

20 YEARS
VODAFONE



Sir Peter Leitch's Mad Butcher Club

AT MT SMART STADIUM, HOME OF THE MIGHTY VODAFONE WARRIORS

Newsletter

24 February 2015

#61

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Photos courtesy of www.photosport.co.nz

This Newsletter is Dedicated to the Vodafone Warriors **ONLY 11 DAYS TO GO UNTIL THE FIRST GAME**

THE Vodafone Warriors came out of in their final preseason hit-out 42-14 winners over the club's New South Wales Cup team, but there were so many changes between the teams it hardly mattered.

What did matter was the number of positives out of the game, played in front of a decent crowd at Papakura.

Simon Mannering, Konrad Hurrell and Jacob Lillyman all came through their first outings, Hurrell getting two tries, Mannering one and Lillyman clocking up much-needed time in the middle in his return from a knee operation.

The NRL combination ran away with it but it didn't shape that way early on when the NSW Cup line-up opened the scoring, new centre Jonathan Wright racing on to a grubber.

It took time for the top side to settle before Manu Vatuevi was released on the left edge, while soon after Hurrell stormed over.

The second period saw the NRL side run in five tries through Sam Tomkins, Nathan Friend, Solomon Kata, Hurrell and Mannering.

With the score at 38-4 coach Andrew McFadden requested goal-line dropouts so the NRL side could do some extra defending, and they conceded two tries before finishing off with a little Shaun Johnson magic.

The other feature was the constant stream of penalties. NRL referees Adam Devcich and Gavin Reynolds giving the players another taste of the new laws.

This Time it Really is Our Year

I am nothing if not consistent, because I have been saying for 20 years, this is our year.

But this year, there is a big difference.

We celebrate 20 years in the NRL, and more importantly than that, there is a range of new blood at the club, and with that influx of new players and management comes new thinking, fresh ideas and an enthusiasm I believe will take us a long way in this our anniversary year.

Don't get me wrong, I thought Wayne Scurrah copped more criticism than was actually fair, and I have enormous respect for him. In my humble opinion he did a fine job, but the time was right for a change and he has been replaced by Jim Doyle.

Jim is another man I have a lot of time for. He is a hard-working, straight-shooting, down-to-earth sort of bloke, yet is as sharp as a tack and a first-class businessman to boot. But he also bleeds rugby league and his stint at the NZRL taught me he was a fine operator.

On top of his appointment, I believe the club has bought really well, and I expect Ryan Hoffman to do some very good things. There is a criticism that goes around when top Aussies come over to the club, and it goes that they are just after a pay-day.

I do not believe that for one second with Ryan, and the way they tell me he has been around the club, in training, and at the trials, gives me a lot of confidence that he is about to become a huge favourite with the fans.

So with all the new blood I am looking forward to the 2015 NRL campaign with zest in my step.

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter, which focuses on the Vodafone Warriors as they gear up for the start of the year.

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I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter, which focuses on the Vodafone Warriors as they gear up for the start of the year.

Our stable of top writers has contributed articles on the club, and look out for your chance to win great prizes too.

Don't forget, everyone who contributes to this newsletter does it for love of the game, and because, like you, they want to see the Vodafone Warriors do well. So if you don't agree with something they have to say, it's not because they are idiots, it's just because their opinions might be different to yours.

But we all share that love for the Vodafone warriors, so read on and enjoy.

Fans Star in Ads

Members, Mt Smart Stadium and me have star billing alongside the players in the Vodafone Warriors' 2015 advertising campaign - It's better at our home.

Our campaign launched with the brand spot Nation of Warriors on SKY TV on Sunday, and also making guest appearances in the first ad were Kiwi music artists Sid Diamond and Ladi6.

A nation of Warriors, focusing on the Vodafone Warriors as New Zealand's team, is followed by Home, which is all about inspiring fans to watch the Warriors live.

The campaign runs across multiple channels – TV, print, radio and social media – and also features a call to action promoting the club's new ticket offer – the 3-Game Flexi Pass – giving fans the chance to see any three games for just \$60.

“In our 20th anniversary season we wanted the campaign to not only feature our players but to be about the Vodafone Warriors being a team for the whole country,” Vodafone Warriors managing director Jim Doyle said.

“All the fans appearing are committed members. They represent what being a Vodafone Warriors supporter is all about, bringing out how rewarding it is to be a member and how vital it is for their club to have a strong and loyal member base.”

Watch out for Nation of Warriors on SKY before being It's better at our home in the countdown to our first home game of the season against Parramatta on March 21.

View the ad here:

<http://bit.ly/17spbCW>



Live on the Big Screen at SkyCity

On March 7 members will have free access to watch the Vodafone Warriors take on the Newcastle Knights on SkyCity theatre's big screen. Make sure you're there to cheer them on.

With the much anticipated start of the season what better way to kick off proceedings than the atmosphere of a full theatre of passionate members?

The event, which kicks off at 6pm is set to be a popular one so make sure you register early.

Jerome Ideal for his Role

Most of you will know that Jerome Ropati has long been a young man for whom I have tremendous respect, so when the long-serving former Vodafone Warriors centre was announced as the first New Zealander to be appointed an NRL Community Ambassador I was over the moon for him.

After a playing career lasting 12 seasons, and we all know how many of those were dogged by terrible injuries, he has joined the ranks of fellow league legends like Nathan Hindmarsh, Andrew Ryan and Alan Tongue in the NRL Community team.

Jerome's first task was visiting schools in Rotorua, and I am told he loved it. "I'm honoured to represent my country as the first-ever New Zealander to join the NRL Community team," he said.

"Throughout my career, I've been lucky enough to see the positive impact league can have on community issues, so I'm excited to get stuck in."

Just think about it for a second. Over the Community Carnival (Feb2-27), NRL players reach a quarter of a million kids, mostly giving them a message about everything from nutrition and healthy eating, to regular exercise and mental health.

Woodstock and the Vodafone Warriors has a ring to it that is about to become more familiar to fans of the club with the announcement that Woodstock is a major sponsor for the next 3 years.

"With 2015 signaling a new chapter in our history we are delighted to welcome Woodstock into the Vodafone Warriors' family," said Vodafone Warriors chief executive Jim Doyle, of the new sponsorship deal.

Jerome at school with the Kids.



Dot Makes my Day

Sometimes someone just makes you day with their kindness. Such a soul is Dot Eaton from down in Christchurch, a city dear to my heart.

We exchanged a few emails, and she said many kind things to me, but she also told me about how trim and fit the boys are looking and how she cops a fair bit of grief every year for being such a diehard Vodafone Warriors fan. You hang in there girl! Be Proud!

Dot sent me this picture with her and Manu Vatuvei, taken last year, and tells me it was a dream come true.

Now I like Dot's optimism and positivity. She told me: "Roll on March when the Mighty Warriors top the leader board and stay there. I'm so excited that it's nearly time."

She loves the newsletter, which is always great to hear. "Thanks for your email, they are awesome and I don't know how you find the time. Do you know how special I felt that you replied personally? I told so many people, and that you take the time to reply is amazing, and that's why us Warriors fans are so lucky to have you."

Crikey. I was very touched by that.



"We'll be there every step of the way to help the Vodafone Warriors kick off their 20th anniversary celebrations. It's a great time to start our partnership," says Maxwell.



**HARDCORE
SUPPORTERS.**



A Message from the Big Chief

I hope you are all looking forward to the start of the season. Cappy and the rest of his team have been planning and working through the off-season to make sure the boys are in the best possible shape so they are ready to go come Round 1.

We have got through our trials pretty well and it was great to see so many people turn out in Rotorua and Papakura to watch the boys. The focus now switches to the first two games, away to Newcastle and Canberra.

As we all know our travel schedule is demanding but with the first two games being double journey legs it adds that. On the positive side, it gets them out the way early.

Off the field we have also been working hard and looking to raise our standards in everything we do.

Our focus has been on improving in every area of the Vodafone Warriors but we have a specific drive to increase the number of members. As a club we have a very large following but only a relatively low number of members.

We have started a new campaign focused on the fact we are New Zealand's team and our vision is that our team is your team.

The campaign featured not only our players but some of our members. The next ad is about attracting fans to come and watch us at "our home" so watch out for that because it also features one of our biggest fans, the mad Butcher.

Roll on the start of the season and go the Vodafone Warriors.

Cheers, Jim Doyle, Managing Director



And from Captain Mannering Too...

ANOTHER pre-season is over and done with and now it's time for the games to start. The team has had a decent trial period and all the new guys are fitting in well.

It'll be a tough job for Cappy to pick a team for the first game against the Knights because everyone in the squad is really pushing for a spot. Looking forward to seeing you all at some stage during the season, and most of all, many thanks from the team for all your support.

Simon Mannering



And the Minister of Sport...

THE 2015 NRL season is almost upon us and I know the boys will be rearing to go!

2014 was a great year for the Kiwis with their outstanding win in the Four Nations. I took special pleasure from their win at Suncorp over the Kangaroos in the first game, and of course we were all thrilled with the final result of the tournament.

The 2014 competition saw an extraordinarily high standard of play across the NRL and fans are now eagerly awaiting the 2015 competition.

I recently attended the NRL season launch down on the Auckland waterfront, which was a class act. It was historic to have it held in New Zealand for the first time ever and emphasised how important the Vodafone Warriors and New Zealand are to the NRL's success.

I thoroughly enjoyed attending the Auckland Nines a few weeks ago, and am looking forward to pulling on my original 1995 Warriors jersey at Mt Smart as we celebrate 20 years of the Warriors in the NRL. Go the Mighty Vodafone Warriors!

Jonathan Coleman, Minister of Sport



Andrew McFadden on the upcoming 2015 Season

WITH just over a week to go until the 2015 NRL season starts it's fair to say it can't come soon enough for the players and staff.

We still have plenty more to do between now and our first game against the Knights but there's no question the players are getting restless, as they always do at this time of year. They just want to get out and play. They've worked hard, really hard, the trials are over and now it's time to put everything we're striving for to the test.

We've come a long way since the hugely disappointing end to last season.

Planning and changes were critical for the 2015 season. Tony Iro and Andrew Webster came on board as assistant coaches and Balin Cupples was appointed as our head of athletic performance. Stacey Jones stepped up to coach our New South Wales Cup side and Kelvin Wright was promoted to take Stacey's place with the Vodafone Junior Warriors. There were other changes we had to make too, all of which were designed to create a completely different dynamic and a new environment.

On top of that we had the injection of new signings and players coming into the squad from our NYC side as we set out to take the club to a level we expect to be at. The last three seasons haven't been good enough for the Vodafone Warriors after failing to make the finals; the play-offs should be the absolute minimum for us and we hadn't even achieved that.

None of the success we aim for can happen without putting the right blocks in place. Central to that has

been working to harden up our attitude across the board. We need to be tougher in all respects, both physically and mentally and the signs during the off-season and since the New Year have been encouraging. At the same time there's a long way to go still.

All of us – the players and the staff – are working together doing all we can to give the Vodafone Warriors the best chance of producing the quality of effort and performance needed consistently in this competition.

While there were aspects in our trials in Toowoomba, Rotorua and Papakura that didn't meet the standard we have collectively set for ourselves, there were far more positives to come out of the hit-outs. What we certainly have is real competition in all positions which makes selection a challenge, but that's precisely what we want within the squad.

Now we're about to find out how ready we are and we couldn't be more excited about what lies ahead of us.

It's been great spending time among members and fans in Rotorua, Glen Eden and Papakura over the last two weekends. The support has been terrific and, like everyone we've seen, we're looking forward to what is a very special year for the club in this our 20th anniversary season.

We'll see you at Mt Smart Stadium.

Andrew McFadden
Head coach
Vodafone Warriors



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Saturday 21 March 2015 at Mt Smart Stadium

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a Warriors
home jersey
courtesy of
Canterbury!





Api Pewhairangi

Date of Birth: 19-03-1992

Height: 184

Weight: 87

Position: Five-eight, centre, halfback, fullback

Rep. Honours: New Zealand Maori (2011), Junior Kiwis (2012)
Ireland (World Cup 2013)

Junior Clubs: Te Aroha Eels

Previous Clubs: Newcastle Knights (2010-12), Parramatta Eels (2013-14)

FG Debut: 11/05/2013 (Rd 9), Eels v Broncos

Api made four first grade appearances for the Eels – three in the centres and one at standoff, but caught the attention of the Warriors while playing for Wentworthville in the NSW Cup



Jonathan Wright

Born: March 08, 1987

Birthplace: Gilgandra, New South Wales

Position: Centre/Wing

Height: 187cm

Weight: 98kg

Junior Club: Northern Lake Warriors

Previous Clubs: Parramatta Eels (2009-2010), Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs (2011- 2012), Cronulla Sharks (2013-2014)

NRL Debut: Parramatta v Newcastle, June 07, 2009 (Rd 13)

NRL Career: 91 appearances (2009-2014):

Parramatta: 12 games (2009-2010), 3 Tries

Canterbury-Bankstown: 38 games (2011-2012), 17 Tries

Cronulla: 41 games (2013-2014), 8 Tries



Ryan Hoffman

Date of Birth: 26-01-1984

Height: 192cm

Weight: 105kg

Position: Second Row

Rep. Honours: 6 Tests Australia (2007-09, 2012, 2014); 11 games NSW (2007-08, 2013-14); Four Nations (2009, 2014); NRL Auckland Nines (2014-15); 7 games City Origin (2006-07, 2009-10, 2012-14); PM's XIII (2014)

Junior Clubs: Campbelltown Collegians

Previous Clubs: Melbourne (2003-10 & 2012-14), Wigan (2011)

FG Debut: Melbourne (2003-10 & 2012-14), Wigan (2011)

Twitter: @ryanhoffman12

Instagram: @ryanhoffman12



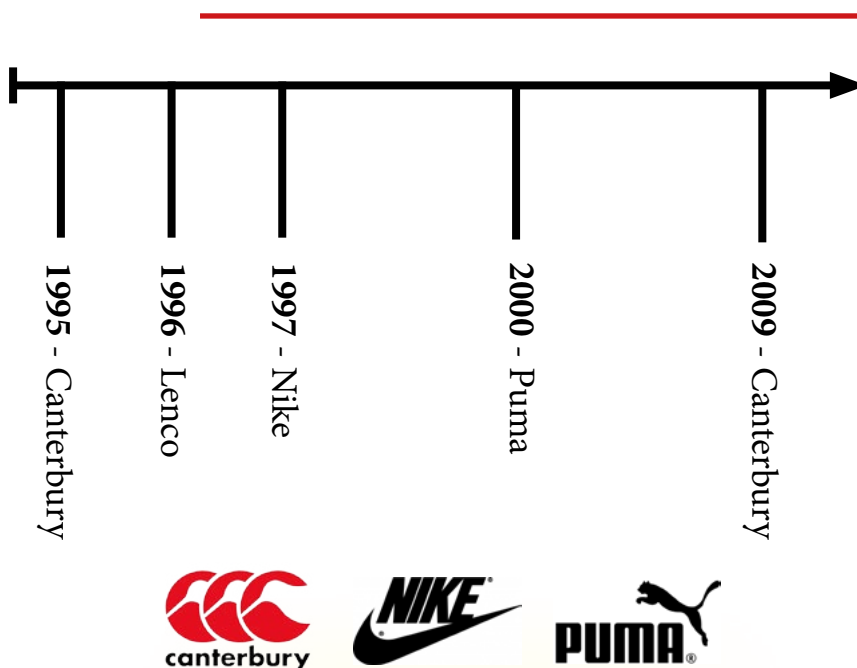
Bodene Thompson

Born: August 1, 1988
Birthplace: Tauranga, NZ
Position: Second Row
Height: 185cm
Weight: 107kg
Junior Club: Tauranga City Sharks
Previous Clubs: Gold Coast Titans (2009-2012), Wests Tigers (2013-2014)
NRL Debut: Gold Coast v Newcastle, Australia, May 10, 2009 (Round 9)
NRL Career: 85 appearances 2009-2014
NRL Points: 64 points (16 tries)
Representative: Kiwis 2014 (Four Nations), New Zealand Maori 2010



Matt Allwood

Date of Birth: 16-11-1992
Height: 185
Weight: 93
Position: Centre, Wing
Rep. Honours: NRL Auckland Nines (2014-15), New South Wales Under-17 and Under-18
Junior Clubs: Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School
Previous Clubs: Canberra (2014)
FG Debut: Canberra v Parramatta, North Queensland, 1300SMILES Stadium, Townsville, 08/03/2014 (Rd 1)



**Vodafone
Warriors
Apparel Sponsors
over the Years**

Former Warriors Prop now Doing “The Hard Yards”

By John Deaker



FORMER NZ Warriors Prop now doing “The Hard Yards” off the field

The importance of Jerry Seuseu’s role as Welfare and Education Manager at the NZ Warriors shouldn’t be underestimated. This week’s big drugs story across the Tasman emphasized how important it is to provide good support and direction for players during their rugby league careers to assist them off the field during and after their playing careers.

John Deaker caught up with Jerry Seuseu this week:

Q: Jerry, how did you end up in this role?

A: In 2009 I got a call from Don Mann saying a position was becoming available and I should apply for it. I then began in the role with the club in early 2010.

Q: Was being involved in rugby league always something you wanted to do when you finished your playing career?

A: Back when I was playing I wasn’t sure if I would. I trained as a schoolteacher so effectively I had that as a plan B - but when i came back from playing with Wigan in England i was initially involved working in the schools program in Auckland Rugby League for 2 and a half years before I got the call from Don at the Warriors.

Q: Explain what is a key part of your role is?

A: A big part of the Holden Cup is about preparing players for things outside football because it’s proven that a low percentage from the NYC will have long careers in the NRL. I try to ensure that when the players have done their time with us that they are well prepared to go out and be contributing members of the community.

Q: How much does your own background help you to have more of a feel than a lot of people for young Polynesians lives and the needs they have?

A: It does help - and it’s good to be able to come back to the club and contribute that way at the place i spent 8 years as a player. Yes, it’s handy to be able to identify where people come from - but in saying that everybody’s different so you have be able to isolate the key issues for each individual and then put systems in place to help them out based on those issues.

Q: How do you measure progress - is it through the success stories of individuals?

A: It’s hard to measure your impact because it’s more clear in some ways when nothing is happening - for example having nothing associated with the club like the big drugs scandals this week in Australia linked to the Titans club. Part of our role is to help players value their role and the opportunity they have. It’s about getting alongside many of them and ensuring that they don’t fall foul to temptations and do damage to the reputation of themselves or the club. With rugby being the main show in town we make them aware of their need to be ambassadors for the club. It’s also important to change some of the old thinking - for instance when I was coming through in 2003 I was doing a Law paper and everyone thought I was a bit of a weird guy - but now it’s much more common with many of the young boys doing tertiary education - so it’s just about trying to continue to promote that as normal and break the mould of the player that would traditionally go on to play in The NRL.

Continued next page...

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Q: What has changed the most about rugby league since you played?

A: The game is much more sanitized these days. A lot more issues were sorted out on the field in the past. The game probably lacks some of the rogue personalities it used to have like Quentin Pongia and John Lomax too. Social media also means that players like Shaun Johnson need to retain squeaky clean images. They have to be almost as careful on the field - for example they might get 2 or 3 weeks suspension for tackles that were considered fine in the past. Sports science has also played a big role, with players training much more specifically for the game and putting a lot more emphasis on recovery.

Jerry Seuseu played 132 matches for the Warriors including playing at prop in the Warriors' 2002 Grand Final loss to the Roosters. It might be off the field where he is able to leave his greatest legacy with the NZ Warriors club though.



WE are Lorraine and Dave McKee and we live in Christchurch.

We have followed THE VODAFONE WARRIORS with a passion from 1995 when Dean Bell led them down the tunnel to the present day with Simon Manning. The first game that we went to see in AUCKLAND was against Canberra in 2002.

We went to a few more games and through the kindness of a few people and Sir Peter Leitch we managed to get into the Stacey JONES lounge where we always had a ball.

In 2009 we decided we would purchase SEASON tickets and STACEY JONES lounge tickets, on the basis that if we travelled three times a year to games it would be great value.

We are proud to say we saw all the home games in 2009 and have not missed a home game since 2009

and this will be our seventh year. In that time we have met many people in THE MAD BUTCHERS CLUB in the Stacey Jones Lounge who have become great friends.

We have been very fortunate to have met a lot of Vodafone WARRIORS players through the MAD BUTCHERS club in the Stacey Jones lounge and SKYCITY.

We would like to congratulate the Vodafone WARRIORS on 20 years in the NRL and we will be cheering them on to an elusive grand final win.

Here is a picture of us with Bill Wavish the Vodafone Warriors Board of Directors Chairman.



A promotional banner for the NBL Finals. It features a basketball player in a white jersey on the left. The text reads: 'TOGETHER.STRONGER. SEMI-FINALS vs ADELAIDE 36ers'. Below this, it lists the schedule: 'SEMI-FINAL 1 Thursday February 26th @ Vector Arena', 'SEMI-FINAL 2 Saturday February 28th @ Adelaide Arena', and 'SEMI-FINAL 3 Monday March 2nd @ Vector Arena'. A red circular button on the right says 'BOOK YOUR TICKETS HERE' with the website 'nzbreakers.co.nz' below it.



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Semi Final 1 vs. Adelaide 36ers

Thursday 26th February at Vector Arena

Semi Final 2, if required, will be on Monday 2nd March

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Coaching line-up Gets a New Look

By John Coffey QSM

South Island correspondent John Coffey examines the men who make the big calls



VODAFONE Warriors coach Andrew McFadden heads a new-look coaching team – though there is nothing unfamiliar about first assistant Tony Iro, regained over summer, or second assistant Andrew Webster.

Iro has fashioned an impressive coaching record after a career that included 25 tests for the Kiwis and an outstanding record in both British and Australian club competitions.

He was the club's first under-20s coach in 2008-09 before becoming first grade assistant for three seasons from 2010, and a brief stint as head coach in 2012.

Now McFadden can make use of that experience, having persuaded Iro to return from a two-year stint with the NZRL specialising in the high performance arena.

Webster, 32, is regarded as an up-and-coming coaching talent after guiding the Tigers under-20s last year, and before that the Eels.

McFadden said he spotted Webster while both were involved in the Super League, McFadden in France, Webster at Hull Kingston Rovers. Webster began coaching after having played lower grade for Parramatta and Balmain, and in the United States.

Vodafone Warriors football general manager Dean Bell has described the partnership of Iro and Webster as an ideal blend of experience and youth.

For his part, Webster said his decade-long apprenticeship was always designed to gain an NRL position, and he was “hugely excited” to have that chance with the Warriors.

Also joining from the Tigers is new head of athletic performance Balin Cupples, who arrives in Auckland after being the Tigers' S G Ball coach in 2011, the under-20s strength and conditioning coach in 2012, and assistant NSW under-18 s coach in 2013.

Those who remember one coach and a manager might recoil at the 37 personnel, almost half of them involved with the first grade team, now at the club. But there are many good men, including seven former Kiwis – Iro, Ruben Wiki, Daryl Halligan, Stacey Jones, Duane Mann, Jerry Seuseu, and Dean Bell.

Wendys Hamburgers

Go to www.wendys.co.nz for more info on this deal!

BIG KAHUNA
on **BRIOCHE**



Why the Warriors are a Big Part of My Life

By Ben Francis



IT was 2005 when I saw my first Warriors game. They lost to the Roosters at Ericsson (now Mt Smart) 10-6, but it was another two years until I watched live. Patrick Ah Van scored an amazing try from a restart but we lost to the Tigers 30-26.

The atmosphere at Mt Smart was a big part of the reason why I wanted to come back.

There is something special about Warriors' fans, who are a loyal bunch.

games have it all and that's what gets the fans roaring. Every game I have attended, the atmosphere has never been a let-down no matter the result.

The atmosphere and passion of the fans is hard to beat.

That atmosphere and excitement turned me into a diehard Warriors and NRL fan.

My favourite Warriors moment was 2008 against the Storm - first round of the playoffs. That 18-15 win when Michael Witt scored a superb try saw the first eighth seed knock off the number one seed and I can recall what Ray Warren was saying in the lead-up to that try.

Lance Hohaia is my favourite player. He was a great sparkplug and I'm sure I saw him play every position except prop.

A special moment was being at the airport to congratulate the team making the 2011 grand final. A few hundred were there and it was great just speaking to other fans.

Ben Henry is my favourite current

player. I remember speaking to him at the airport when the team arrived. He asked me if I watched the U20s or the All Blacks and I said the U20s. He just laughed.

My love for the Warriors has spread into the family, I try to watch every game with my dad, so it's a big part of our father-son time.

My younger sister loves the Warriors now too, and won a pair of Shaun Johnson's game-worn shorts at her school raffle, and all she wanted for Christmas was a Warriors hat and shorts.

The Warriors are now a big part of my life. Like most fans I will come up with any excuse to watch, live or on TV. But being at the games is something special. I just love it.

DATE	TIME	OPP	VENUE
Sat, March 7	4.30pm	Knights	Hunter
Sun, March 15	6.30pm	Raiders	Canberra
Sat, March 21	5.00pm	Eels	Mt Smart
Sun, March 29	2.00pm	Broncos	Mt Smart
Mon, April 6	5.00pm	Storm	AAMI
Sat, April 11	7.30pm	Tigers	Mt Smart
Sat, April 18	5.30pm	Cowboys	1300Smiles
Sat, April 25	2.00pm	Titans	Mt Smart
Sat, May 9	5.30pm	Sharks	Remondis
Sat, May 16	3.00pm	Eels	Parramatta
May 22-25	Bye		
Sun, May 31	4.00pm	Knights	Mt Smart
Sat, June 6	3.30pm	Rabbitohs	NIB
Sat, June 13	8.00pm	Roosters	Mt Smart
Sat, June 20	5.30pm	Titans	Cbus
Sat, June 27	5.00pm	Raiders	Mt Smart
July 3-6	Bye		
Sun, July 12	4.00pm	Storm	Mt Smart
Sun, July 19	2.00pm	Roosters	Sydney FS
Sat, July 25	5.00pm	Sea Eagles	Mt Smart
Sat, August 1	TBC	Sharks	Mt Smart
Sat, August 8	TBC	Dragons	Westpac
Sat, August 15	TBC	Panthers	Pepper
Sat, August 22	TBC	Cowboys	Mt Smart
Sun, August 30	TBC	Tigers	Campbelltown
Sun, September 6	TBC	Bulldogs	ANZ

2015 Warriors Draw

20 YEARS
VODAFONE



FINALS

September 11-13	Qualifying semis
September 18-19	Semis
September 25-26	Preliminary finals
October 4	NRL Grand Final

Locked and Loaded - A moment of Genius

By David Kemeys



BEING editor in chief doesn't count for much because Pete says write about this, and write about that. So when he said he wanted a piece for the start of the season, reflecting something to do with the club's history, I decided on a My Favourite Moment.

Doubtless my favourite moment is not your favourite moment, and some of you will have more history to call on, including being there for the club's very first game against Brisbane.

I confess I loved the grand final, even though it cost a small fortune to be there, and we lost. I loved being at Wests after crossing the ditch for the Mad Butcher Club trip to the State of Origin, a night of great company, and great football as we put the Tigers to the sword.

I will never forget getting a small corner of the ground to sing: "Francis Meli, you're on tele," after the big fella went in at the corner and stood watching the replay on the big screens we had back in those days.

There have been spectacular tries, thunderous hits, great performances, massive highs and terrible lows. But that is the lot of the true footy fan.

So I will tell you my personal high, and it involves a game that didn't get us to the grand final, involve a legend of the club, or even happen at Mt Smart.

Instead it was in Christchurch. It rained, then it rained some more, then it rained really hard, then it pissed down.

It was bit cold, in fact it was bloody miserable. How none of the players ended up in hospital with exposure is beyond me.

A group of us had travelled to Christchurch to see the boys play the Roosters. As you do, we went early and if things could go wrong they did. I will not bore you with the details, but they did involve losing a member of the group, another ending up in hospital with a heart complaint, one being mugged, another losing his wallet and still another spraining an ankle.

But there we sat, after a weekend we were keen to for-

get, in the bitterest cold I have ever felt as the Roosters failed to play the game and looked like taking the points.

But up stepped little Kevin Locke, who to be fair had been having a blinder anyway. With a loss looking like topping off a truly shocking weekend, he made a break, kicked ahead, raced round Anthony Minichello, made a despairing dive that left him concussed when he smashed his head into the posts, and led to many video replays before the try was given.

We had snatched victory from the jaws of defeat in a way that exemplified the courage and commitment we expect to see from the players- and let's face it - we may not always have been privileged to witness.

Instead of limping back to Auckland, battered, bruised and beaten, we were cock-a-hoop and celebrating what had suddenly become, in our minds, a weekend of pure triumph.

So Kevin Locke, you made a big travel party very happy. It was a moment that has gone down in our history. Whenever we are together we always talk about the trip, and how eventful it was, but that conversation always ends with the Locke try and how great it was.

Oh, and when we got back to Auckland, one of the boys had his car broken into. Someone smashed a window and stole the Warriors scarf he'd forgotten. Bastards.



Thompson on Trial - Still

By John Coffey QSM



South Island correspondent John Coffey takes a look over the new signings in the Vodafone Warriors playing roster.

IT might be harsh to say Warriors recruit Bodene Thompson is still on trial almost six years after he made his NRL debut, but that's effectively the situation.

Thompson started in first grade in May 2009, for the Titans against the Knights, and last season made 21 appearances for the Tigers, having moved from the Gold Coast in 2013.

But that only took his total of NRL games to 85. By comparison, Shaun Johnson did not debut until more than two years after Thompson, but is now only two games behind.

For that reason, Thompson, 26, is the most interesting of the five new Warriors.

There is another reason. Kiwis coach Stephen Kearney saw enough last year to elevate him into his side when Sam Moa withdrew.

Thompson did not manage to get into the playing 17 for any of the Four Nations games, but expect the weeks spent in the Kiwis camp to have been of immense benefit.

It has not helped the Tauranga-born Thompson that he continues to be listed as a second-rower or centre. Such versatility can be a hurdle towards establishing oneself in a specialist position. At 185cm and 107kg he would have no problem filling either role.

Thompson was listed in the second-row for the trial against the Panthers at Rotorua, but surely captain Simon Mannering and Ryan Hoffman are the likely second-row starters when the competition starts.

Hoffman, 31 and a veteran of 245 first grade appearances, 11 State of Origin games for NSW, and six tests, will be looked upon to provide that renowned resilience previously seen from Kevin Campion, Steve Price and Micheal Luck.

But Hoffman is not just renowned for his work-rate, also boasting the foresight and positional sense to

have scored 59 tries for the Storm.

The son of former Canberra Raiders hooker Jay, Hoffman spent two years in Wellington with his family in the mid-1990s. He has also played alongside three current Warriors, Nathan Friend at Melbourne and Thomas Leuluai and Sam Tompkins at Wigan in 2011.

Jonathan Wright, 27, is the next most experienced of the new recruits, with 91 NRL appearances as a centre or wing for the Eels (2009-10), Bulldogs (2011-12) and Sharks (2013-14). Wright has scored 28 tries.

Another centre-wing, Matt Allwood was signed by Andrew McFadden last season on the basis of what he had seen of Allwood as he came through the ranks of the Canberra Raiders. Allwood, 22, is still raw by NRL standards, with all of his 11 first grade appearances in 2014. An impressive junior background includes NSW selection at under-17 and under-18 levels.

Api Pewhairangi made four first grade appearances for the Eels – three in the centres and one at stand-off – in 2013, but caught the attention of the Warriors while playing for Wentworthville in the NSW Cup last year.

He has been on the representative radar longer than that, with NZ Maori in 2011, the Junior Kiwis in 2012 and for Ireland against Fiji and England at the 2013 World Cup.

Born in Palmerston North, Pewhairangi, 22, switched from rugby five years ago and served his league apprenticeship during three seasons in the Knights NYC squad.



And by the way, a big shout out to my mates at Factory Frames who do all my framing and a terrific job every time. If they're good enough for the Butcher, they're good enough for you!

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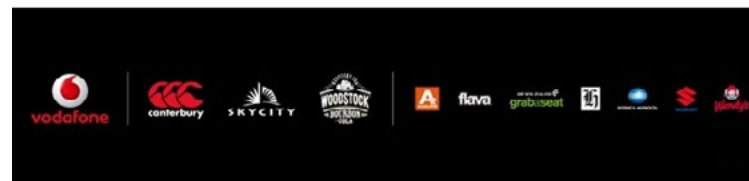
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The Aussies Love the Warriors

By Barry Ross



THE Vodafone Warriors are very popular with Australian fans. They draw good crowds for their matches across the Tasman, while the TV ratings are also strong.

The Aussies like the way the New Zealanders play, and rate many of their players among the world's best in their respective positions.

That popularity extends throughout ARL circles and includes some of the games' biggest names. Australian Team of the Century member Ron Coote (23 tests) said: "They are a great team, who play exciting, crowd-pleasing football. They are very good for our game and are a key league identity because they are not Australian. Shaun Johnson is rightly regarded as one of the top, if not the best player in the game, while I am a big fan of many of their other stars such as Manu Vatuvei and Konrad Hurrell. If they had all the other Kiwis playing in Australian sides, how good would they be?"

"And Australian Team of the Century hooker Noel Kelly (28 tests), is another supporter. "They can be brilliant," said the tough as teak hooker. "I love watching them play. They are a standout team and Johnson is our game's top player. One of the best games of league I have ever seen in my more than 60 years, was a Warriors-Manly game a couple of years ago. Whenever they play they are capable of special things."

Darryl Brohman who played two State of Origin games for Queensland in 1983 and is now one of our most respected commentators on Channel 9 and radio 2GB, praised the Warriors attitude. "I am a big fan of their style," he said. "They are always entertaining and never die wondering. They will try anything, and while sometimes that can be costly, often their innovations pay off. I am a big Warriors fan."

One of Australia's greatest 100 players, Michael Cronin (33 tests) is another fan. First chosen for Australia in 1973 while playing with his home town Gerringong, 100 kilometres south of Sydney, said he had followed the Warriors for many seasons. Cronin owns a hotel in Gerringong, and emphasised how popular the Kiwis were with his patrons. "Whenever they play I have them on TV in my pub and there is always a big crowd. Like most other league people, I am a Warriors fan. Their style is different than the structured style of some Australian teams and I hope they never change that."

And two old 82-year-old legends, who used to belt the hell out of each other in test matches, are also Warriors fans. Harry Wells, (29 tests) now lives at Port Macquarie and Phil Jackson (27 Tests for Great Britain) now lives at Wagga. Both were big hard running centres and World Cup winners. Jackson was a member of the British side who beat France 16-12 in Paris in 1954 in the very first World Cup, while Wells was in the Australian team that won the second cup, in Australia in 1957.

In 2008 Wells was named one of Australia's greatest 100 players, while Jackson is a member of the Barrow club's Hall of Fame.

The two men have been close friends for more than 50 years and both watch our game regularly on TV. "I am thrilled by the Warriors play," said Jackson. "They are always trying things and that is terrific, because if you don't try things you go sterile."

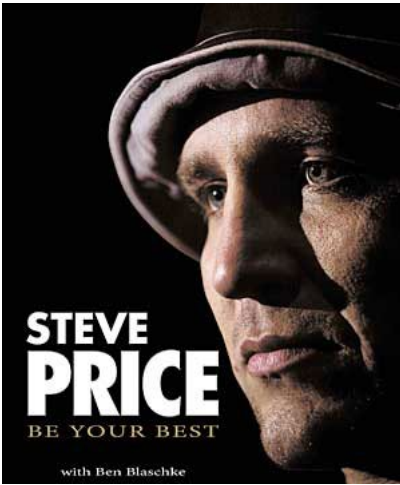
Wells agrees: "The Warriors have some fine attacking players, as well as several powerful defensive men. I enjoy their play and watch them whenever I can."

The Warriors open their 2015 season in Australia at Newcastle's Hunter Stadium on March 7. Their second game is at Canberra on March 15 against the Raiders. Whether it is live or on TV, Australian league fans are eagerly awaiting the Warriors campaign.

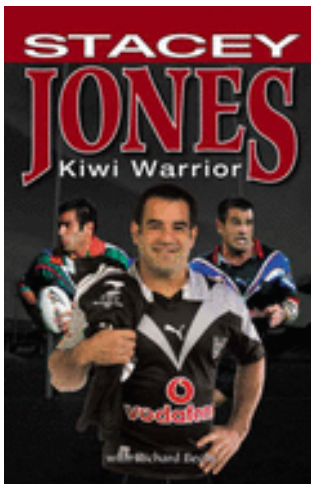
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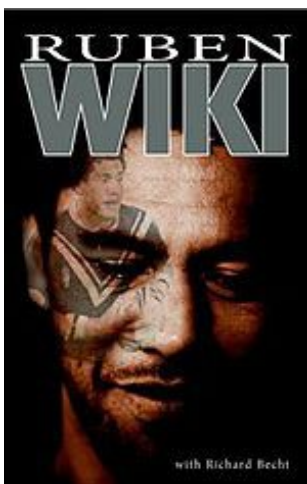
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NRL 2015 NRL Season Guide



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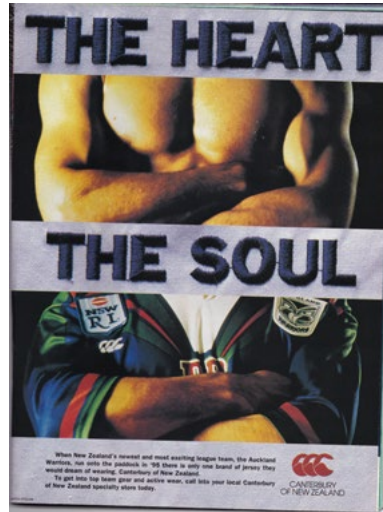
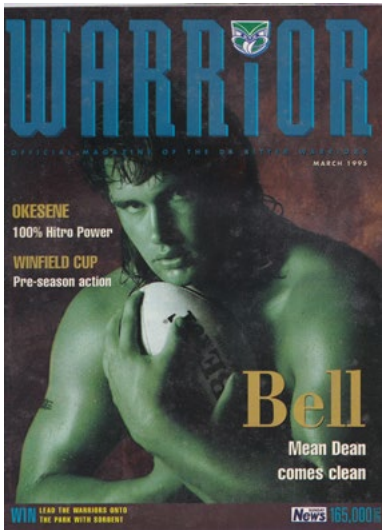
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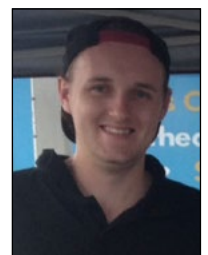
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