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## Newsletter

20th August 2015

#86a

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## Canterbury Rugby League Special



[Here is the link to the grand final coverage provided by star live.](#)

Premiership Massetti Cup – Papanui Tigers

Pat Smith Trophy Grand final winners – Papanui Tigers

Premier Reserves – Celebration Lions

Division one – Burnham Chevaliers

Women's – Woolston Rams

18 Years – Halswell Hornets

16 Years – Hornby Panthers

14 Years – Aranui Eagles

13 Years – Linwood Keas

12 Years – Hornby Panthers

11 Years – Linwood Keas

10 Years – Northern Bulldogs

9 Years – Northern Bulldogs White

## Auimatagi please with Canterbury Development's first hit-out

CANTERBURY DEVELOPMENT coach Andrew Auimatagi saw plenty of positive signs in his recently-assembled outfit's 24-12 win over Otago Whalers in Dunedin in their opening match of the South Island competition.

"It was good to go down there and get a win in our first game," Auimatagi said.

"We've got quite a new bunch there, so it was just good to get out on the paddock, build some combinations there and I think the boys are buying into the systems we're trying to get across to them.

"It's just good to see a good group of young guys coming through and hopefully we can put some more performances like that. We're hoping for a pretty positive campaign."

But Canterbury was held to a 6-all halftime scoreline by the underdogs Whalers, and Auimatagi said there was still vast room for improvement.

"We definitely need to control the ball a bit better. I think the boys were pretty excited, their first game playing for Canterbury and they tried a bit too much earlier on," the coach continued

"But in the second half we started to play some good footy."

"It's mainly around our defence as well – we need to make sure we're working together in defence, finishing off tackles and that type of thing."

While impressed with the team's overall performance, Auimatagi pinpointed a few standout individuals from the 12-point victory.

"(Riccarton's) Chase Williams, he's mainly been playing at hooker this year but we played him at loose forward, and he went really well.

"Also (backrower) Ruben Te Amo, another guy from the Knights.

"And (Hornby centre) Craig Smith, he's pretty solid defensively and he's got a bit of experience."

Linwood player-coach Auimatagi has enjoyed having the Canterbury Development role to sink his teeth into following the Keas' heartbreaking extra-time grand final loss to Hornby just over a week ago.

"It kept me busy. Tuesday training straight after the grand final – it was good to take my mind off things," Auimatagi said, with more than a hint of disappointment still in his voice.

"Just moving on and getting into rep footy's always great as well."

While some players in the Canterbury Development side may have been disenchanted with missing out on the Rockcote Canterbury Bulls' 24-man squad, Auimatagi emphasised to his charges that a call-up to the NZRL Premiership was on the cards for those who perform in the South Island competition – even as early as this season.

"Right from the start when we were in the trial process for the squad we made it very clear it's a pathway into the Bulls," he explained.

"I've been close contact with Darrell (Coad) and the Bulls staff, so it's important for those guys to know that the link is there and it's just another step away."

The Development team will also provide the opportunity for some Bulls players maintain match fitness, as was evidenced in Dunedin.

"On the weekend we had four guys from the Bulls squad (Jiordan Fidow-Kele, Gus Anderson, Phil Lavea and Nathan Saumalu) join us, so it just shows that we're closely connected and you never know, it's just one injury away or one person slipping in terms of form and it could be them playing for the Bulls.

"A couple of guys that needed some more game time, it was good to fill a few spots there and give guys a run off the bench. That's going to be a regular thing, probably up to two guys from the wider Bulls (group) that may come down due to the large size of their squad.

"It's something that we worked with last year as well."

Canterbury Development has the bye this weekend, but Auimatagi said his side will engage in an opposed training session with the Bulls, before preparing for their first home match of the season against Tasman next week.

# 'Bam Bam' ready to rip in for Bulls' title defence

**R**OCKCOTE CANTERBURY Bulls captain Chris Bamford's club season didn't quite go according to plan, missing the latter rounds through injury as his Celebration Lions side dipped out of finals contention, but the veteran is primed for another huge representative campaign as he attempts to lead the new-look Bulls squad to another NZRL Premiership title.

"I had a few weeks off with injury and just played again on the weekend, had a bit of a blowout. I can't wait to just get in to the Canterbury (representative) season and get rearing mate, get going," Bamford enthused.

The towering front-rower spearheaded the Bulls' rousing premiership triumph last year as skipper, but he was nevertheless thrilled to get the opportunity to help defend the title.

"It's one year at a time for me. Obviously being 32 and getting older you don't take anything for granted, and when I was selected again to lead the boys it was a very proud moment for myself and hopefully we can go back-to-back."

With 10 newcomers in the Bulls' 24-man squad named by coach Darrell Coad this week – including a young halves pairing in the shape of exciting tyros Tevin Arona and Gus Anderson – 'Bam Bam' said he and the other more experienced players had a responsibility to guide the greenhorns through their first representative campaign.

"There's a bit of pressure, mate, (but) we've got a few senior boys in the side, so that helps me out as well," the skipper continued.

"So we'll have a seniors' club within the side that helps out the younger guys, not just myself.

"I'm quite excited to play with these young guys. Obviously I've seen them playing club football, and it's going to be interesting to see how they go at rep level."

After going hammer and tongs at one another during another rugged CRL competition season, Bamford admitted that there was a settling-in period as players from six different clubs assemble – but uniting for a common cause ensured camaraderie would be easy to build.

"Yeah mate, it's always difficult – you're going out there sort of hating each other but then you come

together and, you know, we're one as Canterbury," the captain explained.

"We'll let bygones be bygones now and we'll do what's best for Canterbury, and that's to hold onto that trophy."

Travelling around New Zealand together helps with team bonding and the Bulls have road trips to Tauranga, Wellington and Whangarei ahead of them this season – an aspect of the NZRL Premiership Bamford said the team was looking forward to.

"We love it. We thrive on that.

"We love to go on away games, but it's awesome that we've got both the Auckland teams (Akarana Falcons and Counties Manakau Stingrays) here, the two stronger teams in the competition.

"We've got them at AMI Stadium, and with that alone I think we're going to be hard to beat."

Feverish enthusiasm for the return to Rugby League Park for the CRL Grand Final and the Rockcote Canterbury Bulls' home games has been a recurring theme when talking to current players, former greats, coaches, sponsors and supporters.

The Bulls are also relishing the chance to play at the code's spiritual home according to their skipper.

"Mate it's awesome, it's been a long time since we've played at AMI.

"That's our home and it's always been the home of Rugby League, so we're excited to get back there and play some good football."

Although the Bulls come first, Bamford also draws motivation from the prospect of representing the New Zealand Residents side again, while Bulls vice-captain Agaese Fiso will also be gunning for another Residents call-up.

"I hope I can get another Kiwi jersey. I'm getting old and who knows, it might be my last, we'll see," Bamford said.

If he can reproduce his barnstorming performances of 2014 on a week-to-week basis, higher honours should be a formality for Bamford – and it will go a long way to driving the Bulls towards another national premiership title.

# Bulls vital to South Island Rugby League's growth

**S**OUTHERN ZONE Rugby League General Manager Steve Martin has reinforced the Rockcote Canterbury Bulls' importance to the code's growth in the South Island, and believes the Bulls' recent successes have justified the board's decision in 2013 to replace the South Island Scorpions with the Bulls as Southern Zone's representative in the NZRL Premiership.

"We've always felt that the Canterbury Bulls brand is so strong and if we can reinvigorate it by having them in the national competition (as Southern Zone's representative), it gives the chance for Canterbury to actually use that to drive the growth in the game," Martin said when interviewed at the Bulls' season launch last week.

Martin also reiterated that while they bear the Canterbury name, the Bulls are very much South Island Rugby League's team. And although the 2015 squad is made up exclusively of players from the CRL competition, the opportunity is available for players from Otago, Southland, Tasman and West Coast to represent the Bulls.

"As it stands, every player in the South Island is eligible for the Canterbury Bulls," he confirmed.

"The reality is it's a matter of being good enough, and the districts are improving through the South Island competition that's run at the next level down. So that will start throwing up some players who potentially could challenge for places in the Bulls."

Dunedin-based Martin was enthusiastic about the improving standards and participation in Rugby League in the other South Island districts, which have endured some lean times in recent years. He said the five-team South Island competition, which includes Otago, Southland, Tasman, West Coast and the Canterbury Development side, is significantly aiding that growth.

"Their club competitions are strengthening up, but also their involvement in the South Island premier competition is helping even more because they get a chance to not only play against each other, but against the next best from Canterbury (who aren't in the Bulls squad)," Martin enthused.

"And that competition is becoming very competitive."

The Bulls' watershed 2014 NZRL Premiership triumph was a massive boost for South Island Rugby League according to Martin, who brushed off the player eligibility controversy that surrounded the victory.

"While some may say it was won on a technicality, you've got to play players who are eligible to be there and that's the competition rules," he said matter-of-factly.

"And Canterbury were very, very close – they defeated Akarana in Christchurch, and but for a significant player who played for the Counties team, they may have won that game as well and actually earned that right (to qualify) for the final."

Importantly, the initiatives Southern Zone have put in place at junior representative level in recent years are beginning to reap tangible rewards, with several budding stars graduating to the Bulls' squad. It has elevated hopes of more players from Canterbury and the South Island progressing through to the elite ranks.

"One of the things that we're now seeing is the young guys that have come through the pathways like Tevin Arona and Jiordan Fidow-Kele, who played for the South Island age-group teams and now they're actually taking the next step to the pinnacle, which is the national competition (with the Bulls).

"We were thrilled when Nu Brown played first grade NRL (for Cronulla) because he was the first South Island Scorpions player to actually go through right to the top level, and I'm sure there's going to be more like him."

# Coach Coad confident in Bulls' back-to-back bid

**R**OCKCOTE CANTERBURY Bulls coach Darrell Coad is certain his team's extended lead-in to this year's NZRL Premiership – and his own less hectic schedule – will provide the defending champs with an excellent opportunity to win consecutive titles.

Last year, Coad steered Halswell Hornets to CRL Grand Final glory before stepping into the Bulls role for the first time, which ultimately delivered another stirring success in the shape of the national premiership.

But after stepping down from his post with the Hornets, Coad has relished the chance to watch the local competition solely with his Bulls hat on.

"It's been fantastic. I've really enjoyed going around watching the (club) games this year," Coad said at the Rockcote Canterbury Bulls' 2015 launch at Hornby Working Men's Club on Tuesday night.

"It's given me a bit more of an insight to how players perform week in, week out. Because it is a strenuous competition that we're going into.

The increased break between the end of the club competition and the start of the national premiership has also been a major plus according to Coad.

"I guess we're lucky this year because last year we had one week off after the Grand Final and then we were straight into it, whereas this year we've got more time to prep.

"So we're going to have a lot of opposed sessions and hopefully have a contact session as well before our first game, where we can see some combinations and see how they perform under pressure."

Coad named a new-look team for the Bulls' 2015 title defence, with the 24-man squad made up of 14 players who contributed to last year's triumph and 10 new faces.

"It's fluctuated, I've picked a team probably four or five times. But I'm really happy with the squad I've got now. We've got a bit of youth there, a bit of experience," he continued.

Five players from the victorious Papanui Tigers line-up won selection in the Bulls squad, while eight

players from runners-up Linwood Keas made the cut – and Coad confirmed that individual performances under the finals blowtorch played a significant part in picking the side.

Coad believes the players that stepped up in the big end-of-season club games were more likely to produce the goods at representative level.

"That's what it's all about, especially at that next level (NZRL Premiership). The bar does raise.

"In that (Grand) Final on Sunday a couple of guys played their way in and couple of guys played their way out.

"But they (the players that missed out) will be there for us when we need them, we're going to have injuries."

He stressed that although the 24 players presented to sponsors and supporters at Hornby Working Men's Club this week had thoroughly earned their call-ups, there was certainly still scope for players from the Andrew Auimatagi-coached Canterbury side, which will participate in the Southern Zone competition, to play a role if injury or form dictates.

"We're working with Andrew who's coaching the Canterbury side in close contact, so if we need to send guys down or bring guys up we can," Coad explained.

Coad believes that although other teams will be looking to knock the Bulls off their perch after they claimed the title in 2014, their defending champion status will work in their favour.

"I think (teams will be gunning for us), and that's good. We don't feel the pressure, the pressure's on them," he said confidently.

"If they come down here with the expectation that they're going to push us around on our own turf, that's their issue. Ours is to go out there and play with confidence and play good footy, put the pressure back on them."

Another huge boost for the Bulls is the return to their spiritual home, Rugby League Park (AMI Stadium), a venue that holds cherished memories for

Canterbury Rugby League stalwart Coad.

"It's huge (to be back at Rugby League Park), I remember playing there myself back in the day and what a great atmosphere it is there," he enthused.

"I'm sure we'll get good support this year and get a good crowd behind us. With all the advertising (CEO) Terry (Williamson) and Canterbury Rugby League have done to get that support, we'll make it our own again.

While not looking too far ahead of the team's opening-round away clash against Wai-Coa Bay Stallions, Coad was clearly excited about the prospect of hosting heavyweights Akarana Falcons in their first home match at Rugby League Park since 2013.

"(Akarana Falcons) is our second game in and that's going to be really tough. But luckily it's at home and we love playing at home. They hate playing here and they're going to hate it even more after this season.

"I'm really excited, I wish we were playing tomorrow. I want to see how this group goes. We'll do a bit of bonding over the next few weeks and work really hard.

"We won't leave any stone unturned and we're going to really hit the road running this year and kick off to a good start."



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