



## Keeping Rugby in the Valley Stronger Together

Thames Valley Rugby Union Sponsors' Newsletter – Early August 2024.

### News from our Chairman.

About a month ago we finished up our 2024 club season, we can all reflect on the 2024 season



that has created challenges as well as some exciting play from all our clubs. Of course, I try always to be positive but two very strong, staunch clubs had to default games and this is of great concern to our board as well as obviously to each club. Both clubs have been amazing contributors in the past with numerous sides winning multiple championships and having great depth in their clubs over many years. No doubt the committees and members of all clubs will be looking closely at their pathways and the possible talent that is coming through from their catchment areas. Perhaps the development that is happening with our school rugby

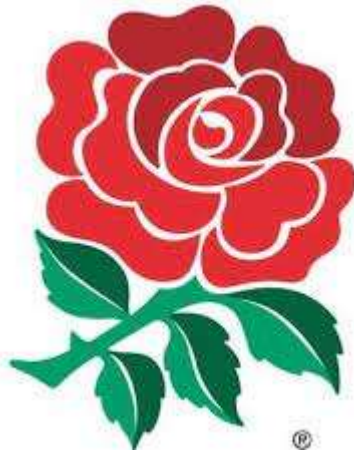
growing a larger player base will assist in future years, along with perhaps the further development of clubs utilising the young talent that is without a side to play in combined teams like the United under 21 team that Paeroa and Waihi clubs introduced a few years ago. We know the United team participates in the strong Waikato competition on a home and away basis. The rugby played is of a very high standard with Waikato being involved in First Division rugby – please note this is in my humble opinion of great value for these lads. For both Waihi and Paeroa this future proofing will be of great value for each club going forward in the years to come. One thing for sure is that rugby is slowly building as the numbers indicate later in this newsletter but in the short term, we all need to be innovative to continue to operate successfully and that applies to all stake holders. It is something for all clubs that may be worth considering as we go forward in my mind.

The club rugby at the senior level, despite the problems mentioned above, has been great to watch with most teams competing exceptionally well in my opinion. As a result the rugby played has been compelling, adventurous and quite physical. Paeroa and Waihi have led the way with both producing outstanding performances over the first two rounds followed closely by Waihou and Whangamata. The last match of the second round between these two clubs was simply sensational. The game ending up with the final winning try being scored in the second minute past full time after Waihi mounted a long sustained attack against the Paeroa to break the deadlock. This game was a great event with fine weather, great ground conditions and a large vocal crowd watching. It was great to see that “Grassroots rugby” also attended and recorded this game for their show as well. It is pleasing the New Zealand Rugby Union listened to the plethora of requests from the many rugby people who wrote in expressing their concerns about the axing of this much loved show. Over many years this wonderful show has delved into the lives of the many rugby clubs and their local family supporters who keep the game alive in the clubs all over New Zealand. The show tells their stories and the history of each club. In my mind they contribute massively to the well-being of the small communities they represent.

Finally as I alluded to our club season is now done and dusted for 2024 - no doubt next year will again be just as compelling to watch. Congratulations to all the finalists who managed to make it through to each of their individual finals. The crowd responded by turning out in huge numbers



and as a result the whole day went incredibly well. The Senior final between Paeroa and Waihi was an excellent game and the top Waihi team coming through with an unbeaten season, was indeed deserving of their victory. It would be fair to say though that the two semi-final games were also of a very high standard as well. The resulting Heartland squad that has been announced contains a numerous stars of their respective club sides. I believe the Thames Valley Swamp Foxes will be again in contention this year. It must be stated that our teams are always well prepared and know the requirements needed to compete with the best teams in the Heartland Competition. It is fabulous to see the announced squad is a well-balanced and talented group. (Please see the squad in a later section of this newsletter). Can I also thank all the staff and the volunteers who assisted with the organisation of our finals day. As we now move into the Heartland, Vixens and our age grade representative seasons we must thank all our coaches for their hard work throughout each team’s representative campaign.



The two match test series against England was compelling and very close with both tests against England going down to the wire. I always find our first tests quite difficult to endure as the All Black team have just come off a long season of super rugby. We are not sure where they sit in terms of replacing their departed players. The All Blacks still have a few things to tidy up as their season unfolds. It will be interesting to see how the rest of the season's tests unfold as the other southern hemisphere teams also look to be very strong. The South African and Irish teams looked to be evenly matched, but the Wales side looked not be at a stage where Warren Gatland would be happy. The

Australian side looked to be in a much better space now that Eddie Jones has departed. It will be interesting to see the Australian side progress under the tutelage of Coach Joe Schmitt.

I thought Beauden Barrett demonstrated his excellence and his huge array of amazing skills when he came on. His experience was extremely valuable as he exhibited his kicking and running kills, speed, ability to beat opposition and tactical understanding during the last thirty minutes of each test. Scott Robertson, our new All Black coach would know how close each game was, but he would have been delighted to win the series two nil. Unlike most of us he does understand that the days of beating some sides by fifty points may have passed. The game against Fiji was very interesting as Fiji demonstrated their ability to run the ball and on occasions match the physicality of the All Blacks. Fijian Rugby is certainly a joy to watch especially when they start to play their style of typical free flowing rugby.



**SQUAD ANNOUNCEMENT  
THAMES VALLEY  
HEARTLAND CHAMPIONSHIP 2024**

MATTY AXTENS <small>WARRINGTON</small>	CONNOR MCVERRY <small>LEICESTER</small>
HENDRIX BEAZLEY <small>WARRINGTON</small>	FLETCHER MORGAN <small>WARRINGTON</small>
QUINN COLLARD <small>WARRINGTON</small>	LEROY NEELS <small>COBBOLD</small>
ASHER DELANEY* <small>WARRINGTON</small>	JAKE O'CONNOR <small>WARRINGTON</small>
TODD DOOLAN <small>WARRINGTON</small>	JOHN PENU <small>WARRINGTON</small>
CAMERON DROMCOOL <small>COBBOLD</small>	BRETT RANGA <small>WARRINGTON</small>
SIONE ETONE <small>COBBOLD</small>	ISAAC SEILU* <small>WARRINGTON</small>
ONEONE FAAFOU <small>WARRINGTON</small>	ALEX THRUPP* <small>WARRINGTON</small>
CAM GERLACH <small>WARRINGTON</small>	SAMOA TOLOA* <small>WARRINGTON</small>
KENAN GILLSON <small>WARRINGTON</small>	TAYNE TUPAEA <small>WARRINGTON</small>
TE HUIA KUTIA <small>WARRINGTON</small>	JOSH TYE <small>WARRINGTON</small>
MOESE MAFI <small>WARRINGTON</small>	BRYSON WILLIAMS* <small>WARRINGTON</small>
LAULEA MA'U <small>WARRINGTON</small>	LEROY VAN DAM* <small>WARRINGTON</small>
FINN MCCALL <small>WARRINGTON</small>	TERRY WOOD <small>WARRINGTON</small>
LANCE MCINTYRE <small>WARRINGTON</small>	

The Preseason Heartland games that were played around the Union were interesting to all our followers. Each of these games allowed our coaching group an opportunity to develop, instil game plans and look at combinations. One thing that is for certain is the Heartland team always exhibit the values of being an outstanding Swamp Fox. The team will continue to develop as they begin to apply the learnings from these games to their first game in Masterton against Wairarapa – Bush. I know our President will be attending that game and the squad will again try to defend the President's cup that Ross donated. The

recent weeks of the Heartland warm up games has seen the coaches put out different combinations. I think it is very important for the players to get together as one cohesive unit. They

need to assimilate a lot of new information – structures, patterns, and expectations. They will also need to understand the expectations of the role each player is expected to meet being a Swamp Fox. This year the games are being again played all around the Thames Valley region but as I stated the away games are all in the North Island. We always see numerous folk/supporters all around the country because we seem to have incredibly loyal supporters who like to travel to away games. The team is incredibly fortunate to see our supporters wherever they play. I am sure this year will be no different.



The All Blacks v Fiji that was played in San Diego in the USA a couple of weeks ago is another push by the NZRFU and world rugby to further expose rugby to this part of the world. It is vital that the USA embrace rugby because it has a huge appetite for all sports. We know they are hosting the Rugby World cup 2031. Many see the USA as an obvious untapped market where rugby will continue to thrive and gain a foothold in this huge sporting market. They certainly liked the pre-game haka led by Ardie Savea.

The preseason Heartland games have gone well for the team with two strong showings against strong opposition. There were many tries scored in the first preseason game against Harlequins followed by a clinical victory over the North Harbour 'B' side where the defence by the Swamp Foxes was outstanding.. The tries scored in the first game were often well constructed and free flowing while the ability to defend their line paid handsome dividends in the second game. The squad looks well balanced with depth in all areas. The team has been working hard to grasp all the expectations of being a member of the Swamp Foxes. I believe there are signals that this team will compete very well again in the 2024 Heartland competition.



It is a very busy time for our staff during the representative programmes across all grades. As I have stated before all our Heartland games are being played in the North Island this year so it will

be great to see our many representative games within driving distance. Finally I must say it was a disappointment to see the two poor passes that affected the outcome of the First Test against Argentina. I know that the All Blacks will look forward to their 2<sup>nd</sup> test against the Pumas in Auckland to put things right. It will be an interesting game Can I also congratulate the Thames Valley Vixens on their winning performance against East Coast in Thames the other day. Although it was a 'friendly' game it bodes well for the Vixen's season ahead.

Let's hope the teams that represent Thames Valley all continue to shine this year. As we get energised with the prospect of representative rugby it will be wonderful to see you on the sidelines both at home and away this year. I am looking forward to Saturday's game against Wairarapa – Bush away in Masterton on Saturday in our First Heartland game for 2024.

Regards

Gordon – Chairman TVRFU.

**Senior Championships (Statistics per Club) – supplied by Kelly Plummer - Historian.**

<b>CLUB:</b>	<b>WON:</b>	<b>RUNNER UP:</b>	<b>ESTABLISHED:</b>
• Paeroa West	16	14	1902.
• Waihou	14	10	1880.
• Hauraki North	10	9	1907.
• Thames	11	12	1982.
• Te Aroha (C.O.B)	6	7	1959.
• Thames United	4	3	1982.
• Waitakaruru	3	3	1909.
• Kerepehi	2	3	1911.
• Paeroa Old Boys	1	4	1950.
• Thames (Huimai)	1	2	1982.
• Mercury Bay	2	1	1888.
• Thames H.S.O.B.	1	1	1982.
• Patetonga	1	0	1920.
• Waihi Athletic	2	4	1959.
• Whangamata	2	1	1963.
• Tairua	0	1	1888.
• Te Aroha Combined	0	1	1982.
• Ngatea	0	0	1919.
• Coromandel	0	0	1888.

**Did you know that there are only four men who have played for both countries.**

Alex Hodgman is just the fourth man ever to play a Test match for both All Blacks & Wallabies

Ted Jessep (2x AB 1931-32) & (2x Aus 1934)

Des Connor (12x Aus 1958-59) & (12x AB 1961-64)

Owen Stephens (1x AB 1968) & (5x Aus 1973-74)

Alex Hodgman (4x AB 2020) & (1x Aus 2024).



The iconic show **Grassroots Club Rugby** is back in 2024, celebrating the heart and soul of community rugby across New Zealand. Screening every Thursday on NZR+ and the All Blacks YouTube channel and Sky, the show is hosted by former All Black Ian 'Kamo' Jones and the renowned voice of Grassroots Rugby, Richard Mason. The first episode highlights games from across the country, including Horowhenua, Eastbourne, Dunedin, and Invercargill. In their second show they came and filmed the Featuring former All Blacks, the show emphasises the vital role club rugby plays in the rugby community. Grassroots Club Rugby brings to light the passion and dedication found at the local level, connecting fans with the essence of the game. The second show back included footage of the final of the second round for the Tom Jordon cup between Waihi and Paeroa with our President Ross Cooper asking the questions of the coaches and Captains for the show. Ross has completed this role for many years on behalf of our union. The finals that have been held will be on the show as well. One thing that this show delivers are all the stories in behind each club of their history and events. It is a show that many New Zealanders watch each week because it is based around our national sport and the history of the volunteers that are involved in every club. Many are families who are generational and span enormous amounts of time. They are real folk who just keep our clubs going for the betterment of all our communities. We are no different here in Thames Valley as we found out during the Senior A competition. One thing for certain is we are not alone in these recent developments.



### **Coach Bob reports.**

I managed to talk my son into making the journey across to Te Aroha for the club finals of our rugby and what a great day it was. A huge crowd rocked in and watched some quality rugby. It was well organised and very well run. The two top teams made it through to the Premier final and Waihi were deserving winners in my mind. To come through the season unbeaten was a remarkable effort from a club that struggled last year to get a side onto the paddock – so I extend my congratulations to them. I thought the whole day was great with numerous finals being played. That to me is a huge advantage, as having all the finals in one place allows us supporters to watch all games being played. It also allows clubs to watch teams from their club if another side from the club happened to make a final. As far as I know the clubs through their delegates vote on where the finals are played. Mind you a spectacular winters day was also a bonus for all us supporters and I believe the standard exhibited was superb. I also must add that the referees do a great job for us all. I think they are often forgotten but it is a difficult role to play when there is so much at stake. Supporters are often vocal and unfortunately occasionally overstep the mark, but overall for the events that unfolded during the four fixtures they were enthusiastic, vocal and happy. It was indeed a great day for all to enjoy.

The mighty All Blacks continued to squeak home against England in their two recent test matches – I watched both tests on television and they made for great viewing. I must state that England were quiet after the game in Auckland as I think they all believed their over-hyped press in the build-up. It is fabulous that the Eden Park winning record continues for the mighty All Blacks. It has indeed become a fortress for our All Black team, but I am sure the record will be beaten one day. The weather was perfect for the whole day and the crowd were in full voice. One thing for sure is that a faster paced game suits the All Blacks, but as always other sides seem to manipulate their “injuries” a little to allow time to get their breath back. It was great to see our near neighbours Australia get to win over Wales – but it was a game lacking a little in ferocity. The South African v Ireland series was also a great two match series with both teams really getting stuck in. It is a shame that there was not one more game in these test series as the deciders could have been fantastic spectacles and very physical affairs. I think that the early indications of test rugby strength have certainly closed with Ireland, Argentina, South Africa and France showing that they are all near the top with the All Blacks sitting at third. I do think the All Blacks will spend time developing players as they come under the coaching being driven by Scott Robertson, but it will take time. The question for all of us is to realise that test rugby is combative and often brutal. How much time will we give the team to establish themselves again on the world stage who knows.



I cannot wait to see the whole 2024 Heartland rugby season unfold especially after the previous great seasons where our boys performed exceedingly well. Hopefully I will be able to get along to the local games and watch the players show us their skills. I have read the team selected and it looks to be a superb side. I know they played a couple of Heartland warm-up games before their first game away against Wairarapa – Bush in Masterton. This is a great opening game for the team. It is obvious to me that the Heartland competition is one of the very best. Each team really resonates with their local supporters who always find their way to games all over New Zealand - our loyal supporters are no different. The side chosen is a vastly experienced side with the likes of Connor McVerry and Brett

Ranga returning. Hopefully the boys will again demonstrate that they deserve to be in the in the running for the Meads Cup again this year after having some great fixtures against both Whanganui and South Canterbury – as we know these two sides are two of the best sides traditionally along with the Swamp Foxes in recent Heartland competitions.



On a sad note it has been difficult to see some of our more recent All Blacks passing away. The sad death of Norm Hewitt was quite a shock to me. Norm, along with Mark “Bull” Allen were great players and entertainers for the Hurricanes and the All Blacks. Norm was a long standing All Black but was a reserve standing behind the great All Black captain Sean Fitzpatrick. Growing up in Pōrangahau, southern

Hawke’s Bay, Hewitt played 296 representative matches during a memorable first-class rugby career spanning 13 seasons for Hawke’s Bay, Southland and Wellington. He earned 23 caps for the All Blacks over nine seasons and was a key member of the Hurricanes in the early years of Super Rugby, missing just one match in the first five years. One of the great images of Norm was when he was leading the Haka for the AB’s on their tour to England and Norm and his opposite Richard Cockerill ended up very close together. It was great drama for the large crowd who were watching from the grandstands.

I also thought that some of the younger players that Razor picked played well when they were given the chance against Fiji. Mind you the Fijians were not as I expected with this opportunity against the All Blacks away. In my mind they would not handle the rush defence that England employed against the All Blacks. Still it was a shame that the All Blacks seemed to have an easier time than I thought they would against Fiji. Still it was a great opportunity to allow these younger players this opportunity to experience test rugby and be involved in all that goes into playing test rugby. It will be great to see the players get a break with their families and then see what squad is chosen for the next games although it would be wise not to of wary of Argentina. I am sure that Razor will bring back a few of his senior players when he is preparing for the next round of games as the competition ramps up. Experience does count at the very top level of sport as the margins are so close. As I just stated I think Argentina first up is dangerous and SA will beat the Wallabies.

The preseason camp for the Heartland team has been done and dusted. It went well from all accounts. The team also did work around the town which went down well with the locals. The games against the Harlequins which the Harlequins won in a very high scoring try fest. The game went well with the selectors giving them all a run as they build up to the first game of the season against Wairarapa – Bush away. This will be a great team to play as we know that there is a trophy at stake called the President’s cup which the Swamp Foxes currently hold. I believe our current President Ross Cooper donated the cup a couple of years ago as he played for both unions back in the day. It will be a great way to start the campaign as it away as I stated. These away trips allow the team to continue to grow the team spirit as well as play on the artificial turf in Masterton.



It has been great to see the two preseason games against New Zealand Harlequins and the North Harbour B Team. Both teams faced were strong teams with two great games resulting. For all our representative teams the many games are taking place all around the North Island. The age grade teams have a very busy schedule of matches for both women/girls along with the various boys teams. I must state how it also great to see the various coaching/management groups offering to assist as well. For me personally it is always fantastic to see some of our ex-players offering to assist with coaching and managing of the many teams.



**Congratulations to Coromandel for taking out the Women's' Club of Origin championship.**

## **Swamp Jackals XV to play 3-games in 2024.**

The Thames Valley Rugby Union have announced a 3-game campaign for the Swamp Jackals XV (previously the Development or Emerging team) in August. This team will be built of players who are in the Swamp Foxes wider squad, high achieving Club players that had standout seasons, and our upcoming generation of talented players.

**Scott Penney**, Chief Executive Officer of TVRU said,

“It is exciting to increase our depth of experience at representative level, under a more structured and professional campaign. I think we will really see the benefits of keeping Men in a representative environment, and it will make the transition from Club rugby to Heartland rugby an easier experience with this stepping stone in place”.

We are thrilled to play against quality opposition, from our two neighbouring provincial unions. All three matches will be tough, including a fixture on the newly laid artificial turf at Hamilton Marist and two Heartland Championship curtain-raisers in Te Aroha and Te Kuiti respectively.

### **Swamp Jackals XV Schedule:**

- Saturday 17th August vs Waikato Colts XV at Hamilton Marist.
- Saturday 24th August vs Waikato Divisional XV at Boyd Park, Te Aroha.
- Saturday 31st August vs King Country B at Rugby Park, Te Kuiti.

### **Management Team:**

Mark McAlley (Head Coach)

Blake Nightingale (Assistant Coach)

Cody Muir (Assistant Coach)

Baz Vevers (Assistant Coach).



**Thames Valley Secondary Schools Champion Boys First XV Winners -Hauraki College.**

## **New World Waihi Secondary School Finals Day Results Saturday 10th August:**

The finals were played in Thames and were very well supported by the many passionate school teams supporters.

### **U14 3/4 Boys Final - L Berry Cup**

 Paeroa College - 17

 Te Aroha College – 5

### **U15 1/2 Boys Final - Bob Passey Cup**

 Waihi College - 36

 Hauraki Plains College - 20

### **1st XV Boys Final - Coulter Cup**

 Hauraki Plains College - 27

 Paeroa College - 10

### **1st XV Girls Final - Allison Stewart Memorial Cup.**

 Hauraki Plains College - 27

 Paeroa College – 17



**THAMES VALLEY VIXENS SCHEDULE 2024**

**VS NGATI POROU EAST COAST**  
SATURDAY 10TH AUGUST | RHODES PARK | THAMES

**VS KING COUNTRY**  
SATURDAY 17TH AUGUST | HAURAKI NORTH RFC | WAITAKARURU

**VS WAIRARAPA BUSH**  
SATURDAY 24TH AUGUST | BOYD PARK | TE AROHA

**VS WHANGANUI**  
SATURDAY 31ST AUGUST | CITY COLLEGE | WHANGANUI

**VS NI WOMENS HEARTLAND FINALS**  
SATURDAY 7TH SEPTEMBER | MEMORIAL PARK | MASTERTON

**VS COUNTIES MANUKAU B**  
SATURDAY 14TH SEPTEMBER | MARAMARUA RUGBY CLUB

Logos at the bottom include: Waihi College, Dynasty, LEACH, Brian Tunnicliffe Motor Group, Gold Ridge, BAYLEYS, Superior, and a shield logo.