



Keeping Rugby in the Valley Stronger Together

Thames Valley Rugby Union newsletter - September 2024.

A message from our Chairman,

We were all delighted with the Thames Valley Heartland teams' first victory, nearly four weeks ago in their 2024 campaign opening game against the Wairarapa- Bush side away in Masterton. To get five points away was an incredibly valuable start to their Heartland season. It was a game that was difficult as the Wairarapa – Bush side played well for a large part of the game but when it mattered the Swamp Foxes scored their points at the start and at the end of the game. Of course our superb goal kicking number ten Quinn Collard kicked superbly throughout the game scoring points from his boot with deadly accuracy added considerably to a final sizable score of 37 -24. I know the coaches will identify their work-ons and rectify the deficiencies. The weather for the game was magnificent but the trip back was disrupted considerably as the team's flight was cancelled out of Wellington with the appalling weather conditions in Wellington. A long bus trip for the team was the result. Flooding in Pahiatua and very heavy rain caused a few problems as well for the many returning supporters. I think the team will benefit greatly from their first hit out. Congratulations to the following Thames Valley Swamp Foxes who made their debut against



Wairarapa - Bush - **Charlie Marsh #1281, Will Martin # 1282, Leroy van Dam # 1283, Bryson Williams #1284 and Isaac Seiuli #1285.** The team played on the artificial turf at the main ground in Masterton and came away from the game with a few scratches/scabs that will need time to heal along with the travel factor – a long bus trip home from Wellington as foul weather disrupted the flight. Other results from the weekend saw the Thames Valley Jackals playing on the artificial turf in Hamilton and having a solid win over the Waikato Colts 31-12, and at Waitakaruru the Thames Valley Vixens went down narrowly to King Country 20-26.

Will Martin receiving his first Thames Valley start and Jersey in the Thames Valley team room.

The second game of the Swamp Fox season was against North Otago and was played at Boyd Park in Te Aroha. Thames Valley has established a sound record against North Otago over time. It

is worth remembering that the Swamp Foxes did not play any games in 2020 because of covid. In 2021 the team also did not play North Otago. In 2022 Thames Valley played North Otago in Whitianga winning 26 – 21 in glorious weather. Last year we lost in Maheno in a close game 33 – 34. The points scorers for Thames Valley last year were - tries Leroy Neels (2), Tim Erceg and Ethan Dromgool with Fletcher Morgan kicking 3 penalties and 2 conversions.



Our Thames Valley Vixens doing the hard yards recently after completing a gym session.

The round two match of the 2024 Heartland competition was played against North Otago in very wet conditions at Boyd park in Te Aroha. The ground was expertly presented despite the rain by our staff and their helpers. The two sides were able to produce some excellent wet weather rugby in my opinion. The Thames Valley team started by scoring two tries in the

first ten minutes with a blistering start. This start and some fabulous defence ensured they scored another well-deserved victory 24 - 15. The Vixens showed their class in defeating Wairarapa Bush in a one-sided match in the curtain raiser. It was wonderful to see two ex-Black ferns playing for The vixens – as well. The depth in our women’s/ girls rugby is starting to grow showing that huge numbers are now involved in the game in Thames Valley. The game against Wairarapa – Bush was won by the Vixens 48 – 10. Whilst the Jackals played an



absorbing match that was very close throughout and hard fought Losing 25 – 29 to a Waikato Divisional XV in the last minute of their game and our U19 Girls lost 27 to King Country u19 - 31.



Left: Congratulations to Laulea Mau who received his blazer for Thames Valley Rugby Union yesterday (20 games). Thank you to the friends and family of Lea, who made this presentation extra special! Left: Coaches David Harrison and Joe Murray made the presentation.

Reunion: 1969/1970 Thames Valley sides.



Photographs from the reunion of the 1969/1970 team held before the North Otago game.

I attended the morning celebration at COBRAS reminiscing with our ex-players from their time playing in the two international games they won in Valley colours over Tonga and New South Wales in 1969 and 1970. Thanks to Kelly Plummer and Ross Cooper who both did a magnificent job organising and running the day. Of course the chat was loud over lunch, and it was a room full of great memories and with perhaps some embellishment of the facts or storyline! One thing for certain is it was a stunning morning to remember these players from an era of great achievement. Not every team from Thames Valley can claim two victories over international teams. The other wonderful aspect for these returning players from 1969/70 was that the Swamp Foxes also secured the victory over North Otago to make these wonderful players' day even better. Many were seen wearing their medallions during the game with great pride.

The third Heartland game against our great friends, fellow Chief's members and the team who beat us this year in Hamilton as they prepared for their Ranfurly Shield match against Hawkes Bay created a re-match of great intensity and interest for both teams. For our President Ross Cooper in particular who was born in Te Kuiti where his parents owned their family farm the game had deeper layers of importance. We know that he toured with the All Blacks when the team toured Italy and France with Colin Meads as the All Black team manager in 1995. (see article on the late Sir Colin Meads on Page seven). After two solid wins our Swamp Fox team were feeling confident going into this away fixture in Te Kuiti against King Country, but rugby pundits knew that was not going to be easy as we have always had close fixtures against the rampaging Rams home or away.

This proved to be a game that was indeed an exciting one under their new lights at Te Kuiti as they were in action for the first time in a Heartland game. Being a night game was new for some of the players from both sides. Then adding another pressure point was the added impact of the two trophies up for grabs. This was a golden opportunity to gather up these two trophies and put them in the trophy cabinet for the year. Trophies create another level of interest and are keenly sought by the teams. A crucial aspect was also the Thames Valley's defensive ability as demonstrated against North Otago last week and this was again vital. Finally the weather was atrocious with heavy driving rain throughout the game creating appalling conditions for both sides to contend with. The game was one for the history books for the Swamp Foxes – their win 23 – 18 was built on their ability to manage all these factors with a skilful display of Swamp Fox rugby. I cannot though take anything away from King Country as they also made things difficult. Their kicker kept them in the game with an almost flawless display. When we see games like this game we can sit back and simply enjoy what makes Heartland rugby so special for everyone. It was to be Thames Valley's night, and the team were quietly and respectfully jubilant as they accepted the trophies. Paul Mitchell "Ox" presented the Meads cup and Bill Osbourne presented his esteemed trophy.

Finally the first All Black test in South Africa was another huge fixture for all rugby supporters world-wide. This game had everything - the score was close, but the Springboks do know how to close out the game with "their Bomb squad" who again proved pivotal to the scoreline in the last 15 minutes. The game in front of their passionate supporters at Loftus was indeed a great spectacle but the scoreline of 27-31 to South Africa reinforced their dominance of world rugby.

As always if you see me on the sidelines or any board members during our representative season please come up and have a chat.

Regards Gordon.

Coach Bob comments.

I managed to see the Valley team playing on my son's computer against Wairarapa – Bush on their pod cast. I have to say that it was something that I enjoyed as I am not able to travel as far away as Masterton. It was a great game for the 'Swampies' except for a quiet middle period which also contained a few mistakes, and unforced errors. Mind you, the Bush boys were strong ball carriers and made metres post tackle – this will be something that the coaching staff will address I am sure at their trainings prior to their game against North Otago. It was a solid start for the team as they scored five points for the away win which was a great start One thing that was pleasing to see was the superb goal kicking from Quinn Collard. I know from his outstanding effort for Waihi in their undefeated run in winning all their matches this year in club rugby how skilled at kicking he is, but it was indeed another master class from Quinn in Masterton. It was a battle for the team to get back which left me thinking about the many and often very long trips after the games we played when air travel and hotel stays were not on the menu at all. Back in our day it was usually home after the game travelling by bus. I must state though it was great to go along to the Vixens game played at Waitakaruru where our ladies went down in a close game to King Country. My son and I enjoyed their game and admired the tackling from both teams. I believe our girls are really getting to understand the game and now can adapt and change tactics and adapt to the weather conditions. Obviously, a lot of hard work is being made in our women's and girls' space in Thames Valley and we are starting to reap the rewards of all this hard work.

Then my son agreed to drive across to Te Aroha in time for us to catch the first home game against North Otago recently in Te Aroha. We nearly did not go because of the wet weather but I was glad we did. Firstly because Te Aroha does have a large grandstand – very useful on a wet day and I thought it was a great game of wet weather rugby. We had just arrived and it seemed amazing that Thames Valley had scored two converted tries!!! I thought their defence throughout the game was sensational and it won them the game without doubt. We drove home after the game as the sun was starting to just peak through the clouds. The team would be thrilled with their start to the



game and their defence, as of course we were. As we were leaving, I saw Ian Foster chatting with Ross Cooper for Grassroots TV – I must state that Fozzie looked relaxed and well past the awful treatment he received from the press last year. He apparently was supporting the North Otago number two who was from his club in Japan. Thames Valley have started the 2024 campaign well and after two wins in two games is tracking along nicely to make finals rugby at the end of the season. I

know the campaign can be quite brutal but the depth in the Thames Valley Rugby Union this year is quite strong if the Jackels curtain raiser game was anything to go by so injuries may not be so problematic as in some years in the past. Perhaps we could also gain some Japanese players to play in Thames Valley clubs as well.

Two man tackling in the North Otago v Thames Valley game was a strong feature of the Thames Valley performance throughout the game two weeks ago. The picture below is a great example of what was talked about at training and then the boys executed perfectly – great coaching!!



I must state I really enjoyed catching up with the Thames Valley CEO Scott Penney after the game against North Otago briefly over a beer at the aftermatch function at the Waihou club rooms. I believe he is doing a fabulous job for the Union as he is so enthusiastic and driven. I can see he is a very hard worker with a rugby brain to boot. One of the things that he does so well is making time to talk to people. He told me that he is pleased with how the team and for that matter the whole union is tracking. He mentioned the continued growth of the women's/girls area as a great positive for the union along with the number of players arriving in the union at the beginning of the year thus creating an opportunity of not only wearing Thames Valley colours but also possibly gaining a black jersey by being selected for the Heartland team. These days rugby administrators need a great team in behind the boss and I believe we have that in truckloads here in our office.

Thames Valley played King Country in the third game of this year's Heartland campaign at the unusual time of 5:30 pm to celebrate the installation of their new lights at their ground in Te Kuiti and the fact that the game was televised. I was asked to go down by a fellow player from my years playing for Thames Valley. We were hopeful that Stan Meads would be there at the game. He is a great supporter of King Country Rugby and was like his brother a great player in his own right. Thankfully I did have a quick chat with Stan as he walked across to the grandstand with folk from the Chiefs and New Zealand rugby just before the game started. This fixture was indeed a game of huge tension and demonstrated that the weather conditions that were incidentally appalling were not going to spoil the fixture. The rain was heavy and unrelenting throughout, but the skills and game awareness from both teams demonstrated to all why Heartland rugby is such a great brand of rugby to watch. It was a stunning game with the closeness of the scoreline right throughout creating enormous tension for all the supporters watching.

It was a team effort from all the players who took the field on the night, but the forwards certainly rolled up their sleeves and got stuck in and created the platform for The Swamp Foxes to close out the game. The backs certainly know how to score tries but the penalty count will be concerning, and this alone kept the Rams in the game right to the final whistle. It was a great display of kicking from the Rams goal kicker in the conditions. I am sure the management group and the players enjoyed their trip home and deserve congratulations, but Whanganui are looming!!! We need a huge crowd to come long to support the team in Thames.

Cheers

Coach Bob.

When thinking about Thames Valley v King Country – no one can forget this man!!!!

A tribute to Sir Colin Meads – ‘Pinetree’.

BY THE TIME HE HAD FINISHED PLAYING HE HAD AMASSED 361 GAMES, 55 OF THEM TESTS, FOR A TOTAL OF 133 ALL BLACKS APPEARANCES WHILE 139 OF THEM WERE FOR KING COUNTRY FOR WHOM HE PLAYED HIS LAST GAME IN 1972.

For 15 years Sir Colin Meads gave his heart, soul and a good deal more to New Zealand rugby on the field and earned the right to be adjudged the All Black of the Twentieth Century.



But his influence stretched well beyond his playing years and well beyond your usual rugby public on the field. As a player who was sent from the field against Scotland in 1967, only the second All Black to be dismissed, he won the public's

sympathy due to the relative innocuousness of his offence and avoided becoming the recluse that the first player Cyril Brownlie, who was sent off against England in 1925

Meads thought his career was over when his ordering off occurred, but it could be said it was only the beginning. The French had already tried to diminish his influence during their test of 1967, the game before the Scotland test, when he was kicked in the head by lock Alain Plantefol leaving a gash that required 18 stitches. But he returned to the action and the All Blacks won a game that many who played felt was their toughest game ever. He was in his prime as a player in a forward pack that carried all before it through the late-1960s. Some of the rugby the All Blacks forwards played against the Five Nations champions from Wales in 1969 was the forerunner of the ball-in-hand play associated with modern day All Blacks forwards. South Africans knew how influential he was on the field in 1970 and a South African boot, courtesy of captain Skip Henderson of the Eastern Transvaal side, threatened to end Meads' tour when his arm was broken. It's worth remembering that long-time All Blacks watcher and commentator Winston McCarthy claimed that in the five games he played in Africa before the injury, Meads produced the greatest rugby he had ever seen from a forward.

Instead of sending Meads out of the tour, the broken arm only added to his legend as he found an armguard which allowed him to resume playing, and he appeared in nine of the last 10 games on the tour. And when he got home the arm was still broken! It didn't matter that he was given the leadership of the inexperienced side that lost the 1971 series to the British & Irish Lions, still their only success in New Zealand, because he had put the country first in accepting the role. There were many who felt he was still capable of taking the 1972-73 team to Britain, Ireland and France, even after suffering a broken back in a motor accident earlier in 1972. However, he wasn't chosen, and he became the first player to be feted by the NZRFU, as it was then called, when a President's XV was assembled from around the world to play the All Blacks twice in 1973.

Of course, the President's XV won the first 'international' although the New Zealanders in the side said they were most uncomfortable doing so. By the time he had finished playing he had amassed 361 games, 55 of them tests, for a total of 133 All Blacks appearances while 139 of them were for King Country for whom he played his last game in 1972. His try-scoring was also significant – crossing the line 81 times in his career and adding a conversion to finish with 253 career points. Soon after retirement he began a fundraising connection with the Intellectually Handicapped Children organisation and made a significant contribution to the wellbeing of those involved.



And being the laconic speaker that he was he became a favourite to speak at rugby and sports dinners and lunches up and down the country, and around the rugby world. He coached King Country for five years before giving up the role when taking on an All Blacks as a selector, although that only lasted a year when he travelled to South Africa with the rebel Cavaliers side in 1986. Unpopular as that was at the time, Meads was never handicapped by it and

returned to win a place on the NZRFU Council from 1992-1996.

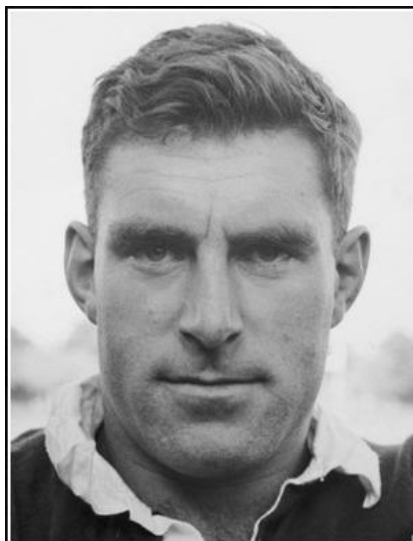
He managed the All Blacks to the Rugby World Cup in 1995 and famously put his stature in the game to use for the modern generation of players after their first test loss as professionals overseas against France in late 1995. The players who felt his wrath in a closed team session have never forgotten his words, and they won the second test.

Now he's the subject of a bronze statue in his home town of Te Kuiti, the ultimate accolade, to go alongside those of life membership of New Zealand Rugby, a place in the International Rugby Hall of Fame, a knighthood and a trophy named the Meads Cup for the Heartland rugby competition, which was possibly the area of the game with which he most identified.



What a legacy he has left for all to cherish and admire. No wonder the Meads Cup is a cherished prize for the winning team each year in our Heartland competition.

Colin Meads talking about Jonah!!!



I've seen a lot people like him, but they weren't playing on the wing.

— Colin Meads —

AZ QUOTES

Congratulations to all the young Thames Valley Players who have been chosen to play in the Chief's under 20's Heartland side. We are so proud of you - See the team below...

CHIEFS HEARTLAND
UNDER 20S

HUNTER ARNOLD	TAUPO MARIST RUGBY CLUB
DONOVAN BAILEY	WAIHO RUGBY & SPORTS CLUB
KINGSTON BEAUCHAMP	TONGARIRO UNITED RUGBY CLUB
RICO BELL	WAITETE RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB
TORBAN BLOK	UNITED U21S
RIAN BUTLER	UNITED U21S
KORBIN CHWESIK	UNITED U21S
ADAM CLAGUE	MERCURY BAY RUGBY AND SPORT CLUB
ZEKE COLLIER	THAMES RUGBY & SPORTS CLUB
JACK DALLAS-JOHNSON	TAUPO MARIST RUGBY CLUB
HUNTER DOWNARD	TAUPO MARIST RUGBY CLUB
FOZZ GILBERT	WHANGAMATA RUGBY & SPORTS CLUB
IHAKA HARPER-DENT	HAUTAPU (PLAYER OF ORIGIN)
CALEB HAZLETON	WAIHO RUGBY & SPORTS CLUB
CALLUM HEDLEY	WAITETE RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB
OSTEN HULL	HAURAKI NORTH RUGBY CLUB
KEAHREY HANSON	PIO PIO RUGBY CLUB
AIDON MCKAIN	UNITED U21S
BLAZE MCLEOD-KEENE	TAUMARUNUI DISTRICTS RUGBY CLUB
JAYDEN PARI	PIO PIO RUGBY CLUB
POURI-LANE PETOREKANI	WAIHI ATHLETIC RUGBY CLUB
KYAN REYMER	PIO PIO RUGBY CLUB
BRAIDEN RICHARDS	WAIHO RUGBY & SPORTS CLUB
MARSHALL SHEEHAN	HAMILTON MARIST (PLAYER OF ORIGIN)
HUNTER TALIVAI-LEYDON	TAUPO RUGBY & SPORTS CLUB
TAINÉ TUKUA-GRANT	TAUPO MARIST RUGBY CLUB
RIAN WHITE	TAUPO MARIST RUGBY CLUB

Obituary Ray Wells # 423



7th August 1938 – 16th August 2024.

Ray Wells passed away in Morrinsville on 16th August 2024. He was a very prominent wing three quarter in the late 1950s and 1960s and is remembered for his powerful running and lethal left foot centering kick. Ray made his first- class debut for Thames Valley against North Auckland in 1956 when he was only 17 years of age.

He went on to play another 61 games for the Valley and in doing so scored 96 points. Ray played in several All Black trials and was unlucky not to be chosen for the 1960 All Blacks tour to South Africa. He played in that famous 1662 win over Australia and when Thames Valley toured the South Island in 1964 and played 4 games in eight days. he scored a try in every match: against Otago, North Otago, Mid Canterbury and

Canterbury. He ended his playing career with two seasons for Waikato in 1965 and 1966. He scored a try for Waikato against South Africa on his 27th birthday. Ray followed the fortunes of Thames Valley closely and was keenly interested in all areas of Thames Valley rugby.

A look back at one of our Thames Valley legends. From the TVRFU 2016 AGM.....



Last night at the Thames Valley Rugby Union AGM, Waihou's club Patron and Life Member Andy Townsend, was presented with a Life Membership from Valley Chairman Graham Hallett.

Andy was first involvement with Thames Valley Rugby was as a Provincial Representative Player, making his Valley debut in 1959 and played a total of 23 games for the union.

Andy was a member of the famous 1962 Thames Valley team which defeated Australia 16-14 in Te Aroha. He scored one try in his first class career and made his final appearance in 1963.

Once his playing days were over Andy concentrated on club rugby but maintained his link to Thames Valley through various delegates' roles at Thames valley level. By 1985 Andy had withdrawn from active involvement at club level and was approached to join the Thames Valley Disciplinary Committee because of his background at both club and provincial level. After giving the offer due consideration Andy agreed and so began a thirty year involvement on arguably the most demanding and difficult committee in any rugby union.

Andy was always able to consider all points of view and provide wise counsel. With his knowledge and dedication he became a well-respected member of the Judicial Committee. Andy served continuously on the Disciplinary Committee until the end of 2014, when no longer be able to make the weekly trip to Paeroa to attend hearings. 30 years of service in any role is remarkable and his contribution to Thames Valley Rugby in this capacity is outstanding and deserves appropriate recognition.

Andy is still a regular supporter at all Thames Valley home games and is easily recognisable in his club jacket – he was at the Thames Valley game at Te Aroha against North Otago and attended the aftermatch at the Waihou Club rooms a couple of weeks ago.



The Thames Valley Vixens played Wairarapa – Bush in the curtain raiser before Thames Valley v North Otago game in Te Aroha. Hannah Riddle-Pelchen striding out for the Vixens.

A Photograph from the centenary celebrations of the Thames Valley Rugby Union held in 2022 in Te Aroha - the photograph is of the 1980's decade. There are many legends of Thames Valley Rugby in this photograph.



It was a great day for both the Swamp Foxes in Te Kuiti and the Vixens in Whanganui.



A report from the under 16's/Under 19's women plus our Vixens - all who played in Whanganui composed with thanks by Rosè Fitzell.

Under 16's : - All the U16 Thames Valley girls really played well for their first game. They worked well as a team with both sides being able to score early in the first half. Whanganui then managed to get in an extra try and conversion. They went into half time ahead 12 – 5. After half time the Thames Valley girls battled away with both teams demonstrating excellent defensive strategies. This resulted in neither team scoring. From reports some of the Thames Valley girls did suffer from some high tackles. The game therefore was an awesome first hit out for the team. The girls really enjoyed their game, and it will be exciting to see what they achieve in their next match.

Under 19's: - The team turned in an impressive performance throughout the game. Whanganui had some solid girls, and they came out “hissing”. The Valley team kept their composure, and their defence kept Whanganui out for the first few minutes. The game then loosened up and it was try for try for the rest of the half. The Valley backline played well working off the forwards and found the try line because of some clever set plays. In fact both teams demonstrated a strong attack and strong defensive work. The Valley girls matched whatever the opposition threw at them. At halftime the score was 10-10. After the half time break the under 19 girls found their confidence and saw the chance to take this game away from Whanganui. As a result the team threw everything at them. With the Thames Valley forwards working hard to draw in the Whanganui forward defenders. The backline then maintained the ball well and were able to move the ball from side to side all over the field. This relentless effort created opportunities to score three tries and they only let their opposition sneak in one more for their side. Special mention for Coach Matt and Manager Briar to see three years hard work result in their first win. They have created an amazing team environment which promises to deliver more during the rest of their season.

Vixens: - In this telecast fixture the Valley wāhine produced an incredible game in front of the many Thames Valley fans sitting in the stadium. It was also great that our under 16's and u19's were able to watch from the stand. The Vixens demonstrated to everyone what they were capable of during a very well-constructed first half of rugby. It was smart, connected and clever and they achieved a comfortable lead with Whanganui on the back foot for much of the half. There was a strong head wind blowing our kicks almost backwards on occasions. It would be a fair assessment to state that Whanganui was not prepared for this onslaught. When this occurred the Vixens maintained the ball in hand instead of kicking it away and it worked well. After halftime Whanganui managed to claw back the gap which resulted in some incredibly exciting rugby. We had the wind in the second half and the girls worked incredibly hard. Into the last 15 minutes we saw a few key players injured and some of the reserves take the field. Issy Drysden took the field after playing for the under 19's. This is an indication of the depth that is growing. In the last final minutes Whanganui attacked relentlessly but the Vixens held them out. Petra Zwart (the under 19's assistant coach) played, which caused very loud cheering from the two curtain raiser teams every time she was near the ball as the crowd would erupt. It was an excellent and well-earned result from the Vixens to come away with the win. Congratulations to the management group on achieving this great result. Girls'/Women's rugby is growing, and the girls are building an amazing legacy here in Thames Valley with help from staff and team managements. Perhaps our three teams all joining together to create one large circle on the field at the end of the game is an indication of this.