

NEW ZEALAND RUGBY LEAGUE
ANNUAL REPORT
YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2008



NEW ZEALAND
RUGBY LEAGUE



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NEW ZEALAND RUGBY LEAGUE CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE



IT'S EXTREMELY PLEASING TO BE ABLE TO REPORT THAT TWO OF THE BOARD'S OBJECTIVES FOR 2008 WERE ACHIEVED AND HAVE SUCCEEDED IN GIVING OUR GAME'S IMAGE A HUGE BOOST NOT JUST NATIONALLY BUT INTERNATIONALLY.

When we planned the year our objectives were:

- The formation of a strong coaching and management structure that created a professional environment to enable the Pirtek Kiwis to win the World Cup.
- The Pirtek Kiwis winning the Rugby League World Cup for the first time in its 54-year history;

The selection of Stephen Kearney as head coach and Wayne Bennett as coaching and management adviser proved to be a resounding success. They also had highly capable support staff around them who combined well to create the required professional environment where the players were comfortable with their surroundings and were able to learn and progress.

In 13 attempts since 1954, New Zealand had never beaten Australia in a World Cup match let alone won the title. The triumph at Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane on November 22 led to the team being voted one of the four finalists in the Team of the Year category for the prestigious Halberg Awards while Stephen was also a finalist for the Coach of the Year. While we didn't come away with either award it was great recognition for the game that both the team and Stephen were acknowledged.

While the Pirtek Kiwis are to be commended on their success, so too are the Kiwi Ferns. They provided the other major on-field highlight of the year by winning the women's World Cup for the third straight time since its introduction. It's a great credit to the Women's Rugby League Committee who, under Christine Panapa, have worked tirelessly for so many years and done so independently with minimal assistance from the New Zealand Rugby League. Well done to Christine and her team.

We had successes in other areas as well, notably through the National Provincial Premiership sponsored by Bartercard and supported by New Zealand Community Trust, while the NJC 18s (Kiwi Cup) and NJC 16s (Foundation Cup) were supported by the NRL Partnership. These competitions represent the NZRL's commitment to the next tier of the game and they produced some excellent football as well as providing a stepping stone for our future stars.

2008 was also a milestone year for New Zealand Maori Rugby League, Otago Rugby League and Southland Rugby League, all who celebrated their centenaries during the year.

This was a year when we received invaluable financial support from Colin Love and the NRL Partnership enabling us to start the year on a positive note as the Partnership provided us with working capital to proceed with a number of projects that would otherwise have been placed on hold.

The selection of the Board, including the three new independent directors, ensured there was an excellent blend of commercial and football experience to cover the many difficult situations that arose throughout the year. The sub committees formed have ensured that correct governance procedures are a priority.

The Board agreed with SPARC that it would be valuable to undertake a complete review of the game in New Zealand, including the way it is organised. We were delighted that Sir John Anderson agreed to participate in the review as the Independent Chair. The Board has fully co-operated with the Review Committee during the process, and I would like to thank the Committee for the work they have undertaken. Adoption of the outcomes of the SPARC report will ensure Rugby League, a game that is clearly important to all New Zealanders, continues to flourish and grow.

During the year interviews were carried out with the intention of employing a chief executive officer. However, this did not eventuate as the review with SPARC commenced and its recommendation was to install a temporary CEO for the period of the review. This position was taken up by Murray McCaw who has proven to be an excellent choice, and he has played a part in the success of many of the commercial decisions that the Board has had to make in the last few months.

Above all, the Pirtek Kiwis ensured 2008 will be a year we never forget, a year when history was made allowing New Zealand to claim world champion status for the next five years.

Ray Haffenden
CHAIRMAN

NEW ZEALAND RUGBY LEAGUE EXECUTIVE REPORT

Restoring key stakeholders' confidence was a priority for the Board and Management Team after the 2008 annual general meeting.

With the Anzac Test being held to celebrate Australian Rugby League's centenary and the Rugby League World Cup following at the end of the year, we considered it critical to secure outstanding leadership for the Kiwis. The 2008 combination of Stephen Kearney as coach and Wayne Bennett as coaching and management advisor provided the ideal solution to NZRL's short and long term objectives.

The best indication that confidence had been restored off the field was the signing of new Kiwis sponsor Pirtek. In addition Sunday News joined our stable of sponsors of the Kiwis and we are grateful for their support and partnership.

The creditable on-field performance in the Centenary Test also showed that stability and confidence had been restored within the team.

One area in which we had to build confidence and trust was with the NRL. An indication of the Board's success in regaining their support was the confirmation of an increased development investment from the NRL Partnership.

An increase in the contestable portion of this grant (i.e. over and above the base grant) was critical to ensuring the survival of key programmes during a year in which the availability of funding through New Zealand based sources was limited.

One of the critical programmes the NRL Partnership funding allowed us to progress was the ongoing development of LeagueNet, the online competition and membership management tool that we piloted with the first five Districts in 2008 as stage one of our regional roll out.

LeagueNet will eventually give NZRL a vastly improved capability to support its membership needs with streamlined competitions management, database maintenance, transfer processes and other administrative tools intended to alleviate the load on our volunteer workforce. It is critically important that all Districts make use of this tool for their membership

database and competition management, as LeagueNet also provides a ready management tool for clubs to use to reduce their administrative burden and leverage their membership.

The first benefits of utilising LeagueNet were seen by participating Districts with all registered mini-mod Juniors each receiving a personalised postcard from Kiwis Captain Nathan Cayless.

At the conference following the 2008 AGM, NZRL, in keeping with the rebuilding theme, updated the members on policy reforms, addressing governance deficiencies, a review of the NZRL constitution to continue this process and unveiled the plans to undertake an independent evaluation of membership capability using Chris Ineson.

THE BEST INDICATION THAT CONFIDENCE HAD BEEN RESTORED OFF THE FIELD WAS THE SIGNING OF NEW KIWIS SPONSOR PIRTEK. IN ADDITION SUNDAY NEWS JOINED OUR STABLE OF SPONSORS OF THE KIWIS AND WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIP.

The appointment of three high quality Independent Directors and initiating a CEO recruitment process continued the drive toward improvement in capability and off field performance.

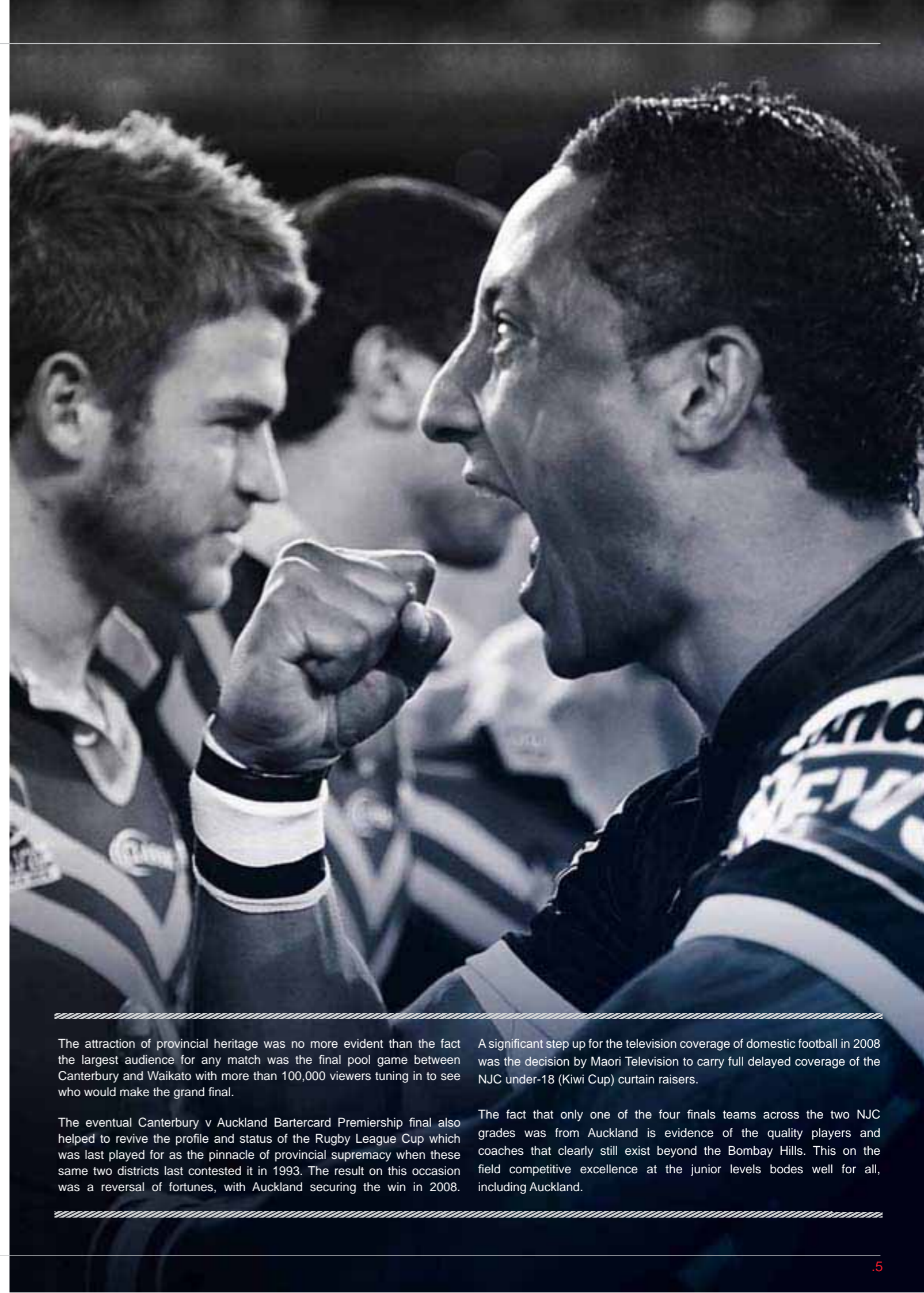
By mid year this momentum had drawn in key partner SPARC, who indicated that if NZRL was prepared to broaden the scope to an independent "whole of sport" review, they were prepared to fund the exercise. That review, led by Sir John Anderson, began in July 2008 and as everyone is aware the final report was released in February 2009.

A sign of the commitment that NZRL and SPARC had jointly made to this process was the NZRL's decision to delay the recruitment of a permanent CEO and, with SPARC's support, appoint Murray McCaw as interim

CEO, initially until the end of December 2008.

A key achievement on the domestic front was the National Provincial Premiership incorporating the National Junior Competitions (NJC 16s and 18s) and the Bartercard Premiership (senior provincial).

Rationalising these three grades and ensuring that participating Districts were able to select their teams from local club competition gave us a competitive, high quality presentation that generated television audiences well in excess of the previous franchise based format.



The attraction of provincial heritage was no more evident than the fact the largest audience for any match was the final pool game between Canterbury and Waikato with more than 100,000 viewers tuning in to see who would make the grand final.

The eventual Canterbury v Auckland Bartercard Premiership final also helped to revive the profile and status of the Rugby League Cup which was last played for as the pinnacle of provincial supremacy when these same two districts last contested it in 1993. The result on this occasion was a reversal of fortunes, with Auckland securing the win in 2008.

A significant step up for the television coverage of domestic football in 2008 was the decision by Maori Television to carry full delayed coverage of the NJC under-18 (Kiwi Cup) curtain raisers.

The fact that only one of the four finals teams across the two NJC grades was from Auckland is evidence of the quality players and coaches that clearly still exist beyond the Bombay Hills. This on the field competitive excellence at the junior levels bodes well for all, including Auckland.

The end of the domestic representative season transitioned to the business end of the professional club competitions and New Zealand fans had much to be proud of at both ends of the world.

The Warriors took us all to within 80 minutes of another NRL Grand Final and in England, two former Kiwis coaches contested the Super League title, the honours going to home grown hero Brian McClennan.

To ensure New Zealand fans had an opportunity to see our top talent at home and also to provide us with the best possible build-up for the World Cup, NZRL took a calculated financial risk in staging two pre-tournament events in New Zealand.

Thanks to support from key partners like Venture Taranaki, New Plymouth District Council and Sky TV, the All Golds v NZ Maori and Kiwis v Tonga events were able to be run with minimal risk and were presented in a manner befitting both occasions.

The New Plymouth event offered an ideal platform for both the Kiwi and NZ Maori coaching staff to prepare for their World Cup opening fixtures and was also the perfect opportunity for NZRL to honour a Kiwi icon, Ruben Wiki.

NZ Maori Rugby League should be congratulated for being proactive in securing their festival fixture on the World Cup under card. There was also good symmetry with Ruben's farewell given that his 16-year NRL career started when he was spotted by then Canberra Raiders coach Tim Sheens, as a teenager playing for NZ Maori in the 1992 Pacific Cup.

The test against Tonga was the perfect step up for the Pirtek Kiwis and gave NZRL the opportunity to recognise our Honorary Ambassador as the teams competed for the inaugural "Peter Leitch QSM Challenge Trophy". In future this silverware will be put on the line for challenges played among New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours. The naming of this trophy was to recognise the long standing connection that Peter has to both the rugby league and Polynesian communities. We thank Peter for allowing his name to be attached to this trophy.

We were honoured also to be able to host a number of Tongan dignitaries including Her Royal Highness Princess Salote Pilolevu Tuita. It was clear from the sea of red supporters in the stands that the Tongan community came out strongly in support of this event.

Despite a significant investment in the promotion of both games we were most disappointed with the crowd size. However, the games' value to our World Cup campaign is without question. Reports from Kiwis coaching and management staff strongly support this view but the clearest evidence was provided by the team on 22 November 2008.

This, however, should not disguise the fact that it will be difficult for us to have the Pirtek Kiwis playing in front of their home fans unless we can provide an attractive opponent, and New Zealanders support their World Cup-winning team by attending games played on New Zealand soil.

Our focus now shifts to ensuring that our international success can be translated into long-term revenue gains and positive development

outcomes. Our short-term focus was to ensure the trophy was used to encourage more children to play rugby league.

The revival of the Kids 2 Kiwis programme (previously a Rugby League Foundation programme) and a commitment to ensuring the trophy supports junior registration activity around the country in early 2009 was the initial stage.

While this will be the most visible aspect of the Kids 2 Kiwis drive, stage two of the programme is arguably far more important as it is about improving our capability to consistently deliver educational football in keeping with its intent, that is to provide a safe and fun environment for children to learn the rules and skills of the game progressively matched to their physical development.

This part of the programme requires a re-focus on the education and support of the many volunteer officials who are responsible for delivering this critical level of the game.

While the Warriors and Kiwis are held up as our 'shop window', it is volunteer officials at the entry levels of the game who invariably give children, their parents and their teachers the first real 'assessment opportunity' of participation in rugby league.

If we fail here, football and commercial success is meaningless. The focus going forward must be about achieving our objectives at both ends of the spectrum.

We have also produced a draft High Performance Plan that the Board has approved in principle. The commercial success of the NZRL is highly dependent on us ensuring the sustainable success of the Pirtek Kiwis on the world stage – a stage that grows in its breadth and depth through the efforts of the Rugby League International Federation. It is hoped that funding will be available in 2009 to bring the first phase of this High Performance Plan to reality.

All of the commercial programme for NZRL is up for review in May 2009. It is vital for the long-term success of the game in New Zealand that this programme is progressed in the context of the rugby league community nationwide, having fully supported the implementation of the recommendations from the Independent Review Committee. Without that support we will not only lose the support of SPARC and the Gaming Trusts, but it will also make the delivery of commercial programmes nationally and internationally very difficult to achieve. Ultimately this will impact on the growth of our game.



Murray McCaw
INTERIM CEO



Peter Cordtz
GENERAL MANAGER

2008 NZRL ANNUAL AWARDS

In the year of the Rugby League World Cup, the 2008 Annual Awards took on a special significance given the success of both the Kiwis and the Kiwi Ferns. It was also an opportunity for New Zealand Rugby League to officially acknowledge Ruben Wiki's departure from representative football. New Zealand Rugby League was honoured to be able to call on the services of supporters, sponsors, former players and coaches to present the 2008 Annual Awards.



COACH OF THE YEAR
Presented by NZRL Chairman Ray Haffenden:
Stephen Kearney (Kiwis)



WOMEN'S PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Presented by NZWRL President Dame Georgina Kirby:
Maia Tua-Davidson (Kiwi Ferns, Hawke's Bay)
Accepted on Maia's behalf by Kiwi Ferns Captain Luisa Avaiki.



PERSONALITY OF THE YEAR
Presented by former Kiwi and NZRL Team of the Century Winger Tom Hadfield:
Manu Vatuvei (Kiwis, Vodafone Warriors)



INTERNATIONAL ROOKIE OF THE YEAR
Presented by former Kiwi and Kiwis Association President Don Hammond:
Issac Luke (Kiwis, South Sydney Rabbitohs)



PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Presented by His Excellency The Honourable Anand Satyanand PCNZM, QSO, Governor-General of New Zealand:
Jeremy Smith
Accepted on Jeremy's behalf by Kiwis Captain Nathan Cayless.



SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD
Presented by former Kiwis Coach Frank Endacott:
Ruben Wiki



REFEREE OF THE YEAR
Presented by former international referee Dennis Hale:
Leon Williamson (Auckland)



BARTECARD DOMESTIC PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Presented by Bartercard NZ Ltd CEO Paul Bolte:
Sione Tongia (Auckland)



JUNIOR PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Presented by NZRL Patron Helen Clark:
Luke Laban (Junior Warriors, Wellington)

2008 NATIONAL PROVINCIAL PREMIERSHIP

2008 was the first year of the revamped National Provincial Premiership, and saw three grades from each of the six participating Districts compete in a five-round competition, with the Grand Finals day taking place at Mt. Smart Stadium in Auckland on Sunday 28 September.

With broadcast partner Maori Television once again covering the competition, the average number of people per game watching the live coverage was 79,000. The highest viewing figures came from the Canterbury v. Waikato match played in Christchurch on the 21st of September, when over 100,000 watched the match live on Maori Television.



Auckland Captain Jeremiah Pai accepting the Rugby League Cup from Paul Bolte, CEO of Bartercard New Zealand, the Senior Premiership competition sponsor.

NATIONAL PROVINCIAL PREMIERSHIP COMPETITION TABLES

NATIONAL JUNIOR COMPETITION - U16s	P	W	L	D	FOR	AG	PTS
Auckland 16s	5	5	0	0	182	62	10
Wellington 16s	5	3	2	0	98	98	6
Taranaki 16s	5	3	2	0	116	122	6
Canterbury 16s	5	1	3	1	122	142	3
Waikato 16s	5	1	3	1	82	104	3
Bay of Plenty 16s	5	1	4	0	76	148	2

NATIONAL JUNIOR COMPETITION - U18s	P	W	L	D	FOR	AG	PTS
Wellington 18s	5	5	0	0	207	78	10
Canterbury 18s	5	4	1	0	183	106	8
Auckland 18s	5	3	2	0	178	92	6
Bay of Plenty 18s	5	2	3	0	96	181	4
Waikato 18s	5	1	4	0	94	185	2
Taranaki 18s	5	0	5	0	94	210	0

BARTECARD PREMIERSHIP	P	W	L	D	FOR	AG	PTS
Canterbury	5	5	0	0	242	96	10
Auckland	5	3	1	1	204	92	7
Waikato	5	3	2	0	110	138	6
Wellington	5	2	2	1	146	138	5
Bay of Plenty	5	1	4	0	114	186	2
Taranaki	5	0	5	0	96	262	0

NATIONAL PROVINCIAL PREMIERSHIP GRAND FINAL RESULTS

NJC U16s FINAL - FOUNDATION CUP

Auckland 32	Wellington 4
Tries Denim Enuake, Jacob Aki, Patrick Vaivai (2), Tyrone Tangata Makiri, Reece Tamasi Goals Harry Davis-Young (4)	Tries Tyson Tamakaha

NJC U18s FINAL - KIWI CUP

Wellington 29	Canterbury 22
Tries Lazarus Mulu (2), Matt Harrison, Chris Taraeka, Tyson Foesther Goals Blaise Lomax (4)	Tries Tyler Jarden, Riki Taukiri, Pani Manawatu, Matiu Rangiua Goals Sean Scott (3)

BARTECARD PREMIERSHIP

Auckland 38	Canterbury 18
Tries Raymond Ioane, Sunita Laiseni, Savinata Hafoka, Sione Tongia (3), Wayne McDade, Pita Godinet	Tries Nathan Sherlock (2), Chris Bamford Goals Scott Hurrell (3)



NZRL MUSEUM - HOME OF THE RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP TROPHY

2008 WAS A BIG YEAR FOR THE NEW ZEALAND RUGBY LEAGUE MUSEUM AS IT BECAME THE HOME OF THE RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP TROPHY FOR AT LEAST THE NEXT FOUR YEARS.

Don Hammond, Museum Curator, was kept busy as visitor figures continued to climb with fans from all over New Zealand, and around the world, turning up to see the trophy and take in the exhibits.

"We have had visitors from all over the country, and as far away as England, come in to visit the Museum, and the number of school groups coming through the Museum has increased as well," said Don.

Another point worth celebrating in 2008 was the announcement of Autex Industries, a long-time supporter of rugby league in New Zealand, coming on board as a sponsor of the Museum for a two-year period.

"Autex's support of rugby league goes back a long way," said Don, "and the Committee was thrilled when Autex again showed their dedication to our great game by sponsoring the Museum."



Sitting on the Museum Committee are front left to right: Don Hammond, Allen Gore, Brian Keane, Trevor Maxwell; Jack Fagan, Brian Reidy, Tom McKeown and back left to right: Bill Rayner, Gary Whittle, Ray Haffenden and John Bray.

The museum is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 11.00am until 3.00pm or by appointment, while visits outside these times can be arranged by phoning Don via the NZRL head office. Don is also the contact person for anyone wishing to donate items to the Museum.

NEW ZEALAND RUGBY LEAGUE LIFE MEMBERS

Restricted to a maximum of 20 living Members at any one time, New Zealand Rugby League's Life Members are a select group who have been nominated by their peers as recognition of their outstanding contribution to rugby league in New Zealand.

Nominated in 2008 were former administrator and now league historian Bernie Wood and formers Kiwi and Kiwis Coach Lory Blanchard.

Robert Aynsley	Lory Blanchard	Jim Campbell
Ray Cranch	Crispin Easterbrook	Ken English
Allen Gore	Don Hammond	Les Huston
Noel Isle	Peter Kerridge	Bud Lisle
Tom McKeown	Ces Mountford	Bill Nesbitt
Gerald Ryan	Bill Whitehead	Bernie Wood

NEW ZEALAND RUGBY LEAGUE LEGENDS OF LEAGUE

Four new inductees in 2008 take the number of members of New Zealand Rugby League's Legends of League to 42.

Albert Arapeta Paurini Asher, first capped for New Zealand Maori in 1908 and the Kiwis in 1910; Tawera Nui Eia Nikau, first capped for New Zealand Maori in 1986 and the Kiwis in 1989; Jim Rakutai, first capped for New Zealand Maori in 1909 and the Kiwis in 1911; and Puti Tipene (Steve) Watene, first capped for New Zealand Maori in 1937 and the Kiwis in 1930, were inducted in New Plymouth to commemorate New Zealand Maori Rugby League's Centenary year.

OUR LEGENDS OF LEAGUE ARE SHOWN BELOW; THE YEAR THEY WERE INDUCTED IS GIVEN IN BRACKETS:

Ron Ackland (1995)	Gary Freeman (2007)	Philip Orchard (2001)
Albert Asher (2008)	Mark Graham (1995)	John Percival (1995)
Bert Avery (1995)	Travers Hardwick (2000)	Jim Rakutai (2008)
Roger Bailey (1995)	Karl Ifwersen (2000)	Maurie Robertson (2000)
Albert Baskerville (2001)	Cliff Johnson (1995)	Charlie Seeling (2001)
Tom Baxter (1995)	Charlie McBride (2000)	Pat Smith (2007)
Dean Bell (2000)	Scotty McClymont (2007)	Bill Sorenson (2000)
Lory Blanchard (2000)	Ron McGregor (2007)	Kurt Sorenson (2000)
Jock Butterfield (2001)	Bill McLennan (2000)	Ken Stirling (2007)
Roy Christian (2007)	Hugh McGahan (1995)	Kevin Tamati (1995)
Tony Coll (2007)	George Menzies (1995)	Lance Todd (2007)
Mel Cooke (1995)	Cecil Mountford (2000)	Steve Watene (2008)
Cyril Eastlake (1995)	Frank Mulcare (2007)	Des White (1995)
Olsen Filpaina (2007)	Tawera Nikau (2008)	Dennis Williams (1995)

NEW ZEALAND RUGBY LEAGUE SELECTORS

NZRL WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE 2008 KIWIS SELECTORS FOR THEIR DEDICATION AND HARD WORK THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

Howie Tamati (Convener of Selectors)

Tony Kemp

Wayne Bennett

Stephen Kearney

Darrell Williams

2008 KIWIS INTERNATIONAL MATCH REPORTS

CENTENARY TEST

**FRIDAY, MAY 9 - SYDNEY CRICKET GROUND
V AUSTRALIA - LOST 12-28**

Australian Rugby League celebrated its 100th anniversary with a decisive but still hard-earned 16-point victory over the Pirtek Kiwis in the ARL's Centenary Test. While disappointed with yet another loss to the Kangaroos in a history showing only 28 New Zealand wins in 114 clashes, the Pirtek Kiwis could still take plenty out of the contest played in front of almost 35,000.

They suffered two major setbacks on the injury front which did nothing to help their cause. Standoff Ben Roberts withdrew with a hamstring strain so Warriors standoff Lance Hohaia, the side's 19th man, was called in as a replacement. There was a further blow when captain Roy Asotasi was forced to leave the field in the first half and never returned.

That disruption coincided with a poor start for the New Zealanders. Unable to mount pressure in the opening quarter, they found themselves down 0-22 in as many minutes, a start they were always going to struggle to recover from. There was ample evidence of resolve in the side, and in the opening minutes of the second spell that was translated into a magnificent try to centre Iosia Soliola, converted by Jeremy Smith.

Australia stretched the margin to 22 points once again when Johnathan Thurston's deft kick in behind the New Zealand defence was turned into an Israel Folau try in the 65th minute. It would be the Kangaroos' only points of the second half, in fact their only points in the last hour of the contest.

The Kiwis found one more try in the final minute to winger Sam Perrett, superbly converted by debutant Issac Luke to bring the final score back to 12-28.

TEST MATCH

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18 - MT SMART STADIUM, AUCKLAND
V TONGA - WON 56-8**

The Pirtek Kiwis completed their build-up for the 2008 Rugby League World Cup by swamping Tonga in a 10-try rout. The 56-8 victory – which enabled the Kiwis to become the first holders of the Peter Leitch QSM Pacific Cup Challenge Trophy – followed a 44-10 victory by the All Golds (largely the Kiwis' World Cup side) over the New Zealand Maori in New Plymouth six days earlier.

Spearheading the success in the Kiwis' fourth test against Tonga was standoff Benji Marshall in his first test appearance in New Zealand. His previous three tests had all been played in Brisbane.

The Wests Tigers star had a hand in many of the tries as well as scoring twice himself. One of the beneficiaries of Marshall's work was Warriors centre Jerome Ropati, whose first test appearance since the 2006 Tri Nations series netted three tries. Ropati actually dotted down four times, only to have his would-be fourth try rubbed out by the video referee on an obstruction call.

Also scoring two tries – two of the first three of the match in fact – was winger Jason Nightingale.

RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP - GAME 1 SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26 - SYDNEY FOOTBALL STADIUM V AUSTRALIA - LOST 6-30

The Pirtek Kiwis had a disappointing start to their 2008 Rugby League World Cup campaign in Sydney. They were determined to stop the Australians making a fast start to the second match in the competition's top pool. And they essentially achieved that goal, conceding an early penalty and converted try but coming straight back into the contest when standoff Benji Marshall put second rower Sika Manu across to close the score up to 6-8.

The Kangaroos, though, reacted with their second try to debutant winger Joel Monaghan, giving them a 14-6 halftime lead. The Pirtek Kiwis were unable to play their way into a stronger position in the second half as Australia uncorked three more tries, two of them to Israel Folau, to win by 24 points.

Despite the loss, Kearney was still pleased with the efforts of some of the side's younger forwards, especially props Sam Rapira and Adam Blair as well as back rower Manu.

RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP - GAME 2 SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1 - SKILLED PARK, ROBINA V PAPUA NEW GUINEA - WON 48-6

The Pirtek Kiwis put their 2008 Rugby League World Cup campaign back on track with a crushing 42-point winning margin over Papua New Guinea. It was the first time the two countries had met since the Kiwis had a 64-0 win in Palmerston North in 1996.

With Adam Blair and captain Nathan Cayless taking the Pirtek Kiwis forward from the outset, they had four tries and a 22-0 lead at halftime against a side that had lost just 22-32 to England.

After Warriors centre Jerome Ropati had opened the scoring with a ninth-minute try – giving him seven in seven tests – his club-mate Simon Mannering picked up a double before winger Sam Perrett collected a lovely wide pass from Benji Marshall for the first of his two tries. Marshall, though, was used for only 40 minutes. With some tightness in his hamstring muscle close to halftime, Kearney decided against risking him in the second half.

While Papua New Guinea countered with a fine try to left winger David Moore in the 48th minute, the Pirtek Kiwis were in search and destroy mood after that. In all they scored five tries in the space of 21 minutes. One of them was to Blair while interchange forwards Issac Luke, David Fa'alogo and Greg Eastwood all joined him in scoring their maiden test tries. The other four pointer was Perrett's second while left winger Manu Vatuvei was denied a try on a contentious forward pass call.

Pleased as he was with the effort and the result, Kearney said he knew England would provide a stern examination in Newcastle next Saturday night.

RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP - GAME 3 SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8 - ENERGVAUSTRALIA STADIUM, NEWCASTLE V ENGLAND - WON 36-24

Manu Vatuvei's record four-try harvest powered the Pirtek Kiwis to victory over England in their final pool match at the Rugby League World Cup. With one try in the first half and three in the second, the 22-year-old helped to rescue his side after a disappointing first half when they were 8-24 down at one stage.

But the New Zealanders were certainly impressive in the second half, completely shutting England out to gain success – their first against a major test-playing nation since 2006.

Vatuvei's four-try haul was a record for a New Zealander in a World Cup match and equalled the mark held by three other players – Australians Mat Rogers and Wendell Sailor and England's Keith Fielding. He underlined once again what an asset he is when the ball ends up in his hands regularly. England simply couldn't contain him.

However, it wasn't until the 70th minute that New Zealand hit the lead for the first time when hooker Issac Luke landed a close-range penalty to put his side 26-24 up. There was time after that to stretch the final advantage to 36-24 with tries to Nathan Fien and Vatuvei. For Fien, it was his first try for New Zealand.

RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP - SEMI-FINAL SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 15 - SUNCORP STADIUM, BRISBANE V ENGLAND - WON 32-22

Halfback Benji Marshall's 79th-minute try sealed a third Rugby League World Cup final appearance for New Zealand when it held off England in their semi-final clash. With their 32-22 success, the Pirtek Kiwis eliminated the Tony Smith-coached side to book a place in the final, again in Brisbane, a week later.

On a night when the Kiwi Ferns savaged Australia 34-0 in the Women's World Cup final, the Kiwis had the satisfaction of not only reaching the final, but also savouring their second successive win against England in a week.

Coach Stephen Kearney and adviser Wayne Bennett had demanded a vastly improved start in this semi-final and the players obliged as Sam Perrett, Lance Hohaia and Jerome Ropati all scored inside the first 23 minutes to give the Pirtek Kiwis a 16-0 lead. That was a major reversal after labouring against England in Newcastle, when the Kiwis conceded an 8-24 margin at one point.

This time they were far more assured and urgent but, having created what should have been a winning platform, they then let England back into the contest. First captain Jamie Peacock powered across, and right on halftime England put on a perfectly executed kick and chase play from a scrum for standoff Danny McGuire to score, closing the margin to 16-10 in New Zealand's favour at the break.

Second rower Bronson Harrison, who was promoted to start the test with Sika Manu going to the bench, scored a brilliant try in the 57th minute, blasting onto a great short ball from halfback Nathan Fien. With Jeremy Smith's conversion, the Kiwis had a 22-10 lead – only to allow England back within six points again when centre Martin Gleeson scythed through New Zealand's left side defence.

When England failed to cover a Fien kick, Ropati had his second try – his ninth try in as many tests – and the New Zealand side was out to a 28-16 lead. This, though, was proving to be a night when the Kiwis couldn't quite put England away. The bulldog spirit came through once more, McGuire snatching a second try and Rob Burrow's conversion had the score-line reading 28-22 with six minutes to go. It made for a tense final phase, the Pirtek Kiwis just ahead in a match that ought to have been put to bed by then. Finally it was, when Marshall swooped on another England error for a gift try.

RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP - FINAL SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22 - SUNCORP STADIUM, BRISBANE V AUSTRALIA - WON 34-20

In front of 50,000 plus spectators, the Pirtek Kiwis gave the game what could potentially be a new future by overturning the much-vaunted Australians 34-20 in the 2008 Rugby League World Cup grand final.

In two previous appearances in the final, in 1988 and 2000, New Zealand had been well beaten by the Australians. But this match proved to be a wonderful exception as the Kiwis, benefiting from their build-up of five tests in the previous five weeks, overcame a 0-10 deficit to spring one of the greatest sporting upsets (although inside the New Zealand camp the outcome was anything but unexpected).

The scene was set for an epic opening as the Kiwis got within centimetres of their opponents while performing their traditional pre-game haka, the emotion spilling over into several heavy hits early in the contest. And feeding off a vastly superior completion rate, New Zealand was ultimately able to dictate terms.

Just days earlier Australian fullback Billy Slater was named the world's best player. But he was guilty of a moment of madness which, together with a dash of controversy (specifically a penalty try awarded to New Zealand), helped the Kiwis to their unprecedented triumph.

Massive underdogs heading into the match, the Kiwis pulled off the biggest turn-up in World Cup history as the Kangaroos surrendered their No 1 ranking to their trans-Tasman rivals with their first loss since 2006.

The Aussies were left lamenting a series of blunders and a call from video referee Steve Ganson - the Englishman awarding the Pirtek Kiwis a penalty try with 10 minutes remaining which extended New Zealand's lead to beyond a converted try.

Adam Blair then confirmed the win with a try four minutes from time to revive memories of their memorable 2005 Tri-Nations final triumph.

In the penalty try decision, Ganson ruled Australian winger Joel Monaghan had taken out Lance Hohaia as he chased through a Benji Marshall kick.

The Australians had just got themselves back into the contest when Darren Lockyer, who scored two tries, sent Greg Inglis over to cut the deficit to 22-20, coming after Slater's season of magic combusted with a monumental brain-snap.

Slater, who had a stunning first half in which he set up tries for Lockyer and David Williams, chanced his arm one too many times with his flirtation with the touchline ending in disaster as he flicked the ball infield 10 metres from his own line only to watch Marshall pounce and dive over for a 22-16 lead with just 19 minutes remaining.

It set up the sort of grandstand finish tournament officials had been craving after the Australians had romped through the preliminary rounds with massive winning margins over every opponent.

2008 INTERNATIONAL RESULTS

CENTENARY TEST NEW ZEALAND V. AUSTRALIA, 09 MAY 2008, SYDNEY CRICKET GROUND, SYDNEY

Pirtek Kiwis 12	Kangaroos 28
Tries Iosia Soliola, Sam Perrett Goals Jeremy Smith, Issac Luke	Tries Mark Gasnier (2), Paul Gallen, Cameron Smith, Israel Folau Goals Johnathan Thurston (4)



PIRTEK KIWIS V. TONGA 18 OCTOBER 2008, MT. SMART STADIUM, AUCKLAND

Pirtek Kiwis 56	Tonga 8
Tries Jerome Ropati (3), Jason Nightingale (2), Benji Marshall (2), Setaimata Sa, Thomas Leuluai, Simon Mannering Goals Krisnan Inu (6), Steve Matai (2)	Tries Cooper Vuna, Tevita Leo-Latu



WORLD CUP - GAME 2 KIWIS V. PAPUA NEW GUINEA 01 NOVEMBER 2008, SKILLED PARK, GOLD COAST

Kiwis 48	Papua New Guinea 6
Tries Simon Mannering (2), Sam Perrett (2), Jerome Ropati, Issac Luke, David Fa'alogo, Adam Blair, Greg Eastwood Goals Krisnan Inu (6)	Tries David Moore Goals John Wilshire



WORLD CUP - SEMI-FINAL KIWIS V. ENGLAND 15 NOVEMBER 2008, SUNCORP STADIUM, BRISBANE

Kiwis 32	England 22
Tries Jerome Ropati (2), Sam Perrett, Lance Hohaia, Bronson Harrison, Benji Marshall Goals Jeremy Smith (3), Benji Marshall	Tries Danny McGuire (2), Jamie Peacock, Martin Gleeson Goals Rob Burrow (3)



ALL GOLDS V. NEW ZEALAND MAORI 12 OCTOBER 2008, YARROW STADIUM, NEW PLYMOUTH

All Golds 44	New Zealand Maori 10
Tries Manu Vatuvei (2), Lance Hohaia (2), Setaimata Sa, Krisnan Inu, Sam Perrett, Ruben Wiki Goals Issac Luke (3), Krisnan Inu (2), Logan Swann	Tries Shaun Kenny-Dowall, Jason Nightingale Goals Kevin Locke



WORLD CUP - GAME 1 KIWIS V. KANGAROOS 26 OCTOBER 2008 SYDNEY FOOTBALL STADIUM, SYDNEY

Kiwis 6	Kangaroos 30
Tries Sika Manu Goals Steve Matai	Tries Israel Folau (2), Greg Inglis, Joel Monaghan, Billy Slater Goals Johnathan Thurston (4) Penalty Johnathan Thurston



WORLD CUP - GAME 3 KIWIS V. ENGLAND 08 NOVEMBER 2008, ENERGY AUSTRALIA STADIUM, NEWCASTLE

Kiwis 36	England 24
Tries Manu Vatuvei (4), Lance Hohaia, Jason Nightingale, Nathan Fien Goals Issac Luke (3), Jeremy Smith	Tries Rob Burrow (2), Mickey Higham, Martin Gleeson Goals : Rob Purdham (4)



WORLD CUP - FINAL KIWIS V. KANGAROOS 22 NOVEMBER 2008, SUNCORP STADIUM, BRISBANE

Kiwis 34	Australia 20
Tries Jeremy Smith, Jerome Ropati, Lance Hohaia, Benji Marshall, Adam Blair Penalty Try Lance Hohaia Goals Issac Luke (2), Benji Marshall (2)	Tries Darren Lockyer (2), David Williams, Greg Inglis Goals Johnathan Thurston (2)

