



Thames Valley Rugby Union Newsletter. – late September 2024.

Note from the editor – I have tried to include something about our three recent opponents.

A message from our President,

As we head into the next section of our Thames Valley Rugby representative rugby programme, we realise that it is a very busy time for all our teams. It is difficult sometimes for us to get around as many of the fixtures as we would like to. For the most of us we try hard to support when we can – sometimes with a few teams playing in one venue we can enjoy watching all teams at that venue. For myself I do like the fact that sometimes many of our younger players can watch the senior players perform and witness how they handle themselves while representing our province. Whilst we would all love to win every game this really happens. What is important to us is that our teams contain great caring people who put their families first, have great pride in wearing our colours and add value to the legacy they leave. These values are an intrinsic part of being a Swamp Fox or



a Vixen. The winning of the Bill Osborne Taonga and the Centurions cup made the day in Te Kuiti a very special one for all those that played, watched the game live or on watched it on television. The next game against Whanganui in Thames was therefore a very important game. I hope the weather holds and the crowd enjoy this special event win, lose or draw.

Former All Black Bill Osborne passing over the Taonga to captain Matty Axtens after the King Country game.

I have decided to travel down with our superb Vixens as they are playing in the final of the truncated 'Heartland' ladies competition. This competition is in its infancy and not all Heartland unions are competing unfortunately owing to the costs involved. Sometimes the costs of travel,

accommodation and holding these fixtures require dexterity and thinking slightly outside the square so the games can take place as the competition is not actually sanctioned yet by the NZRFU. I enjoyed my time with the Vixens, and they played well to get as close as they did. From all reports the game in Thames three weeks ago was a classic and apparently very close – both sides threw everything they had at each other but unfortunately, we came up short by two points 16 – 14. It was a great match and if the Valley continues to believe I am sure they can grab another chance to play Whanganui and then we now know we can beat them as the score would indicate. I also believe that we are doing well in representing our whole community in these home fixtures at venues around our province. I heard that the after match meal was superb so well done to the cooks at Thames Rugby and Sports.



As we continued to watch the All Blacks in South Africa after the first test four weeks ago the pressure will continue to ramp up on Razor Robertson. The South African depth now is strong right across all positions. Still I believe that the All Blacks must learn to close out wins – something the likes of Sam Whitelock certainly had experience in. Patience and being clinical regarding not making unforced errors or

giving away penalties were crucial elements of his calming leadership moments. One thing we know from the past moments in South Africa it is not an easy place to win these games but, in my mind, the All Blacks were in front with 12 minutes left on the clock they should not have lost. I believe going down to Cape Town at sea level will be easier for the teams, but it will not define the outcome of this next test. Unfortunately as we know, although putting on an improved effort we again lost to the to South Africans in Cape Town. Small moments often decide outcomes but to be fair in my mind we again struggled to close out the 2nd test despite New Zealand's best efforts. It will be interesting to see the next phase of test rugby as the year meanders along at international level.

Thames Valley Under 16's win tournament in Turangi.

I always enjoy the journey down to attend the Ngāti Porou East Coast Rugby fixture against Thames



Valley in Ruatoria. This time it was superb with great weather and bright sunlight. While the travel is an interesting journey and one that we do not travel often the folk of the East Coast region are super friendly, welcoming and are truly passionate rugby supporters. Like all small unions they never give up on supporting their teams win, lose or draw. One thing I know for certain is that East Coast has a strong affiliation with Thames Valley Rugby. Obviously, they .are a competitive side to play and their players love playing at home in Ruatoria.

Onto the game itself I thought it was a mixture of some great close-in tackling but with numerous scores against us the defensive qualities were well tested out wide by the Ngāti Porou East Coast team who were on occasions able to create some spectacular free running tries. We, of course, also scored quite a few ourselves to take away the maximum points from the game with the game ending 60 - 45. Never the less it seemed to me from the sideline to be a little disjointed and somewhat confusing – maybe the superb track and very warm, fine weather caused this, being something that the team had not been able to enjoy in recent fixtures. The Thames Valley Boys under 19 side played superbly as well in the curtain raiser against East Coast to take the win. The Valley team are a very exciting well-structured side to watch. Their forwards are hardworking, and the backs are a great unit with a desire to attack. The loose forwards are also a very strong combative unit. Two well deserved wins for the Thames valley created a very positive vibe amongst the many supporters who made the trek to the coast. It was also wonderful to see that the many Thames Valley supporters who travelled to the game also enjoyed a superb sit down after match meal along with both teams and officials. It was a great day for rugby and a great day for all who witnessed this game.



Charlie Marsh looking sharp against Buller.

In the next match against Buller last Saturday in Whangamata the weather, field and crowd witnessed a superb display of skilful running rugby by the Swamp Foxes. The style and attacking skills of the team blasted the Buller team out of the park The Buller Union battles away against the odds – as it is New Zealand’s smallest union. (See details later in this newsletter.) The local club and the town did themselves proud with a huge turnout of fans. It was obvious to me that the club and the locals got stuck in to make a great impression on the visiting crowd. The first half was simply superb, and it continued right throughout the second half. Just for the record here are the Statistics from the game - **Thames Valley 84 (Q Collard, S Etoni 2, A Thrupp, C Marsh 3, R Tongotea 2, J O’Connor 2, T Doolan tries; Collard 7, Doolan 3, F Morgan 2 conversions) beat Buller 14 (2 tries; 2 conversions).**

It was great to see the Legends get the victory over the Waikato Presidents in a willing game of golden oldies rugby. Wow we have some very positive signs emerging with all our many representative teams.

It has not been easy for the All Blacks but the two games in South Africa demonstrated that we are very close to making another step up. I looked closely at the impact that Joe Schmitt and Mike Cron had on the Australian squad, and in my mind, it is very positive. The discipline in the All Black team will need to be fixed quickly as they are continuing to implode very late. Still I look at the positives and we have locked away the cup for another year. We also managed to hold on at the end with thirteen players!!

Next week we go down to Gisborne to play Poverty Bay – should be an interesting game.

Kind regards

Gordon.

Thames Valley Rugby Union Under 16 Boys playing in the Heartland under 16 tournament in Turangi and won the tournament.

- **Beat Whanganui 17-5**
- **Beat King Country 3-0**
- **Beat Eastern Bay of Plenty 34-8**



Thames Valley v East Coast - A legend of East Coast Rugby - **Charles Ferris Harrison.**

Surname:

Harrison

First names:

Charles Ferris

Known by:

Charlie

Clubs:

Hikurangi

Provincial teams:

East Coast 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017

Provincial captain:

East Coast 2010

Biography:

2003: Halfback [7], Sub [1] - 8 games

2005: Halfback [5], Sub [2] - 7 games

2006: Halfback [7], 2/5 [1], Sub [1] - 9 games - 2 tries (10 pts)

2007: Halfback - 9 games - 1 try (5 pts)

2008: Halfback - 8 games
2009: Halfback - 9 games

2010: Halfback - 10 games - 2 tries (10 pts)

2011: Halfback [10], Sub [1] - 11 games - 2 tries (10 pts)

2012: Halfback [9], Sub [1] - 10 games - 1 try (5 pts)

2013: Halfback - 9 games

2014: Halfback - 9 games

2015: Halfback [3], Sub [6] - 9 games

2017: Halfback [1], Sub [4] - 5 games

Total: 113 games (40 pts)



Thames Valley v Buller :

Background information about The Buller Rugby Football Union.:

The rough and tumble of football was popular in colonial times, and nowhere more so than on the South Island's rugged west coast, the domain of miners and bushmen. As the rugby version of the game started to take hold, a West Coast union based at Greymouth was established in 1890. But the logistics of playing rugby in an area where the clubs were spread out over hundreds of kilometres proved too much. In 1894 the Westport and Foulwind clubs decided to form the Buller Rugby Union.

Buller is one of the minnows of New Zealand rugby. In the last decades of the 20th century rugby in the area suffered as mine closures and industrial decline saw players moving away in search of work. One notable exception is Thomas Stuart, who between 1984 and 1999 played a record 154 games in the cardinal (scarlet) and blue of Buller. D.J. Baird scored a record 575 points for Buller between 1981 and 1991. Buller has never won any of the domestic championships or the much-coveted Ranfurly Shield, although it came close to winning the shield in 1949.

The home of Buller rugby is Westport's Victoria Square. Buller currently competes in the Heartland Championship and won the second-tier Lochore Cup in 2012. Along with South and Mid Canterbury, Tasman, West Coast and Canterbury, Buller is part of the Crusaders Super Rugby franchise.

Local rivalries

The rivalry between Buller and West Coast is one of New Zealand rugby's most enduring. For two unions who have never won a major trophy, securing the Rundle Cup and bragging rights on the coast is the next best thing. The Rundle Cup replaced the Molloy Cup, competed for since 1896 when the Coast defeated Buller 16–0. The first Rundle Cup match took place in 1911. Of the nearly 40 trophies contested by two provinces in New Zealand rugby it has the longest continuous history and is second only to the Ranfurly Shield as the oldest rugby prize in New Zealand. Another significant local trophy is the Seddon Shield, competed for since 1906 in honour of the former premier and long-time Coaster Richard John Seddon. Buller first won this challenge trophy for representative teams from Buller, Nelson Bays, Marlborough and West Coast in 1913.

Tom French

While Buller is not one of the first unions people think of when it comes to Māori rugby, the annual award for the New Zealand Māori player of the year is named in honour of Buller's Tom French. French played his club rugby for Westport and in 1911 was selected for the New Zealand Māori rugby team. After his playing career ended, he became a distinguished administrator of Māori rugby. The French Cup was first awarded in 1949 to the North Auckland midfield back Johnny Smith.

Red and blue All Blacks

Six players from Buller have represented New Zealand, all but one of them before the Second World War.

The first, **Thomas Fisher** from the White Star club, played five games on the All Black tour of Australia in 1914. **Chas McLean**, a 1920 All Black from the Westport club, had survived service on Gallipoli and been awarded the Military Medal.

Ken ('Snowy') Svenson played 34 matches for the All Blacks, most of them after moving to Wellington. He was first selected while playing for Westport's White Star club and Buller in 1922. Front-rower **Bob Tunnicliff** scored a try in his sole appearance for the All Blacks, against New South Wales in 1923.

Eddie Holder, 'arguably the finest all round back' produced by Buller, played 10 times for his country between 1932 and 1934. Considered unlucky not to make the tour of Britain in 1935, he switched to league and played for the English club sides Streatham and Mitcham, and Wigan.

In 1949 **Bill Mumm** became the Ngakawau club's only All Black when he played in the first-test loss to the touring Australians at Athletic Park. Uniquely, another All Black team lost in South Africa on the same day. Injury prevented Mumm playing in the second test and further national honours failed to come his way, perhaps because he was seen as too small for a tight forward. A sawmiller by trade, he was also a world champion axeman. Bill Mumm was awarded an OBE for a lifetime of community work.

A game from the past: Buller braves the Brook

Buller rugby team,

In 1948 Otago, coached by Vic Cavanagh, was the strongest team in the land. Buller arrived in Dunedin for the first challenge of the 1949 season to face an Otago team missing 11 players on tour with the All Blacks in South Africa. Despite this there was little to suggest anything other than a routine victory for the holders. Cavanagh – somewhat surprisingly overlooked as the All Black coach for the tour – had set about rebuilding the Otago side. Buller's miners and loggers were not concerned by Otago's reputation and were bolstered by hundreds of visiting supporters. After a rowdy street parade the game got under way on a boggy Carisbrook, conditions well suited to the visitors. From the first whistle they got stuck into the defenders. Led by soon to be All Black prop Bill Mumm and loose forward George Anderson, Buller stretched the Otago defence, scoring two tries. At half-time the score was 6-all. Despite hammering away at the Otago line in the second spell, Buller could not score, and Otago hung on to the shield with the 6-6 result.

Buller's Last-Minute Heroics Secure Bill Osborne Taonga in Ruatoria

Ngāti Porou East Coast 11 vs 13 Francis Mining Buller

Buller's Last-Minute Heroics Secure Bill Osborne Taonga in Ruatoria

In a match that will live long in the memory, Buller produced an outstanding performance to clinch the Bill Osborne Taonga, edging Ngāti Porou East Coast 13-11 in the first round of the Bunnings Warehouse Heartland Championship. Andrew Wells' injury-time penalty sealed a thrilling victory, leaving the Ruatoria crowd stunned as Buller celebrated their first-ever triumph in the prestigious challenge.

The first half was a gritty and hard-fought affair, with both teams unable to break through. Each side traded penalties, and the 3-3 scoreline at halftime reflected the intense defensive effort. Buller, asked to absorb a lot of pressure, stood firm thanks to a tireless display from flanker Joe

Taylor, whose work across the field was nothing short of remarkable. Opportunities were scarce for Buller on the attack during the opening 40 minutes, but when they did emerge, Louis Devery was a constant threat in the midfield, making significant inroads against the East Coast defence.

It was East Coast who broke the deadlock in the second half, with Te Rangi Fraser crossing on the left edge after relentless pressure on the Buller try line. Buller, however, refused to fold and continued to battle. They were eventually rewarded after 70 minutes when Sione Lonitenisi powered over the line, following a sustained period of pressure on East Coast's defence. Buller's forwards, including Anthony Ellis and Caleb Havili, were menacing with the ball in hand, with Lonitenisi finally breaking through to give Buller a 10-8 lead.

The final stages of the game were nail-biting. Buller, controlling possession and the clock, seemed poised to close out the match. But a turnover at halfway led to a dramatic breakaway by East Coast, resulting in a penalty right in front of the posts. The home side converted to snatch an 11-10 lead with just a minute left on the clock.

With time running out, Buller won the restart and kept their composure. After 20 exhausting phases, they earned a crucial penalty. Although the players were running on fumes, Wells coolly stepped up and slotted the 30-metre penalty from a central position, handing Buller the 13-11 victory and sparking jubilant scenes among the players and supporters. Joe Taylor's immense performance was key to Buller's success, while Harris McRobbie impressed with his strong carries in the front row. Captain Anthony Ellis led by example, and Alan Paterson and Caleb Havili were formidable in the locking department. Wells orchestrated the game well from flyhalf, and Matt Soper shone on his first-class debut at halfback. Buller's first challenge for the Bill Osborne Taonga ended in triumph, an incredible result that the team will be immensely proud of. This victory will give them huge confidence as they move deeper into the Heartland Championship.

Coach Bob reports:

I must state that winning the Bill Osborne Taonga was very special for the lads in Te Kuiti over a month ago. When they proved to be the first team to do this from Thames Valley, I am sure it will always be a memory to cherish. Whilst I was disappointed that we did not hold it for longer that is the realities of sport. The game against Whanganui was always going to be epic encounter and I thought it certainly lived up to its billing. My son and I went across to Thames and I must say the ground was in fine shape despite all the wet weather. There was a large crowd and a great buzz around the place. Thames Valley played well but simple mistakes cost us. I have to say the very long time the boys held onto the ball in the last 7 or 8 minutes proved how sad it was that a little more patience was not evident in the earlier periods when the boys were on attack. It was an epic game with a lot of very good things evident, but Whanganui put the game out of reach with some great defence during that hectic finish. To get that close was a grand effort but some simple errors cost us dearly.

Still I believe we will get another chance against Whanganui later in the season looking at the draw and we can also feel confident when and if we play them again. But I also know we must never get ahead of ourselves. What I am impressed with this year has been the success of the many teams we have playing representative rugby – these teams all play with great skill both our men/boys and ladies/girls!!!

Test rugby is a brutal affair for the players and their support staff especially in South Africa. I, like a lot of New Zealanders, set my phone to wake me up at 2:45 a.m. on Sunday morning – mind you it still felt difficult to get out of bed but a quick cuppa and some heat from the heat pump managed to sooth the anxious wait. Once again it was not to be our night despite an improved effort from the All Blacks. Scott Robertson and the All Blacks now face some hard work before their next games as the pressure begins to ramp up. Of course we all know the rugby nations now operate in four year cycles between Rugby World cups but there is a need to bring through players who can demonstrate that they can beat all comers now and in four years. Obviously, we simply expect the All Blacks to beat everyone all the time. I chuckle when I read some media as the All Blacks have enjoyed great success against South Africa and won lots of games with their record of wins still better than South Africa – of course we all live in the now and not in the past as much.



The second game in this batch of three was our Ngāti Porou East Coast fixture a couple of weeks ago . What a game it was – high scoring with numerous spectacular tries and to me this exorbitant scoreline indicated suspect defensive patterns and a somewhat free flowing attitude to the fixture. One thing is for sure it seems a hard place to come and play rugby. The East Coast team players enjoy the support from their many supporters playing at home. Some of the tries scored by the Coast team were soft with poor tacking out wide indicating some frailties with the Valley defensive system. Never-the-less to score sixty points against the Coast at Ruatoria was very commendable. The day from all accounts was fine and the field firm – such a difference to play



in these conditions for our boys after the games in the wet in recent times. From all reports our hosts as usual were awesome feeding everyone at the after match function including the many Thames Valley supporters. Can I state to get five points away is fabulous in the overall scheme of things. I also heard that the Vixens played recently the Counties Development squad losing 48 -25. In stating this I must state our girls have performed well throughout their season. They have travelled and grown many younger players in their squad which will stand us in a better much stronger position going forward.

Thames Valley team on the ground at Ruatoria in their team huddle.

I was looking forward to the Buller game as my son has agreed to take me across to Whangamata for the game. While the game was played after a fantastic curtain raiser where some of our older more mature legends who played for the Silver Foxes against the Waikato Presidents side. It would be fair to state that the mind was willing, but the body did struggle a little! BUT the Thames Valley Silver Foxes did score a very meritorious victory over the Waikato Presidents. Of course all the legends will claim they beat Waikato – and so they should!! Even though it was golden oldies and with squads of many!!!

The main game between Thames Valley and Buller was an incredible game with the Swamp Foxes running riot. The ground conditions were superb, and the Thames Valley team responded by a score of 84 – 14. It will be interesting to see if the form continues in their next game against Poverty Bay in Gisborne. Which in the past has been a bit of a bogey team for us. For me it was a stunning game showcasing the many talents we have here in our union.

The test match against Australia was also very close – may be it should have been a one sided scoreline, but it was not meant to be. I think they will soon click, and it will be interesting in Wellington in the return match. Small issues and inaccuracies continue to plague the team **but be warned they will click** – Good results in Argentina against South Africa as well.

Regards Coach Bob.

These three legends all played for the Blues – now their sons are in the Blues – Can you name all six?

