

VODAFONE



**Sir Peter Leitch Club**

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28<sup>th</sup> September 2016

# Newsletter #141

## It's the Biggest Week of the year for Rugby League

It's the NRL Grand Final THIS Sunday



Kick Off:  
9.15PM

*New Zealand Time*

# Who Wins the 2016 Grand Final?

By John Coffey QSM

Author of ten rugby league books, Christchurch Press sports writer (44 years), NZ correspondent for Rugby League Week (Australia) and Open Rugby (England)



**T**HE AUSTRALIAN airlines will profit from Grand Final weekend, with Melbourne Storm fans heading to Sydney for the NRL decider on Sunday, and Sydney Swans supporters going the other way for the AFL showdown on Saturday.

Both have been dominant clubs in the last decade, in contrast to their rivals. The Cronulla Sharks are seeking their first title in their 50th season, while the Western Bulldogs have not played a final since 1961.

I know nothing about Aussie Rules but I do know I have mixed feelings about whether I want the Sharks or the Storm to take home the trophy. Here are some arguments for and against:

## **Why I want the Storm to win:**

More Kiwis: With the Bromwich brothers, Kevin Proctor and Tohu Harris, the Storm have a distinct Kiwis connection, not to mention flying wing Suliasi Vunivalu, who went to school in Auckland.

Best team all season: The Storm are the most consistent team, as evidenced by their winning the minor premiership being without champion fullback Billy Slater.

The coach: Craig Bellamy has been blessed with some superstars but also has the knack of turning journey-men into influential players. And his emotional outbursts are a joy to watch.

Bellamy again: New Zealanders have Bellamy to thank for developing the coaching skills of his former assistants, Stephen Kearney and David Kidwell, the newly-appointed Warriors and Kiwis coaches.

The Melbourne market: The Storm have given league a strong foothold in the heartland of AFL. Their fans, many of them ex-pat Kiwis, proudly wear their purple colours in Victoria's capital.

## **Why I want the Storm to lose:**

The wrestle: Sometimes it is difficult to decide whether the Storm is a league franchise or a wrestling club. No-one likes it and other clubs complain, while quietly employing their own wrestling coaches.

The unforgiven: A previous Storm administration was responsible for the worst case of salary cap cheating in the game's history. The club was stripped of two premierships but there is still a lingering stain.

Cameron Smith and the referees: No-one can cosy up to a referee as skilfully as the Storm captain, although it is noticeable now that the whistle-blowers are aware of it and don't want to look like Cam's new best mate.

Been there, done that: Melbourne can claim legitimate premierships before and after the salary cap scandal, unlike the title-less Sharks, who get the sympathy vote.

Marika Koroibete: The Fijian flyer is an excitement machine. But I don't want to see him fingering a \$10,000 NRL winner's ring while bored witless on the Melbourne Rebels wing next year.

## **Why I want the Sharks to win:**

End the pain: A fulltime rendition of "Up, Up Cronulla" would signal the end of 50 seasons of suffering for fans who have only known disappointment from their pocket money school days to qualifying for the pension.

Harold's home: Coach Jack Gibson's line that "waiting for Cronulla to win a premiership is like leaving the porch light on for Harold Holt" (the prime minister who disappeared off a beach in 1967) would finally be put to bed.

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**Soft spot:** It was at the Hotel Cecil in Cronulla that I celebrated my 21st, on the last night of the 1967 Kiwis tour. Bruce Castle was captain; now his daughter, Raelene, is CEO of an NRL club.

**That old winning feeling:** Cronulla has extended the careers of two long-ago Grand Final winners. Luke Lewis was a wing with Penrith in 2003, while Chris Heighington was with the Tigers in 2005.

**Mick Ennis:** Love him or hate him, the Cronulla hooker probably deserves a premiership ring after suffering one loss and missing another final through injury at the Bulldogs.

### **Why I want the Sharks to lose:**

**Mick Ennis:** Thankfully, this will be the last dance for league's biggest pest. When he crosses the white line he transforms from Jekyll to Hyde. But his media career is assured so he will never go away. Bugger.

**Andrew Fifita:** Unlike Ennis, this bloke is totally unlikeable and has proven himself to be the biggest plonker in the game. His only challenger is Greg Bird, who spent time at Cronulla on his way to the Gold Coast.

**Paul Gallen:** Reformed from a grub to be the game's hardest worker. But he became a NSW legend during their biggest Origin losing sequence and needs a Grand Final defeat to earn similar status in club land.

**Pepping it up:** Just as the Storm are haunted by salary cap cheating, so the Sharks are still trying to live down a drugs scandal that cast a pall over the entire NRL. Many feel they were let off too lightly.

**Warriors woes:** A Sharks win with James Maloney and Chad Townsend would be tough on Warriors fans. It would also leave the Warriors and Titans as the only clubs still to win a premiership.

**Verdict:** I think the Storm will win because this is the sixth Grand Final for coach Craig Bellamy and play-maker Cooper Cronk, and the fifth for captain Cameron Smith. But I will be supporting the Sharks on Sunday. Up, Up Cronulla.

## Kiwis in the Grand Final

**By John Coffey QSM**

Author of ten rugby league books, Christchurch Press sports writer (44 years), NZ correspondent for Rugby League Week (Australia) and Open Rugby (England)



**F**OR MORE than 20 years we have been accustomed to watching New Zealanders playing pivotal roles for their clubs on Grand Final Day in Sydney.

That coincides with the ending of international transfer bans, the emergence of the Warriors, and a migration of players to Australian clubs. But it was not always that way.

Billy Kelly was the first New Zealander to share in a victory in what was then the Sydney competition. A centre, Kelly had toured Australia in 1912 and 1913 and was lured back by Balmain. He played for Australia in a test against the 1914 British tourists before captaining and coaching the Tigers to be unbeaten in 1915. Injuries suffered in the First World War ended his playing career.

In those formative years a first-past-the-post format was in vogue. Later, a Grand Final was played only if the winner of the minor premiership did not also go on to win the knock-out final series. In those cases the minor premier had the right to challenge the winner of the final in a Grand Final. From 1954 the play-offs (which have expanded from being top four to top eight) have reached a climax with a mandatory Grand Final.

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Between 1956 and 1966 the mighty St George, boasting such legends as Reg Gasnier, Graeme Langlands, Johnny Raper and Norm Proven, won 11 consecutive Grand Finals. This was a long time before salary cap restrictions and the Saints were quickest to capitalise on the introduction of poker machines to NSW. Their Leagues Club at Kogarah was so plush it was known throughout Sydney as the Taj Mahal.

Billy Noonan, from Christchurch, was the first Kiwi to play in a Grand Final. In 1974 he was in the Canterbury-Bankstown front-row when the Berries (as they were then known) lost 19-4 to Eastern Suburbs (now the Roosters). A year later Easts thrashed a St George team that included another Kiwis prop, Henry Tatana, 38-0. For the next decade only a handful of top-line players were cleared by the NZRL to play in Australia.

The 1987 decider hinted at what was to come. Versatile Auckland back Darrell Williams lined up for Manly-Warringah against Brent Todd, who was in the Canberra front-row. Williams walked off an 18-8 winner and the first New Zealander to do a lap of honour. However, Todd went on to establish a New Zealand record of four Grand Final appearances by winning against Balmain in 1989 and Penrith in 1990, and losing to Penrith in 1991.

The first multiple Kiwis involvement occurred in 1994, with Canberra's Ruben Wiki and Quentin Pongia triumphing 36-12 over Bulldogs trio Daryl Halligan, Jarrod McCracken and Jason Williams. Halligan and Williams gained compensation when the Bulldogs beat Manly a year later and Halligan also appeared in the 1998 loss to the Broncos. Melbourne's shock second-season victory over St George in 1999 included Kiwis Stephen Kearney, Tawera Nikau, Matt Rua and Richard Swain.

Todd's four-match record has been equalled three times. Manly centre Steve Matai lost to Melbourne in 2007, beat Melbourne in 2008, beat the Warriors in 2011 and lost to the Roosters in 2013; Jeremy Smith was with Melbourne when it lost to Brisbane in 2006, beat Manly in 2007 and lost to Manly in 2008, and at St George for its 2010 win over the Roosters; Adam Blair's loss with Brisbane against North Queensland last year followed losses alongside Smith in 2006 and 2008, and Melbourne's win over Parramatta in 2009.

Two Kiwis have played Grand Finals for three different clubs. Joe Galuvao won with Penrith in 2003, lost with Parramatta in 2009, and won with Manly in 2011. Krisnan Inu lost all three times, as a team-mate of Galuvao for Parramatta in 2009, for the Warriors against Galuvao's Manly in 2011, and for the Bulldogs in 2012. Jeff Lima appeared in three consecutive Grand Finals for Melbourne, winning in 2007 and 2009, and losing in 2008. Melbourne was later stripped of its 2007 and 2009 premierships for salary cap breaches.

The greatest number of New Zealanders to play in a Grand Final is 16 and inevitably involved the Warriors. In 2002 they had 10 Kiwis in their losing team against a Roosters line-up that included Jason Cayless and Andrew Lomu. But that record was shattered in 2011 when a Warriors combination with 13 New Zealanders among its 17 players bowed to a Manly side that fielded Matai, Galuvao and Kieran Foran.

No New Zealand representative has ever won the Clive Churchill Medal since it was introduced in 1986, though Bulldogs (and Kangaroos) forward Willie Mason, the 2004 recipient, was born in Auckland.

The only medal winner with overseas allegiance has been England and South Sydney forward Sam Burgess in 2014.

The Kiwis connection continues on Sunday with Melbourne fielding brothers Jesse and Kenny Bromwich, Kevin Proctor and Tohu Harris in their forward rotation, up against Cronulla backs Sosaia Feki and Gerard Beale. The Bromwich boys will be the first Kiwi brothers to play a Grand Final.





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# Key Numbers for the NRL Grand Final

By Ben Francis



**T**HE STORM and Sharks will face off in the NRL grand final in what is set to be a thrilling encounter.

Both sides will be wanting to win titles for different reasons, the Storm will want to show the league that they are indeed the most dominant side to play in the competition.

The Sharks are looking for their first NRL title in the clubs 50 year history.

So here are three number which could matter in the grand final.

## **101 v 106**

These are the numbers of tries each team has scored this season. The Storm scoring 101 and the Sharks with 106.

The Sharks back three have combined for 48 of the teams tries while the Storm back three have scored 39. When it comes to scoring tries, converting them is key, especially in a final.

One of the keys to the Sharks' success this year was their conversion percentage, they converted 100 of their 106 tries and added 30 penalty goals also, while the Storm converted 92 of their 101 tries and 22 penalty goals.

## **21-10-1**

The Storm have got the major upper hand against the Sharks' winning 21 of the 32 games between the two clubs including eight of the last 10.

The Storm have averaged 25 points per game in those 10 clashes while the Sharks average 10. In the two clashes this season, both sides won one game a piece, Sharks winning in round four 14-6 and the Storm beat the Sharks in round 26 to claim the minor premiership 26-6. I am big on defence, and if the Storm can limit the Sharks, it will play into their hands

## **5-6**

Based off the squads which played last weekend for both sides, the Sharks have six players with previous grand final experience Ben Barba, Michael Ennis (2012) James Maloney (2012,2014) Matt Prior (2010) Luke Lewis (2003) and Chris Heighington (2005)

Maloney, Prior, Lewis and Heighington all won grand finals while Barba and Ennis were a part of the Bulldogs side that lost to the Storm 14-4.

The Storm boast five players but loads more grand final experience with Cameron Smith, Cooper Cronk (2007,2008,2009,2012) Will Chambers (2008,2009,2012) and Jesse Bromwich along with Kevin Proctor (2012) winning titles.

Experience will be key in the final and the players from both sides with previous experience will be the ones stepping up to the occasion in the final.

Being the more experienced side, the Storm will have the upper hand in the final. If the Sharks are to win, it's crucial they don't fall behind early and feel pressured as that is what happened to the Raiders last weekend, they trailed and then pressure hit and the Storm too advantage. My pick is the Storm too win the game 20-12.

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**[stephan.maier@medstar.co.nz](mailto:stephan.maier@medstar.co.nz)**

# Tough Call Which Bandwagon to Jump On For Grand Final

## By John Deaker



**Melbourne have the Kiwis and the role-models but Cronulla have the fairy-tale story and play the more attractive football...**

**A**S AN NZ Warriors' supporter it always takes a bit away from the NRL finals' series not having them involved. It can also be a tough decision who to support in the big games. This week's Grand Final is no exception with both Melbourne and Cronulla appearing to have many reasons why New Zealand fans might support them – but also many reasons why they might have their reservations.

The Kiwi influence at Melbourne seems to grow each year. At the weekend we'll see Kiwis players Tohu Harris, Kevin Proctor, Jesse Bromwich and Kenny Bromwich playing for the Storm. Suliiasi Vunivalu also has a strong connection to New Zealand having been on a rugby scholarship with St Kentigans College before he was snapped up by the Storm.

Meanwhile, Cronulla have players like James Maloney who NZ Warriors' fans developed a soft spot for during his time with the Warriors. Chad Townsend also made an impact at the Warriors but nothing like what the charismatic Maloney did.

In contrast to the Storm, Cronulla are one of the fairytale stories of 2016 the way they've exceeded most people's expectations. The fairytale hasn't just been about their winning though, it's also been the style with which they've won that has impressed so many rugby league fans. The comeback story of Cronulla's coach Shane Flanagan is also an inspirational story itself the way he's bounced back from his suspension following enquiries into the Sharks' supplement program.

An interesting link between the Grand Final coaches this week is that Flanagan assisted Craig Bellamy with New South Wales during their unsuccessful stint from 2007-2010. Amongst other things, this would have given Flanagan a valuable insight into how Bellamy would coach against Cameron Smith and Cooper Cronk.

Neutral viewers allegiance could be swung in this match by the simple fact that Melbourne has the Queensland captain Smith calling the shots while the New South Wales skipper Paul Gallen will lead the Sharks.

Cronulla are full of players viewed as 'Bad boys' for many different reasons. Whereas Cooper Cronk has been praised for his consoling of Canberra players at fulltime last week, Mick Ennis was widely criticized for the way he mimicked the 'Viking clap' to the Canberra fans after they'd beaten the Raiders the previous week. Andrew Fifita has been their individual most embroiled in controversy recently following his support for convicted Killer Kieran Loveridge. And then there's someone like Ben Barba that has used his move to Cronulla to move on from his partying lifestyle which peaked in 2013 when he was involved with 'friends' known as the Epic Bender Crew.

The Storm's salary cap breaches were never going to be good for the popularity of the club and the perception that they've lead the way with wrestling in the NRL has done nothing for the club's popularity outside of Melbourne. However, it's hard to remember one instance when one of Craig Bellamy's players have been involved in any controversy off the field.

So there is no 100% clear-cut feel-good story in this match for Kiwis fans. It's likely that the support for Cronulla will heavily dominate this match at Sydney's ANZ Stadium. It's also just as likely that I'll sit on the fence and just hope for a game like the extra-time thriller we had last year between Brisbane and North Queensland.

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# Kiwis Can Fly

## By A Mystery Writer

**S**IX NEW Zealanders will take the field in the grand final this Sunday, continuing a pattern that has increased rapidly since 2010.

In the last six years more than 50 Kiwis have featured on the NRL's biggest day, with many of them playing prominent roles in the match that stops two nations.

It's a remarkable statistic, which reflects the ever-growing New Zealand presence in the NRL.

Indeed, more players from this country have featured in grand finals since 2010 than in the entire decades of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s combined.

The Storm quartet of Jesse Bromwich, Kevin Proctor, Tohu Harris and Kenny Bromwich, along with Cronulla's Sosaia Feki and Gerard Beale will continue that legacy on Sunday.

The match will represent a second grand final appearance for Jesse Bromwich and Proctor, who featured in Melbourne's 14-4 win over the Bulldogs in 2012.

But it will be first appearance for Harris, Kenny Bromwich, Feki and Beale

The Bromwich siblings will grab another slice of history if they both take the field, as they would become the first New Zealand brothers to play in a grand final together.

Kurt and Dane Sorensen played alongside each other for the Sharks in the late 70s and early 80s, but never reached a grand final.

Seeing New Zealanders in action on the last day of the NRL season is something we take for granted now, but it used to be a very rare occurrence.

Bill Noonan was the first Kiwi grand finalist, turning out for the Canterbury-Bankstown against the Eastern Suburbs Roosters in 1974. The Roosters, inspired by Arthur Beetson and Russell Fairfax, took their first grand final victory for 29 years with a 19-4 win.

The late Henry Tatana was the only other Kiwi to play in a grand final in the 1970s. After being an unused substitute for the Bulldogs in 1974, Tatana ran out for the Dragons a year later in their 38-0 loss to the Roosters at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

In the 1980s New Zealand participation in the Winfield Cup increased significantly, but few Kiwis experienced a grand final.

Outstanding players like Mark Graham, Clayton Friend, Hugh McGahan, Olsen Filipaina and the Sorensen brothers all had spells across the Tasman, but mostly with mid-table clubs.

Three Kiwis did experience the 'big dance' in the 1980s though, with Darrell Williams (1987, Manly Warringah), Gary Freeman (1988, 1989 Balmain) and Brett Todd (1987, 1989, Canberra).

Williams became the first New Zealander to lift the trophy – after the Sea Eagles 18-8 win over Todd's Raiders – while Todd and Freeman were involved in one of the greatest deciders of the modern era, the 1989 extra time classic between the Raiders and Tigers.

From a New Zealand point of view, the floodgates began to open in the 1990s with 24 appearances. Todd became the first New Zealander to record two premiership wins, while Canberra's 1994 win marked the first time two Kiwis had been on the victorious team (Ruben Wiki and Quentin Pongia).

Jason Williams (1994, Bulldogs) scored our first grand final try and Daryl Halligan became the second New Zealander (after Todd) to appear in three deciders (1994, 1995 and 1998).

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In the 2000s New Zealand appearances went to another level. Indeed, the Newcastle Knights side of 2001 was the only grand final team across the decade not to have at least one New Zealander.

There were some prominent performances, with Joe Galuvao (Penrith, 2003), Sonny Bill-Williams (Bulldogs, 2004), Benji Marshall (Tigers, 2005) and Adam Blair (Storm, 2009) standouts for their teams.

Jeremy Smith featured in three successive finals (Storm, 2006-2008) while teammate Blair had three deciders across four years (2006, 2007, 2009).

The current decade has had two notable marks. The 2011 grand final featured the most Kiwis in a grand final, with 13 Warriors and three Sea Eagles. And the 2013 decider saw the most New Zealanders on a winning team, with no less than six Kiwis on the Roosters team that defeated Manly.

In total, there have been 130 New Zealand appearances in grand finals since Bill Noonan's ground breaking appearance 42 years ago.

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### 2016 NRL Telstra Premiership Grand Final Match Officials

Matt Cecchin and Ben Cummins will referee the 2016 NRL Telstra Premiership Grand Final this Sunday, 2 October between Melbourne Storm and Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks at ANZ Stadium.

NRL General Manager Officiating Tony Archer said Cecchin and Cummins had been the best referees through the Finals Series and deserved their place in the decider.

“They refereed as a combination in the Finals Series last year, including a Preliminary Final, and are a proven combination in big games,” Mr Archer said.

“The best officials will referee the Grand Final.”

Cecchin refereed in the 2011 Grand Final, while Cummins will be officiating in his fourth decider.

The match officials for the Grand Final are:

Lead Referee: Matt Cecchin

Assist Referee: Ben Cummins

Senior Review Official: Bernard Sutton

Review Officials: Luke Patten and Ashley Klein

Touch Judges: Jeff Younis and Brett Suttor

Standby Referee: Gerard Sutton

Standby Touch Judge: Chris Butler



**J**ohn Holloway, our resident Tipping Columnist, has a Platinum ticket to the NRL Grand Final available. The ticket is valued at **\$400 NZD** but he **needs it gone** and is **willing to take offers**. Send him an email with your offer.

Email [John.Holloway@apn.co.nz](mailto:John.Holloway@apn.co.nz)

If you wish to **subscribe** or **unsubscribe** please email Stephan Maier at [stephan.maier@medstar.co.nz](mailto:stephan.maier@medstar.co.nz)



Joseph Parker's next fight is set to be a sell-out, with a final release of \$69 and \$99 tickets going on sale today, available at [www.ticketdirect.co.nz](http://www.ticketdirect.co.nz)

Parker's opponent, the 6' 7" Russian giant Alexander Dimitrenko, has touched down in Auckland and has instantly gone on the offensive, claiming Parker is underestimating the challenge on their hands and that the young Kiwi isn't experienced enough yet to call himself a true contender.

'The Giant', a former European Heavyweight Champion, boasts a 9cm height advantage, 18cm reach advantage and a formidable record of 38 wins from 40 fights!

Guests will also finally have the chance to see Bachelorette Naz Khanjani step into the ring, this time to face former Beauty and the Geek contestant and daughter of outspoken television presenter Paul Henry, Bella Henry, who aims to silence Naz once and for all.

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# Big Dance Set to Go

By David Kemeys

Former Sunday Star-Times Editor, Former Editor-in-Chief Suburban Newspapers, Long Suffering Warriors Fan



**W**ELL I did not see that coming. Months ago I tipped the Cowboys to go back to back. On Friday I was with Pete at a lunch with heavyweight boxer Joseph Parker ahead of his big fight this weekend, and claimed I had seen nothing to change my view that Melbourne and the Cowboys would be the two sides in the grand final, and that I was sticking with my tip, the Cowboys.

Less than 10 hours later I was sitting on my couch unable to believe what I was seeing.

The Sharkies did not just beat the Cowboys, they beat up on the Cowboys.

James Maloney was outstanding, Chad Townsend was bloody good after being hooked in his last outing, and Jason Bukuya was all over the place.

Three former Warriors in the big show. Bugger. To be fair, we were all gutted when Maloney left, Townsend not so much, and Bukuya many of us, including me, danced a jig.

He was a huge disappointment at Penrose, in fact I was one of his biggest detractors. I thought he was a great signing, a player with a lot of talent, and he did nothing, less than nothing, for us.

Then of course the Storm were too good for the Raiders, which was hugely satisfying if only because you got to see Ricky Stuart look miserable.

So it is with a heavy heart that I admit that I could not care less who wins the grand final.

The drug cheats play the salary cap cheats.

I can not abide Melbourne, I can not abide Cronulla.

Someone asked me why I have these intense dislikes for other clubs? There is no rhyme or reason to it, I just do. They aren't us, and I don't care what happens to them.

On any given day the side I hate most can differ widely, but pretty much it is the one we are playing that weekend, although Manly have a special place in my list of loathing.

All of which makes it even more distressing for me to admit, that I do kind of hope the Sharks get there. Then again, three words for you, Andrew Fifita – knob.

But it is their 50th year and they have never been champions, so it is something of a fairytale.

Melbourne on the other hand I detest because they are just so bloody good. They cane us on a regular and monotonous basis, have Cameron Smith, who is just so bloody impressive it is depressing, and they win, and win, and win.

Pretty much it is a case of jealousy.

It is pretty obvious, having tipped the Cowboys, I could not tip wet cement out of a barrow, let alone tip the winner of an NRL match, much less the grand final.

The head says Melbourne, the heart says Sharks.

After 50 years of supporting their club, those long-suffering Cronulla fans probably deserve a break. At least we can identify with them.



## Foran Signing Fires Up The Media

So Kieran Foran, give or take some goings-on at the NRL, will be in our colours next year.

The media has gone mental and it has been interesting tracking it all.

It probably indicates where I stand on it all, that I'll lead with Ben Ikin, the NRL 360 man, who gets on my tits frankly, but that's another story.

He reckons we will have the most talented spine in the NRL, something Hugh McGahan, of sack Manu and Ben fame, agreed with on Radio Sport.

Foran needs a clearance, but will come on a one-year deal and Ikin says the signing gives us the best hooker, halfback, five-eighth and fullback combination in the game.

"Issac Luke, Shaun Johnson, Kieran Foran, Roger Tuivasa-Sheck...if that's not the most talented spine in the competition, then I don't know enough about footy," Ikin said – the second part of that statement I might have no difficulty with actually.

We all know Foran has had, and the technical phrase we are looking for here is – a shit year.

But Ikin was full of praise for what Foran did at Parramatta. "He straightened them up. He toughened them up. What have we been saying all year that the Warriors need?"

Daily Telegraph journalist Paul Kent agrees. "The Warriors are a good club for him next year.

He's already thinking about football, and I know he's already putting a lot of work into his kicking game, and that just shows where his head is at."

Kent said we already had a quality halfback, and Foran was an honest fight-eighth who would hold everyone accountable.

Foran himself says coming to Penrose is just the thing he needs.

"I've had a lot of time to think about my future. Initially, footy was the furthest thing from my mind and I needed time away from the game. But the desire to play again has completely returned and I'm keen to make a big contribution."

He admitted he had other options, and when you are as good a player as he is, that's not surprising, but said Auckland was the best decision.

"Being in a new environment was important. I'm also incredibly excited by the potential of the club. I can't wait to be part of the team and I want to play a major role in 2017."

Meanwhile the Herald's David Skipwith said it might just be the most important signing in our history.

"A year ago I would have said that with absolute certainty but now I say 'might' because there are plenty of question marks hanging over almost every aspect of Foran's life, let alone his ability to perform on the football field."

That is, given the turmoil, fair comment, and the NRL does want evidence Foran has addressed his problems.

But Skipwith, and please God let this be true, reckons Foran can provide us with another player "comparable to the relentless Simon Mannering in terms of toughness and competitive desire".

That' would be reason enough for me to sign him.

"Forget Roger Tuivasa-Sheck and Issac Luke, Foran is the real deal in terms of being a proven performer and an elite competitor who could help deliver a maiden premiership."

Heap the pressure on then!

For me it is a whole heap simpler.

Skipwith's colleague Michael Burgess was also excited, but urged caution, warning there would be a temptation to see Foran as a silver bullet.

Bugger it, but the bloke is right, to point out that we have had big names before who failed to live up to expectation.

Jesus man, could you not just let me be pleased for a day or two?

## What Now For Tui?

I worked for a long, long time in the media. Some would say I was in the media for a long, long time, but that isn't the same as working, but I do know this.

It is just the way the media works, that every silver lining has a cloud.

And it took no time at all before the signing of Foran was leading to headlines on the future of Tui Loloheia.

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Burgess, who is pretty bloody good and has sound sources, said Lolohea would assess his future and meet with his management team, before discussing his options.

He can discuss it all he likes, but he signed a contract extension in the middle of 2015 that keeps him at Mt Smart.

How often this year, even – especially – when he could not buy a trick with outgoing head coach Andrew McFadden, did I read the club banging on about his amazing potential, and that we would not be releasing him?

The interesting thing about that is that McFadden is out and Stephen Kearney is in, and he may have a different view on things, though given the way he reacted to calls to sack players, I can't see it.

It is no secret that other clubs have cast covetous eyes on the youngster, and he has to be now in a battle with Foran and Ata Hingano for a starting, and even bench spot.

The poor bugger must have been totally over being here, there and everywhere, and sometimes nowhere, this season.

### **Eligibility Rules Take A Bit To Get Your Head Around**

New rules around player eligibility have seen pretty-much everyone blow up about players being able to swap international allegiances.

Most have been a bit bamboozled by the new rules, some going as far as to call them a farce, and allege they have heaped scorn on the game.

Bloody hell, you would drive yourself crazy looking for any kind of consistency in the international rules, let alone the NRL.

But essentially, if you do not get selected for a tier one nation – which is to say Australia, the Kiwis or England, you can go and play for another nation.

The players everyone has focused on – understandably, are Sammy Radradra – who snubbed Fiji and ended up in the green and gold of Australia.

But someone like Anthony Milford could play State of Origin next year, then play for Samoa at the World Cup if he was not wanted by Oz. After the cup he could switch back to OZ if he wanted.

I get it that some may feel it cheapens the international jersey of second-tier nations like Samoa, PNG or Tonga, but surely it is an incentive for NRL players to don their national colours without giving up on their dreams of one day playing for the Kiwis, Kangaroos, or, god forbid, England.

I don't accept at all that it cheapens the jerseys of those nations.

If you want the game to grow, how is it a bad thing if the 2017 World Cup semis roll around and Scotland, United States, Samoa and Fiji, are there, and actually fairly competitive?

Italy had Anthony Minichiello, Samoa had Milford, Joseph Leilua and Tim Lafai, Tonga had Jason Taumalolo, Konrad Hurrell and Daniel Tupou.

The argument is that pride in the jumper and the honour of representing your country is everything. That's romantic, but it just isn't the reality of professional sport.

And before anyone in New Zealand gets on their high horse about it, take a look at the Kiwis.

### **Ennis The Menace**

There are players you hate but you have to admire. Corey Parker at the Broncos is one. Of course if he was Corey Parker at the Warriors...

But he has had an amazing career, got an incredible work-rate, plays with pride, blah, blah.

Sam Thaiaday, Paul Gallen the list goes on.

Then there are players you just plain hate, and Michael Ennis is it for me. The man should have a P in his name.

Of course the fact that he winds me up so much is kind of proof that he is bloody good at what he does, which makes him even more intolerable in my view.

The man is the Richie McCaw of league – he's never been onside in his life.

He constantly niggles, milks penalties, chips at referees, plays on the absolute limit of the laws of the game, and I can't wait to see the back of him.

Even Cowboy Jason Taumalolo says he is guaranteed the title of league's most irritating man.

*Continued on next page...*

*Continued from previous page...*

Ennis copped plenty of criticism for taunting Raiders fans, and Taumalolo says that's Ennis to a tee. "I speak for most of the NRL that Mick is up there as one of the most annoying players in the comp."

I don't think I'm going to be able to cope if he goes out a winner.

Of course if he was Michael Ennis of the Warriors....

### **Serbia Goes Big**

I love watching our game expand and it is now reaching deep into Europe. Serbia has named a 56-man squad to play in the European pool qualifiers for the World Cup. The squad has locals but also players from Australia, England and France.

### **Viva Espana**

And Spain has named a 40-man squad for its qualifiers, four of whom have also already played for France.

### **Wales Recalls Stars**

The reigning European champions are Wales, and they have strengthened their squad with the return of Super League stars Rhys Evans, Gil Dudson, Lloyd White and Ben Flower.

### **Even Russia...**

Russia is in on it too, naming a 29-man squad for its qualifiers. Around half are debutants.

---

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## **David Hartnell on League in Libraries**

**T**HE VODAFONE Warriors League in Libraries 2001-20015 box set is an amazing array of short stories, which have been created by Kiwi children and beautifully illustrated.

This box set should be in every primary school in New Zealand, each and every story makes reading fun. I was introduced to the box set by Sir Peter at his Celebrity Roast, in fact, he flung them at me saying that I needed to read something worthwhile. This is such a great product that my partner Somboon and I, are going to take some box sets to several orphanages in Thailand that we sponsor, so they can not only learn English but read some great stores. And yes Sir Peter in case you're wondering - I have read every book in the box set.

**David Hartnell MNZM Hollywood Gossip Column.**



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 CSG



# NRL Grand Final

## By Sir Peter Leitch



*Thought you might like to take a read of the bit I wrote for my newspaper column.*

**A**FTER 28 weeks of league there are only two sides left in the running to be crowned NRL champions - the Cronulla Sharks and the Melbourne Storm.

Not too many people saw the demolition job Cronulla did on the reigning premiers the North Queensland Cowboys coming.

They were the better side for 80 minutes and thoroughly deserved their preliminary final win.

It will be something of a fairytale if they can win, having never won the big prize before in the club's 50 years.

Of course they have former Warriors James Maloney and Chad Townsend calling the shots in the backline, and another, Jason Bukuya, in the forwards.

Standing between them and glory is Cameron Smith's Melbourne Storm, who have a collection of Kiwis in their line-up, including the impressive Bromwich brothers.

They were too good for Canberra's Raiders in their preliminary, and I confess to feeling some sympathy for their coach Ricky Stuart, who cops plenty of criticism, but who I happen to think is a much misunderstood thoroughly good bloke.

He once crossed the Tasman to speak at a charity fundraiser for me and did not charge a penny because it was a charity event.

And shock horror, I will not be at the Grand Final this year, though I would love to be.

But I have a wedding to attend on Friday night, and on Saturday night I will be at the Vodafone Events Centre to watch heavyweight boxer, and good south Auckland boy, Joseph Parker fight his giant opponent Alexander Dimitrenko.

I have an enormous amount of time for Joseph. He is nothing like the loud-mouthed, trash-talking boxers you see coming out of America. He is the complete opposite, quiet, focused, respectful, humble and just impossible to dislike.

As usual there is lots of talk about Joseph's opponent not being much, but that is complete nonsense.

Even British boxing promoter Eddie Hearn, who handles champion Anthony Joshua – who Joseph has the rights to challenge - said he thought it was a gutsy fight.

It's a brave move by his team. They are obviously very confident. What I like about Parker and his team is they are actually looking to improve. Dimitrenko is good preparation, though risky, when you've got that golden fight in front of you"

And this Saturday night at Mt Smart the grand final of the New Zealand Rugby League Premiership will be played between the Counties-Manukau Stingrays and the Akarana Falcons.

**The game kicks off at 8pm, and is live on Sky TV, as is the curtain-raiser at 6pm.** That will see Waikato, the winners of the championship, play Wellington's Orcas, who finished bottom of the premiership, in a promotion and relegation battle.

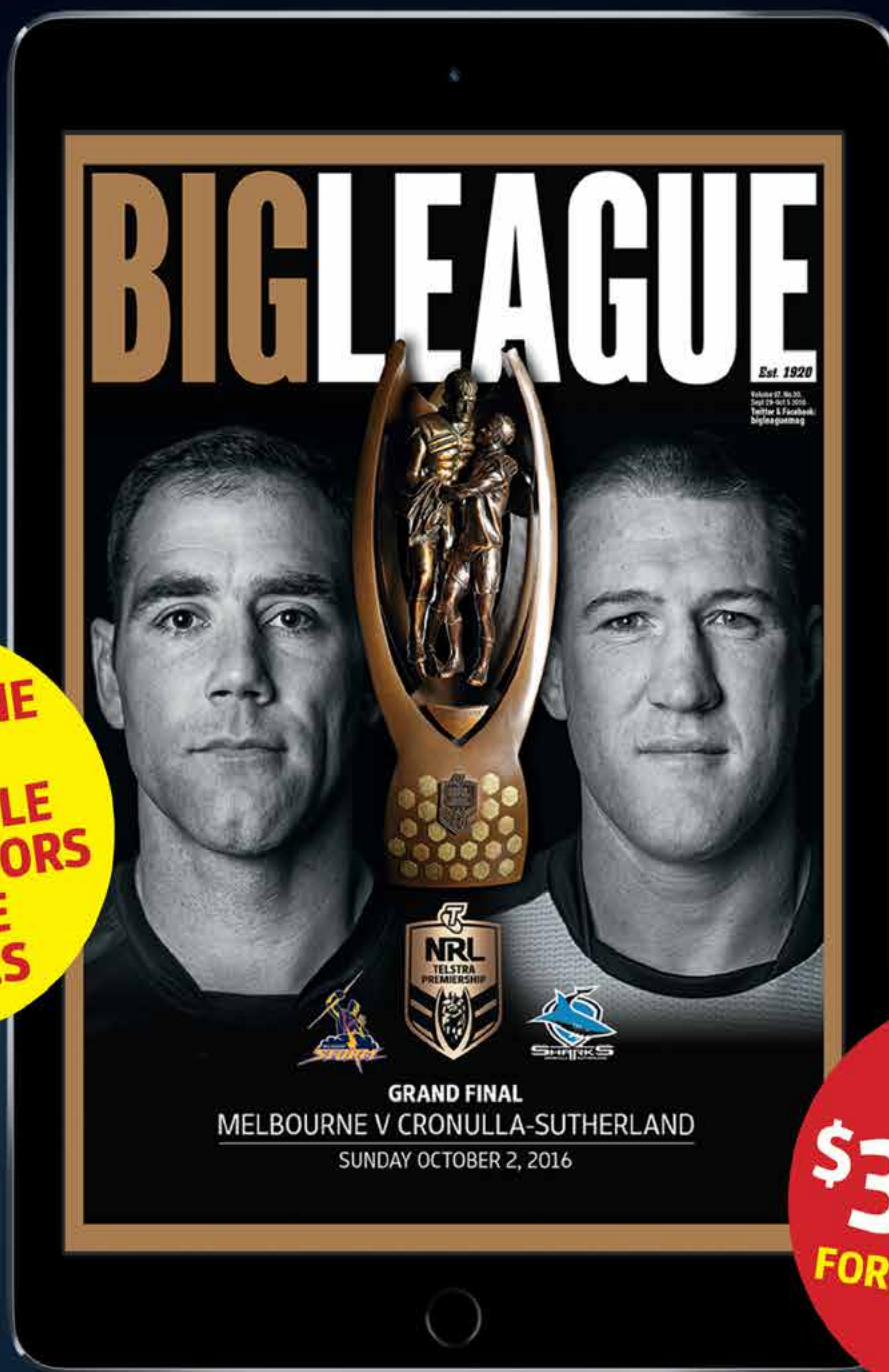
And I have to say well done to Southland, where the game of league has had a boost despite the Rams losing their championship decider to Waikato 52-6.

All credit to Waikato, who overpowered the Rams, but Southland punched well above their weight to come second in the championship, and that is something the boys in the side can be proud of.

Southland is not exactly a hotbed of league, so it is great to see the code cracking on and performing well.



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**I**HAVE VIVID memories of the two previous Sydney Grand Finals in which the Cronulla Sharks played. They did play in a third Grand Final but that was the 1997 Super League Grand Final which was staged in Brisbane at the ANZ Stadium on 20 September. The Broncos won this decider over the Sharks by 26-8.

Cronulla's first Grand Final was at the Sydney Cricket Ground on 15 September 1973. This was a good effort as the Sharks had just joined the first grade competition six seasons previously, in 1967. I was a spectator at this match, high up in the Ladies Stand at halfway on the western side. Manly won this game 10-7 with Immortal and Australian Team of the Century member, Bob Fulton, scoring both the Sea Eagles tries. After growing up with Fulton in the Wollongong area, 80 kilometres south of Sydney, this was a pleasing result for me. But there were many other memorable moments to come from this epic Grand Final. Many rate it the toughest of all Grand Finals and when you examine the make-up of both forward packs you can understand why. The Manly six were Bill Hamilton (1973 Kangaroo), Fred Jones (capt) (3 Tests), John O'Neill (10 Tests), Peter Peters, Terry Randall (11 Tests), Malcolm Reilly (9 Tests for Great Britain), while the Cronulla pack comprised Cliff Watson (30 Tests for Great Britain), Ron Turner (4 Tests), Grahame Bowen, Ken Maddison (4 Tests), John Maguire, Greg Pierce (8 Tests). The tackling throughout the game was ferocious and there were several brawls. In Steve Haddan's book, "100 years of National Rugby League Finals," he writes "the first 20 minutes of the 1973 Grand Final could best be described as unrestrained mayhem. Knees, fists and boots dominated the traditional softening-up period and shirmishes erupted everywhere."

While Fulton was the match winner, the Cronulla captain/coach, Tommy Bishop, also played a major role in the clash. Bishop, who played 15 Tests for Great Britain, was a superb ball player. He arrived in Australia back in 1969 as a 10 pound migrant with his family, thinking he had a contract with the Roosters, but they didn't want him and when he was told that Cronulla were interested in his services he was gobsmacked. The Sharks were at the bottom of the competition and Bishop wasn't impressed. But things changed and years later he said that it was the best move he had ever made. Now 75, Bishop lives at Redcliffe in outer Brisbane.

I had an excellent seat at the 1978 Grand Final, as I worked as co-commentator with Rex Mossop on Channel 7's TV coverage of the game. This Grand Final was played on 16 September, again at the Sydney Cricket Ground and it finished in an 11-all draw. Both sides managed just one try. Winger, Tom Mooney, who is now the owner of the Bangalow Hotel between Byron Bay and Lismore, as well as the Railway Hotel at Byron Bay, was the Manly try scorer, while Sharks winger, Steve Edmonds, picked up his team's try. To say that the Sharks were disappointed in the display of referee, Greg Hartley, would be an understatement and numerous League fans all over Australia agreed with them. In 1978, including the Grand Final, Manly had to play six finals matches in 24 days before they won the Premiership and this was an excellent effort. But their critics will point to the fact that Hartley controlled five of these vital games. As well as this, other club coaches, Jack Gibson (South Sydney), Roy Masters (Wests) and Terry Fearnley (Parramatta) continued to question whether Manly had done it alone and each of these three asked the NSWRL that Hartley be given none of their team's games in 1979. The Grand Final replay was held at the Cricket Ground three days later and Manly took the title with their 16-0 win. Manly fielded the same starting team in both the Grand Final and the replay, but Cronulla were missing four in the replay. As well as this, two of their best men, Test lock, Greg Pierce and Kiwi Test front rower, Dane Sorensen, missed both games.

Those days are long gone now and while there are still refereeing problems, they are mainly because of perceived incompetence rather than perceived bias. The weather forecast for the big day is good for Sydney. As I did back in 1978, I am tipping the Sharks, as I think they can score more points than the Storm. That is not because of any lack of respect for the Storm. They are a very talented side, with a brilliant coach and an intelligent captain. But as I live in Sharks territory I will have my porch light on, as 2 October 2016 will be the day, that former Prime Minister, Harold Holt, might return. Australian Team of the Century coach, Jack Gibson, said around 1985, that waiting for Cronulla to win the Premiership was like leaving the porch light on for Harold Holt to come home.





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## Cutters Crowned Intrust Super P'ship NSW Champions



**A** 73RD MINUTE field goal from Illawarra halfback Drew Hutchinson proved the difference as the Cutters claimed a 21-20 victory over minor premiers Mounties in the Intrust Super Premiership NSW decider at Pirtek Stadium on Sunday (25 September).

On a memorable day in which NSWRL said goodbye to one of Rugby League's most iconic stadiums, the Cutters celebrated their first Intrust Super Premiership NSW title in the club's short history.

Having made all three NSWRL Grand Finals, Mounties managed just the one victory as the club's Ron Massey Cup side claimed a comfortable 36-16 win over St Marys.

East Campbelltown Eagles caused a major upset in the Sydney Shield, defeating a Mounties side who had won 21 consecutive matches heading into Sunday's Grand Final.

For all the latest on the NSWRL Grand Final Day, including match reports, reactions and photos, [click here](#).

## Fittler's Hogs Continue to Give Back - NSW

**N**SW'S BRAD Fittler today (Sunday, 25 September) presented a cheque for \$141,351.62 to Father Chris Riley's Youth off the Streets from funds raised during this year's NSWRL Hogs For The Homeless Tour.

NSWRL Chairman Dr George Peponis joined Fittler at half-time of the Intrust Super Premiership NSW Grand Final at Pirtek Stadium as Father Chris Riley accepted the generous gesture.

Since its inception in 2013, Hogs For The Homeless has raised more than \$450,000 for Youth off the Streets, with this year's tour also raising much-needed funds for Rugby League clubs around NSW.

The fourth annual Hogs For The Homeless Tour saw former Origin greats including Fittler, Matt Cooper, Steve Menzies and Nathan Hindmarsh, ride their Harley Davidson motorbikes far and wide throughout NSW to raise awareness and funds for Father Chris Riley's Youth off the Streets.

In addition, the crew helped drive Junior Rugby League membership and participation, with 3000

Rugby League balls handed out to children across 19 country towns in 10 days.

Having been a supporter of Youth off the Streets since his playing days, Fittler is thrilled to be a part of such an exciting and inspiring journey once again.

"It is amazing to see how animated the people get when we arrive in these small country towns," said the former Origin captain.

"It is so unbelievably humbling to meet these wonderful people who have so many great stories to share. I love seeing the smiles on kids' faces when we put a footy in their hands.

"Helping people in need is something I feel strongly about and the more attention we can bring to the work of these organisations the better off thousands will be."



# Mounties' Dream Season Continues - NSW

**M**OUNTIES HAVE capped off an historic season after claiming the 2016 NSWRL Club Championship at the NSWRL Grand Final Day at Pirtek Stadium (Sunday, 25 September).

Known as the Flowers Memorial Pennant, Mounties were rewarded for their impressive season after becoming the first team since St George in 1985 to reach all three NSWRL senior grade grand finals.

The Club Championship is calculated across the five NSWRL competitions - Intrust Super Premiership NSW, Ron Massey Cup, Sydney Shield, SG Ball and Harold Matthews.

Named after Fred Flowers, the first president of the Political Labor League, the title is awarded to the club with the highest aggregate points at the conclusion of the competition rounds.

Clubs receive certain points for each victory they earn and despite not competing in the NSWRL junior representative competitions, Mounties still managed to top the tally board, highlighting their extraordinary success in the senior competitions.

After finishing the regular season as minor premiers across all three senior grades, Mounties earned a combined total of 103 points to claim their first NSWRL Club Championship.



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## New Zealand Under 21 Men Set for Sultan of Johor Cup

**T**HE NEW Zealand Under 21 Men have been named for the Sultan of Johor Cup in Malaysia next month. Thirteen of the 20 players heading to the Sultan of Johor will also be competing at the Junior World Cup in December.

There is plenty of talent in the team, with two of the country's best Under 18 players Reuben Andrews and Dylan Stevenson set for their first taste of international representative hockey.

Head coach Bryce Collins said the Sultan of Johor Cup was a great development opportunity, especially with the Junior World Cup looming.

"This is ideal preparation and development ahead of the Junior World Cup and taking 20 players allows us to expose a greater number of players to international hockey," he said.

"All of these players have performed to a high standard through various high performance tournaments this year with Reuben and Dylan selected thanks to excellent Under 18, Under 21 and Rankin Cup tournaments."

New Zealand will go up against Australia, England, Pakistan, Japan and hosts Malaysia at the tournament which runs from 31 October - 6 November.

PLAYER NAME	POSITION
Reuben ANDREWS	Defender/Mid-fielder
Robbie CAPIZZI	Striker
Dom DIXON	Goalkeeper
Alex HANHAM	Midfielder
Hugh HENDRICKSON	Defender
Sam HIHA	Midfielder
Jonty KEANEY	Striker
Sam LANE	Striker
Ollie LOGAN	Defender
Thomas MALLON	Goalkeeper
Joshua MEATES	Canterbury

PLAYER NAME	POSITION
Kieran O'CONNOR	Striker
Mitchell OTTOW	Midfielder
Bradley READ	Defender
Aidan SARIKAYA	Midfielder
Joshua SMITH	Defender
Dylan STEVENSON	Defender
Dylan THOMAS	Striker
Johnny THORN	Defender
Mackenzie WILCOX	Striker



# Rota's Revival Sparks Stingrays Success

## By Chapman - NZRL Communications Manager



COUNTIES MANUKAU hooker Krystal Rota emerged as the unlikely hero, steering her Stingrays home in the final to defend their NZRL National Women's title at Rotorua's Puketawhero Park.

Rota crossed for the winning try with only a few moments to spare in a tight 12-8 win over Akarana Falcons, as the Stingrays finished the three-day tournament with an unblemished record across six games.

But earlier in the second half, Rota seemed out for the count with a knee injury and needed another layer of tape on top of her usual heavy strapping to continue the contest.

The Stingrays have dominated this event in recent years, but had shown their vulnerability this weekend, trailing at half-time of three games en route to the final. On Friday, they had lagged 10-6 behind Akarana, before storming home for a 20-10 victory.

This time, the score was locked at 4-4 midway through, after wing Jocephy Daniels had given Counties the initial advantage, matched by powerful second rower Annetta Nu'ausala for Akarana.

Kiwi Ferns wing Atawhai Tupaea put the Singrays ahead after the break, but opposite Tanika Bell seemed to have put the game into overtime, when she scrambled over late for the Falcons.

"The score says it all," reflected Counties co-captain Teuila Fotu-Moala, who was later named Most Valuable Player of the final, but who had also caused Rota's injury scare, when they collided in a tackle.

"There was only a try in it and that try was scored in the last couple of minutes. We knew it would be tough and we'd have to grind it out.

"We identified our starts weren't good through the tournament, so for this final, we tried to work on it. Our second wind kicked in, but they didn't drop their level and we had to keep matching their energy."

Counties forward Kahurangi Peters was duly named tournament MVP, veteran team-mate Sarina Fiso was best back, while Nu'ausala continued her rise up the national standings, nominated as best forward.

### NZRL NATIONAL WOMEN'S TOURNAMENT

Puketawhero Park, Rotorua

- Final – Counties Manukau Stingrays 12 (Jocephy Daniels, Atawhai Tupaea & Krystal Rota tries) Akarana Falcons 8 (Annetta Nu'ausala & Tanika Bell tries)
- Final MVP – Teuila Fotu-Moala (Counties Manukau)
- Finals match officials: Antoinette Grootjans (referee), Jaxon McGowan & Mike Rangihika (touch)
- Outstanding coach: Mike Linton (Canterbury)
- Outstanding manager: Christine Mirko (Counties Manukau)
- Outstanding trainer: Dan Keepa (Counties Manukau)
- Outstanding match official: Antoinette Grootjans
- Best Back of the Tournament: Sarina Fiso (Counties Manukau)
- Best Forward of the Tournament: Annetta Nu'ausala (Akarana)
- Most Valuable Player: Kahurangi Peters (Counties Manukau)
- More Than Just A Game Team: Wai-Coa-Bay

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# Auckland Rivals Survive Southern Scare

By Chapman - NZRL Communications Manager



**C**OUNTIES MANUKAU Stingrays and Akarana Falcons will contest this week's NZRL National Premiership grand final at Auckland's Mt Smart Stadium.

But Canterbury Bulls will be left lamenting their missed opportunities, as they dipped out on points differential in a three-way countback for the top two spots.

Stingrays progressed to the final with an overpowering 82-12 road win over Wellington Orcas in Porirua, a performance that ultimately lifted them to the top of the competition ladder and also consigned their hosts to next week's promotion/relegation fixture.

Centre Paulos Latu, wing Alan Niulevu and prop Uila Aiulupo all recorded try-scoring hat-tricks, while half Raymond Talimalie scored 26 points, converting 11 of 15 tries.

But the real drama took place in Christchurch, where the Bulls needed to topple unbeaten Akarana by 19 points to advance to the title game.

Canterbury eventually prevailed 38-26, with centre Matt Sauni scoring three tries. The three frontrunners all finished with two wins and one loss for the season, but Counties enjoyed a +78 points difference, ahead of Akarana (+28) and Canterbury (+16).

Last year's premiership also ended in a three-way tie, with Counties Manukau and Canterbury facing off in the final, and Wai-Coa-Bay missing out on points differential.

Meanwhile, Waikato secured the NZRL National Championship title and a chance for promotion to the top grade, when they overcame Southland Rams 52-6 in Invercargill.

## NZRL NATIONAL PREMIERSHIP

Counties Manukau Stingrays 82 (Paulos Latu 3, Alan Niulevu 3, Uila Aiulupo 3, George Edwards, Raymond Talimalie, King Vunyayawa, Sione Feao, Howard Brown & James Dowie tries; Talimalie 11 goals) Wellington Orcas 12 (Ulai Oti & Lake Manaia tries; Himiona Henare & Anthony Utanga goals)

Canterbury Bulls 38 (Matt Sauni 3, Nathan Saumalu, Vinnie Paul, Chris Bamford & Phil Nati tries; Tevin Arona 4 & Toi Sepuloni goals) Akarana Falcons 26 (Siva Otunuku, Cortez Taulu, Zae Wallace, Taylor Daniels & Tevita Latu tries; Wallace 3 goals)

## NZRL NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Waikato 52 (Morgan Harper 3, Aaron Jolley 2, Te Puhi Rudolph 2, Piripi Parangi & Eru Keepa tries; Jolley 8 goals) Southland 6 (Logo Peteru try; Jayleel Faamoe-Ioane goal)

Sunday, September 25

Canterbury Development 46 (Isaac Misky 4, Steve Maat 2, Phil Wahnig, Texas Toleafoa & Tauvale Tauvale tries; Angus Anderson 5 goals) Taranaki 16 (Charles Walters 2 & Jaron Schischka tries; Mark Davis 2 goals)

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*Had the pleasure of meeting the Taranaki Rockets Rugby League team at Auckland Airport on Sunday night. Shouted them a feed of subway and a drink, top bunch of guys*



*My best wishes go to my good mate Rodney Green and his family as he battles for his life in Auckland Hospital. The picture is of me, Rodney and his brother Clinton.*

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