

## Australian Police Rugby Union - New Zealand Tour 2008

After a short trip across the Tasman, the touring squad were met at the Auckland airport by New Zealand police liaison officer Barry Gallagher wearing his authentic APRU polo shirt. After a short conversation with Barry, we enjoyed the short bus trip from Auckland airport to Rotorua whilst getting to know each other. Accommodation was at the Rotorua Novotel.

**Rotorua:** Once there we met by our Rotorua police liaison officer Matt McLeod. We were informed that Rotorua was the historic township of the Maori culture and we were not disappointed by our reception. We were escorted out of the reception area where we were officially greeted with the Maori 'Powhiri' (Traditional Maori welcome), including the traditional Maori warrior. We entered the room where we were spoken to by a Maori elder and met the reception party. After our unique welcome and being the first time most of the players, coaches and committee had been together, we took the opportunity to socialise at a local Irish hotel with some friendly Rotorua police officers.

Over the following two days, the players were put through their paces by coaches – Jim Hook and Kelvin (white bait) Farrington. Both coaches have enormous amounts of playing and coaching experience and this showed with the quality of work completed in the short amount of time they had to prepare the team. The weather was bleak and cold and the training ground was wet and heavy under foot. However, the boys got stuck into the training on both days. An injury cloud hung over the head of our most capped prop Garry McNeil after his battle with the scrum machine. He was given to game day to test his fitness, however succumbed to the injury and would miss the following two games.

### Game 1:

#### Australia Police v Bay of Plenty Police

Rotorua International Stadium

Wednesday the 30<sup>th</sup> July 2008

In weather more suited to water polo, both teams took the field in (at times) torrential rain. From the start, the experience and preparation time of the opposition team was prominent. The ball was like a cake of soap and handling errors from the APRU gave away enormous amounts of possession, therefore giving away territory. APRU set plays, including scrums and lineouts were sound for our first game together and defence for the first twenty appeared to set up a good platform for the rest of the game. The Bay of Plenty police capitalised on their extensive possession and went to the break with a 12 nil lead.

The APRU didn't seem to be able to gather any momentum during the second half and the Bay of Plenty began to pile on some points. The APRU made a number of breaks through scrappy defence during the second half, however the last minute passes would not stick, which cost them a number of tries. The fitness of the Bay of Plenty over the remaining twenty to twenty five minutes out shone the APRU with the final whistle sounding in the torrential rain, both teams were ready for a warm shower.

Winger and line out jumper Adam Clift (NSW) started the game well and dominated in most of the APRU lineouts until a broken finger ended his tour. APRU forwards dominated in patches of the game with an extremely strong and man of the match performance by captain Matt Aiken (WA) at lock and flankers Shannon Hardgrave (NSW) and Josh Mason (QLD). Nick Filter at Fly Half was under extreme pressure throughout the game and had limited chances to show his flare and that of his back line. Filter succumbed to a shoulder injury late in the game. The centre pairing of Travis Wilson (WA) and Robert Dahlstrom (AFP) performed well with limited ball and stood in good stead to continue with this pairing for the next two games. After the game the APRU dressing room looked like a casualty ward with Adam Clift (finger), Ashley Hagar (back), Nick Filter (Shoulder) and Stefan Chirila (Achilles).

**Final Score:** Bay of Plenty 52 v A.P.R.U 0

**Players Player:** – Matt Aiken

**Man of the match:** 3 points - Matt Aiken

2 points - Josh Mason

1 point - Travis Wilson

After the game, both teams returned to the local rugby clubhouse where we enjoyed the hospitality of our new policing and rugby friends with a traditional Maori hangi dinner. Some of us were fortunate enough to catch up with some old friends from the New Zealand tour to Australia last year.

The Australian Police Rugby Union would like to extend our thanks to Matt McLeod, Bay of Plenty Coach Dermot & Damien White for their hospitality and organisation of our time in Rotorua. We are grateful of your commitment to police rugby in Rotorua. We would also like to thank the Bay of Plenty police rugby team for the hard fought game and the spirit it was played in.

**Auckland:** On Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> July we boarded our bus heading for Auckland and a test match against the New Zealand police team in two days time. On arrival, our accommodation was positioned in the centre of Auckland and close to all facilities that every

good rugby touring team requires. Jim and white bait gave the boys the night off and time to see the sights of Auckland and bond and a late training time for the following day.

Friday saw a short trip to our training ground on the other side of the harbour. It looked as if we would get to train without any rain until the bus pulled up and we got off. The ground was quite good for the amount of rain that we had since our arrival. The cohesion of the team was coming together which was evident in the team run at the end of training. A few people were moved to unfamiliar positions due to injuries and did so without fuss and putting the team first. They should be congratulated for that.

Saturday is my rugby day!! The team started the morning with a walk around the nearby park, had breakfast and commenced preparing for the game which was scheduled for a 12:30pm kickoff. We headed out to the Gribblehurst rugby park, which is the home ground of the local Eden rugby club and a short distance to Eden Park for our nights festivities of watching the Wallabies battle with the All Blacks. There was tension in the air with some players nervous and excited at the chance to redeem themselves and get stuck into the New Zealand police rugby team after last years game in Melbourne.

### Game 2:

#### Australia Police v New Zealand Police

Gribblehurst Park, Auckland

Saturday the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2008

Preparation for this game had been intense and all players were reminded of the pride and passion of representing their country. The APRU took the field ready to battle and put their bodies on the line. The New Zealand team performed the Haka, which is inspirational for both teams, especially getting you pumped to take it to the Kiwis when you're standing 10 metres from them yelling and screaming at you.

The ground underfoot was quite wet and occasional rain, however the game commenced at speed and the quality of play was extremely high from both teams. APRU forwards led from the front through Brendan O'Brien, Shanon Hardgrave, Matt Aiken and Hayden Lord. APRU scrums remained strong and the front row continued to work overtime. After fifteen minutes of play, it was evident that we would have to make a valiant effort to contain the New Zealand backs, who were big, fast and skilful. At times our passing let us down and the New Zealanders capitalised with a few quick tries. We recommenced the games with strength and vigour and kept them camped in their own end at times. The New Zealanders had a superior fitness level than the 'bluetongues' and once we were tired, the brains switched off at times and balls weren't going to hand. They took full advantage of this, going to the break with a 42 – 0 advantage.

With Scottish bag pipes sounding in the background, Jim and Kel dissected the first half whilst providing direction for the second. The boys were talking it up and in great spirits and they prepared to return to battle for the second half. This positive attitude and commitment to Australia and each other showed during the second half. Handling errors were being cut, and led by captain Matt Aiken, props Paul Edwards, Michael Cantrell and flanker Shanon Hardgrave, the forwards continued to take advantage of territory by keeping the ball in tight and moving the ball methodically up the field. Rob Dahlstrom, Travis Wilson and Neal Sullivan were directed around the park by Michael Whitney playing at Fly Half and made some inroads through the tight defence of the New Zealand backs. A dedicated effort by stalwart Steven Fishpool inspired all to pick up their efforts and continue to keep the score down. Strategic replacements by Jim and Kel lifted intensity during the game and we restricted the Kiwis to only 25 points in the second half. A gallant effort from a committed team with mention of Travis Wilson and Neal Sullivan playing with injuries until the end.

**Final Score:** New Zealand 66 v A.P.R.U 0

**Players Player:** – Shanon Hardgrave

**Man of the match:** 3 points - Shanon Hardgrave

2 points - Paul Edwards

1 point - Matt Aiken

The after match function was held in the Eden rugby clubhouse above the ground whilst the local rugby played their semi final match. It was pleasing to see both teams socialising together and enjoying each others company and celebrate the test match. The boat race of ten people came down to the wire with many Aussies calling for a replay of the video for the outcome. After reviewing the footage, our baby bluetongue, Rob Dahlstrom was piped at the post.

Whilst the boys celebrated, several members of the committee took the opportunity to discuss the future planning of the inaugural Police rugby World Cup for 2011. Several plans have been put in place and attempts will be made to affiliate with the IRB. After the function, both teams headed off to Eden Park for the Bledisloe Cup game. Unfortunate to see the Wallabies play with less intensity than they did the previous week and were well beaten.

The Australian Police Rugby union would like to thank Barry Gallagher for his tireless efforts in planning and preparation of our stay in Auckland and we look forward to seeing you in 2009 in Australia.

**Whangarei:** On Sunday morning we packed and boarded our bus for the last leg of our twelve day tour and preparation for our last game. Whangarei is three hours north of Auckland and the battered bodies of the players enjoyed a quiet ride. We had the Sunday

night off with plans to train first thing in the morning. We woke Monday to a overcast day and the thoughts of a training run without any rain. On arrival at the ground, the rain commence, but luckily only for a short time. However, the ground was wet and it was cold running around. The training sessions by this time were precise and to the point. A few of the boys were making bets on who would slide through the water and mud with only one maniac taking up the offer and ploughing head first into the biggest pile on the ground. The scariest thing of Tony Hyndes' move was the trip back to the hotel with him only wearing his Speedos. Not a pretty sight at all.

Monday night gave some of the boys a chance to recover from injuries and other attended the Whangarei police station where we caught up with an old friend and Whangarei liaison Doug Tepoke. Tuesday saw a chance for the boys to enjoy some of the far north sights, but not without one last training session to finish the tour. About an hours drive out of Whangarei, we stopped in the middle of no where at a small township and trained on the local ovals. We were met by the local club delegates who were more than happy to allow us full use of their grounds and clubhouse. The day was spent sight seeing and enjoying the free time. Some went of in the jet boat for an hour or so and other enjoyed the clear day and a bit of sun and relaxed. It was about the only day that we had clear all tour and we did enjoy it.

Last but not least: Game day. Blokes with injuries were talking themselves into playing, the old heads were relishing the last game before retirement, or second retirement for a couple. However, all were keen to get a win up.

### Game 3:

#### Australia Police v Northland Police

Northland Stadium, Whangarei

Wednesday the 6<sup>th</sup> August 2008

It was a moderately warm day to begin with until we boarded the bus and arrived at the ground. A bit of rain come overhead for a short time, but luckily it prevailed and we were left with a glorious day to play rugby. Not too wet under foot at the magnificent stadium and not too warm to over exhaust a mob of tired weary bodies.

We started the game with passion and commitment and dominated our scrums and holding off a much bigger pack. We defended well and scrambled when they made breaks through our line. After the first twenty minutes, we fell to sleep and the Northlands team began to dominate. We pushed passes and didn't hang onto the ball and it cost us on the score board. The Northlands team slowed the game down to their pace, which was a hindrance to our team and the running rugby we knew we could play. The word from the coaches at half time was to speed it up and get back to our game plan and patterns we had trained the last ten days with. Both Neal Sullivan and Travis Wilson continued to impress with their game

and ability to put their shoulder injuries to one side whilst the game was on.

The team commenced the second half in better fashion and at the speed the previous two games were conducted under. This tired the bigger forward pack of the Northlands team and we began to dominate in all facets of the game. Our backs began to work together and it paid off on the score board. We were 31 - 7 down after ten minutes of the second half, when the boys began to rally together with outstanding performances from Matt Aiken (WA), Shannon Hardgrave (NSW), Mick Cantrell (NSW) and Robert Dahlstrom (AFP) to name only a few. Again strategic replacement bolstered the APRU side and provided fresh legs to keep the game at the same pace. The bluetongues posted their biggest come back ever and went out winner with a side line conversation from Michael Whitney to steal the game in the last minutes.

<b>Final Score:</b>	APRU	33	v	Northland	31
<b>Players Player:</b>			-	Shanon Hardgrave	
<b>Man of the match:</b>	3 points		-	Shanon Hardgrave	
	2 points		-	Robert Dahlstrom	
	1 point		-	Michael Cantrell/ Gary McNeil	

After the game, we socialised with the Northlands team at the ground and then returned to Whangarei police station to their bar to continue celebrations and indulge in a feed. The Bluetongues celebrated the win into the night. The APRU would like to thank Doug Tepoke for your hospitality and friendship during our stay in Whangarei.

It was a magnificent twelve day tour and great to get a win up against the experienced New Zealand teams.

On behalf of the APRU committee, I would like to extend our special thanks to Jim Hook and Kel Farrington for their tireless efforts in planning and preparation of this team. I am always bewildered how they can continue to pick up our team and turn them around in such a short time to become winners. Special thanks go to Andrew Toovey for his help with the injured and trips to the hospital and Bryan (Holby) Holborow for his knowledge and efforts in keeping the boys on the park at training and game day. You are always there for the boys when needed. I would personally like to thank the APRU committee for their passion for the Bluetongues and getting the tour organised and also your dedication whilst on tour. Thanks to all of our hosts in New Zealand in making it a memorable trip. I would also like to thank all our players for your commitment, camaraderie and passion whilst on tour and congratulations on the win.

Jayson Joerdens

APRU – Vice president