

VODAFONE



Sir Peter Leitch Club

AT MT SMART STADIUM, HOME OF THE MIGHTY VODAFONE WARRIORS

7 April 2016

Newsletter #116

Wins at Home Will Do Me By David Kemeys



LET ME get this on the record. I like Michael Burgess, the man who writes league for the Herald on Sunday. Never met the bloke, don't always agree with what he writes, but I think he's generally very good.

On Sunday he wrote all about how the Vodafone Warriors have to improve their playing record across the ditch in Oz. Hard to disagree, but up to a point I do.

It must be a horror show constantly crossing the Tasman to play. Just think about when you load the kids in the car for that trip to Australia. You have to be at the airport two or three hours early, add another hour or so just in case for the traffic. So effectively you are up quite early, spending hours in an airport, hours more on a plane, hours more getting through Customs at the other end, travelling to a hotel somewhere, then boarding a bus to drive who knows how long so you can train.

Now chuck in the time difference, unfamiliar surroundings, and being away from loved ones and everything that is normal for you. Your routines are in bits, the food is all over the place, you probably don't sleep as well as you normally would, etc, etc.

Next suffer through yet another bus ride, this one to a hostile ground, and just generally deal with being the away side.

Now play for 80 minutes and repeat the process to get home.

Now do it again next week because you have back to back away games.

Every side that comes to Mt Smart endures the same – in reverse of course – but they endure it once a season.

Burgess argues, and it is quite right, that if the Warriors are to do well, they need to improve their record in Australia, which let's face it, has not been great, never more than four wins a year between 2012 and 2015.

He points out the Cowboys are outstanding away from Townsville, the Rabbitohs won two-thirds of away games, and the Roosters dropped just two away in 2013.

Yet, but playing in Sydney is playing in Sydney.

I'd prefer that we learned to win more often at Mt Smart.

Your home ground should be one where other teams fear to come.

It should be noisy, hostile, and defended like your lives depended on it.

We have all heard the phrase – fortress.

Half of your games are played there – give or take all the constant game shuffling, but that's another story – and winning all of those would virtually guarantee a finish in the eight.

The truth is we don't, and I doubt visiting Mt Smart instils fear in other clubs.

How many sides win at Suncorp, or AMI in Melbourne?

I'll admit to being selfish here. As a fan I want to go to a game and I want to see my side win.

So I'm sorry Michael, while, sure, I'd love to see us win more often in Australia, I'd far rather we won more often at home.

Former captain Simon Mannering said it all in the Burgess article: "Our aim is to not to make a big deal out of having to travel, never use it as an excuse. It's got to be an attitude thing. It doesn't matter where you are playing. You have just got to perform. We haven't done that consistently."

Heart Rate Went Through The Roof

IT WILL come as no surprise to anyone that the highlight of the weekend for me was avoiding a heart attack when the Vodafone Warriors tipped over the Roosters in golden point with a try to gladden the heart.

Former Rooster Roger Tuivasa-Sheck broke his former team-mates hearts, slicing on to a wonderful Tuimoala Lolohea ball after the little winger caught a bomb and burst up the field.

It was an absolutely thrilling game and to win it 32-28 was sweet justice, because for the life of me I can not understand how we were not given a penalty try early in the game.

That is all history now, and all I care about is that it is back to back wins for the first time in I do not know how long, and our first win across the ditch since round 15 last season.

Bring On Manly

That second win, after we beat Newcastle on Easter Monday, makes us two wins and three losses, with Manly coming to Mt Smart this Saturday night.

It was great to see some of the players who have copped criticism, much of it unwarranted in my view, do so well.

Tuivasa-Sheck had his best game in our colours, Shaun Johnson got about his work well, and Issac Luke was very good.

But the player I was really pleased for was Jacob Lilyman, who made his 150th NRL appearance, and that is some achievement. Lilyman is much under-rated, and I thought was exceptional against the plucky Roosters.

Now that my heart has recovered I will start trying to drum up a decent crowd for Saturday.

There is nothing like seeing the game live, so come along to Mt Smart. The gates open at 5pm ahead of the NYC taking the field at 5.15pm, and the NRL side at 7.30pm. The match day sponsor is Woodstock.

Here's hoping we can go three from three. Go the mighty Vodafone Warriors.

Big Ben Steps Up Too

Prop Ben Matulino put together a 67-minute effort making 124 metres from 15 runs, plus 34 tackles.

More of the same please Ben!

All The Way With Issac

There were also big numbers from hooker Issac Luke too. He was on the field the full 81 minutes, making 127 metres from 14 carries, including six dummy half runs with six tackle breaks, plus 30 tackles.

Headline Grabbers

But as I said, and rightly so, it was Tuivasa-Sheck who grabbed the headlines. He finished with a game-high 171 metres from 18 runs. His match-winning stunner aside, he came up with try assists for Manu Vatuvei and for Solomone Kata's second try, three line break assists, three tackle breaks and 14 supports. Not bad is it?

Lolohea, as well as sending Tuivasa-Sheck away for his moment of glory, made 160 metres from 12 runs, produced another try assist for Johnson, and made plus two line breaks.

Welcome Shaun

I'm excited to hear that contract negotiations were completed for a player swap that will see Canterbury back rower Shaun Lane join us in exchange for second rower Raymond Faitala-Mariner.

Don't get me wrong. I'm sad to see Faitala-Mariner go. I thought he was a player with plenty of potential, but Lane is a monster at 1.98cm, and is still only 21.

Both players were off contract at the end of the 2016 season, and will get immediate releases.

And they both made their NRL debuts last year, Faitala-Mariner going on to play 11 times, and Lane appearing in each of the Bulldogs' last 14 matches.

Lane joins on a one-year contract.

"This is mutually beneficial for both clubs," Vodafone Warriors recruitment and development manager Tony Iro said. "Ray had been seeking a release but we weren't prepared to allow him to move until we were able to find a replacement. In Shaun, we have a player who brings the qualities we were after to strengthen our squad."

Lane played NYC football for the Bulldogs in 2013 and 2014, and was rookie of the year in 2015, winning the Steve Mortimer Medal.

"I'm excited to be here and just want to do all I can to play as much first-grade football as possible."

Bungle Admitted

NRL referees' boss Tony Archer has admitted the bunker bungled a no-try decision against the Warriors. He said Roosters utility Aidan Guerra should have been sin-binned after grabbing Ryan Hoffman, but the bunker was correct in not awarding a penalty try.

That's because: "Obviously there are a number of elements to this decision...it's not a penalty try because Roosters fullback Latrell Mitchell is present and the ball is loose. In relation to the interference, only a penalty was awarded. It is the responsibility of all officials to assess the seriousness - in this particular breach the player should have been sin binned."

Lolohea Earns Praise

Andrew McFadden praised Tui Lolohea's effort to set up Roger Tuivasa-Sheck's golden point try. Under pressure, Lolohea claimed a difficult high ball and then split the defence with a great run, sending RTS in.

"There was a huge amount of pressure on that catch. You've got to stay composed and make sure you don't get ahead of yourself. We've had that same edge and they're building their combination."

Stats Well Worth A look

Same old story, behind in the penalty count 9-7, and not flash on the completion rate either, just 67% to the Roosters 77%.

But we were pretty much dominant everywhere else, making 20-odd more runs than the Roosters, 300 more metres, darting out of dummy-half twice as often, and making 7 line breaks to 3.

It was the Roosters though that made the most tackle breaks, 34 to 29, and missed fewer tackles – 29 to our 34, so certainly something to work on there.

As you would expect when you win, our kicking metres were better, and we made fewer tackles.

No Joy For Juniors

The Sydney Roosters, no other word for it, thrashed us 44-6 at Central Coast Stadium in Gosford.

How on earth someone came up with a kick-off time of 9.40am is beyond me, and it certainly seemed to upset our boys, who were never in it.

The hosts raced to a 10-0 lead in as many minutes,

but we got it back to 10-6 after Chris Sio crossed and Zion Ioka converted.

That was it though, one way traffic after that, with the Roosters comfortable winners.

Intrust Super Premiership

After shooting to a useful 14-4 lead the Vodafone Warriors eventually fell 26-14 to Wentworthville in the Intrust Super Premiership.

Halfback Mason Lino made his first appearance of the year after knee surgery, and both David Fusitu'a and Ken Maumalo were on the score-sheet again.

Coming off a hat-trick, Maumalo made it six tries for the season already.

With a two wins-three losses record the Vodafone Warriors are eighth equal.

They're on the road again next Sunday, facing the North Sydney Bears.

Anti-Social Media

Interesting that Shaun Johnson fired off about the abuse he gets on social media.

Like me, he is big on social media, and he has more followers than Moses 86,000 on Facebook alone.

But he said online abuse was an increasing problem and while social media was a good way to connect with fans, it was also a place for people to vent frustrations.

"I can't imagine ... talking to people the way people talk to me. I'll always roll with it because that's just part of the gig. They are, though, they're little shits. People think we don't have feelings."

Tough stuff from the halfback.

Southern Boys Lead The Way

What a weekend for the old sports-mad Mad Butcher. My Blues won a game, beating the Argentinian lot the Jaguares 24-16. Sure plenty of people will argue that's not be much of a feat, but a win is a win, especially when you are the always under-fire Blues.

All Black Charlie Faumuina was outstanding in the win, but it was another South Auckland boy who really put a smile on my face.

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I do not pretend to know much about rugby, and I know even less about motor-racing.

But I know getting over the line first is all that counts and that is what Manurewa's Indy Car ace Scott Dixon did in Arizona, winning the Phoenix Grand Prix.

Incredibly, it was the 39th career victory for Dixon,

moving him to equal with Al Unser, who even I know about. The pair are now fourth on the all-time list. Only AJ Foyt (67), Mario Andretti (52) and Michael Andretti (42) are ahead of the pair.

Dixon led for the final 155 laps of the race, and that must take some doing.

Roosters v Vodafone Warriors

Photos courtesy of www.photosport.co.nz



Ben Matulino warming up



Ben Matulino on the run past Mitchell Aubusson



Issac Luke on the run past Isaac Liu



Shaun Johnson scores a try



Tensions erupt after a tackle on Blake Ferguson from Solomone Kata



The boys celebrate their win

Mounties 50 Illawarra 16
Newtown 38 Wests Tigers 14
Penrith 50 Manly 12
Wyang 28 Canterbury 22
Wentworthville 26 NZ Warriors 14
North Sydney 24 Newcastle 10

NSW Intrust Super Premiership Round 5 Results



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Almost There - *Story Courtesy of Big League Magazine*

By Michael Burgess

Big things were expected from the Warriors' new-look spine, but meeting those expectations is proving harder than anyone thought. *By Michael Burgess*

OVER THE YEARS, there have been plenty of great Kiwi combinations that have taken Australia by storm. Think of Split Enz and Dragon, Sir Richard Hadlee and the late Martin Crowe, Sunline and trainer Trevor McKee.

Many were expecting a similar impact from the Warriors' new all-star spine, though it hasn't quite happened yet. We may not have seen the best of Issac Luke, Shaun Johnson and Roger Tuivasa-Sheck together, but surely it's only a matter of time.

And, though it might seem a stretch at the moment, this Warriors spine could come to be regarded as one of the best in the history of the NRL.

Look at the evidence. Johnson, who picked up the 2014 Golden Boot award, is one of the most exciting talents in the game. He's in his sixth season in the NRL and once he gets over the lingering effects of the ankle injury that ended his 2015 campaign, he's capable of anything.

Luke has been one of the sport's premier hookers for almost a decade but is still only 28. One of the few men who has bested Cameron Smith during his career, Luke is now at home, surrounded by family and will have a lot to prove to his Kiwi fan base.

Meanwhile Tuivasa-Sheck, after just one season at fullback with the Roosters, was earmarked as someone who could change the way the position is played as he shredded all kinds of records. He's already grabbed a handful of Dally M awards and it's frightening to think just how good he could become in the No.1 jersey.

Jeff Robson has a much lower profile, but provides solidity. He has a history of playing a supporting role alongside bigger names and brings grit alongside the glamour.

They got their first win of the season last week. But when will they fully click?

THE STRUGGLE

"Getting all of your playmakers to gel always takes time," says former Kiwis and Warriors coach Frank Endacott. "Obviously it can't take too long, but it doesn't happen overnight."

Endacott coached some of the most talented spines the sport has ever seen, particularly for the Kiwis. He had the outstanding flair of Henry and Robbie Paul (who could switch between the halves and hooker), the incomparable Stacey Jones and the speed of Richie Barnett at fullback.

"Having great individuals in those positions doesn't guarantee they will gel," says Endacott. "They have to adjust their games to suit how the others play. And most importantly, they have to get used to each other otherwise it isn't going to work."

So far in 2016 it's been a process of adjustment. Johnson is working alongside his fourth halves partner since he came into grade, after James Maloney, Thomas Leuluai and Chad Townsend. After four years with Nathan Friend at dummy half, Luke provides a different style of service for Johnson.

In Sydney last year, Tuivasa-Sheck got constant profit through the middle of the ruck, following the rampaging Roosters forwards. At Mt Smart, Tuivasa-Sheck has been used wider, though there were encouraging signs against the Storm in Round 3 as he tallied 231 running metres.

Luke's start has been hampered by injury, though he showed glimpses of form in Round 2.

Kiwis coach Stephen Kearney has no doubts the Warriors' foursome will eventually fire.

"I don't think they are far off," says Kearney. "Their styles can work well together and there are signs of progress. By the end of the year it might be a different conversation."

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FINDING THEIR VOICE

Tuivasa-Sheck has settled in well, despite frightening levels of expectation across the Shaky Isles. While Luke's signing was well received, the acquisition of Tuivasa-Sheck generated incredible excitement; arguably no player has arrived at the Warriors with more on his shoulders – not Ruben Wiki, not Matthew Ridge, nor Greg Alexander.

Alongside Luke, Tuivasa-Sheck is expected to change the destiny of the Warriors from perennial pretenders to consistent contenders. Until now he has handled the hype, because great expectations have always come from within.

“Growing up, I learnt that off my old man,” says Tuivasa-Sheck. “Going into every game he used to tell me ‘you are the best player on that field – that is how you need to see yourself’. It was hard for me to see that sometimes because of the boys around me, but I have to see it that way.”

When he arrived at Bondi, Tuivasa-Sheck was just another Kiwi Rooster with a hyphenated name and a promising game. Now he is so much more. He's still only 22, but already one of the leaders at the Warriors.

“I've got to try and live up to it and be as professional as I can,” says Tuivasa-Sheck. “I'm one of the senior players and I have to roll like that. I can't be the shy kid.”

THE ROCK

Veteran Robson is the man in the background, like Ringo Starr among the Beatles. But he's used to that. He was overshadowed by Jarryd Hayne and Daniel Mortimer at Parramatta in 2009, and by Todd Carney and Michael Gordon at Cronulla.

“I'm excited about the challenge but I'm here to do a job,” says Robson. “I've played among some good combinations before and I'm sure we can get the best out of each other here.”

There's no doubt they can. With some ongoing surgery, they have the potential to be one of the best spines seen at Mt Smart.

Greg Alexander, Stacey Jones, Gene Ngamu and Syd Eru had their moments in 1995 and 1996, but never fired consistently. Daniel Anderson's team in 2002 and 2003 had fine quartets, with Ivan Cleary or Brett Webb at fullback, Lance Hohaia or Motu Tony at five-eighth, Jones and PJ Marsh at hooker.

The other famed Warriors foursome was in 2011, with Kevin Locke, Maloney, Johnson and either Hohaia or Aaron Heremia in the No.9 jersey.

The current troupe could top them all – though only time will tell.

“Shaun, Issac and Roger are all great attackers, and all capable of winning games for you on their own,” says Endacott. “They just need to click as a combination.”



Isaac Luke on the run.
Photo courtesy
www.photosort.nz

**This is the sort of article you miss
when you don't subscribe to Big
League Magazine.**

Refs Should Use the Bin

By Barry Ross



I WAS PLEASED to see Andrew McFadden question why refs are not using the sin bin after the incident involving Warriors captain, Ryan Hoffman, against the Roosters. There is no doubt that Aidan Guerra should have been marched and if this had been done, the match could have been decided at this point.

The Warriors were on top at this stage and if the referee had made the right decision, they could have put themselves in a winning position early in the game. The sin bin is being used less and less and I would like to hear an explanation as to why this is the case. If you do the wrong thing, particularly in try scoring situations, you and your team should suffer the consequences. No doubt the adverse publicity in the Sydney papers the next day after the non sin binning of Guerra, resulted in the referees using the bin in the Monday night match between the Raiders and the Bulldogs. This is not the consistency the players and the fans want.

But that wasn't the only bad deal the Warriors received from the whistle blowers. What about the blatant shepherd by Shaun Kenny-Dowell near halfway with about four minutes to go? And what about the Roosters players being offside as they attempted to charge down Shaun Johnson's last minute attempted field goal. The referee asked the Bunker to check if the ball had gone over the crossbar. Why couldn't he have asked to check the offside, at the same time?

The second half penalty count was 6-1 against the Warriors. I am not questioning the penalties given to the Roosters but what I am concerned about, are the penalties not given to the Warriors. Australian Team of the Century coach, Jack Gibson, always said that it was the penalties you were not given that is worrying.

I don't want to be a ref basher, but there is plenty of room for improvement. Like many others, I believed the Bunker was an instant success. But now I am not so sure and I agree with Cronulla coach, Shane Flanagan, who said after his win against the Tigers on Saturday that the Bunker hasn't made better decisions, it has just made the rulings come a bit faster.

Back to the win over the Roosters. The Warriors played some entertaining football and wasn't it great to see a golden try win the match in the Golden Point extra time. It was an exciting end to an entertaining game. Shaun Johnson continued his good form from the previous week against Newcastle, while the Warrior forwards did a good job on their opposition six. Ben Matulino won the Fox TV Man of the Match award and it was pleasing to hear him praise his fellow prop, Jacob Lillyman after the game. Ben ran for 124 metres and made 34 tackles, while Jacob ran for 159 metres and made 30 tackles. Issac Luke also found plenty of holes in the dummy half area. He ran for 127 metres and made 30 tackles, as well as playing the whole 81 minutes which is encouraging to everyone connected with the club. Tuimoala Lolohea only made 12 runs but his total was 160 metres. His take of the high bomb and then brilliant and powerful 40 metre dash to set up Roger Tuivasa-Sheck's winning try, was one of the weekend highlights.

After five rounds of football, several Warriors men are at, or near, the top of the statistic tables. Shaun Johnson is equal second on the individual points list with James Maloney and Johnathan Thurston, while Roger Tuivasa-Sheck tops the run metres with 1,025 and the total number of runs with 103. Simon Mannering is second on the tackle table with 220, while Ben Matulino is equal second on the offloads list with 12. Solomon Kate is equal second on the line breaks with 5 and second of the try getters with 6.

The Warriors are now just one win out of the top eight. Let's hope that comes at home this Saturday against the Sea Eagles and also that Shaun Johnson reaches the 50 NRL try mark. He now has 49. NSW have plenty of options for the fullback position in the coming State of Origin series. James Tedesco has been consistently good all this season, while the Cowboys Lachlan Coote and the Dragons Josh Dugan have also been impressive. You can add Penrith captain, Matt Moylan, to this list. He made his comeback after injury on Sunday against Parramatta and played well. Parramatta's Michael Gordon is another fullback playing good, consistent football.

April Always a Nervous Month

By John Coffey QSM



THERE IS always a nervous strain to watching the NRL in April. It is the month leading up to the Anzac Test (to be played at Newcastle on May 6), and one tends to shudder when a current Kiwi stays down after a big hit or causes one of his opponents to stay down after a big hit. Injuries and suspensions have weakened our Test and tour ranks for the last 30 years.

I once compiled a list of Kiwis who had been suspended from representing their country, starting with Dean Bell at Eastern Suburbs (now the Sydney Roosters) in 1985. Over the years the list simply got too long to comfortably print in a newspaper and I gave up. These days the protective instincts of the NRL clubs is probably a bigger threat than the judiciary committee.

When the Kiwis lost two of the three matches against England last year they were without a whole host of experienced players who would have been certainties for the Test team. Some, such as Shaun Johnson, had quite serious injuries. But there were grave suspicions about the unavailability of others. Kieran Foran and Jason Taumalolo were among those sorely missed.

Foran would have captained the Kiwis in the absence of Simon Mannering and been the chief playmaker. But Parramatta, a club in turmoil, did not want its million-dollar signing to break down on a foreign field. Taumalolo withdrew after selection, citing a dicky knee which was not obvious when the Cowboys rampaged to their grand final triumph a few days earlier.

The Big League magazine recently reported Taumalolo had “benefited greatly from his decision not to play for New Zealand last November”. No mention of a dicky knee. Cowboys assistant coach Todd Payton instead said, “You need a full pre-season as a player, and that’s particularly the case for those bigger guys who play in the middle of the field.

“The work that they do in pre-season can have a big effect on how they start the year. You can see the difference it has made to Jason. He trains pretty hard, especially considering he is still a young man. But I think he understands his place in the team.” What price on the Cowboys re-examining Taumalolo’s knee before the Four Nations in England later this year?

Then we have James Graham, who did play for England in last year’s Tests, praising the form of fellow Bulldogs forward Greg Eastwood, who did not front up for the Kiwis. Graham told journalists he noted Eastwood was leading from the front – not his usual position – when he (Graham) returned to training in January. “He’s been a great player for a decade but this year his game has gone to the next level,” said Graham.

Eastwood, aged 29, concurred: “I’m not getting any younger and I knew I had to change a few things to have a full pre-season. That bit before Christmas wasn’t easy but once I was past that and had done the hard yards I felt great and I think that I’ve benefited from that.” Maybe Des Hasler has taken a note of Eastwood’s comments and will remind him later this year.

I can fully understand why NRL clubs want to protect their valuable employees from injury while wearing another jersey. Kiwis are an easy target too. Any media or public outrage in New Zealand will not cause a ripple in Sydney or Townsville. It was even easier last year with the Kangaroos all resting. But it still hurts to hear British commentators refer to England’s “series triumph over the world No.1 Kiwis”.

Australia is leaving no stone unturned to prevent the Kiwis achieving a fourth consecutive Test victory at Newcastle next month. Mal Meninga, having guided Queensland to a decade of State of Origin dominance, has ignored any NSW objections by taking the same coaching crew (Michael Hagan, Allan Langer etc) into the Kangaroos camp.

Now the Roos have been boosted by Parramatta wing Semi Radradra deciding he had “turned Australian” after qualifying by residency. Radradra has played Sevens, under-20s rugby union, and rugby league Tests for Fiji, but that has seemingly been erased from his memory. Yet because he was not resident in Australia before the age of 13 he is not eligible for Origin.

In his case Parramatta officials are probably ecstatic the ARL might pay Radradra a hefty bonus for donning the green-and-gold gear against the Kiwis on a weekend when there is no club football, without losing him for three Origin games. But they would also have their fingers crossed there is no bone-shaking collision between Radradra and Foran on May 6.

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Ben Henry

By Ben Francis



IN HIS comeback NRL from a second left knee reconstruction, Ben Henry was pumped to be back on the field. However thirty minutes into his return game against the West Tigers in round one, disaster struck when Ben Henry was lying on the ground in pain after tackling Tigers Prop Tim Grant.

"I looked down at my knee and saw my knee cap wasn't there. I thought oh no not again." said Henry.

It was heartbreaking for league fans to see Henry grabbing at his left knee, not knowing the extent of the injury, those watching at home feared the worst. Many worried that the injury could have been the end of Henry's career who many see as a future captain at the club.

Henry is expected to be out for at least 18 weeks and is hoping to get back out on the field at the backend of the season. "The club and I have sat down and discussed a training plan for myself to work on so hopefully I will be back out on the footy field if the knee holds up," Henry said.

Ben Henry has spent a total of 23 months out with his two previous knee injuries.

Henry's first knee injury happened at training in 2013 days after the record 62-6 loss to the Panthers. The second happened in Round 4 last season in a loss to the Broncos.

"The second knee reconstruction was definitely the worst" he said. "After the first reconstruction I never thought I'd do it again, it took a toll on me."

"Family has been MASSIVE during my injuries, my wife gets sick of me spending lots of time at my parents house," Henry added. "They are just happy I'm doing alright."

"Most people say their proudest career moment would be their debut game, but mine would have to be any game where I come back from injury," Henry said. "Makes me proud and I know I'm a stronger person from it."

Henry got into rugby league through his mates at school and really enjoyed it. "I never did envision this a career," he said. "I am really blessed and lucky to be doing what I do." Outside of Rugby League, Henry has got a Diploma in Computer Science and a Certificate in Small Business.

Ben Henry has been a part of the Warriors since 2009. He is one of a number of players to come through the Junior Warriors program in which he played a record 64 games and winning two premierships. Henry was also captain during the 2010 and 2011 seasons. He made his first grade debut in Round 1 2012 against the Manly Sea Eagles. To date, Henry has played in 52 NRL games scoring 17 tries and kicking 3 goals. Henry has also played 1 test for the Kiwis in 2014. He can also play a number of positions including Second Row, Lock, Centre and Hooker.



*Ben Henry on the run during the Warriors v Tigers game on Sat 5th March.
Photo courtesy of www.photosport.nz*



Ben Francis with Ben Henry and Bodene Thompson.



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The Mann Name And Rugby League Are as Closely Connected as Ever

By John Deaker



DUANE MANN captained the Kiwis and Tonga in a distinguished playing career that included him playing in the Vodafone Warriors' first match in 1995 against the Brisbane Broncos. These days anyone who captains the Kiwis is likely to be very financially secure when they hang up their playing boots. That wasn't the case for Mann, but it makes him an ideal person to preach to teenagers the importance of not putting all their eggs in one basket as they pursue professional rugby league careers. In his role of Academy and Pathways Manager for the Warriors, Mann has the opportunity to do that.

"My regret was not going to University and deciding to concentrate only on my football," he reflects.

"So I'm telling the kids coming through today the opposite: 'Don't throw everything in to football. You have to do well in other things.' With the knowledge and coaching that kids receive these days they can put a lot of hours into their training but they still need to study hard and have a job and a career plan once they've left University."

Mann kicked off his current stint with the Warriors in 2013. It's his third term with the club following his 13 matches as a player in 1995 and his period as the junior elite coach from 2003 till 2005. Many of his roles in rugby league and schools over the years have helped him gain valuable experience he can utilize in his current job.

"A core part of my role now is managing our academy program which is 16's and 18's age-grade players. So we have a bunch of players who have the opportunity to come in and spend some time with us and we put them through some strength, conditioning and skill-based work," he says.

"We also monitor their club performances with this being the pathway towards the Under 20's competition. So we take a hands-on role of their athletic development."

Mann's father Don played 4 tests for the Kiwis. The large family that Don and Elaine raised ensured it was always likely that the Mann name would continue to be prominent within New Zealand rugby league circles.

"There were 6 brothers in my family and a couple of other Uncles that were raised by us – so we were always playing against mates of the same age or a year older – and playing against each other in club footy," says Duane.

"My parents have also been season members since 1995 and I'm sure they would have done so even if I hadn't played for the Warriors. Don't forget also that my older brother worked in management for the Warriors for 10 years as well as having a stint with the NZRL."

Duane remembers Don (Senior) as playing in what he regards as the "Golden era" for New Zealand rugby league and has particularly fond memories of watching his father's Ponsonby Ponies sides that were stacked with great Kiwis from that period. He's very proud of the fact that Don and his late Uncle George started the first league competition in Tonga, organized the first national team in 1986 and were instrumental in launching the first Pacific Cup that year in Rarotonga.

To many people born after Duane it's the era he played in that is remembered with 'gold-tinted glasses', particularly many Auckland teams consisting of predominantly amateurs that pulled off upset victories over fully professional touring teams. This included a 30-14 win over Great Britain in 1988 – Mann's second year in the Auckland team. He recently reminded some teenagers of this great history that Auckland teams had long before the Auckland Warriors were formed.

"Because they are split into two zones the kids today seldom get to represent the whole of Auckland at age-group level so I reminded these boys recently about Auckland's great history playing against international teams and also Australian club teams."

Continued on next page...

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It was making the 1989 Kiwis team that Mann believes gave him the necessary exposure required to secure a professional contract with Warrington in England. His four seasons there saw him notch up 124 games – nothing like the 212 games he played for his Auckland-based Glenora Bears, but it was an environment where he could learn first-hand what it was like to be a professional footballer.

Despite his distinguished playing career, Mann is envious of everything the modern-day footballer has compared to what was available to him and his peers.

“I don’t think there’s anything I’d have hated about playing today. I think it’s a fantastic era to be playing in with so much coverage, the profile of the players, the sports science, coaching and instant feedback you can get as a player. Add to that the salaries they can earn too.”

Mann’s son and his twin daughters have all finished high school now but the process of raising his daughters – who are both competitive swimmers – gave him an appreciation for the commitment other sports demand. He’s passed on this insight to the teenagers he’s come into contact with.

“It’s a tough sport and getting to know that side of competitive swimming has been valuable even though I thought I had a good knowledge of what it took in other sports. I remind many of our elite kids that there’s a certain toughness required for training for sports like swimming, athletics and other sports. And our kids playing league can learn from that.”

The Mann family’s rugby league story is already an illustrious one, but Mann suggests it’s not even peaked yet.

“We have a dozen or so of my brothers and cousins sons – some Manns plus some on my mum’s Maori side of the family) aged 8 to 15 playing club league at the moment so look out for them coming through over the next decade.”



Duane Mann Speaking At The Vodafone Junior Warriors Awards Evening, 9 September 2015.

David MacKay / www.photosport.nz

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Yet Another Massive Week

By Shontayne Hape



WOW, WHAT a week it's been here at Vodafone Warriors HQ. As I write this, I'm still buzzing from that golden point win over the Roosters last Sunday.

I won't forget the image of Roger Tuivasa-Sheck bumping off Kiwis teammate Shaun Kenny-Dowall to score the match-winner any time soon!

The victory handed the Vodafone Warriors their second win on the bounce and has put us in a good position heading in to Saturday night's home clash against the Sea Eagles at Mt Smart Stadium.

While the Sea Eagles have struggled so far this year, there's no doubt they are a good team with a good record against us and will be another challenge for the boys.

That said, I'm confident we can make it three in a row this weekend.

On the back of such an exciting win over the Roosters, it's hard not to feel pumped about this weekend.

The membership team and I will be out in full force again and I can't wait for our first Saturday night game at home this year.

Obviously the time for selling full season memberships has come to an end but if you know a Vodafone Warriors fan who hasn't yet signed up as a member, gently remind them they can still get three-game packages for just \$39.

I'll be hanging out in front of Gate B at Mt Smart Stadium on Saturday night and selling memberships before I head to the members' clubrooms for our post-game activities.

Swing by and say hello if you're in the vicinity.

See you at the game and go the mighty Vodafone Warriors.

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MANLY SEA EAGLES





THIS WEEK IN BIG LEAGUE'S HUGE ROUND 6 ISSUE...

Jam-packed with FEATURES and NEWS, plus columnist **PHIL ROTHFIELD** and game analysis by **BEN IKIN**; plus **NRL**, **HOLDEN CUP**, **NSW CUP**, **QLD CUP** and **RON MASSEY CUP** team lists and a **FULL NRL DRAW**.

FEATURES

- Broncos supercoach **Wayne Bennett** knows **Anthony Milford** is something special, which is why he doesn't impose rules on the 21-year-old and allows his natural talent do the talking. The humble half says even he didn't realise he had something special until the Raiders flew him to a special training session with Andrew Johns when he was in Year 11.

- Never without his notepad, **Chad Townsend** is determined to make the Sharks halfback position his own after a few years of topsy-turvy form. He's managed to hold youngsters like Jack Bird at bay and is having the season of his career so far, and study is the thing helping him most.

- **Jeremy Smith** is turning 36 next week and is the oldest player in the NRL, but he's still considering playing on next year in what will be his 13th season of first grade. The veteran says his job now is to impart his wisdom on the Knights youngsters, especially about maintaining longevity in their careers.

Also, **Kenny Bromwich** and **Jordan McLean** are 50 games in and leading the Storm pack; we take a tour of the multi-million dollar **Panthers Academy**; **South Sydney** try to overcome the slump in their early season form; **Jacob Lillyman** pushes for Origin after playing 40 minutes straight for the Warriors against the Roosters and **Phil Rothfield** talks good guys in rugby league.

PLUS... **Matt Moylan** is in talks to extend his contract with the Panthers until 2021; Raiders centre **Jordan Rapana** is fighting hard to keep his position over his mate **Sisa Waqa** and we revisit the **Top 8 biggest blunders**.

AND: Little League, lower grade previews, news, The Analyst picks apart Roger Tuivasa-Sheck's game and we get **10 Minutes With Lewis Brown**.



THIS WEEK'S ISSUE

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Bigger and Better Than Ever

By John Coffey QSM



John talks about Big League Magazine

SPORTS PUBLICATIONS tend to come and go, particularly in the current era when new technology has radically changed the manner in which we obtain our news and recreational reading. But Big League magazine – in print and online -- is undoubtedly bigger and better than ever as it looks towards a century of service to rugby league fans.

Big League started out as The Rugby League News in 1920 and was sold around the footy grounds in Sydney. That was only 12 years after the Sydney inter-club competition started, and in the aftermath of the First World War. Sport was just recovering its place in society after so many players and officials had fought and died on the European killing fields.

I have seen copies dating back to the late 1940s, when international rugby league was again rebuilding after another world war. One copy which has special pride of place was published on July 8, 1967, my 21st birthday. Australia beat New Zealand 13-9 at the Sydney Cricket Ground that day, completing my first Kiwis tour for the New Zealand Press Association.

In 1974 the News changed its name to Big League. The colourful magazine has evolved as the competition grew from being the Sydney premiership to include clubs in other parts of New South Wales and then in Queensland, Melbourne and Auckland. But the features so vital to earlier generations – team lists, points tables, profiles and news items – have remained.

The statistics in the modern Big League are quite astounding, thanks to stats guru David Middleton, who began compiling his records while still at school and regularly shocks Footy Show panellists and viewers alike with the obscure facts and figures he can produce. Every NRL game is previewed before kick-off and analysed after fulltime. Season leaders in every aspect of the game fill several pages.

There are profiles of leading players and not just Australians, either. New Zealand Herald reporter Michael Burgess and Christchurch-based freelance writer Will Evans are among the contributors. Nor is history forgotten. Evans comes up with very interesting Top 8 lists -- this week it was Unlucky Send-offs (remember Gary Freeman being marched when captaining Parramatta at Mount Smart in 1996?).

Along with the 30 weekly issues of the magazine, Big League also produces the A5-sized Season Guide, Season Preview, 100-page Grand Final Souvenir, Year in Review, the State of Origin and Test match souvenir programmes, and Middleton's Official Rugby League Annual. It all adds up to an amazing record of the game on both sides of the Tasman.

Air New Zealand's Grabaseat has packages to see the mighty Vodafone Warriors take on the Penrith Panthers at AMI Stadium in Christchurch on Saturday 14 May 16. Starting from \$139 per person. See <https://grabaseat.co.nz/secure/getaways> for more details and to book.



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High-Tackle Holloway... I'll give ya the tip mate!

The Mad Butchers Weekly NRL Tipping Comp.

By John Holloway

NRL Round X

		Sue Phelan	Joe Vagana	John Coffey	Fast Eddie	Monty Betham	Bill Hayward	High-Tackle Holloway
		<i>Maloney's Barber Shop</i>	<i>League Legend</i>	<i>Newsletter Columnist</i>	<i>Devonport Dutchman</i>	<i>The Warrior Boxer</i>	<i>Link Business</i>	<i>Richmond Bulldog</i>
Date/ Venue	Game							
7/04 - Suncorp	Broncos v Dragons	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos	Broncos
8/04 - ANZ	Rabbitohs v Roosters	Rabbitohs	Rabbitohs	Rabbitohs	Rabbitohs	Rabbitohs	Rabbitohs	Rabbitohs
9/04 - Pirtek	Eels v Raiders	Eels	Eels	Eels	Eels	Raiders	Eels	Eels
9/04 - Mt Smart	Warriors v Sea Eagles	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors	Warriors
9/04 - Pepper	Panthers v Cowboys	Cowboys	Panthers	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys	Cowboys
10/4 - Shark Pack	Sharks v Titans	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks	Sharks
10/04 - Hunter	Knights v Tigers	Tigers	Knights	Tigers	Tigers	Tigers	Tigers	Tigers
11/04 - AAMI	Storm v Bulldogs	Storm	Storm	Storm	Storm	Bulldogs	Storm	Bulldogs

How they're traveling....

Picks last week	6/8	3/8	6/8	7/8	6/8	6/8	6/8
Total picks	20/40	18/40	22/40	26/40	24/40	23/40	21/40

THE TIPPING Comp was going great until the Panthers late heroics stunned the majority of the punting crew and fell nicely into the lap of the delighted Devonport Dutchman. I had originally had him on the Eels with the rest of us but my mistake was raised and he solo on the Panthers, the 8 winners bonus was on a plate for Fast Eddie until the Monday nite upset. Still a very good 7 for the Dyke jumper. Smooth 6's for the rest bar the adventurous Big Joe Vagana (3) who is not scared to punt longer shots, this week it didn't work... but his day will come.

Yahooo win number Twoooo for the Mighty Warriooooorrrs!! Cappy will snooze a little easier this week. We played a lot more direct with Lillyman, Matulino, Gubb and co carting up big-time and the Luke-star showing up at dummy-half. Possible returns this week for Bo Thompson, Ligi Sau and Tommygun Leauluai which will rev things up nicely. Footy commentators regularly suggest that Tui Lolohea is wasted out on the wing, when he does what he did on Sunday you would have to think they have a point. A great finishing burst by TVSheck but the winning try was born in the magical stepping to open spaces by the ebullient young wingman. Cant help but wonder what might eventuate if he and Johnson were creating (with TVS) around the halves.

Apart from the 36 zip hiding that the Cowboys dished to the despairing Dragons all games were tight affairs, just a kick or a try in it. Manly even without DCE are always tough at The Brook the Bunnies only just got past them 16/12. The Broncos didn't have it easy either at 24/16 the under-rated Titans staying with them most of the way. Talented young Coast colt Ashley Taylor continues to shine even against big name halves Hunt and Milford.

Continued on next page...

Continued from previous page...

Was the Storm under par or the Knights up for it... a bit of both but Cam Smith dragged his side thru for the lollies at 18/14. The Sharkies got home late against the never say die Tiger pride 34/26. Westie bossman Aaron Woods is a fearless leader and Tedesco a brilliant creating attacker but the hard-bitten Paul Gallen drives a tough crew and Cronulla with Barba back in form got over the top in the end 34/26.

The Panthers have had a couple of very near misses in the early rounds but a determined away effort snagged this one after the bell to shock the favoured Eels 18/20. Cartwright is special and what a difference the return of Matty Moylan made....with the muscular Mansour smashing about all over the shop they are a threat. The Monday niter was a turnup...Rickys rampaging Raiders bashed the Bulldogs toothless 22/8 and on hallowed ground at Belmore no less, Dessy will not be pleased!

The oppo this week the improving Sea Eagles at homebase 7.30 Saturday nite. We will need to step it up again. See ya at Mt Smart.

Jersey Winners



Hi buddy, thanks for the fantastic signed jersey I won through the newsletter.

Nga mihi

Raymond Greaves



Thanks for the signed jersey I won through the newsletter. I love the newsletter and I love the signed jersey.

Tony Coll

Comment from Sir Peter Leitch: *Tony is a former Kiwi. He played 65 games for the Kiwis including 30 tests and was the Captain in 1977 for the Rugby League World Cup.*



Fay showing off her jersey she won through the newsletter with her partner Tom. Both proud Vodafone Warriors supporters.



Hi Sir Butch

My lad Max played his first game of the new season inn the weekend and had a blinder, got player of the day.

A Vodafone warrior in the making

Brad



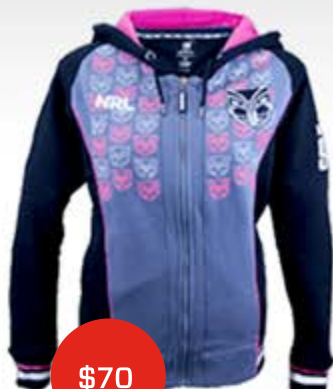
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Jacob Lillyman Jersey Presentation



Jacob Lillyman with Simon Mannering.



Jacob Lillyman with his wife Tui-kay and baby girl Arani.

LAST WEEK the team held a special luncheon for Jacob Lillyman. Simon Mannering presented Jacob his jersey along with Tui-kay (Jacob's wife) who read out a letter from Jacob's parents on their behalf. Jacob was very grateful to everyone for going out of their way to organise a luncheon for him.

Lillyman Had A Blinder On Sunday

SURE ROGER Tuivasa-Sheck and Tuimoala Lolohea grabbed the headlines, but as I said, what about that workhorse Jacob Lillyman in his 150th game.

He was outstanding in the middle of the park in his milestone appearance for the club – the 11th player to reach the mark.

The 32-year-old had his best performance of the season, playing 57 minutes (his longest stint so far), carried the ball 20 times, made 159 metres (easily the most of any forward on the park) and made 30 tackles. He also threw a great pass to send Shaun Johnson in for his first try.

There is no reason to think he won't, so this weekend he will make his 151st appearance for the club, the most by an Australian player.



Jacob waves to the crowd after his 150th game. Photo courtesy www.photosport.nz

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With exceptional catering, MC interviews with special guests and exclusive post-match entertainment, the Legends Lounge offers the best of Vodafone Warriors hospitality.

Package includes:

- Reserved table for 10 with premium match day seating
- Three hour pre-game beverage package
- Three course meal including entrée, plated main course and dessert
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OPEN AIR BOOTHS

Situated in the TSB Stand, the Open Air Booths provide a great way to entertain guests or clients while being part of the grand stand atmosphere. The price includes a selection of beverages as well as two food servings throughout the course of the match.

Package includes:

- A private Booth for 10 guests
- Reserved padded seat for each guest
- Catering served twice throughout the match
- Bar fridge stocked with \$200 worth of beverages
- Two VIP car park passes

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SIR PETER LEITCH CONCOURSE LOUNGE

Be entertained by the one and only Sir Peter Leitch QSM, the 19th Vodafone Warrior.

Located on the Concourse, Level 1 of the TSB Stand, the Sir Peter Leitch Concourse Lounge gives you the opportunity to enjoy pre, post and during the match hospitality with your seats just a short distance away. Your ticket includes a Vodafone Warriors Scarf Membership and a delicious carvery meal with access to your own private bar.

Sir Peter will host you pre & post game with his unique brand of humour, he will ensure you will remember the Vodafone Warriors trip to New Plymouth!!

Package includes:

- Exclusive access to the Sir Peter Leitch Concourse Lounge
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- Scarf Membership pack
- Cash bar facilities
- Live post-match entertainment

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Thomas Leuluai Returns from Injury *by Richard Becht*

THOMAS LEULUAI is set to play his first game in almost 11 months while Jonathan Wright replaces the injured Manu Vatuvei for the Vodafone Warriors' sixth-round NRL clash against the Manly Sea Eagles at Mount Smart Stadium on Saturday (7.30pm kick-off; match day sponsor: Woodstock).

Leuluai (30) had his 2015 season ended by an ACL injury in the club's 10th-round game against the Parramatta Eels on May 16 last year.

He has been included on a five-man bench but is poised to come back for his 68th NRL appearance on Saturday night.

Wright is named on the left wing after Vatuvei was forced off with a hamstring injury 66 minutes into Sunday's 32-28 golden point win over the Sydney Roosters in Gosford. He made a try-scoring appearance filling in for Vatuvei against Melbourne on March 28, his only previous NRL outing so far this season.

Vodafone Warriors head coach Andrew McFadden has made one other change to the starting line-up used against the Roosters, moving Sam Lisone to loose forward with Albert Vete going to the bench.

VODAFONE WARRIORS v MANLY SEA EAGLES

Mount Smart Stadium, Auckland

7.30pm, Saturday, April 9

- 1 Roger TUIVASA-SHECK
- 2 Tuimoala LOLOHEA
- 3 Blake AYSHFORD
- 4 Solomone KATA
- 5 Jonathan WRIGHT
- 6 Shaun JOHNSON
- 7 Jeff ROBSON
- 8 Jacob LILLYMAN
- 9 Issac LUKE
- 10 Ben MATULINO
- 11 Simon MANNERING
- 12 Ryan HOFFMAN (c)
- 13 Sam LISONE
- Interchange
- 14 Jazz TEVAGA
- 15 Albert VETE
- 16 Charlie GUBB
- 17 Konrad HURRELL
- 18 Thomas LEULUAI

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NYC KO: 5:15pm

NRL KO: 7:35pm



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My mate Dexter,
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Catching up with
Coach Cappy.



Great to meet new Vodafone Warriors
player Shaun Lane. He made me feel
like a dwarf.



With my good
mate
Solomone
Kata

At Vodafone Warriors HQ



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Here is the team that help me put together the newsletter each week. We have a number of fantastic contributors who send in content each week that along with my editorial gets wrapped up by our graphic designer and sent out by our distribution man to your inbox.

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