs will have rising talent Solomon Alaimalo on their roster for 2017.

Josh Goodhue, Kara Pryor, Sam Nock and Solomon Alaimalo will all feature at this weekend's Brisbane Global Ten's Tournament for their respective franchises.

TAB *THIS WEEKEND!*
8-12 FEB 2017, AWF SPORTS STADIUM, ALBANY
INTERNATIONAL MEN'S SOFTBALL
GET YOUR TICKETS TODAY!
CHALLENGE CUP
Softball Is A Champion Sport On And Off The Diamond
<http://softball.org.nz/> Facebook Twitter



By John Deaker

Taylor's One Day Career Would Make Martin Crowe Very Proud

Ross Taylor celebrates his century. International One Day Cricket. New Zealand Black Caps v Australia. Photo www.photosport.nz

ROSS TAYLOR'S series-winning hundred against Australia at Seddon Park at the weekend reinforced the fact that he's one of New Zealand's greatest batsman we've produced. The performance would also have made Martin Crowe, Taylor's mentor, very proud as he looked down from cricketing heaven.

Most cricket fans still think of Martin Crowe as being a better batsman than Ross Taylor. Crowe was such a classical batsman to watch whereas Taylor is more unorthodox in the way he acquires his runs. However, the stats don't lie when you compare cricketers and while Taylor's test record is only just superior to Crowe's (Taylor has 6015 runs at an average of 46.99 v Crowe's 5444 runs at an average of 45.46) it's one-dayers where Taylor's recorded is far superior to Crowe. From 178 matches Taylor averaged 43.42 whereas Crowe averaged only 38.55 from 143 one dayers. The clearest specific difference is Taylor's 16 centuries compared to only 4 that Crowe acquired. Often Taylor's 100's have lead to victories for the Black Caps like it did on Sunday.

Taylor was of course unavailable (eye surgery) when the Black Caps were beaten convincingly by Australia over the tasman two months ago. Having him back on board for the home series not only proved how valuable he remains, it was also a reminder how lucky New Zealand was that he didn't give up playing for the Black Caps when Brendon McCullum took over the captaincy from him. The mentoring of Crowe and the goals he helped Taylor set undoubtedly helped keep the 32 year-old involved with New Zealand cricket.

What remains fascinating now is whether Taylor can make it back in the Black Caps T20 team. He was dropped against Bangladesh and the indications are he won't be selected to take on South Africa next week. This must be extremely frustrating for Taylor. It's also not the type of treatment one of our greatest batsman should be receiving, particularly when all the best batsman worldwide are able to adapt their games quickly between the three different forms of the game. One man who would undoubtedly be very frustrated by all this (and sadly unable to do anything about it) is the late, great M.D Crowe.

**Check out my interview with a legend of the game
Gorden Tellis - Sir Peter Leitch:**

<http://sirpeterleitch.co.nz/videos.php?p=558>



By Shane Hurndell
Hawke's Bay Today
Sports Reporter

Don't Let Nines Negativity Get You Down

The Roosters celebrate their win at the final of the Downer NRL Auckland Nines. Photo www.photosport.nz

KIA ORA from the Eastern Region of the North Island or Tohu Harris country as we like to call it. Sir Peter has asked me to give regular updates from the region during the season and it will be a pleasure to do so. However his brief for my inaugural piece was to give my impressions of the Downer NRL Nines at the weekend and in particular the performances of the Kiwi Ferns team.

It's just as well when it comes to sport negatives have the potential to be turned into positives, because Vodafone Warriors and Kiwi Ferns fans had plenty of negatives to dwell on as they vacated Eden Park on Sunday night.

The Warriors were woeful during their losses to the Eagles, Eels and Dragons. One can only hope these displays were a result of what non-playing Nines ambassador Shaun Johnson hinted at in the media ...the Warriors have this season placed more emphasis on their pre-season campaign than the Nines.

Us long-suffering Warriors supporters won't mind if this proves to be the case and new head coach Stephen Kearney and captain Roger Tuivasa-Sheck lead them to title glory.

As for the Kiwi Ferns who lost their three-match series to the Jillaroos for the first time in three years ... it was a tough couple of days for the Alan Jackson-coached outfit which included six newcomers and had a horrific run of injuries. The big positive is the fact with so many newcomers having a taste of international play at the weekend they will be better for the experience when the more important 13-a-side World Cup is played later in the year.

Jackson and his deputies would have learnt more attention needs to be paid to the squad's fitness levels. There was definitely improvement from the 20-4 loss on day one to the 8-0 loss in game two.

Fortunately for the Kiwi Ferns, Aussie speedsters Chelsea Baker and Samantha Bremner, won't have as much space to utilise during the 13-a-side World Cup. The biggest plus for Jackson, captain Sarina Fiso, a workaholic for the team on and off the field, and fellow key players Honey Hireme, Georgia Hale and Teuila Fotu-Moala is they have time between now and the World Cup.

It was a pity less than 25,000 paying spectators were present on both days of the tournament. The talk is Auckland could lose the tournament to an overseas venue.

Hopefully this won't be the case and if Eden Park gets another crack next year it's crucial fans turn out in better numbers.

Continued on next page...

Continued from previous page...

This will only happen if the Warriors and Kiwi Ferns perform better. Having been a spectator in the S337 block at the previous three tournaments before the weekend's it was a privilege to experience it as a spectator in Sir Peter's lounge at the weekend.

His hosting feats are legendary and the weekend was no exception with the likes of Konrad Hurrell, Manu Vatuvei, Tuivasa-Sheck and Gorden Tallis turning up to speak to fans between games and Austin Powers also turned up and belted out a few favourites. If only the Warriors were as consistent and good at playing as what Sir Peter is at putting on a show!

Although the Warriors didn't feature at the business end of the tournament this season it was still exciting with several upsets. The Roosters deserved the title as did their playmaker Connor Watson the MVP.

By the way while I was in Sir Peter's lounge a couple of Northcote Tigers supporters asked me if that Dexter bloke helping Sir Peter out was Dexter Traill who played for the Hawke's Bay Unicorns in 1997. They were right.

Traill played nine games for the Unicorns during that Lion Red Cup season and scored three tries. However his biggest claim to fame is being the only player to win four consecutive Hawke's Bay premier club rugby league titles with Taradale Eagles in the mid 1990s.

Shout him a couple of beers and he will tell you about all four and the tries he scored in each of the finals. The last one was a beauty.

You might just have to take 10 or 12 metres off his 1997 match-winning intercept!

NO ADVERTS ARE PAID FOR IN THIS NEWSLETTER

Aroha17 All Stars Gala Fundraiser

One night only! Saturday February 18 at HALO (cnr Mayoral Dr & Greys Ave). 7pm arrival. 8pm show.

Comedy, pop and cabaret entertainers come together to raise money for youth suicide prevention activities. Hosted at Midtown's hottest new restaurant and nightclub HALO.

Enjoy a night of entertainment with Mike King, Megan Alatini, Mika Haka and friends, all using their talents for good - profits to Mike King's keytolife.org.nz and MikaHakaFoundation.co.nz

Mike King is a comedy legend, with a political savvy that will have you in fits of laughter. Megan's sultry vocals will bring the room to a standstill, and Mika's ambiguous costumes and music from his new album "Swimming with Sharks", featuring Keisha Castle-Hughes, will be launched with guest dancers.

Please book your show tickets now at iTicket <http://bit.ly/2lgFR7K>

For pre-show dinner booths or private rooms please call Halo 09 869 4160

MIKA
HAKA

MEGAN
ALATINI

MIKE
KING

ALL STARS

G A L L A

FUNDRAISER AT HALO
FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAMS

AROHA'17
MHF.CO.NZ

18 FEBRUARY
CNR GREYS AVE. & MAYORAL DR., AK



2017 Harmony Cup

By Andrew Marmont in Australia

THE SMOOTH sounds of salsa music filtered throughout Hillier Oval in Western Sydney for the 2017 Harmony Cup on a very hot, humid day on Saturday.

The program featured international debuts for El Salvador, Uruguay and Peru, while Poland played its first match outside of Europe. Despite the extreme conditions – the mercury soared close to 40 degrees – a healthy crowd of close to 100 appreciated the skills, courage and determination by the teams. The Africans, Thailand and Poland in particular put in superb displays.

Rob Bergin played a big part in bringing the day together. He heads the Latin Heat, an organisation that encourages people of South American heritage to play rugby league. After modest beginnings, Saturday showed just how far league has come with full nations able to take part.

"The event was evidence that there is an audience and a hunger for more international games for emerging rugby league nations," he says.

"I have heard from some people with the highest positions in the game that rugby league will never grow beyond its current boundaries and that countries are not open to new sports.

"We have a game that is amazing and now we just need the belief and resourcing for it to fulfill that potential."

First up was the Latin Heat playing an African United under-17 team. Africa isn't synonymous with rugby league at all. But try telling that to Steve Warwick, who has managed to create a club that allows African kids a chance to try rugby league.

"It's about bringing kids together from different nations and unite under one banner. We have boys from Uganda, Ivory Coast, Zambia, Zimbabwe – most are refugees who came from Africa. Hopefully their success will spread and guys (in Africa) will see this and want to be a part too."

Their under-17 side, from many different parts of Africa, didn't have a training session prior to Saturday. The talent is certainly evident though.

"They have so much natural ability and are so athletic. For a lot of them, playing rugby league could be key to their futures," he says.

Most pleasing is how playing in a team environment brings the group together. Outside of the sport, they traditionally might not mingle. But that inclusive culture is now starting to create a really positive environment, Warwick says.

Warwick's main plan is to create an African rugby league academy and expand it throughout Australia. He has a great ally to help him with this. Former Kangaroo great Brad Fittler spent an hour with the team during the week and is very interested in helping the club develop in future.

Sydney University took on a side made up of players of Incan Empire heritage, including Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Chile. Although the local team won heavily, for many of the Incan side, it was their first taste of decent football.

Peru had never played a rugby league international until Saturday. With Peruvian flags waving and a supportive crowd cheering as they ran out on the ground to play the African United side, it was an encouraging beginning.

"It is a huge honour and I feel a lot of pride," says their coach Jamie Perez.

Continued on next page...

Continued from previous page...

“I never thought I’d get the opportunity to pass on my knowledge of rugby league into my Peruvian heritage. It’s also a credit to the players. They’re the pioneers and the ones doing it today.”

Despite losing 10-68, Peru scored two late tries and left the crowd enthused at their performance. Their two tries, both scored by lock Issac Guerin, mean they finished strongly. One was a juggling act but Guerin managed to hold on and dive over. Cue wild celebrations in the stands and on the field.

It was great to see El Salvador play its first international match too. They took on Thailand who could call upon veteran NRL and Super League coach Brian Smith as head coach. Smith was delighted to play contribute to the emerging nation’s program.

“It’s the first time I’ve been to one of these events and wanted to dance,” he says. (He did a little boogie, with the salsa music still blaring away in the humid night).

Hungary easily accounted for Uruguay 50-4. In the final game, Poland defeated Chile 56-0.

Despite the lopsided score-lines, the South American countries will feel pleased. Chilean team manager Carlos Gonzalez is very hopeful of greater success in South America as a region.

“It’s about getting exposure, getting some decent sponsors and earning ranking points. If one more country in the region starts a rugby league competition, then we can play within the area (rather than having to play teams from other continents),” he says.

The crowd appreciated all the teams’ performances. It was made up of a mixture of passionate rugby league fans, family and friends of the players, plus a few curious parties. What a wonderful celebration of rugby league.

Results:

Poland 56 D Chile 0
Thailand 32 D El Salvador 12
Hungary 50 D Uruguay 4
Africa United 68 D Peru 10
Sydney University 48 D Incas 0
Africa United Under 17’S 26 D Latin Heat Under 17’S 18



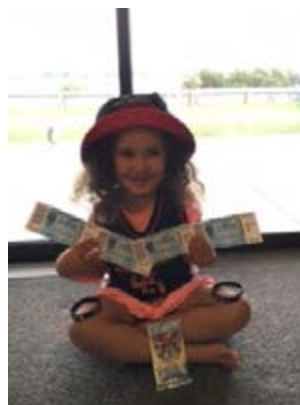
Lucky Winners Have Their Say

Hi Peter

JUST WANTED to say a big thank-you for the Nines tickets and other goodies, we were so stoked to be going, I even got the kids ready for the Nines fan day. Let's go Warriors

Thanks

Olivia



Afternoon Peter Leitch,

THANK YOU kindly for my surprise phone call this morning, I was truly overwhelmed and to be honest more shocked than anything. I'm very grateful and appreciate the tickets and having an awesome time with all my children on day one. Go the mighty Warriors.

Kind Regards

Sonya Su'e



HI SIR Peter, Karen (lady in wheelchair from 9's here) wanting to say thank you for your generosity to myself and our family on Sunday. It was truly a special afternoon with all the extras, book, plate, BBQ cleaner, and photos. May see you in Dunedin for the Bulldogs and return your hospitality. Thank you again for making NRL Nines 2017 so memorable.

NO ADVERTS ARE PAID FOR IN THIS NEWSLETTER

Win 1 of 20 Downer NRL Auckland Nines Jerseys



Everyone who entered the Ruben Wiki Jersey giveaway is automatically entered into this giveaway!

Include your preferred size on the back of the envelope and we will do our best to send you that size should you win.

Nines Jersey
Giveaway
P.O. Box 54295
The Marina 2144,
Manukau, Auckland
New Zealand



Name:
Address:
Phone Number:
Email:
Preferred Size:

To enter: YOU MUST subscribe to Sir Peter Leitch Club Newsletter.

Then post a stamped addressed envelope with your name, address, phone number, email and preferred size to the address on the left.

Winner will be drawn on 22/02/17



Team Named for Sunshine Coast Trial

by Richard Becht

NEW CAPTAIN Roger Tuivasa-Sheck, Ryan Hoffman, Shaun Johnson and Solomone Kata headline a 23-man squad named today for the Vodafone Warriors' first NRL trial against the Melbourne Storm at Sunshine Coast Stadium on Saturday (5.00pm kick-off local time; 8.00pm kick-off NZ time).

Also named are Kiwi international David Fusitu'a, front rowers Albert Vete and Charlie Gubb and wing Ken Maumalo.

As well as Hoffman and Johnson the line-up includes other 2017 NRL Nines players Tuimoala Lolohea, Blake Ayshford, Matt Allwood, Jazz Tevaga, Ata Hingano, Bunty Afoa, Mason Lino, Toafofoa Siple, James Bell, Junior Puga, Isaiah Papalii, Ofahiki Ogden and Lewis Soosemea.

"This trip to the Sunshine Coast is hugely significant in terms of our preparation for the NRL season," said Vodafone Warriors head coach Stephen Kearney.

"This is what we've been building towards since coming into camp in early November.

"It's a big chance for a lot of players from our Nines squad to show where they for the NRL season and it's also important for the others selected including Roger as he comes back from missing most of last season.

"One thing we do know is that the Storm will give us a real test. They always do."

This will be the first trial between the two sides since the Vodafone Warriors beat the Storm 24-12 in Hamilton in 2009.

Coming straight after the Downer NRL Auckland Nines, the match has added significance for Kearney as he makes his debut as Vodafone Warriors head coach against the club he made 139 NRL appearances for as well as serving as an assistant coach from 2006-

2010.

It's not the first time the Vodafone Warriors have played at Sunshine Coast Stadium; they lost a trial there 16-24 to Manly in 2008.

The Vodafone Warriors arrive on the Sunshine Coast on Friday. They train at the venue that afternoon and will also be involved in a signing session at the stadium.

Tickets for Saturday's trial start at \$20 for adults, \$10 for children (under-18) and \$55 for a family of four.

There is also an ultimate fan package available for \$150 which includes reserved grandstand seating, pre-and-post VIP tent access and the opportunity to meet players.

Tickets can be purchased from the Sunshine Coast Stadium website www.sunshinecoaststadium.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au

The Vodafone Warriors complete their trials programme against the Gold Coast Titans at Palmerston North's Central Energy Trust Arena on Sunday, February 19 (2.00pm kick-off).

VODAFONE WARRIORS

v

MELBOURNE STORM

**Sunshine Coast Stadium, Kawana Waters
5.00pm, Saturday, February 11**

Roger Tuivasa-Sheck (C)

Bunty Afoa

Matthew Allwood

Blake Ayshford

James Bell

Erin Clark

David Fusitu'a

Charlie Gubb

Ata Hingano

Ryan Hoffman

Shaun Johnson

Solomone Kata

Mason Lino

Tuimoala Lolohea

Ken Maumalo

Ofahiki Ogden

Isaiah Papalii

Junior Puga

Pat Siple

Toafofoa Siple

Lewis Soosemea

Jazz Tevaga

Albert Vete

Great to catch up with legends of the game...



Back Row: Nolan Tupaea (ex-kiwi #557), Shontayne Hape (Warrior #80), Tony Tuimavave (Warrior #13), Graeme West (ex-kiwi #517), Jerry Seuseu (Warrior #50), Joe Vagana (Warrior #18), Ali Lauitiiti (Warrior #55), Francis Meli (Warrior #65), Epalahame Lauaki (Warrior #110) and Logan Swann (Warrior #42)

Front Row: Stacey Jones (Warrior #24), Motu Tony (Warrior #90), Clinton Toopi (Warrior #66) and Nigel Vagana (Warrior #32)

LAST WEDNESDAY I hosted a little luncheon to welcome home Motu Tony. Motu has been in the UK working as the general manager of football at Hull FC. The event was hosted at Ellerslie Event centre which did a fantastic job. It was great to catch up with a group of ex-players and chat about the old days. What made it even better was that Clinton Toopi showed up from the Gold Coast and an even bigger surprise was Epalahame Lauaki (who has recently returned home for good) attending. It was a great day with lots of storeys told. Everyone there was a top bloke and I am proud to call them my mates.

- Sir Peter Leitch

If you wish to **subscribe** to the newsletter go to:
www.sirpeterleitch.co.nz

Our Sponsors

A VERY BIG THANK YOU TO ALL OUR SUPPORTING BRANDS!

Without the help of these brands the Sir Peter Leitch Club and Newsletter wouldn't be as fantastic as it is. If you do get the opportunity please support them whenever you can.



The Newsletter Team

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.

Sir Peter Leitch - Editor
David Kemeys - Editor at Large
Hayden Woodhead - Graphic Designer
Stephan Maier - Distribution

John Deaker - Correspondent
John Coffey - Southern Correspondent
Barry Ross - Australian Correspondent
Ben Francis - Northern Correspondent
John Holloway - Correspondent
Miles Davis - Correspondent