

## Western Pioneers Newsletter 17 July 2011



Next week's games are the semi final clashes for the North Harbour Championship between minor championship winner **North Shore and the Western Pioneers at Vauxhall Park** and Silverdale play Massey at Silverdale.

The following week will see the winners of these games square off for the Championship at North Harbour Stadium.

After the Pioneers game against Northcote, **Ray Alo** was presented with his Helensville blazer for playing 30 Premier games.

Ray came to Helensville in 2008 when they made the semi finals, losing to North Shore on that occasion. That year he made the North Harbour team for their clash against Auckland in the Battle of the Bridge. He captained Helensville the following year, and sustained a bad knee injury that necessitated surgery.

This year he has had an outstanding season for the Pioneers, before again succumbing to a knee injury that has cut his season short. He has seldom been bettered as a powerful second five and it was a surprise that he wasn't named in this year's Harbour squad.

As part of the arrangement with forming the Pioneers, players are eligible to receive recognition for significant playing milestones by counting games they had previously played for either Kumeu or Helensville and games with the Western Pioneers.

Six of the Pioneers backs were this week named in **the Harbour B team squad**, which is a remarkable achievement, but no surprise to Pioneers supporters who have had so much pleasure watching these guys week in week out torment opposition defences with their skilful play.

They are Nalu and Phillip Tuigamala, Regan Oxenham, Ray Alo, Apiu Pritchard and Paotonu (Charlie) Luteru. Also in the squad is Jimmy Tuivaiti but along with Ray will not play due to injury.

This was the last home game for the Pioneers and with that the end of the raffle season. This week's raffle prize was wine, generously donated by Pioneer's supporter and wine maker **Bill Spence**. Bill makes his extraordinarily good wines under the Moncellier label, which can be purchased on line at [www.moncellierwines.co.nz](http://www.moncellierwines.co.nz) Thanks for your generosity Bill.

**A Ritchies bus is going to be put on for supporters to go to the North Shore game.**

There will be a charge of \$10 per head. It will depart Helensville from the Kaipara Tavern car park at 1.00pm, pick up more supporters at the Kumeu shopping centre at 1.30 pm and return home at the conclusion of the after match speeches at North Shore. Please full it up with your friends and family, so spread the word!

You can book your seat(s) by contacting **Century 21** on 420 8360.

Our raucous support can help get the Pioneers into the final.

**Finally, a couple of thoughts for the week.**



Is there a more unpopular rugby player in NZ than Luke McAlister?

On the basis of the first game, are North Harbour fans in for another disappointing season?

Was watching Samoa beat the Wallabies the best viewing of the weekend?

## Western Pioneers Match Report 17 July

On Saturday at rugby headquarters in Helensville, Jane Burmester's Century 21 Western Pioneers put paid to any hopes Northcote had of retaining their North Harbour club title when they sent them home with a 13-10 defeat. It was the third time this season that Northcote have come up short against the Pioneers so they can have no qualms.

The score line flattered the vanquished as they scored a converted try on fulltime, long after the Pioneers faithful had ordered the first round at the club's bar.

Northcote and their loyal band of supporters arrived to find the field in remarkably good condition considering the recent inclement weather. (A memo here to the Pioneer's coaches: You look after the playing side of things and the management will handle the other issues!)

On arrival the Northcote contingent looked ill at ease. Perhaps they were looking for more mud, as they had spent most of their season sloshing around in it at Stafford Park. Or was it the fact they had had to dig deeper into their pockets to cover the fuel bill to get to Helensville, the threat of a proposed Harbour Bridge toll or a capital gains tax on their holiday homes?

The Pioneers soon gave them more reason for concern as they held their much vaunted forward pack at bay, and imposed their own dominance. Mention must be made of the Pioneer's magnificent eight.

Young prop Shane Dixon has been thrown in the deep end with Tai Ve'a being taken away by the Harbour selectors. He has stepped up to the mark and with time and age will be a cornerstone of the Pioneers pack for years to come.

The other prop is Fala Sakaria, also improving with every outing and unlucky not to have been selected for the Harbour B squad.

In between these two is the hugely experienced hooker Tani Fuga, who is relishing the challenge of leading his young cohorts into action each week and hitting the mark with his lineout throws.

Lasalosi Kaifa returned to the fray after a few weeks on the sideline and with Josh Williams forms a powerful locking pair.

Ross McKean was moved from lock to blindside flanker and his physical presence around the field and at lineout time is significant

Fou Tuivaiti's non stop action, whether it is on attack or defence, from his position as number seven.



Player of the Day for the Pioneers was Bryce Steel, who has been thrust into the role of number eight. Bryce has a bright future ahead of him. As he physically develops, he will become a top player. He is a genuine lineout option and gets heavily involved in general play.

It was to be a typical knockout match and with a lot at stake, the pressure and wet ball contributed to many handling errors. The Pioneers were seldom under real pressure in the first half, but it wasn't until 25 minutes had passed that they scored.

They attacked strongly, committed Northcote to the breakdown, and then spun the ball wide. With Charlie Luteru screaming for the ball out on the wing, fullback Geraint Walsh took it upon himself to score as he managed to step inside two defenders and crash over handy to the posts.

Regan Oxenham, back after a week off, converted and the Pioneers were up 7-0. He later missed a penalty, which shaved the uprights after more attacks on the Northcote goal line, and halftime arrived with the score 7-0.

At this stage the match reporter had to seek leave of absence as he headed home to check his flock of ewes, as lambing commences early in the North West. With lambs having the equivalent value of gold dust, every survivor means more dollars can go in the Kiwi Saver account.

Shortly after half time Northcote was unlucky not to score when one of their players had the ball knocked from his grasp as he attempted to place the ball over the line. They did get a penalty shortly after to narrow the gap to 7-3.

The Pioneers converted their territorial advantage into points as Oxenham kicked two penalties to extend their lead to 13-3, and a semi final spot beckoned.

Northcote got their consolation try, surprisingly scored after some good back play when the Pioneers defence came up out of alignment. For most of the season, the Northcote backs have been less threatening than the Kumeu JB2 team's backs.

This game signalled the farewell appearance in North Harbour rugby of French referee Julien Szostak as he completed his sabbatical and heads back to his homeland to enjoy the culinary delights of snails, garlic and frog's legs.

Helensville and the Pioneers bid him "au revoir" with heavy hearts, as he has plied his trade with enthusiasm and flair over the past few years.

Who will forget early in his career in NZ when, detailed to officiate at Helensville, he misread the instructions and ended up at the wrong venue! He quickly put his Peugeot in overdrive, and his speed to get to Helensville was only surpassed by Helen Clark's cavalcade as it sped through South Island towns several years ago.

Thanks for the memories Julien.

When the pigeon finally flew in from Moire Park to deliver the result from the other quarter final, it showed that the Western Pioneers will front up at North Shore's home ground,



Vauxhall Park, next Saturday as Massey had consigned Takapuna to the ignominy of the Plate Division for 2011.

Massey will play Silverdale in the other semi at Silverdale.

These results show categorically that the balance of power in North Harbour club rugby has shifted with the magnitude of a 7.8 earthquake to the outer regions of the union. Sadly for North Harbour rugby followers, and there are precious few of them left, the rep selectors have in their wisdom chosen only four players in total from the Western, Massey and Silverdale teams for their ITM Cup side, preferring instead to go with players from predominantly second rate club sides.

The match up against North Shore is just the draw that the Western brains trust (if in fact there is such a group) were keen to have, as after two reasonably close losses to Shore this season, they feel that third time around they can put Buck Shelford's men to the sword.

You Western Pioneers supporters are urged to head to Vauxhall Park next Saturday and see if the Pioneers can, in their first season, cement a place in the following week's final. It will be a great game of club rugby, as the new boys in town take on the establishment.

The Senior First side played their quarter final against a North Shore team they had previously defeated twice this season. Sadly on this occasion, they went missing in action, being defeated by 41-0.

There were unsubstantiated rumours that Shore played several of their Premier players, who had the bye this weekend, but it would be hard to imagine that a club with North Shore's integrity would stoop to such low tricks.

They will play in the plate round next week.