



Thames Valley Sponsor's Newsletter No 3 – May 2024.

A message from our chairman.

We have been very busy over the last month working diligently as well as watching the season of club rugby unfold here in the Valley. I would have to state that this year we have seen the emergence of some improved depth throughout our clubs, women's rugby, schools, and age grade rugby. I think a lot of the union's great success has been the effort along with skills possessed within our staff and the increasing depth seen in our clubs/schools. Often, we find it difficult sometimes to get our teams enough opportunities to perform on a wider stage at a



suitable level. I must state that I believe our club rugby is a step up from previous years and the standards seen so far in this year's club season have been great. What impresses me is the growth in our female space and the upsurge in age grade rugby. It is great to also see our secondary schools growing again after the ravages of covid 19. One thing is certain the make-up of sport for our younger age groups attending schools have been changing along with attendance as has been recently reported in the media.

Ross Cooper, Aaron Smith, along with myself in Paeroa late last year celebrating receiving the gift of the seat that was given by the NZRFU to all the Unions. (Andrea took the photograph.)

Our club rugby is building nicely as the season unfolds. A couple of clubs have set the bench mark this year because of clever recruiting along with a combination of older players and the addition of exciting younger players. Add to this clearly understood game plans and strategies and we have a great 'product'. I believe that Thames Valley is seen as a very positive, well run rugby union. We are recognised throughout New Zealand as the small union who constantly finishes above some of the other larger unions in New Zealand Rugby across a raft of KPI's. This year our clubs have been demonstrating, so far, a style of rugby that is played with freedom and demonstrates improving skills and fitness. I believe this style suits the finer, more settled weather of autumn, but clubs also need to develop different game plans for the wetter/colder months ahead. Mind you there is rain around quite a lot from now on as usual.

One area that I believe we are reaping rewards is the growth and depth of our women's and girl's rugby area. We have been developing these areas through further support from our staff and funding from the board. Of course we also see the growth within our clubs of several women's teams emerging. This is seen as something that we can be very proud of. There are an enormous number of girls now playing rugby here. Of course this is without very little major funding from NZRFU for the Heartland Unions. It has been great to see Brendan Clarke continue to operate very effectively as Coach along with his management group in this area.

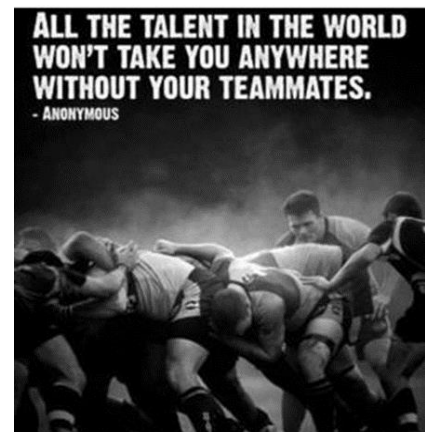


We are also delighted to see staff member Janine Spice working so tirelessly in the area as well. Of course our Vixen's sevens team also did extremely well at the end of last year which was wonderful and has set this season up well.

Coromandel v Waihou – 2024.

Recently we have seen that our Junior clubs and Secondary School rugby getting underway after the holiday break. It is great to see Hauraki College back at First XV level beating Paeroa College on Saturday. This is an exciting time for all our young players as they demonstrate further growth from previous seasons. Of course these players rely on their parents/families for transport, coaching and support - this has never changed. What is pleasing is seeing our former club and representative players getting involved as well. One of the very best things is seeing the knowledge these former players have received is being passed on to the next generations. This is what makes rugby so special here in New Zealand. Of course it is no different here in Thames Valley. Perhaps the most important thing to pass on is that all our young players enjoy their rugby experiences and have lots of fun on their journey.

As we head deeper into our season ahead, we will do our very best to continue to support all our stakeholders across the Union especially our sponsors. Sponsors are so valuable and appreciated especially in amateur sport here in New Zealand and we, like everyone else really appreciate all our sponsors greatly. If you see me around our clubs, please come up and have a chat or share time afterwards in the club rooms. All our sponsors matter to us and all are always welcome to pop in for a chat at our office if you are in Paeroa. We are looking forward to playing a game in Hamilton as a curtain raiser to the Chief's game on the 24th of May. Finally a very special welcome to Bryce Lawrence, NZRFU, who is Head of training and education spending time with the Heartland Coaches at their training run in Te Aroha. It is always wonderful for us to have folk from NZRFU attend training or functions with us here in Thames Valley.



PS...Great to watch NZ men's and women's teams clean up in the recent sevens in Singapore!!

Best wishes,

Gordon.



Cam Gerlich playing with flair for the Waihi Aces against Whangamata in round three. Cam played at Fullback. **The Waihi Aces** are currently on top being unbeaten in the Thames Valley Senior A competition. While the **Coromandel Rugby and football club** are still unbeaten in the Thames Valley Senior B competition after beating the Waihi Bullets team at home after round five.

A look back at our history – “PUNCHING ABOVE THEIR WEIGHT”

Written - 8 September 2022

Heartland championship Meads cup final South Canterbury v Thames Valley

Thames Valley's 2018 Meads Cup triumph was one of the great days in the union's history. South Canterbury v Thames Valley.

Everyone trusts that all in the Thames Valley raised a glass or five at last month's centenary celebrations in Te Aroha. They deserve to. They will have spoken of 1953, 1957, 1962, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1995 and 2018, among other seminal years or great victories by the Swamp Foxes. For this is not a large union, by playing numbers, but it often turns out gutsy teams that play their hearts out for their region and their colours. It is a far-flung province, a mix of the coastal clubs like Mercury Bay, Coromandel, Thames, Tairua and Whangamatā and some of the inland clubs of the two Paeroa clubs, Hauraki North, Cobras, Waihou and Ngātea. Farmers, fishermen, teachers... Thames Valley rugby people come from all walks of life to do rugby battle on Paeroa Domain, Thames' Rhodes Park, Te Aroha's Boyd Park.

To the west and nor-west are the big cousins Waikato, Counties Manukau, and Auckland. To the south and east is Bay of Plenty. King Country is not that far away. Joining the list of first-class venues on September 24 will be Whitianga's Moewai Park, home of the Mercury Bay club. The Swamp Foxes will host the Old Golds of North Otago in what should be a buoyant occasion. In 1997 the late Graham Watton, Rugby News's long-serving Thames Valley correspondent, released a book to commemorate 75 years of the union. In the earlier days, the region was part of the wider Auckland union area, making for some long treks into the big smoke. Now the roads are better, and the people are an eclectic mix. Life member, union President and historian Kelly Plummer has released his own book, Swamp Foxes Alive, detailing the history of this proud province. "The book is a companion volume to what Graham has done," says Plummer. "It was hard to decide what to put in and what to leave out." Some of his research will find its way online at the union website. But you do not need to be Einstein to know that the 1962 victory over Australia at Boyd Park, 16-14 scoreline with just 14 men and after a late Terry Shaw dropped goal, will be featured. It was, is and maybe always will be the greatest day in Thames Valley rugby history.

Six of the eight surviving members of that team made the centenary celebrations, which could have doubled as marking 60 years since that triumph. The coach, Norm McMillan, died just this year at the ripe old age of 98. But one should not forget that Thames Valley beat the might of Auckland thrice in the 1950s, including usurping the Coronation Shield at Eden Park in 1957. Plummer relates the story of how Kevin Barry, the union's second All Black, described the 1954 25-17 win in Te Aroha over Auckland as one of his great memories.

For this is not a large union, by playing numbers, but it often turns out gutsy teams. Just a year after the shock win over the Wallabies, Thames Valley was humbled 52-3 by Auckland in Te Aroha on a firm track. "Kevin said to the union, 'For God's sake, put us in the mud at Paeroa or the tide at Thames.'" Waikato was blanked 17-0 in 1945 in Hamilton, and the upstarts from the east tipped over the Mooloos a handful of times, the last occasion being 1973 in Paeroa. The flagship rep team has also lowered Fiji, Tonga, and New South Wales, and in 1995 and 2021 almost toppled NZ Universities.

When the stars align, and that mud and tide are in, Thames Valley can often be a formidable foe. In 1997, at the start of an otherwise disappointing season in the NPC second division, Thames Valley, with a couple of All Blacks rings-in, including former Valley Roller Mills rep Scott McLeod, rolled a star-studded NZ Barbarians team (which was Auckland in disguise) 60-31 on a midweek afternoon in Paeroa. Alas, the match does not feature in first-class records as too many subs were used.

Not just McLeod, but also the likes of Carl Hoefft, Keith Robinson and even Wallaby Jeremy Paul made their rugby starts in Thames Valley. After some fallow years in the Heartland Championship, the Swamp Foxes won hearts and turned heads in 2018 when they won away playoffs in Whanganui and Timaru to clinch the Meads Cup in stirring fashion. They withdrew the 2020 team from all rep play but could be a contender in the 2022 Heartland Championship.

"We're really in the Matt Bartleet legacy because he picked David Harrison and Joe Murray as his assistants and he's still involved in the background in an advisory capacity," says Plummer. Paul Neazor, in his 2006 Provincial Giants book, opts for 1988 as the union's finest season. It's a compelling case, going 9-2, beating Counties in Ngātea, and clinching the NPC third division crown with some super all-round rugby. Thames Valley and grassroots champion Ross Cooper is a union life member, former loose forward, and coach of that great 1988 team.

His 2ic was Brian Duggan, still the union's most capped player. They raised standards, got the team fit, introduced the grids that the peerless Auckland team was using at training, and fielded what Cooper describes as "an incredibly powerful pack" that included the Silvester brothers, Mark Darrah, Pene Reuben, and captain Irvine Campbell, who scored 14 tries, including three hat-tricks, from No 8. Chris Costello kicked the goals and Kevin Handley ran in six tries.

In 1989, Handley scored the best try of the match, maybe the season, as Auckland brought the Ranfurly Shield, some 15 All Blacks and 7000 punters, to Paeroa Domain. As vice-chairman of the union, Cooper will have the unenviable task of picking, with chairman Grant Dickey, a Chairman's XV of the best rep players from the last 50 years, while Plummer will name a President's XV from the first 50 years. Cooper has loved seeing the recent resurgence of Thames Valley rugby, exemplified by the Swamp Foxes.

"They are now well resourced and managed, and they have up-to-date equipment on a par with top division unions. Their trainings are cutting edge, and they use Facebook to promote the side around the region," says Cooper. While the Swamp Foxes can act as a galvanising force in a far-flung union, women's rugby is on the rise too, with the 'Vixens' playing in the Waikato Development competition.

Great days in Thames Valley rugby:

1922: Formation of Thames Valley union.

1926: Thames Valley wins the first (of seven) Roller Mills tournament titles.

1945: Thames Valley beats Waikato 17-0 in Hamilton, one of several shock wins over its neighbour to the west over the years.

1951: Thames Valley beats Fiji in Te Aroha.

1953: First Thames Valley victory over Auckland.

1953: Bob O'Dea becomes the union's first All Black (of two).

1957: Thames Valley wins its first, and only, Coronation Shield over Auckland at Eden Park.

1962: Thames Valley defeats Australia 16-14 in Te Aroha.

1969: Thames Valley beats Tonga in Te Aroha.

1970: Thames Valley beats NSW in Thames.

1988: Swamp Foxes win NPC third division title and beat first division Counties.

1989: A record 7000 cram into Paeroa Domain to see Auckland defend the Ranfurly Shield.

1989: Thames Valley Roller Mills, including Jeremy Paul and Keith Robinson, wins a seventh and last title.

1990: Swamp Foxes win NPC third division title.

1995: Swamp Foxes win NPC third division title.

1997: Swamp Foxes beat a strong NZ Barbarians side (Auckland in disguise) 60-31 in Paeroa.

2018: Swamp Foxes win Meads Cup, downing South Canterbury in Timaru.

Coach Bob comments:

Well it is so nice to be back watching club rugby again as the Thames Valley Union got stuck into their multitude of weekly competitions across all grades of rugby including secondary schools and all our junior clubs. It always amazes me when I go along to watch the grandchildren play their games of rugby as all of them usually are so positive about their individual rugby experiences. When I attend games there are always coaches who give the kids the benefit of their wisdom.



Coupled with this are the many referees who referee their games. What is important for me is to teach the grandchildren the values that our Swamp Foxes hold close to their chests – that is being great caring people, making time for their families and to be excellent ambassadors by appreciating all those involved in their rugby journey. Of course there is all the value

learnings about never giving up, being a great team mate, timekeeping and always helping others etc. One thing is a constant – skills must be always of the highest standard.

I must also state that it has been great to see that our younger boys and girls are being provided with great experiences by the many clubs and schools who offer great coaching. Of course the man in the middle – our referees also contribute to their ongoing enjoyment and safety – sometimes the referees are the coaches so big ups to these coaches.



I have been lucky enough to catch a few games during the holidays, both at club level and at age grade level. The age grade tournaments that have

been organised for the youngsters have been fabulous for all teams. These youngsters get a lot of enjoyment from playing their games against the other teams as many have mates in them. The players also improve and grow from year to year. The year seven day in Te Aroha at the beginning of the holidays was great – rain everywhere except in Te Aroha! Great development is witnessed, and some great emerging players were on display. Special mention to the coaches of these teams as they must act as the referee as well on many instances – so for these folk they have a very full on day.

Senior Club rugby is moving along nicely – from my sideline eye and from reading the reports the teams have all started strongly. Perhaps an improvement in the weather would help although I did enjoy watching the battle of the two unbeaten teams – Waihou and Waihi battle it out in Waihi in their top of the table clash with both teams being unbeaten before Waihi took out a very hard fought game by a flattering margin. I have to say that the three games played in Waihi in the rain were all great games. Watching the games during the split rounds will unfortunately limit choices but give players a rest going forward and time to recover from injuries. The first rounds of the spit weekend rugby were both great to watch. Waihi are continuing their unbeaten run with a well taken victory against Thames while Waihou got up in a last minute victory over COBRAS. It always helps when the weather is fine, allowing the players to play with more freedom. As my son stated at the Waihou v COBRAS game there seems to be more freedom in the teams' ability to execute attacking games strategies when it is fine but on occasions the defensive plans are somewhat lacking. I think that the players' ability to execute these plans are usually affected by fatigue and an ability to maintain their line. The defensive line in my view is always held together by having excellent communication with the backs always maintaining a line that is a strong, united, and



cohesive. The other aspect that is crucial is that all players in the defensive line whether they are forwards or backs have their eyes up and stick to the agreed plan outlined by their coaching staff. We all know that as soon as one player deviates from the agreed plan then there will be a gap created. I am really looking forward to is hopefully travelling over to Hamilton to watch the Swamp Foxes take on the King Country Rams during the curtain raiser before to



the Chiefs' game on the 24th of May. For any Heartland team to get to play on the stadium creates a wonderful memory. To have the game as a curtain raiser to a super game adds a different dimension to this fixture as well. It gives the players an opportunity to experience another, rather larger stadium than any of the venues that we have. It also creates different pressures for the chosen team to execute the plans so early in the season. It will be a very interesting event in my opinion, and I know from my own playing days the games over the years against King Country always seem to finish with a very close score line. The King Country Rams always have a very physical approach to their play especially up front. The other aspect is for all us supporters is that we can see who is in line for the Swamp Fox team for the Heartland season ahead.



Further action from the Waihi v Thames game played in Waihi in front of a very vocal large crowd.

I was able to enjoy watching the Heartland coaches put the large number of invited players through their paces at a training run in Te Aroha in preparation for the King Country game and to build depth and connections. The turnout of players and coaches was very pleasing to witness. The depth of available

talent is also impressive as there were only four teams to select from – as it was bye week for the teams the players were chosen from. One thing I did notice was the set up and their organization as it was amazing – it was expertly coordinated and conducted and extremely well run.

Finally this week's games are important so hopefully I will be able to twist my son's arm to get to a local game.

Oh by the way Loved the show the boys put on Friday in Rugby Chat – I thought they both looked fantastic in their outfits!!! I also think it is important to remember our wonderful mothers for mother's day!!! – Well done team!!!

Kind regards

Coach Bob.

Some facts about one of our greatest All Blacks - Sam Whitelock.

- In 2008 he was part of the New Zealand Under 20's team that won the inaugural Junior World Championship, which was followed by a provincial debut for Canterbury later that year. He played a total of 22 games for the province.
- He made his Super Rugby debut for the Crusaders in 2010 and played 180 times for the team through to 2023. Only Wyatt Crockett has more appearances (203). The club won seven Super Rugby titles during his time there.



- He scored two tries in his test debut on 12 June 2010 against Ireland in New Plymouth, aged 21, becoming All Black number 1104. His last test was the 2023 RWC final against South Africa in Paris.

- He recorded 125 wins in 153 tests, with 22 losses and six draws. When he reached 100 tests, he was the first player in the world to do so with less than 10 defeats. At that point he had lost just eight times.

- In addition to two Rugby World Cup wins, he won 11 Tri Nations/Rugby Championship titles and was involved in 14 straight seasons where the All Blacks retained the Bledisloe Cup.

- Whitelock was the eighth All Blacks centurion, achieving the milestone in a 38-13 win over Australia in Sydney on August 18, 2018.

- He first captained the All Blacks against Wales on 25 November 2017 and would go on to captain the side in a total of 18 tests.

- The November 2017 clash with Wales marked his first test alongside brother Luke. The pair would play a total of five Tests together while Luke was awarded the captancy a week before Sam (against France XV) on the 2017 end of year tour.

- Whitelock's brother George played one test for the All Blacks in 2009, while another brother Adam represented the All Blacks Sevens.

- In 2022 Whitelock and long-time second row partner Brodie Retallick set a new world record of 64 test starts together, surpassing Springbok duo Bakkies Botha and Victor Matfield

- He was awarded the Kelvin R. Tremain Memorial Trophy as New Zealand Player of the Year in 2017 and was named in the 2022 World Rugby Men's Dream Team.



News from the Thames Valley Rugby Union office:

Junior Rugby:

Our Junior Rugby commenced last weekend. This space has continued to grow from previous seasons, with a whopping 58 teams entered in the six respective grades. It is always great to see the activity at each of our Rugby grounds at 10.00am every Saturday morning, on the playing fields where young boys and girls are having the time of their lives and Mum and Dad are keeping the local economies going with the endless amounts of coffees and sausage rolls.

May I please remind people the importance that this is ONLY Junior Rugby. In one week, we have already received several incident reports all related to adult behaviour. Don't let this be you, act like adults, be positive and remember this is about the children, not you.

Secondary Schools:

The newly formed Under 18 Boys Competition kicked off. It has been fantastic to see the growth of this competition, now that there are no limitations on how many school leavers can represent their local school/club. Whangamata Area School, Hauraki Plains College and Mercury Bay Area School looked fantastic in their opening round victories, whilst don't be surprised if Paeroa College, Thames High School and Te Aroha College cause a few headaches.

This weekend the Under 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ and Under 15 $\frac{1}{2}$ Boys competitions start, we look forward to seeing how these results prevail. The Youth Girls start next Thursday 16th May in Te Aroha, whilst the 1st XV Girls will start in June.

Club Rugby:

We head into this weekend's action, round six, with both the Premier and Senior B competitions very evenly poised. It has now become do or die for some teams in both competitions, knowing that another loss or two could eliminate the possibility of finishing in the Top 4. In my opinion, this is the best depth we have had in Senior Rugby for some years, and I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate Club Officials, Coaches, Managers and of course our Players for their commitment and contributions towards our community game.

The Hauraki North Diamonds are currently sitting in 4th place in their eight team Waikato Development Women's competition, needing just one more win to cement themselves in the top four. Whilst the Rugby United Under 21s suffered their first loss of the season last weekend against Pirongia, placing them 4th out of the twelve teams in the Waikato Colts Competition.

Women's Rugby:

On Monday night, each of the seven Clubs who have shown interest in the Women's Club of Origin attended a logistics evening, aimed at creating the correct playing guidelines to best suit our participants. We will be confirming the teams, dates, draws and format over the next few weeks. Information on this will be found on our website and social media channels.

Referees:

Last week Wayne Berry (Referee Manager), Chris Jones and Ryan Rogers facilitated an Associate Referee Course at Waihi Athletic Rugby Club.

Each of the ten participants received training about language, signalling, law and how to manage a match. These people received an associate referee shirt (pictured) thanks to the sponsorship of Diprose Miller.

If you're interested in the next one, head along to Ngatea Rugby & Sports Club on Monday 13th May at 6.00pm, please RSVP to Wayne via email wayne.berry@farmside.co.nz to register.



Around the Traps:

- The TVRU hosted a First Aid in Rugby course last Sunday at Paeroa Rugby & Sports Club. Thank you to NZR for facilitating the course and to our wonderful 14 people from our province that took the opportunity with both hands.
- Representative Rugby Schedules & Coaching Groups will be confirmed very soon. We have several great people lined up to lead these programs, plus some fantastic programs which will again enhance the brand of Thames Valley Rugby.
- Our Primary School Tackle tournaments kick off next Wednesday 15th May in Whangamata (Girls) and Wednesday 22nd May in Thames (Boys). We hope to have over 600 participants at both tournaments.
- We have delivered some fantastic coach development activities over the last two weeks. We had Brad Morgan from the Chiefs deliver a seminar on how to analyse a game of rugby, with over 10 coaches attending. The following evening we hosted a further 15 coaches to a Swamp Fox training in Te Aroha where they could observe Joe, Harry, Leon and Murray Driver – well done community coaches for taking these opportunities.

For more information on what's going on, head to our Thames Valley Rugby Union and Thames Valley Community Rugby Facebook pages. Plus there is our website which has all up to date draws, points tables and other news.

On behalf of the TVRU Staff, keep up the great work and thank you for contributions towards Rugby within our beautiful province.

Kind Regards,

Scott Day

Community Rugby Manager.

Events as part of our Girl's development programme.

Thames Valley Rugby have been fortunate enough to have **Tiki Edwards** and **Maggie Cogger-Orr** from New Zealand Rugby come to the Thames Valley recently.

Tiki delivered an Under 18 Girls Development Day (14 attendees) and Maggie delivered an Introduction to Refereeing Course for Women and Girls (12 attendees). Both courses were fantastic. **Janine Spice**, in her role as a game development officer is doing a great job in this area for the union.



Action from the Waihi Primary School's Rippa day expertly organised by Thames Valley Rugby Union staff member Taine Wilson held at Waihi East Primary school.