



Thames Valley Rugby Union Newsletter - May 2025.

A message from our Chairman Gordon.

I am thrilled with the 2025 club competition that we have been witnessing throughout the 2025 club season to date for several reasons – the games have been all hard fought, close and the weather has been very kind although a couple of weeks back it did indeed change to damp conditions. Of course there have been large crowds on the sidelines. Club competitions always bring out all the passionate vocal supporters from all our clubs. People enjoy watching close games, with big hits (legal) and great skills on show. I must also state that most of the games I have watched have all been hard fought affairs with the lead often changing several times throughout fixtures. I enjoy that our referees are continuing to complete a sterling job controlling



the games. One thing I see is that the work completed by our referees is of a consistently high standard week in and week out. The role for these superb folk is a voluntary one and is enjoyable for them all for most of the time.

TVRFU Referee Coach Mike Dilnott.

The juggernaut that has continued to impress of course is the Waihi Athletic senior side although it has not reached the same levels as they did in 2024. They remained unbeaten

until they played Mercury Bay in an amazing game at home in Whitianga. Before this game, Waihi had won several of their close matches played this year. Like most clubs they are slowly gaining momentum as they create the connections required to play together seamlessly and efficiently but in a game of two halves, they let the triumphant Mercury Bay stretch the lead too far in Waihi's disjointed first half. I have seen the other clubs getting close to achieving victory, but it had eluded them. Thames, Paeroa, **Mercury Bay (right)** and so on all have been playing well. Their teams are large, powerful and capable but some of the players lacked fitness, skills to execute under pressure, discipline and being able to execute defensive patterns for the whole



game. All these things require complete buy in from the whole team to ensure success. Mercury Bay defended well enough in a tight second half comeback from Waihi. In some games this year I have seen players giving away penalties for things that are controllable – like being off side at rucks. Sometimes basic skills such as finding touch with kicks, passing accurately and getting up off the ground after being in a ruck are sometimes worrying for coaches as they worry about gaps in defence. I am amazed at the number of players who get up and walk back into position after a ruck. The other thing I see is the lack of talk on the field – I am always amazed when I watch from the sideline how quiet players are when playing – very few players talk at all let alone talk positively. I enjoy watching teams that seem to celebrate great effort and excellent execution that leads to a well taken try. These teams always have a positive vibe going throughout the whole team along with their supporters and community. After games team cohesion is easily seen – dress codes, players mixing with all the supporters from both sides, and getting out of the changing rooms quickly before the supporters and sponsors leave. I for one loved the game between Waihi and Mercury Bay as it went down to the wire and the effort from both teams was exemplary and passionate in front of a wonderful expectant crowd. It was great!!! The very next game against the strong side from Paeroa resulted in a 29 - 21 loss for the gallant Mercury Bay side. While Waihi put together a strong second half against Thames to take the win 45-19 to move back up the rankings to the top position. How good is all our rugby this year!!



The 2025 Super rugby competition continues to truck along nicely with teams all now starting to realise all points and games are crucial. Obviously, upsets are also important – if a leading team is beaten by another team outside the top six it can cause huge problems for qualifying or for getting a home final spot. I think there have been some cracking games this year. There have been some major inconsistent performances and results – none more so than the Blues and

Hurricanes along with some of the Australian sides. Pacifica rugby although again inconsistent away from their home bases have performed slightly better this year. I would love to see the South African sides involved again just to see another level and style being exhibited. Now it is a free flowing running game that is being played. To have a high score in any game is an indication of very poor defence and poor defensive training. One thing I saw when the African sides played was that they physically dominated possession, field position and strangled teams with defence and size. They do this by their kicking strategies and their ability to choke attacking teams with their offensive defence. Their teams are also patient and can hold onto possession for long periods of play. One strategy that will be under scrutiny this year from the referees is their incessant **“injury”** breaks that they have utilised in the past when the referees allowed them to **“recover”** by stopping play. This should cause the Springboks a few issues when they play games during the 2025 All Black season. It will be interesting to see international rugby teams change their tactics to cope, or, for that matter copy their tactics and utilise their own the bomb squad tactics. I have also been following the Australian coaching saga that continued to unfold like a soap opera. They

finally solved their problems when both Joe Schmitt and **Les Kiss (right)** were able to work through their respective roles and find a solution. I was disappointed that New Zealand was not able to retain Schmitt before he went to Australia as I think he has a different approach to the game – (as I believe he thinks differently about the game - a little in the Tony Brown style). New Zealand rugby needed to retain people like these two coaches in my



opinion, but we continue to suffer financial constraints across all aspects of the game here in New Zealand and both have gone offshore for now. NZ rugby must solve their money issues ASAP.



I read about the recent sad passing of former long standing doctor for both the All Black and Warriors - **Dr John Mayhew**. He was a leading sports doctor who committed so much time to being the first specialised rugby doctor. He was the first world leading sports specialist in his field. Our President Ross Cooper attended his funeral as Doc was part of the team when Ross was involved with the AB's. He told me there was a very large attendance of family, friends and rugby folk from around the world attend the service at Rosmini College and afterwards at the North Harbour Rugby Stadium. For one person to spend 16 years as an All Black Doctor and 14 years as a Warriors' doctor speaks volumes for his dedication to his role as their doctor. I know that some of our Valley players were treated by Doc when others could not seem to sort their injuries out as he was very generous with his time and looked after all players who asked.

May I give a large shout out to all our clubs as we start to get to the pointy end of the season. I have been thrilled with the tenacity of our clubs to field teams this season and continue to front up. We are proud of the effort firstly put in with the clubs to continue to participate in rugby each week. Also thanks to our hard working staff and our coaches that go along to support the clubs when asked or approached. Please remember they are there to assist if needed.

It would be remiss of me if I did not acknowledge and sincerely congratulate the **Ngatea Rugby and Sports Club** on reaching their 50 year celebrations shortly. They are a committed club, excelling in administration, playing, and supporting initiatives in Thames Valley. They have produced quality players and administrators over fifty years, and I wish them continued success for the next fifty years. Now that winter has finally arrived with the arrival of

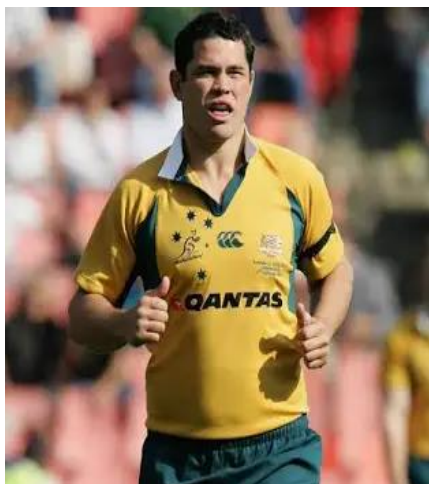


some rain and colder weather, we can expect a few surprises in the results as teams adapt their game plans to the conditions. Some teams have players that can control the game plan well and

change tactics to suit the conditions. They will continue to excel while others may struggle a little. Others may suffer multiple injuries which can also affect their performances. Adaptability, creativity and excellent skillsets always help but turning up to training is the most important factor in ensuring ongoing improvement and success. Can I wish all teams every success in their quest to make finals rugby this year. If your team does make the finals remember to get along and support them no matter what!! As usual if you see me around the area or on the sidelines please come up and have a chat or share a beer with me.

Regards Gordon.

A few random Highlights of Thames Valley History



1922: Formation of Thames Valley Rugby 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 (above playing for Australia)** and **Keith Robinson (right All Blacks, Chiefs, Taranaki, TVRFU)-**, 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.

2024: Swamp Foxes win Meads Cup , downing Mid – Canterbury in Te Aroha in front of a huge crowd.



Keith Robinson - All Blacks, Chiefs, Taranaki, Waikato and Thames Valley.

Robinson was a beast of a player and exactly the sort of person you'd expect a lock from the early-mid 2000's to be. Keith started his career just down the road from the small rural town of Te Aroha where he was raised as he turned out for Thames Valley in the 1998 and 1999 NPC seasons. He made just over 20 appearances for the Swamp Foxes where his tough as nails attitude and ability to do the dirty work earned him a shot with Taranaki. Once again it was another short stint in his new provincial colours, but that didn't lessen the impact he made as he helped Taranaki to a solid mid-table finish whilst also earning his first Super Rugby contract with the Chiefs in the process.

Just as he had done the previous few years it didn't take him long to impress those at the higher levels as after only two seasons of Super Rugby in 2001 and 2002, he earned his first call up to the All Blacks. He was chucked straight in at the deep end as he was asked to make his debut starting alongside Ali Williams against England at Twickenham. He played a part in both of New Zealand's other end of year tour matches against France and Wales, but it remained unsure whether John Mitchell was fully convinced his new lock was up to test standard.

The following year Robinson started all 11 of the Chiefs Super 12 matches, but himself and the Chiefs struggled to find their best form as they barely held out the Cats and the Sharks in a battle for the wooden spoon. The All Blacks selectors decided he hadn't shown enough improvement to merit a spot in the national side, so instead Robinson got to play his first full season in his new provincial colours for Waikato. He made massive strides towards improving his form during the campaign as his work in the tight and especially at lineout time helped his Waikato side reach the Semi-Finals; he even managed to score his first and only try of his career in their early season win over Auckland.

2004 saw a continuation in the upward trend as the Chiefs finished in a much improved Semi-Final position where Keith's resurgence of form earned him an All Black recall by new All Blacks coach Graham Henry. He played his first tests on home soil as he helped the All Blacks on their way to wins over England and the Pacific Islands, but once again his progress stopped or at least paused there as a serious back injury ruled him out of the entirety of the 2005 season.

Through sheer grit and determination not only was Robinson able to make one remarkable comeback to be playing rugby in general, but a second comeback after some solid showings for the Chiefs and Waikato meant he was given yet another call-up to the All Blacks for the 2006 end of year tour. Then 2007 came around and just as it started to look like Robinson had turned a corner and fully cemented himself in the national setup the All Blacks crashed out of the World Cup in the quarter finals, and with that Robinson had crashed out of rugby all together at just 30 years of age and with a tick over 120 professional matches to his name, citing the recurring injuries as his reason for leaving the game early.

Coach Bob comments:

It has been a very interesting club season to date – fantastic close hard fought games that have encouraged the supporters to get out and watch/support their respective club sides. Unlike last year there seems to be a few more clubs playing well enough to make the finals this year – Mercury Bay, Paeroa, Thames and Waihi are all setting the standard to reach the finals. All four teams have forwards who are effective, physically fit, and capable in both attack and defence. They also have talented backs that can score tries and work together on defence. This year has seen remarkable running rugby and outstanding forward contests in close-quarter plays. Close games are frequently decided by narrow margins that result from suboptimal decisions, inadequate

technique, insufficient skill execution, or a lack of fitness. Under pressure players can make mistakes that can be crucial when adding up the points at the end of the day. Watching from the sidelines, I am often surprised by players' poor skill execution and mistakes like kickers missing touch from penalties. The top teams are ones that can effectively manage the pressure and get "out of jail" in tight defensive situations. As I have said in the past fitness plays a key part as well. Fit rugby teams often score in the final play of games to win. The All Blacks have repeatedly achieved this in test matches over the years as we all know.

The fine weather has ended, and winter has begun with cold, wet, or windy conditions that are not ideal for rugby, especially at club rugby level. Despite the wet weather, I always plan to attend as many club rugby matches as I can. I do have adequate wet weather gear and sturdy work boots. Additionally, I have a reliable golf umbrella but usually I can find somewhere out of the rain. Wet



weather brings different skills into prominence and decision making is crucial. Top players in pivotal positions are especially important. Kicking skills are important both for clearing the line under pressure and for goal kicking. Key drivers and leaders are also key components to a team's success as the winter weather bites. I will be able to watch the rest of club season with a keen eye looking at players with these skills. No doubt the Valley selectors will also be thinking about the Ranfurly shield fixture that is on the horizon against Taranaki. Getting together a group of players that can compete with confidence for this illustrious trophy against a tough first division side is a priority for them. It will be a fabulous opportunity to watch them compete the 2025 Heartland rugby as well as a shield challenge.

Jonah watching on

Rugby at the top level often relies on the wisdom of top players who have been around for a vast amount of time. Players gain experience and knowledge through being exposed to the many different teams they are asked to play against. Obviously, players, coaches and support staff work hard with their analysis of any opposition that they are playing. One thing is that they also develop game plans for all opposition teams they are programmed to play. Modern technology and game analysis specialists also supply teams with an enormous treasure trove to gain information from. Everything is studied and facts are established to share – every test side does it. We obviously as amateur clubs and fully employed full time working players do not do this to the same level but our coaches/players do spend some of their spare time looking at the opposition teams. Attending the two training runs and the quality of the work the team completes allows the

coaches and senior players to hopefully devise a suitable game plan for their weekly opposition. I know from personal experience from my playing days back a few decades ago we were nowhere as well informed as players these days are. We just enjoyed getting out and running around trying our best to win. We then shared a few beers afterwards often while the family usually milked the cows!!! How times have changed -

To finish the win by Mercury Bay over Waihi was apparently a great game and I offer my congratulations to the winners Mercury Bay and to Waihi for their record number of wins on the trot and their sterling fight back against the Bay in the second half. Mercury Bay was then beaten by Paeroa in the next round while Waihi beat Thames. The next game between Mercury Bay will be a cracker in Waihi and I am already working on my son so I can



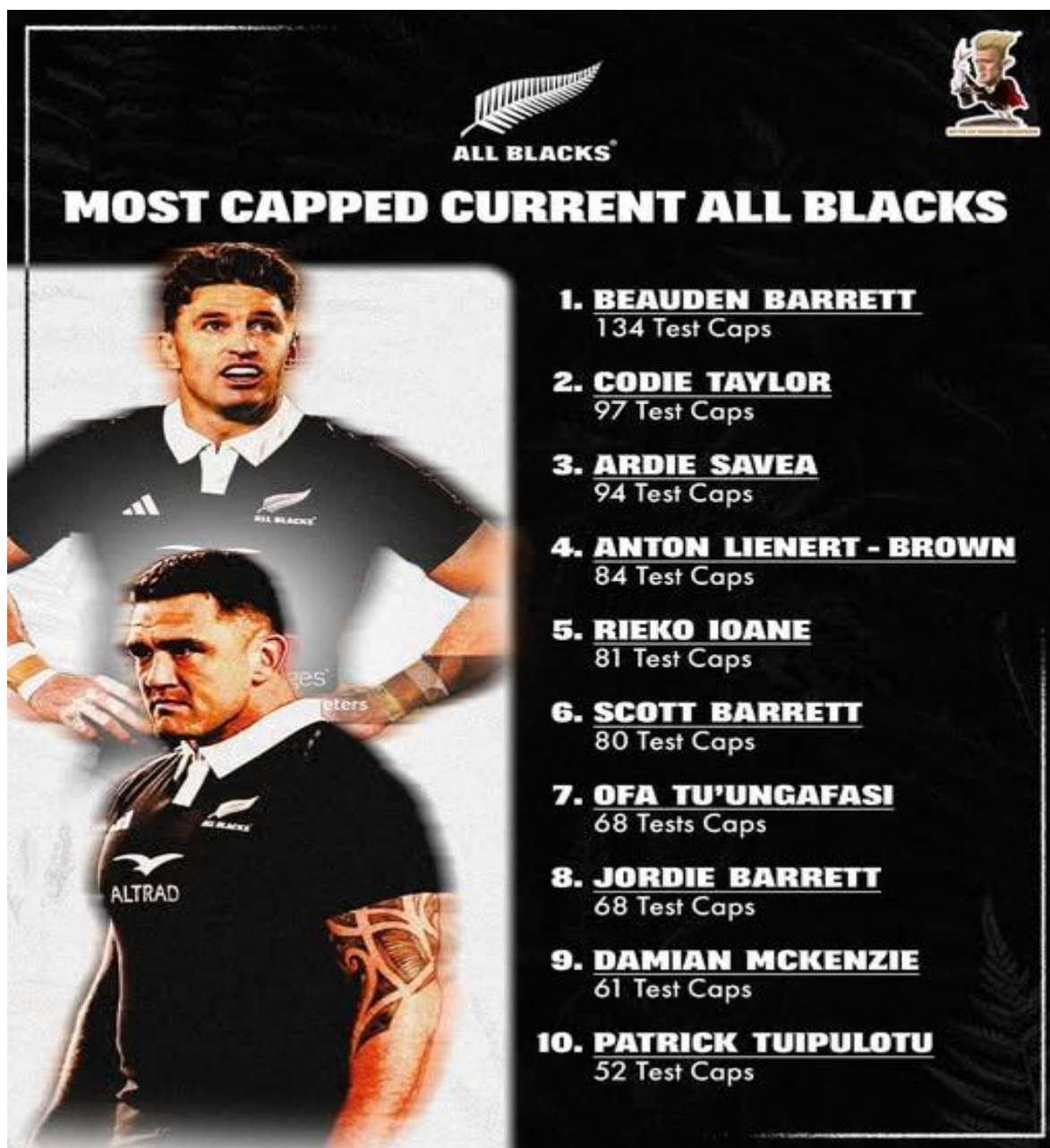
attend and watch the game. In conclusion I think there have been some awesome games this year including our increased number of our ladies sides – long may it continue as we start to get towards the second half and finals of the club season. Club rugby 2025 has been indeed special this year. I trust it continues right through to the end of the season.

Regards

Coach Bob.



Part of the huge crowd that watched the three games of Women's rugby at Ngatea held on the 4th of May in glorious weather. The position the photograph was taken is looking towards the grandstand from the far side of other field. Congratulations for the great day of the ever improving displays of Women's rugby here in Thames Valley – one thing that is certain is that Women's Rugby will continue to grow in popularity here in the Valley.



The graphic features the All Blacks logo at the top center and a small illustration of a player in the top right corner. On the left, two players are shown in their black jerseys with white collars. The player in the background is Beauden Barrett, and the player in the foreground is Scott Barrett. To the right, a list of the top ten players by Test caps is provided.

Rank	Player Name	Test Caps
1.	BEAUDEN BARRETT	134 Test Caps
2.	CODIE TAYLOR	97 Test Caps
3.	ARDIE SAVEA	94 Test Caps
4.	ANTON LIENERT - BROWN	84 Test Caps
5.	RIEKO IOANE	81 Test Caps
6.	SCOTT BARRETT	80 Test Caps
7.	OFA TU'UNGAFASI	68 Tests Caps
8.	JORDIE BARRETT	68 Test Caps
9.	DAMIAN MCKENZIE	61 Test Caps
10.	PATRICK TUIPULOTU	52 Test Caps

The above illustrates the top ten All Black Players who are currently playing super rugby in 2025 – although Anton Lienert-Brown is now out injured.

1995 winning team for the Thames Valley Rugby Union: See Player List on the next page.

Following Thames Valley's success in 1990 Thames Valley Spent two years in second division before returning to Third division in 1993. Playoffs had been introduced in the 1992 season and the Swamp Foxes were losing semi-finalists in 1993 and 1994. Thames Valley had a difficult start to the 1995 season by playing Waikato, North Harbour, Northland and Bay of Plenty in a Coronation Shield competition. These matches were all lost. The NPC competition started with a sound 44-17 win over North Otago at Oamaru, but the Swamp Foxes lost to Wanganui 17-6 at Paeroa in the next match. However they went onto win all their remaining games, including a semi-final against Horowhenua (38-17.) Poverty Bay were outclassed 47 points to 8 in the final at Paeroa.

Information supplied by Kelly Plummer TVRFU Historian.

Our Thames Valley 1995 Champions

Cap	Name	Club	1995.
• 787	Chris Allen	Hauraki North	6
• 807	Kevin Ashworth	Thames	3
• 794	Daniel Barrier	Thames	4
• 786	Jason Bartley	Hauraki North	5
• 814	Dion R Bennett	Hauraki North	4
• 821	David W Bennett	Hauraki North	1
• 815	Mark Bright	Waihou	6
• 819	Brian Campbell	Ngatea	1
• 806	Howard Chappel	Athletic	3
• 825	Paul Clark	Whangamata	6
• 823	Dave Dillon	Ngatea	8
• 715	Greg Ellis	Thames	8
• 782	Andrew Gibbs	Ngatea	10
• 822	Jarrold Gallagher	Ngatea	3
• 810	Dennis Hazelton	Te Aroha COB	12
• 797	Carl Hoeft	Te Aroha COB	12
• 824	Warren Hodges	Taupiri	10
• 746	David McCallum	Hauraki North	9
• 773	Carl McDuff	Hauraki North	15
• 768	Gavin McLiver	Hauraki North	15 Captain
• 820	Nooroa Manu	Ngatea	13
• 813	Stephen Meek	Waihou	4
• 774	Dean Moloney	Thames	7
• 816	Sean Muir	Mercury Bay	5
• 826	Brendan O'Carroll	Ngatea	1
• 812	Bob Rigger	Te Aroha COB	10
• 805	Jody Rohrlach	Thames	4
• 818	Paul Schuler	Te Aroha COB	2
• 803	Glenn Sutton	West	15
• 726	Richie Taylor	Thames	16 TVRFU Centurion.
• 808	Frank Teague	Waihou	11
• 802	Shane Temata	Te Aroha COB	12
• 811	Carl Tremayne	Thames	14
• 817	Paul Wilson	Waihou	11
• 781	Roger Wilton	Waihou	13 TVRFU Centurion.



Willie Hetaraka Coach.

Warren Gatland Coach.

Looking back at our All Black history: Wilson Whineray

The great New Zealand rugby writer T.P. McLean declared ‘unhesitatingly’ that Wilson (‘Noddy’) Whineray was New Zealand’s ‘greatest captain’. Colin Meads agreed that as a captain Whineray ‘inspired fierce loyalty’.

He captained the All Blacks 68 times in his 77 appearances between 1957 and 1965. The All Blacks lost only four of the 30 tests in which he was captain. Awarded an OBE in 1962 and a knighthood in 1998 for services to sport and business, Whineray was also NZ Sportsman of the Year in 1965. The Auckland-born Whineray played first class rugby for an incredible six unions because of his time at university and work as an agricultural field cadet. It was for his home union that he played most of his rugby. At Auckland he benefitted from the coaching of Fred Allen and captained the side to unprecedented success in the Ranfurly Shield.



Primarily a loosehead prop, Whineray was part of a formidable All Black pack that included Colin



Meads, Kel Tremain and Ken Gray. It was often argued that he was a better leader than scrummager, but according to Colin Meads it was ‘hard to recall a time when our scrum suffered because of any weakness’. A lineout move that was perfected by the All Blacks on the 1963–64 northern hemisphere tour was known as ‘Willie Away’ after its key feature, which involved Whineray peeling away from the lineout to receive the ball from a halfback position to set up attacks in midfield. Following his retirement from the game Whineray studied as a Harkness Fellow at Harvard University and carved out a successful business career. His status in the game was recognised internationally in 2007 when he was inducted into the International Rugby Hall of Fame in London. He died in Auckland on 22 October 2012.

The Ranfurly Shield

Presented by: New Zealand Rugby Union

Type: Provincial challenge trophy

First contested: 1904

Current holder: Taranaki

Current season: 2025

The Ranfurly Shield, colloquially known as the Log o' Wood, is a trophy in New Zealand's domestic rugby union competition. First played for in 1904, the Shield is based on a challenge system. The holding union must defend the shield in challenge matches, which are usually played at the shield holder's home venue, and if the challenger is successful in their challenge they will become the new holder of the Shield. There is a tradition for the first challenges of a new rugby season to be played against smaller associations from the Heartland Championship.



Although the professional era of rugby has seen other competitions, such as the NPC and Super Rugby, detracting from the pre-eminence of the Ranfurly Shield, many regard it as the greatest prize in New Zealand domestic rugby. This is mainly due to its long history, the fact that every challenge is a sudden-death defence of the Shield, and that any team has a chance to win.

Taranaki won the Shield from Tasman on 6 October 2024.

History

In 1901 the Governor of New Zealand, The 5th Earl of Ranfurly, announced that he would present a cup to the New Zealand Rugby Football Union to be used as the prize in a competition of their choosing. When the trophy, a shield, arrived, the NZRFU decided that it would be awarded to the union with the best record in the 1902 season, and thenceforth be the subject of a challenge system. Auckland, unbeaten in 1902, was presented with the shield. The shield was designed as a trophy for association football, not rugby. The picture in the centrepiece was a soccer one and was modified by adding goal posts on the soccer goal in the picture to create a rugby scene. The alterations to the centrepiece are still apparent.

Auckland were on tour in 1903 and did not play any home games, and thus did not have to defend the Shield. Their first defence was against Wellington in 1904 and was unsuccessful.[citation needed] Since the introduction of the National Provincial Championship in 1976, all home games a Shield-holder plays in the NPC or Heartland Championship, during league play are automatically challenge matches.

Auckland holds the record for the greatest number of consecutive Shield defences, 61 matches between 14 September 1985 and 18 September 1993. During this period Auckland took the Shield on tour to provincial unions that, mainly for financial reasons, would be unlikely to be able

to mount a challenge for the trophy. While dismissed by some critics, usually because of the one-sided scores, it was mostly regarded as a success by those involved.

In 1994 when Canterbury wrested the Shield from Waikato, it was in battered condition, with large cracks, chips and peeled varnish. Nearly a century of use had taken its toll. Canterbury player Chris England, skilled in woodwork, fully renovated it, bringing it back into pristine condition. In 2023 the Shield was restored over nine months by Tri Peek in Waikanae, Wellington, who had been repairing the trophy for several years before the full restoration decision. The original Oak shield was replaced with English Oak from the Hutt Valley in New Zealand, seasoned for 5 years. The badges, already recently replaced in 2012 were moved to the new shield. The old Shield, which had gradually become worn down by 118 years of handling and an untold number of celebrations, has been blessed and decommissioned by NZ Rugby Māori cultural adviser the late Luke Crawford, recognising its status as a taonga in rugby. The replacement shield was accidentally broken after being dropped on a concrete floor in September 2023 just after Hawke's Bay had won it from Wellington.



The rugby ground at Manaia which will host the Swamp Foxes when the team faces Taranaki for the Ranfurly Shield on Saturday, July 19th, 2025.

Let's get behind Thames Valley by supporting the team in Manaia!!!!

