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CLASS, CONFLICT AND THE  
CLASH OF CODES  
THE INTRODUCTION OF RUGBY LEAGUE  
TO NEW ZEALAND: 1908-1920

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## ABSTRACT

Rugby league was introduced to New Zealand in 1908 by players desirous of playing a game generally considered to be faster and more skillful than rugby union. Even before its introduction, there were fears within the rugby union community that league would replace union unless steps were taken to make that game more attractive to both play and watch. In the early years of the twentieth century disputes within the New Zealand Rugby Union as to whether to introduce rule changes to make the game more attractive, or to stay with the status quo, had led to division and disharmony. This situation led the promoters of rugby league to be optimistic that their game, once introduced, would quickly replace rugby union as New Zealand's premier winter sport, but they greatly underestimated the hostility they would encounter from rugby union authorities, and this never happened.

Investigated in this thesis are the reasons why the high hopes of rugby league's promoters were not fulfilled but how, nevertheless, in the years 1908 to 1920, the game did become established as a working-class sport in parts of the country, particularly the cities of Auckland and Christchurch. Newspapers of the period are used to show where and when league was introduced, where it was, and was not, successful, and to provide evidence of the efforts of rugby union authorities to brand league a professional sport, to threaten its players with banishment from rugby union, to deny league the use of Council owned playing fields, and to deny schoolboys the right to play rugby league at school. Occupations of league players and officials, found from electoral rolls, are used to show that league was an overwhelmingly working-class sport, shunned by the middle-class. The difficulties of establishing the game in small New Zealand towns are related to the geographic and demographic features of the country, and finally, the recovery from the effects of the Great War, which forced most leagues into recess, is shown to owe much to the highly successful postwar tours by international teams from Britain and Australia.

Five periods in the development of rugby league are postulated; its introduction in 1908, its near collapse in 1909 and 1910, its expansion during the years 1911 to 1914, the difficulties experienced in the war years 1915 to 1918, and its post-war recovery in 1919 and 1920. The Great War put paid to the real possibility that league would rival union as New Zealand's premier winter team sport, but by 1920 it had recovered sufficiently to become firmly established on the New Zealand sporting scene with its own constituency of players and supporters.

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# INTRODUCTION

In England and Australia rugby league, in the regions in which it was played, became *the* working-class rugby code, leaving rugby union as an exclusively middle-class game.<sup>1</sup> In New Zealand this class division never occurred: whilst league was undoubtedly *a* working-class game, it was only ever played by a minority of working men, the majority staying loyal to union.

This thesis is an investigation into the introduction of rugby league football into New Zealand in the years before, during, and after the Great War; the reasons why the game was taken up, the people involved in the game, both as players and officials, and the difficulties its promoters encountered due to the activities of opponents of the game within the rugby union community and the middle class in general. It will investigate the relationship between class and code and attempt to show that league in New Zealand was a working-class sport as it was in England and Australia. In New Zealand, in the years leading up to the Great War, attempts were made, with varying degrees of success, to introduce the new code throughout the country. The new game achieved its greatest popularity in the city of Auckland but was also successfully introduced to other major population centres such as Christchurch, Napier and Wanganui. The sports geographer John Bale has written of the difficulties in establishing a new sport. He identifies three stages in the establishment of a sport in a particular town or country.

Initially only a small number of potential adopters actually adopt the innovation. At a second stage a 'band wagon' effect is observed when the majority of adoptions occur, followed by a final period when the 'laggard' adopters finally succumb to the innovation.<sup>2</sup>

He also argues that the size of the adopting unit is important, with large places adopting the innovation before smaller places, and distance acting as

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<sup>1</sup> But note that in England, even in the northern heartland of league, soccer became the most popular football code.

<sup>2</sup> John Bale, *Sports Geography*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), London: Routledge, 2003, pp. 46-7.

a basic barrier to adoption. It will be argued that his schema is applicable to New Zealand with its small towns widely separated by both distance and geographical features. The game's introduction, to small towns especially, proved to be a struggle, with the task of recruiting players from a limited population base, in competition with other more established codes, especially union, which itself struggled for players.<sup>3</sup> This made it difficult to form teams and start club competitions. The reasons for the varying degrees of success enjoyed by the promoters of the new game in different parts of the country will be investigated.

In contrast to Britain and Australia, little has been written on the introduction of rugby league to New Zealand and there are many gaps in our knowledge of its sports history in general. It is hoped that this thesis will help to fill some of these gaps. More has been written about rugby union in the years leading up to the introduction of league, years in which all had not been well within the rugby community. Even before the 1905 tour an influx of workingmen into the game gave rise to problems similar to those experienced in English and Welsh rugby. These problems centered around gambling, rough play and veiled professionalism.<sup>4</sup> As early as 1891 in Dunedin several Kaikorai players were accused of being paid by bookmakers to deliberately lose a match against Alhambra. The inquiry conducted by the Otago Rugby Union found insufficient evidence to substantiate the accusation, but several players, including Patrick Keogh, star player of the 1888 New Zealand Native team, admitted to having gambled on the outcome of games in the past. Three were severely censured, whilst Keogh was suspended for professionalism. Bookmakers, though, continued to attend rugby matches and take bets on the outcome of games, whilst it was suspected that some players accepted payment to influence the outcome of matches. In 1904 S. George of the City club in Auckland admitted being paid

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<sup>3</sup> Greg Ryan, 'Rural Myth and Urban Actuality: The Anatomy of All Black and New Zealand Rugby 1884 -1938', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 35, 1 (2001), pp. 12-17.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey t. Vincent, "'A Tendency to Roughness": Anti-Heroic Representations of New Zealand Rugby', in *Tackling Rugby Myths: Rugby and New Zealand Society 1854-2004*, Greg Ryan, (ed.), Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2005, pp. 55-68.

by A. J. Long of the Newton club to try and have his team lose the game. Both players were suspended for 10 years. Gaming Acts were passed by Parliament in 1908 and in 1910 to ban bookmakers from football matches but this only forced them to operate 'underground' and the gambling continued.\*

The second problem for rugby was that of rough play. In 1904 a match between Wanganui clubs Kaierau and Pirates saw seven players having to be treated at the local hospital and the match was described as more of a prize fight than a football match. In Wellington club football was characterised by the local press for its foul and brutal play. In Canterbury and Otago both violence and filthy language were claimed to be common in club football. Violent play was not confined to the large cities, but was also noted in smaller centres such as Hawkes Bay, Taranaki, Horowhenua and Buller, with violent players resorting to threatening referees. Despite widespread condemnation the violence continued and in 1907 there were warnings that the rising tide of violence posed a serious threat to the survival of the game, especially as it faced the possibility of rugby league being introduced to New Zealand. #

'Veiled professionalism' seemed to be endemic in New Zealand rugby with cash payments to attract players to a club, 'under-the-table' payments for playing, or providing jobs for players all being practiced. Then clubs such as Sydenham, a working-class Christchurch club, adopted the practice of making a 'presentation' to players when they married. A dispute within the same club openly broke-out in 1908 when a player, J. Howison, refused to pay his dues claiming he had not been paid for lost time whilst playing for the club as agreed. The club threatened to report him to the Canterbury Rugby Union for professionalism but when he stood his ground the club backed down fearing it too would be suspended if the affair officially came to the notice of the Union. The Wellington Rugby Union itself was accused, at its 1908 annual general meeting, of professionalism for not only condoning the finding of jobs for players and club payments to players, but itself making such payments. The Wellington *Evening Post* blamed these actions on clubs, made wealthy by gate takings, and attaching great importance to winning, being

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\* Vincent, 'A Tendency to Roughness, pp. 59-60.

# Vincent, 'A Tendency to Roughness, pp. 62-63.

tempted to violate the rules of professionalism and make clandestine payments to players.\*

The discontent within the rugby fraternity prior to the introduction of the new code has been written about by Vincent and Harfield<sup>5</sup> and by Richardson.<sup>6</sup> Amongst Rugby Union officials the conflict was between those who wanted to exercise more control over the game in New Zealand and those who wanted to stay loyal to the game as governed by the Rugby Football Union in England. The conflict between these two factions, dubbed nationalists and imperialists by Vincent and Harfield, centred around two main issues: changing the rules of the game to make it more attractive to both players and spectators, and permitting the payment of 'broken time' to players who had to take time off work to play rugby. The return of the 1905-06 All Black tourists from Britain, where they had seen at first hand the Northern game, and the rumours of a rebel All Black tour to play matches against Northern Union teams, lent urgency to the conflict. Vincent and Harfield assert that the conflict ended in victory for 'those concerned with preserving imperial solidarity' in the years 1908-09, and yet in the same paragraph, say that 'neither repression nor reform triumphed' and that the 'problems which the reformers had sought to remove continued to vex rugby union football in New Zealand for many years to come'.<sup>7</sup> It will be demonstrated in the course of this thesis that both conflicting statements are true! The imperialists were indeed victorious in 1908, but the conflict did not end and the nationalists within the Rugby Union continued to press for reform throughout the years leading up to the Great War and their campaign continued in the years after the war. Their efforts were thwarted by the officials of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union who remained steadfast

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<sup>5</sup> Geoffrey T. Vincent and Toby Harfield, 'Repression and Reform: Responses Within New Zealand Rugby the Arrival of the 'Northern Game', 1907-8', *New Zealand Journal of History*, October 1997, p. 236.

<sup>6</sup> Len Richardson, 'The Invention of a National Game: The Struggle for Control', *History Now*, June 1995, pp. 1-8.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent and Harfield, p. 249.

\* Vincent, 'A Tendency to Roughness', pp. 65-66.

in their loyalty to the English Rugby Football Union<sup>8</sup> and who defused all opposition attempts at reform by employing delaying tactics to wear down the reformers.

When in 1907 the New Zealand Rugby Union became aware of Baskerville's proposal for a tour of the United Kingdom to play Northern Union teams, it attempted to make representative players sign a document declaring they were bona fide amateurs and would inform the Union of any approaches to play Northern Union. On legal advice that such documents were not legally binding, Auckland players contemplating joining Baskerville's rebel tour, signed the document and took part in Auckland's end of season tour before going of to tour the United Kingdom, thus laying the foundation for the introduction of rugby league to New Zealand.

Although some accounts have been written of the introduction of rugby league into New Zealand and the development of the game in provincial areas has been analysed in other accounts, a systematic study of the formative years of league in New Zealand, the people involved, and the problems encountered, has yet to be undertaken.

Haynes and Smith have both written accounts of the 1907-08 rebel All Blacks' tour to Britain which led to the introduction of the game to New Zealand on their return. Haynes concluded his book with a brief account of early rugby league matches.<sup>9</sup> Smith also writes briefly of rugby league being played following the return of the rebels but stops her account at 1910.<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Moorhouse devotes a chapter of his centennial history of rugby league to the tour and ends with a brief survey of the problems facing those who strove to establish the game throughout New Zealand.<sup>11</sup> Neither Haynes,

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<sup>8</sup> The official title of the governing body of rugby union in England was the 'Rugby Football Union' but to avoid any possible confusion with the New Zealand Rugby Football Union it will henceforth be referred to as the 'English Rugby Union'.

<sup>9</sup> John Haynes, *From All Blacks to All Golds-New Zealand's Rugby League Pioneers*. Christchurch: Ryan and Haynes, 1996, pp.158-163.

<sup>10</sup>Jo Smith, "'All that Glitters": The All Golds and the Advent of Rugby League in Australasia', MA History Thesis, Canterbury University, 1998.

<sup>11</sup>Geoffrey Moorhouse, *A People's Game-The Centenary History of Rugby League Football 1895-1995*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, pp. 84-85.

Smith nor Moorhouse have attempted anything other than short, incomplete and superficial coverage of the early years of rugby league in New Zealand.

Coffey and Greenwood have both written researched and comprehensive studies on the introduction of the game to particular provinces. Coffey's history of the Canterbury Rugby League gives a full account of the formation of that League and also the part played by Canterbury in the establishment of the West Coast Rugby League.<sup>12</sup> Greenwood has written of league in Wanganui,<sup>13</sup> and in Taranaki, Manawatu, Hawkes Bay, Nelson and Marlborough<sup>14</sup> in the years 1908 to 1915. Greenwood has also written an account of the introduction of the game to New Zealand in 1908.<sup>15</sup> Charles Little has researched the re-introduction of league to Dunedin in the 1920s, noting that both class and religion played a major part.<sup>16</sup> John Coffey and Bernie Wood have written a definitive study of New Zealand's league international games over the past one hundred years and, although these are their main focus, in their introduction they briefly discuss the difficulties encountered by the early pioneers of the game, especially the opposition encountered from the Rugby Union and the setback to its expansion caused by the Great War.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Coffey, *Canterbury XIII-A Rugby League History*, Christchurch: published by the author, 1987.

<sup>13</sup> William Greenwood, 'The "Famous Northern Union Game": The Introduction of Rugby League to Wanganui, 1910-1915', research exercise in History, Massey University, 2000.

Bill Greenwood and James Watson, 'The "Famous Northern Union Game": The Rise and Fall of Rugby League in Wanganui, 1910-15', *Sporting Traditions*, 18:1(2001).

<sup>14</sup> William Greenwood, 'Trying Rugby League, Early Attempts to Establish Rugby Football's Other Code in the Central Provinces of New Zealand, 1908-1915', MA History Thesis, Massey University, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Bill Greenwood, '1908: The Year Rugby League Came to New Zealand', *Sport in History*, 27:3 (2007), pp.343-363. This is an earlier version of chapter one.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Little 'More Green than Red: Sectarianism and Rugby League in Otago, 1924-35', in *Sporting Traditions*, 21:1(2004), pp. 33-51.

<sup>17</sup> John Coffey and Bernie Wood, *The Kiwis: 100 Years of International Rugby League*, Auckland: Hodder Moe, 2007, p. 19.

Prior to the First World War, rugby league was played in three countries only: England, Australia and New Zealand, the attempt to introduce the game into Wales having failed. Whilst there are similarities in the way the game developed in England and Australia, its development in New Zealand was significantly different. This will be shown by comparing it with league's development in England and Australia. Rugby league began in England in 1895 when clubs in the northern counties broke away from the Rugby Football Union to form the Northern Rugby Football Union. The game played under this authority underwent a series of rule changes during the first ten years of its existence, becoming, whilst still recognisably rugby football, a noticeably different form of the game.<sup>18</sup> It was this form that was introduced into Australia in 1907 and New Zealand in 1908.

In both England and Australia league became established only in some parts of the country. In England its stronghold was in the industrial counties of the north,<sup>19</sup> whilst in Australia it was the metropolis of Sydney, home to over half a million people.<sup>20</sup> There are similarities between the two locations. The north of England had a number of large industrial towns and cities clustered closely together, each home to a high percentage of working men and their families, whilst Sydney had a number of suburbs with largely working-class populations. Both regions were also populous enough to be home to a sizeable middle class. In both regions, prior to the introduction of league, all classes played the union version of rugby football.<sup>21</sup> After the split

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<sup>18</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, London: Frank Cass, 1998, pp. 208-216.  
Delaney, Trevor, *The Roots of Rugby League*, Keighley: published by author, 1984.

<sup>19</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 157-167.  
Tony Collins; 'The Ambiguities of Amateurism: English Rugby Union in the Edwardian Era', *Sport in History*, 26:3 (2006), pp. 390-91.

<sup>20</sup> Chris Cunneen, 'The Rugby War: the Early History of Rugby League in New South Wales, 1907-15', in *Sport in History*, Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), University of Queensland Press, 1979, pp. 304-5.

<sup>21</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 29-33.  
Murray Phillips, 'Football Class and War: The Rugby Codes in New South Wales, 1907-1918', in *Making Men - Rugby and Masculine Identity*, John Nauright and Timothy J. L. Chandler, London: Frank Cass, 1996, pp. 162-3.

there was an almost total separation: the working classes played league, the middle classes played union.<sup>22</sup> This situation was possible because the population of both regions was concentrated in a small enough area, and was large enough, to enable the middle class to maintain their own exclusive clubs and thus survive even without the mass support accorded to league.

This class division in the rugby game came about for similar reasons in both countries. The influx of working-class players into what had previously been a middle-class game produced tensions that proved irreconcilable. The middle-class players had been educated to regard rugby football as more than just a game: it was a means of inculcating such desirable attributes as manliness, unselfishness, courage and loyalty. It was playing the game not winning that was important, in theory at least, to the middle-class player. Booth claims that by the third quarter of the nineteenth century sport in the English public schools and universities was played 'according to a peculiar set of Christian ideals based on self-restraint, fairness, honour and unenvied approbation of another's success' and that these ideals became 'codified as amateur lore'.<sup>23</sup> But this code became increasingly undermined in the years following the 'split' of 1895, as the Rugby Union authorities tried, on the one hand, to isolate the Northern Union clubs and players as professionals, and, on the other hand, to avoid losing working class clubs in other parts of the country, and in Wales which also made, albeit under-the table, payments to their players. Collins demonstrates the hypocrisy of the Union in dealing with such issues.<sup>24</sup> As a generalisation, it can be argued that the working-class player saw things differently to his middle and upper-class counterpart: he played to win, to gain the respect of his community and to boost its status within the wider community. Dunning and Sheard write of the 'strong spirit of rivalry' between mill towns and

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<sup>22</sup> Tony Collins, 'English Rugby Union and the First World War', *The Historical Journal*, 45:4 (2002), pp.798, 800.

Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 29-33.

Phillips, 'Football Class and War', pp. 162-3.

<sup>23</sup> Doug Booth, 'From Allusion to Causal Explanation: The Comparative Method in Sports History', *International Sporting Studies*, 22:2(2000), p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Collins, 'The Ambiguities of Amateurism', pp. 394 -98.

mining villages in industrialised Yorkshire and of the strong sense of community identification that drove players to play 'less for their own enjoyment and more for the glory which victory would bring to the community as a whole'.<sup>25</sup>

The 'great schism' in English rugby<sup>26</sup> which took place in 1895 saw the formation of the Northern Rugby Football Union. This organisation became, in 1922, the Rugby Football League -the governing body of the game in England. The history of this code is embedded not only in sporting history but in social history as well. Moorhouse writes that sports history is also social history 'because all sports and the societies enjoying them are necessarily intertwined: every sport is shaped by much wider social forces than those of its governing bodies, its clubs, its participants and its other enthusiasts'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly Collins argues that league 'had not only evolved into a separate and distinct sport but it had also developed a culture based on the perceived virtues of the industrial north of England'<sup>28</sup> The 'North-South divide' between the middle-class rugby community in the south of England and that in the industrial north was a clash of cultures and values that became polarised around the question of amateurism.<sup>29</sup> To the well-to-do middle-class officials from the south of England the offer and acceptance of money for playing the game was an anathema. Middle-class players, on the other hand, seemed quite willing to accept payment in the form of generous expenses if such were on offer. The 1888 British rugby union touring team to New Zealand were 'paid substantial sums for their efforts - in direct contravention of a

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<sup>25</sup> Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players - A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football*, Wellington: Price Milburn & Co Ltd, 1979, pp. 143-4.

<sup>26</sup> Moorhouse, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Moorhouse, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain: A Social and Cultural History*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 137-140; Delaney, pp. 18-22; Dunning and Sheard, pp. 49-51.

recently enacted code of amateurism'.<sup>30</sup> The ill-paid working-class player in the north of England had greater reason to seek payment for playing football, and saw nothing wrong with profiting from his footballing abilities. The middle-class directors of clubs in the north of England had a different view to that of their southern counterparts. Many were 'self-made men' who had done well in the new industrial society and who were accustomed to paying for services received. If a footballer could contribute to the success of the club then the directors saw nothing wrong in paying him what they thought he was worth - just as they paid the hands in their mills and factories.<sup>31</sup> In the industrial regions of England and Wales under-the-table payments abounded from the 1870s onward, whilst the middle-class amateurs redoubled their efforts to eliminate them from the game. More stringent rules of amateurism, introduced in the 1890s, made it more difficult to conceal such payments but the requirement that those accused of making or receiving payment establish their innocence, rather than have to be proven guilty, was, for many clubs, the last straw. In 1895, Northern clubs resigned from the Rugby Football Union and formed the rival Northern Rugby Football Union, rather than wait to be banned for professionalism.<sup>32</sup>

Perkin writes of the public schools and university old boys and their 'obsession with the distinction between the gentleman amateur and the mercenary professional'<sup>33</sup> which he argues was primarily a defence against 'social pollution' by the 'untouchables' from the working class and the fear of being defeated by them. 'The struggle over amateurism and professionalism',

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<sup>30</sup> Greg Ryan, "'A Lack of Esprit de Corps": The 1908-09 Wallabies and the Legacy of the 1905 All Blacks', *Sporting Traditions*, 17,1 (2000), p. 45.

<sup>31</sup> Martens, James W, 'Rugby, Class, Amateurism and Manliness: The Case of Rugby in Northern England, 1871-1895', in *Making Men - Rugby and Masculine Identity*, John Nauright and Timothy J.L. Chandler (eds.), London: Frank Cass, pp. 35-36.

<sup>32</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*; Delaney, *Roots of Rugby League*; Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*.

<sup>33</sup> Perkin, Harold, 'Teaching the Nations How to Play: Sport and Society in the British Empire and Commonwealth', in *The Cultural Bond: Sport, Empire, Society*, J. A. Mangan (ed), London: Frank Cass, 1992, p. 216.

he observes, 'was an expression of Victorian class conflict.'<sup>34</sup> This obsession with amateurism led many within the middle-class rugby union establishment to welcome the loss of the northern clubs as it also removed many working-class players from the union game. James W. Martens argues that the issue of professionalism, which caused the deep division in the rugby game between the north and south of England, was a manifestation of the 'fundamental problem in the handling code [which] was a difference in cultural and social attitudes towards sport between the metropolis and the provinces'.<sup>35</sup> Rugby, the middle-class sport, was seen as a means of creating a Victorian gentleman. The game was played purely for fun and 'rewards and standings, numbering players for individual identification and publication of team records were seen as an affront to the purity of the game'.<sup>36</sup> As the game was taken up by working-class players and promoted by northern industrialists, their attitudes to the game changed radically. A premium was placed on success where 'victories and personal accomplishments created community pride and identification [and] to achieve these goals players and officials were willing to ignore, manipulate, and even defy Union regulations'.<sup>37</sup> 'As northern men came increasingly to modify the game to reflect their own community and regional values, the animosity between the public school old boy dominated Union, and the northern clubs grew'.<sup>38</sup> In the north of England both players and the middle-class industrialists who controlled the clubs colluded in the paying and receiving of payments for playing, in the effort to put a winning team onto the field.

It is generally accepted that rugby football was started in the mid nineteenth century by young boys from middle-class families who played the game at various English public schools. From the public schools the game was taken to the wider middle-class community, where it was played by the

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<sup>34</sup> Perkin, p.217.

<sup>35</sup> Martens, p. 33.

<sup>36</sup> Martens, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Martens, p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> Martens, pp. 32-3.

members of exclusively middle-class clubs. It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that working men took up the game in large numbers. Greenhalgh argues that in any sport where there was a reasonable level of working-class participation, professionalism could not be effectively prevented and that within the supposedly amateur Rugby Union under-the-table payments were widespread wherever working men played the game. The decision of the middle-class officials of the Northern Rugby Union to sanction professionalism in 1898 was made in order to control and regulate such payments and thus give it a greater control over its working-class players, a move already taken by cricket and soccer authorities. That this move to a more open and honest acceptance of payments to players was denigrated as vulgar and sordid by sections of the bourgeois press was due to many of the journalists having themselves been subject to a private school and university education where they had formed a close emotional bond to the amateur ethos that they had been taught from an early age. For them, Greenhalgh argues, 'pure amateurism was morally superior, but this was based largely on a class perspective on the type of man who could afford to play without pay.'<sup>39</sup> In reality the vehement opposition to professionalism and the advocacy of purely amateur rugby 'meant in many cases a wish to enjoy recreation exclusively with men of one's own class'.<sup>40</sup>

The biggest threat to the Northern Rugby Football Union during the first ten years of its existence came not from the Rugby Football Union but from the explosive growth of soccer in its northern heartlands. During this period soccer made serious inroads into the player, spectator and managerial basis of the game. The middle-class industrialists and professionals who were responsible for the split from the Rugby Union almost wholly deserted the Northern Union, many transferring their allegiance to soccer. Several clubs resigned from the semi-professional Northern Football League and joined the Football Association, the governing body of soccer. Many amateur league

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Greenhalgh, "'The Work and Play Principle': The Professional Regulations of the Northern Rugby Football Union, 1898-1905", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 9:3 (1992), p. 360.

<sup>40</sup> Greenhalgh, p. 360.

clubs, playing in local leagues, went out of existence, unable to compete with the rapidly growing number of amateur soccer clubs. There were even suggestions made within the Northern Rugby Union itself that the clubs revert to Rugby Union rules of play, and even try to reunite with that body.<sup>41</sup>

Two events took place in 1907 that transformed and reinvigorated rugby league. To try and counter the growing popularity of soccer, the administrators of the game had been introducing a series of rule changes to make the game more attractive. Back play was encouraged by reducing the number of forwards from eight to six and by increasing the value of tries as opposed to goals. Lineouts were abolished and the endless scrums so characteristic of union were largely eliminated by the adoption, in 1906, of the play-the-ball method of restarting play following a tackle. These rule changes had, by 1907, 'marked a decisive rupture with the old rugby game and created the distinct and separate sport of Northern Union football. The impact of this revolution became obvious as soon as the 1906-7 season began - over 800 points were scored in the first two weeks, far and away a NU record'.<sup>42</sup> The second event was the introduction of Northern Union football to the other side of the world, in Australia in 1907 and in New Zealand in 1908 following the return of the rebel All Black tourists. The 1907-08 tourists, the 'New Zealand All Black Rugby Football Team', organised and recruited by Albert Henry Baskerville with help from some of the players from the 'official' Rugby Union All Black tour of 1905-06, gave the Northern Union the national recognition it had thus far lacked. This tour, and the Australian 'Kangaroos' team who toured the following season, gave the game an international dimension that increased its credibility and demonstrated that it was not just another kind of rugby played by working men in the industrial north of England.

The introduction of rugby league to Australia was driven by different forces than those in the north of England twelve years earlier. Working-class player discontent with the treatment they received from the Australian

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<sup>41</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 180-189.

<sup>42</sup> Collins, p. 212.

Rugby Unions was the driving force.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, in the north of England it was middle-class club officials who were finally forced to quit the Rugby Football Union when that body made it too difficult for them to continue making 'under-the-table' payments to their working-class players.<sup>44</sup>

Rugby football in Australia had to overcome strong competition from Victorian, later Australian, rules football which had become the dominant code in all States other than New South Wales and Queensland. From its introduction to Sydney in the 1870s, and to Queensland in the 1880s, rugby was organised and played by men 'of the wealthier classes', men from 'the upper echelons of society', an exclusiveness 'perpetuated by the private school education system which was crucial in the development and diffusion of the game'.<sup>45</sup> The schools employed teachers from Britain who promoted the game whilst after the students left school they continued to play the game at University.<sup>46</sup>

By the end of the 19th century the game had been taken up by many working men and had become the premier winter sport of New South Wales and its principal city Sydney, but the administration 'remained firmly in the control of the privileged classes', the conservative establishment, who 'displayed a very inflexible approach to the needs of a game which...now... catered for men from all walks of life'.<sup>47</sup> This middle-class establishment showed little concern for the working-class players.<sup>48</sup> Thanks to mass spectator support, the Rugby Union was a wealthy body and able, in 1907, to purchase its own ground at Epping Racecourse. This large outlay of money was resented by players many of whom believed that their concerns were being ignored. Player discontent focussed on money matters. The Rugby

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<sup>43</sup> Cunneen, p.295.

<sup>44</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p. 144.

<sup>45</sup> Murray G. Phillips, 'Rugby', in *Sport in Australia - A Social History*, Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 194.

<sup>46</sup> Phillips, 'Rugby' p. 194.

<sup>47</sup> Phillips, 'Rugby' p. 196.

<sup>48</sup> Phillips, 'Rugby' pp. 196-7, and Cunneen, p. 295.

Union refused to pay medical expenses of injured players, refused to support players unable to work due to footballing injuries and refused to make up wages when time had to be taken from work to play football.<sup>49</sup> When, in 1907, a group of businessmen/entrepreneurs decided to form a rival rugby body and organise clubs to play under Northern Union rules they found many recruits amongst the players in the working-class suburbs of Sydney and had little difficulty in forming new clubs in those suburbs.<sup>50</sup> The launch of league in Sydney had 'siphoned off the workers' and rugby union which had been played 'by a wide spectrum of the population...reverted to a game for the middle-class'.<sup>51</sup>

Chris Cunneen maintains that although introducing the game was the idea of 'a number of people in Sydney and some N.S.W. capitalists'<sup>52</sup> instrumental in the setting up of nine clubs in working-class districts of Sydney, the players 'lured to the code by the entrepreneurs' had a powerful representation in club and official circles. 'The players themselves were virtually the founders of new clubs and were strongly represented on management committees.'<sup>53</sup> The class nature of early league was underlined 'by its strength in those areas of inner Sydney where the Labor Party had become firmly established.'<sup>54</sup> Many of its leading figures had close links with the Party and the new code was able to establish an early presence in the Catholic schools,<sup>55</sup> something New Zealand league was never able to do.

Writing of the role of Irish-Australians in Australian sport, Peter A. Horton maintains that the central areas of Australia's large cities housed the workforce for burgeoning industries and docks. These became urban slums

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<sup>49</sup> Cunneen, p. 295.

<sup>50</sup> Cunneen, pp. 297-8.

<sup>51</sup> Phillips, 'Football Class and War', p. 163.

<sup>52</sup> Cunneen, p. 297.

<sup>53</sup> Cunneen, p. 303.

<sup>54</sup> Cunneen, p. 298.

<sup>55</sup> Cunneen, p. 304.

and consequently the heartland of the Australian Labor movement. These inner city centres became the locations of an Australian working-class sub-culture and sport became a unifying form of working class expression.<sup>56</sup> The Irish Catholic working class, many of whom lived in the inner suburbs of Sydney, were, he argues, heavily involved in the class conflict and were attracted by 'the anti-establishment spirit of rugby league, the financial potential it held and, even the less complicated nature of the game itself'.<sup>57</sup> They were 'particularly enamoured by the professional code and its administration as it definitively represented an anti-English establishment activity; hordes of working-class Irish-Australians gravitated to it for the solidarity it offered'.<sup>58</sup> Phillips identifies three interrelated issues - 'political affiliations, social class and sporting ethos' - that highlight the divergent social traits of union and league. Union was promoted by conservative politicians from its inception whilst, in contrast, league 'had strong links with the political movement established to represent the working class, the Labor Party'.<sup>59</sup> Following the establishment of league the game thrived in the working-class suburbs of Sydney whilst in contrast union, 'while played by a wide spectrum of the population prior to the split, became increasingly dominated by the middle class'.<sup>60</sup>

Andrew Moore, in his history of the North Sydney Rugby League Club, states that the advent of league in New South Wales cannot be divorced from the 'big themes in the social history of British eastern Australia between 1890 and 1910' and that these themes 'revolve around the tensions and

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<sup>56</sup> Peter A. Horton, 'The "Green" and the "Gold": The Irish Australians and their role in the Emergence of the Australian Sports', in *Sport in Australian Society, Past and Present*, J. A. Mangan and John Nauright (eds), Frank Cass: London, 2000, pp. 72-3.

<sup>57</sup> Horton, p. 77.

<sup>58</sup> Horton, pp. 77-8.

<sup>59</sup> Phillips, 'Rugby', p. 200.

<sup>60</sup> Phillips, 'Rugby' pp. 201-02.

struggles of class and gender'.<sup>61</sup> One of the major issues was what it meant to be a man. To trade unionists 'to be a man' was to stick by one's workmates, to those concerned with defence issues the alleged decline in masculinity was a worry, and before the advent of machines made work easier, physical prowess was greatly revered. 'In a society greatly concerned with potency and virility, rugby league became an important ritual of working-class Australian manhood.'<sup>62</sup> 'District rugby league football clubs were often formed in the shadows of local ALP branches...[and] many rugby league people were Labor through and through'.<sup>63</sup> Moore also suggests that violence in union matches influenced players to switch their allegiance to league. He quotes from a newspaper article reviewing the 1901 season in which it is stated that many players had decided not to take part in the union competitions due to the roughness of the game during the past season. There were many instances of brutal play which were attributed to the 'disposition of the players' and the 'lack of severity in dealing with the offenders'.<sup>64</sup>

The move to establish rugby league in New Zealand was even more player-driven than was the case in Australia. Player discontent with their treatment by the Rugby Union was not as widespread as it was across the Tasman, but exist it did and complaints were the same - lack of help with medical expenses and refusal to make up wages lost in order to play football. But aside from these financial concerns many players were curious about the new rugby game played in England. All Black footballers returned from the 1905-06 Rugby Union tour of Britain having seen at first hand this new game and regarded it as faster, more skilful and entertaining than union.<sup>65</sup> They were also aware of the greater financial rewards available to Northern Union

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<sup>61</sup> Andrew Moore, *The Mighty Bears: A Social History of North Sydney Rugby League*, Sydney: Pan MacMillan, 1996, p. 21.

<sup>62</sup> Moore, p. 21.

<sup>63</sup> Moore, p. 21.

<sup>64</sup> Moore, p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> Moorhouse, p.70.

players and contrasted these unfavourably with the 3 shillings a day they received from the New Zealand Rugby Union whilst on tour.<sup>66</sup>

Even though it had not even been played in New Zealand, the new game appeared to be more attractive than the established union game to many New Zealand players.<sup>67</sup> Officials were concerned about the threat to union should the new code ever be introduced into the country, and the conflict between the so called 'nationalists' and the 'imperialists' was mainly about how best to counter this perceived threat. The nationalists wanted rule changes to make the union game more attractive to both players and spectators, and to compensate players for loss of wages incurred whilst playing football. The imperialists, on the other hand, argued for maintaining the status quo; sticking with the existing rules and rejecting any broken-time payments as being contrary to the rules of amateurism of the English Rugby Union. The imperialists won this battle and opted to take a hard-line approach to counter the threat of league.<sup>68</sup>

The New Zealand Rugby Football Union threatened its players with a life ban should they have anything to do with league. When the news of the proposed rebel tour to Britain became general knowledge, it tried to force its players to sign an affidavit of loyalty to the Rugby Union if they wished to be selected for representative games.<sup>69</sup> Despite these threats, it was players who took the initiative and introduced league into New Zealand. But first a team was recruited to go to Britain and play a series of matches against Northern Union clubs and representative teams during the 1907-08 season. The mainly working-class players who went on the tour organised themselves as a cooperative body, the 'New Zealand All Black Rugby Football Team', and each invested £50 in the venture, a considerable sum of money at the time.<sup>70</sup> On

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<sup>66</sup> Haynes, p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> Haynes, pp. 36, 158.

<sup>68</sup> Vincent and Harfield, 'Repression and Reform', p. 249.

<sup>69</sup> Haynes, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup> Haynes, p. 34.

returning from the tour the players became involved in establishing the new game in their various provinces.<sup>71</sup>

In England and Australia league was a sport for working-class players, whilst union was the game of choice for middle-class players. Yet little research has been done into whether this was also the case in New Zealand. Smith<sup>72</sup> makes the point that not many workers would have been able to afford the £50 investment required from members of the 1907 rebel All Blacks team and argues that the majority of its members were adventure seeking middle-class young men. For union in this period, Ryan has demonstrated that All Black players, far from being from a mainly rural background, were in fact overwhelmingly urban.<sup>73</sup> He also shows that professional, in the occupational not the playing sense, middle-class young men who had attended one of New Zealand's elite secondary schools were disproportionately represented in their ranks.<sup>74</sup> Nauright maintains that the 'games ethic' of the English public schools was exported to similar institutions established by 'old boys' in New Zealand and that these 'colonial replicas' became the vehicle by which British middle-class ideals were transplanted to that country. It was from such a public-school-educated elite that the administrators of New Zealand rugby union football were drawn.<sup>75</sup>

Prior to the establishment of league in Australia, union had been played by all classes of society.<sup>76</sup> But after the split most workers opted to play the new game leaving union to become a sport played in the elite secondary schools and universities and by clubs whose players were mainly

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<sup>71</sup> Haynes, pp. 160-61.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, pp. 32-3.

<sup>73</sup> Greg Ryan, 'Rural Myth and Urban Actuality: The Anatomy of All Black and New Zealand Rugby 1884-1938', in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 35, 1 (2001), pp. 8-10.

<sup>74</sup> Ryan, 'Rural Myth and Urban Actuality', p. 25.

<sup>75</sup> John Nauright, 'Colonial Manhood and Imperial Race Virility: British Responses to Post-Boer War Colonial Rugby Tours', in *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*, p. 127.

<sup>76</sup> Phillips, *Football, Class and War*, p. 163.

ex-students of those institutions. This split between working-class league clubs and players and middle-class union clubs and players was quite distinct in New South Wales as it was in the north of England. Such a split never occurred in New Zealand. It had a smaller population and few large centres of population. The largest, Auckland, had less than twenty percent of the population of Sydney and indeed the total population of all the urban centres in New Zealand was barely equal to that of Sydney. Its population centres were also widely scattered mainly around its long coastline. In such a situation any sports club, in order to survive, needed to recruit its members mainly from the working classes. It has been noted that union players mirror New Zealand society at large in the percentages coming from the different classes of society.<sup>77</sup> It has also been noted that like attracts like and that players with similar occupational and social backgrounds tend to gravitate towards the same clubs,<sup>78</sup> but even clubs with middle-class connections, such as the Old Boys clubs<sup>79</sup> found throughout New Zealand, had a large working-class component. For New Zealand then the split did not lead to middle-class clubs and working-class clubs, but rather to union clubs with players from all walks of life, including the middle classes, and mainly working-class league clubs with few, if any, middle-class players. Working-class players, even within the same family, were divided in their loyalties, some playing union, others league.

Doug Booth argues that in those countries where league failed to replace union as the game of the working man it was due to the lack of a strong working class capable of supporting the alternate game and to the success of the union authorities in making their game a vehicle for nationalist ideals that distracted 'smaller and weaker working class movements' from the class-based game of union. He cites New Zealand, Wales and South Africa as

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<sup>77</sup> Neal Swindells, 'Social Aspects of Rugby Football in Manawatu from 1878 to 1910', BA History Honours essay, Massey University, 1978, pp. 30-31.

<sup>78</sup> Finlay Macdonald, *The Game of our Lives: The Story of Rugby and New Zealand and How They've Shaped Each Other*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1966, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> Old Boys clubs were formed by men who had attended secondary schools, the preserve of children from middle-class families at this time. Few boys from working-class families attended secondary schools.

examples and further observes that whilst in Wales union became an expression of Welsh nationalism, the authorities also 'tolerated a degree of professionalism "in order to accommodate working men"'.<sup>80</sup>

Gareth Williams invokes the need to develop a national identity as the main reason for the failure of the Northern Union to establish a presence in Wales despite the many similarities between rugby in South Wales and the north of England. Payment of players in Welsh rugby by way of 'reasonable expenses' was widespread even before the establishment of the Northern Rugby Union and after the 'split' it was 'only the down payment [signing on payment] that tempted players north, since their weekly salary [for playing for a Northern Union club] might not exceed that already paid them in amateur Wales'.<sup>81</sup> That the Welsh Rugby union was prepared to turn a blind eye to such blatant violations of the rules of amateurism was due to the desire of the Welsh middle classes to use rugby football 'as a vehicle for promoting national unity and social consensus'<sup>82</sup>. The Welsh nation was reborn during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and 'the leaders of this new Wales sought to promote Welsh aspirations and ambitions within the British political system and Empire'.<sup>83</sup> One means of doing this was by being a part of the 'international amateur rugby fraternity'.<sup>84</sup> If to be a part meant countenancing under-the-table payments in order to keep working-class players a part of the 'amateur' game, then this was a price Welsh middle-class officials were prepared to pay.

The game had embedded itself sufficiently deeply in popular culture and national consciousness alike by now for there to be give-and-take on both sides. Working men were never excluded, and they deferred to the discipline and obligations imposed by the game and its formalities. Equally the games administrators were quite prepared

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<sup>80</sup> Booth, 'From Allusion to Causal Explanation, p.24.

<sup>81</sup> Gareth Williams, 'How Amateur Was My Valley: Professional Sport and National Identity in Wales 1890-1914', *The British Journal of Sports History*, 2:3 (1985), p. 258.

<sup>82</sup> Williams, p. 264.

<sup>83</sup> Williams, p. 266.

<sup>84</sup> Williams, p. 266.

to tolerate the over-generous payment of expenses to working class players. What they would not consent to was the professionalizing and therefore proletarianising of the game which would mean its forfeiting its middle class support and replacing a classless with a class specific image.<sup>85</sup>

By tolerating the illegal payments to working class players the Welsh Rugby Union kept the game socially inclusive thus allowing it to have a 'symbolic unifying role' in the Welsh national identity.

In the eyes of the New Zealand middle-class elite, sport was part of the process of asserting national identity and the idea was taken up by politicians keen to develop such a national identity whilst maintaining close links with the 'mother country'. Richard Seddon, prime minister at the time of the 1905 All Blacks' tour to Britain, saw the political advantages of promoting such a tour and did much to popularise the All Blacks with the New Zealand public by having the Agent-general in Britain cable the match results back home as government messages. He also made sure he was on hand to be the first to welcome them back in 1906.<sup>86</sup> Jock Phillips argues that it was the endorsement by New Zealand's highest political leaders of the tourists that 'turned them into formal representatives of the nation's manhood'. Following the tour the government used taxpayers' money to give All Blacks an all-expenses-paid holiday in the United States and they were welcomed home as conquering heroes. The players had indeed become heroes and, having been largely instrumental in creating their status, it is 'little wonder that the politicians in New Zealand grabbed hold of the All Blacks' coat-tails' to exploit their success for their own political ends.<sup>87</sup>

One of the reasons for the emergence of union as New Zealand's national game in the early twentieth century was the concern of 'imperial-minded middle-class New Zealanders to preserve an Empire they believed to be under threat'. They believed racial fitness to be imperative if the Empire

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<sup>85</sup> Williams, p. 266.

<sup>86</sup> Nauright, 'Colonial Manhood', p. 135.

<sup>87</sup> Jock Phillips, 'The Hard Man: Rugby and the Formation of Male Identity in New Zealand', in *Making Men - Rugby and Masculine Identity*, John Nauright and Timothy J.L. Chandler, London: Frank Cass, 1996, pp. 86-88.

as they knew it was to survive and they saw rugby union as a means of preparing New Zealand males to 'do their bit for the Empire'.<sup>88</sup> The onset of war in 1914 further heightened calls for maintaining the imperial allegiance in both New Zealand and Australia.

Murray Phillips identifies three "historical themes" as helping to explain the contrasting actions of Australian rugby union and rugby league during the Great War - class affiliations, masculine traditions and the competition for supremacy. Those who supported the continuation of sporting activities argued that sport could benefit the war effort by contributing to patriotic funds and encouraging enlistment in the army. Opponents argued that it was immoral to promote sport as public entertainment while men were dying, that sporting activities were a waste of money and that they inhibited recruitment. The Rugby Union, governing middle-class rugby, was in strong opposition to sport in wartime and ceased all activities. For the middle-class rugby unionist the links between their game and the 'greater game' were well understood; 'football prepared men for battle: football was a man's game - and so was war. Failure to realize this struck at the heart of masculinity'.<sup>89</sup> The Rugby League, governing working-class rugby, continued its operations.<sup>90</sup> Phillips argues that

There is little doubt that this action was prompted by a desire not to forfeit the achievements made since its inception in Australia. It chose to continue because, even though it was firmly the people's choice as a spectacle, the rival code could not be discounted. To cease competition would be a risky proposition: hard-earned advantages in terms of grounds, popular patronage and revenue would be lost; Union, with far greater infrastructure and player support, may have been able to re-establish, rebuild and even be competitive for spectators after the cessation of hostilities.<sup>91</sup>

Michael McKernan maintains that there was a division in Australian sport in the years preceding the First World War between the 'professional'

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<sup>88</sup> Len Richardson, 'Rugby, Race, and Empire: The 1905 All Black Tour', *Historical News*, 47, December 1983, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Phillips, 'Football, Class and War', p. 175.

<sup>90</sup> Phillips, p. 158.

<sup>91</sup> Phillips, p. 166.

and the 'amateur' point of view. He argues that the pressures of the war brought these divisions into sharp focus. For the amateur sport had meaning 'in so far as it taught the young such values as loyalty, determination, unselfishness and the team spirit'. Sport was a preparation for 'something higher, something more important'. This amateur view 'was expressed most frequently and most forcefully by those who may be termed the middle-class opinion makers, for example, headmasters of the Great Public Schools, leading clergymen, and editorialists in the prestigious newspapers'.<sup>92</sup> The professional view was more pragmatic: sport meant entertainment and pleasure and 'an exciting break from the monotony of urban work'. Most adherents of the professional view were workers whilst the amateur view prevailed in the middle class. The two classes moved further apart during the war as the middle-class amateurs demanded the abandonment of sport in wartime whilst the working class insisted that sport continue, 'in order to provide some relief from constant contemplation of the horrors of war'.<sup>93</sup> It will be seen that similar observations might be made about New Zealand.

Was league a working-class sport? Was union the sport of the middle classes? These questions have been answered in the affirmative in the cases of Australia and Britain, but in order to see if this was also the case in New Zealand the question of class in early twentieth-century New Zealand needs first to be addressed. The simplistic Marxist division into two classes: the working class who sold their labour for wages, and the capitalist middle class who owned the means of production, distribution and exchange and employed the workers, will not do. There were a number of identifiable classes in early twentieth century New Zealand and the problem is to decide which are working classes and which middle classes.

New Zealand Government statisticians are not much help. Although they identified six 'classes'; professional, domestic, commercial, transport and

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<sup>92</sup> Michael McKernan, 'Sport, War and Society: Australia 1914 -18', in *Sport in History - The Making of Modern Sporting History*, in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (edited), St Lucia, Queensland University of Queensland Press, 1979, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> McKernan, p. 2.

communication, industrial, and primary producers, plus a small group of 'indefinites' whom they were unable to classify,<sup>94</sup> no distinction is made between the workers and those who employed the workers. Within each 'class', five categories of 'breadwinners'; employers, those in business on their own account but not employing others, wage earners, relatives assisting without payment, and the unemployed are identified.<sup>95</sup> Again this is of little help, but a number of historians have addressed the issue of class in New Zealand.

Belich devotes a chapter of his history of New Zealand to analysing the class structure in early twentieth century New Zealand.<sup>96</sup> He discusses five classes: professionals and professional business managers; manufacturers, especially of consumer goods; skilled craft workers who had served an apprenticeship to their trade; unskilled workers, freezing workers, watersiders, seamen and coalminers; white-collar workers in offices, banks and shops.<sup>97</sup> He cannot decide whether these white-collar workers were 'lower middle class'<sup>98</sup> or working class.<sup>99</sup> He also notes that 'craft actually cut across class, linking middle-class "masters" - artisans who had acquired their own business - to the working-class journeymen and apprentices they employed'.<sup>100</sup> An almost identical statement is made by Cooper, Olssen, Thomlinson and Law in *Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890-1939*, 'Allegiance to craft cut across class and linked "middle-class" masters - artisans who had set up on their own account - to

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<sup>94</sup> New Zealand Official Yearbook 1910, p. 134.

<sup>95</sup> New Zealand Official Yearbook 1910, p. 141.

<sup>96</sup> James Belich, *Paradise reforged: a history of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the year 2000*, Auckland: Penguin Press, 2001, Chapter 4, Social Harmony: The Touch of Class, pp. 126-156.

<sup>97</sup> Belich, pp. 129, 134, 138, 140.

<sup>98</sup> Belich, p. 126.

<sup>99</sup> Belich, pp. 141-2, 155.

<sup>100</sup> Belich, p. 134.

the working-class journeymen and apprentices they employed.<sup>101</sup> In another chapter of the same, book Olssen writes 'Craft cut across class, uniting some of the most successful businessmen, such as the Shacklocks, the numerous small masters, and the journeymen and apprentices they employed.'<sup>102</sup>

This latter observation is in accord with James Watson's postulation of an independent working class as one of five classes distinguished in post World War One Christchurch.<sup>103</sup> He identifies a capitalist class, who drew most of their income from the possession of capital assets rather than their own labour; a professional class of those who had had a prolonged formal education, were self employed and used a fixed scale of charges or who held salaried positions in the state services: a white-collar class of clerical and sales employees and primary school teachers who were obedient to rules and orders, respected authority and followed a relatively strict code of dress, speech and behaviour; an independent working class which encompassed skilled tradesmen, small businessmen and small farmers whose basic ideas revolved round economic freedom, from either wage work or employer authority, owning their own homes and owning some land; labourers, either in agriculture, mining, seafaring, port work, work on the railways and 'fetching and carrying' for skilled workers in industry.

Olssen, in his study of Caversham, also recognised that some journeymen wanted to be self-employed whilst others preferred 'the fewer risks and headaches' associated with wage labour.<sup>104</sup> Most of this self-employed group came from the handicraft sector rather than the factory sector of the skilled workers<sup>105</sup> as both pre-industrial (handicraft) and

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<sup>101</sup> Barbara Brookes, Annabel Cooper and Robin Law (eds), *Sites of Gender: Women, Men and Modernity in Southern Dunedin, 1890-1939*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003, p. 22.

<sup>102</sup> Brookes, p. 52.

<sup>103</sup> Watson, James, 'Crisis and Change: Economic Crisis and Technological Change Between the World Wars, with Special Reference to Christchurch, 1926 - 36', PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1984, p. 508.

<sup>104</sup> Erik Olssen, *Building the New World: politics and society in Caversham 1880s - 1920s*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995, p. 55.

<sup>105</sup> Olssen, *Building the New World*, p. 49.

industrial (factory) societies co-existed in Caversham during this period. He distinguishes nine separate classes; large employers, professionals and higher managerial, semi-professionals, officials (caretakers, foremen), self-employed (or only employing one or two), white collar, skilled manual, semi-skilled manual, and unskilled manual. Again we see in his 'self-employed' class a group that 'cuts across class' as noted by Belich and Watson.

In his doctoral thesis on the making of New Zealand cricket between 1832 and 1914, Greg Ryan uses the work of Beckford, Toynbee and others to distinguish nine classes grouped into three primary classes, a high white-collar class, a low white-collar class and a blue-collar working class.<sup>106</sup> These in turn are further subdivided with the high white-collar class becoming two classes; professionals, and major proprietors, managers and officials. Both these classes would be considered as middle class. The low white-collar class is subdivided into three classes; clerks and salesmen, semi-professionals, and petty proprietors, managers and officials. The first two of these are working class but the third class, especially the petty proprietors, who are mainly self-employed shopkeepers, should be considered lower middle class. The blue-collar class is subdivided into skilled workers, semi-skilled and service workers, and unskilled labourers and menial service workers.

In an attempt to show that 1907-1908 rebel All Black touring team was not the result of a 'working class revolt', but rather a tour that 'appealed to young middle-class men keen on adventure', Jo Smith postulates just two classes, white-collar/middle-class and blue-collar/working-class players, with farmers listed separately as 'others'.<sup>107</sup> By doing this she claims that almost half the tourists, 13 out of 28, were 'middle-class' but her 'middle-class' group includes four clerks, an insurance agent and a club steward who would, by most scholarly definitions, be considered working class. If we separate these 'white-collar workers' from her middle-class group we get a very different picture. The tourists comprised seven middle-class players, six

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<sup>106</sup>Greg Ryan, 'Where the Game was Played by Decent Chaps: The making of New Zealand cricket 1832-1914', PhD Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1996, p. 22.

<sup>107</sup> Smith, p. 32.

white-collar workers and thirteen blue-collar workers: now the middle-class players make up only a quarter of the tourists, a much smaller percentage, though still a significant figure given the lack of middle-class players involved in the launching of league from 1908 onward.

It is possible to overcome the differences noted above and divide New Zealand 'breadwinners' into three middle classes and four working classes if the classes are grouped according to how they derived their income. The major proprietors, merchants and industrialists whose incomes came from the profits of their enterprises (1); and the professionals, architects, solicitors, lawyers, doctors, secondary school teachers etc., whose income was either from a fixed scale of charges or from an annual salary (2), comprise an upper middle class - 'the establishment', 'the old boys' club', the 'elite' who managed the affairs of the nation. The small shopkeepers and self-employed tradesmen who either worked on their own or with the help of one or two assistants, and depended on the profitable operation of their small businesses for their income (3), constituted a lower middle-class. The white-collar workers, clerks, salesmen and shop assistants (1); the skilled tradesmen, carpenters, saddlers, plumbers, blacksmiths, etc. (2), the semiskilled workers, machine operators, engine drivers, etc. (3), and the unskilled workers, labourers, portworkers, seamen, etc. (4) constitute the working class as they all sold their labour for a weekly, daily, or even hourly wage.

For the purposes of this thesis I have not tried to distinguish between the three middle class groups and have included semi-skilled workers, whose jobs required at least some special skills, with tradesmen in one group of skilled workers, distinguished from both unskilled workers with no special skills, who primarily sold their muscle power, and from non-manual 'white collar' workers. Accordingly, the tables in this thesis have five categories, skilled workers, unskilled workers, non-manual workers, middle class and farmers.

A question that troubles New Zealand historians is whether the disparate classes of workers constituted a 'tight' working class in the sense that workers expected to remain within their class for their whole lifetime. If

movement into the middle class is a possibility for workers, then it is much harder for a 'class community' to develop whilst limited social mobility is a precondition for a 'tight' class.<sup>108</sup> The characteristics of a 'tight' working class have been described by David Thomson as 'power relationships, attitudes, ways of looking at the world'.<sup>109</sup> Class in this sense implies 'deep and lasting divisions between groups who think of themselves as different and opposed to one another, not just at this moment or on that issue, but permanently'. Such class division is based on income, wealth and power, but goes further to 'encompass values and behaviours shared with others in a group, but not with outsiders'. Such 'tight' working classes existed in the industrial North of England and in Australia's large cities.<sup>110</sup>

Belich believes that there was no nationwide 'tight' working class in New Zealand until about 1906 but that from that time the growth of the freezing and dairy industries saw a shift of power from craft industries to these new industries and to larger workplaces employing large numbers of unskilled workers ( I would have thought that here we are seeing the emergence, rather, of the new class of semi-skilled worker). These workers, together with seamen, wharfies and coalminers, he claims established their own 'tight' subcultures in the early twentieth century.<sup>111</sup> Olssen argues for the emergence of a 'tight' working class in the rapidly expanding urban areas at an earlier date, from the 1870s onward.<sup>112</sup> Urban society produced a stronger sense of class identity whilst the rapid growth of urban communities brought with it increasing residential segregation. The depression of the 1880s 'sharpened disparities of income, life-style, status, and opportunity' whilst the rapid growth of the industrial sector and factory production eroded the

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<sup>108</sup> Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, p. 143.

<sup>109</sup> David Thomson, *People and Society*, Palmerston North: Massey University New Zealand Social History Study Guide #2, 1993, p. 78.

<sup>110</sup> Thompson, p. 78.

<sup>111</sup> Belich, pp. 133, 138.

<sup>112</sup> Erik Olssen, 'Social Class in Nineteenth Century New Zealand', in David Pitt (ed), *Social Class in New Zealand*, Auckland: Longman Paul, 1977, p. 34.

artisan's hope of achieving independence from the wage system. Such shifting conditions caused the skilled artisans to become 'the most radical and class conscious during the last twenty years of the century'.<sup>113</sup> He illustrates his argument from the situation in Dunedin where there was residential segregation along religious lines as well as according to income. This residential differentiation, 'rooted in different life-chances and opportunities, intensified class distinctions, whilst institutions such as lodges, churches and sports clubs compounded class differences and provided a 'necessary but not sufficient condition for the growth of class consciousness'.<sup>114</sup>

Miles Fairburn argues that a 'tight' working class never developed in New Zealand because there were plenty of opportunities for working men to become independent of wage work, large conurbations 'that maximise the chances for the discontented to mix exclusively with one another and reinforce one another's opinions without coming into contact with the moderating ideas of the contented' never developed, and that workers had 'extraordinarily transient lifestyles', being forever on the move in search of work and never putting down roots in one place. Such habitual transience 'was even more destructive to social ties, including those depending on a sense of class solidarity'.<sup>115</sup> Fairburn's argument is weakened in that he is talking of nineteenth-century New Zealand society and admits that this atomised society was dying out in the period from 1880 to 1920. By the early years of the twentieth century New Zealand was experiencing a great rise in the value of goods manufactured and a rapid development of town population<sup>116</sup> which at least made the development of a 'tight' working class a possibility. Jo Smith also writes of New Zealand lacking large urban areas and their large numbers of working-class people<sup>117</sup> and working-class people

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<sup>113</sup> Olssen, 'Social Class in New Zealand', p. 34.

<sup>114</sup> Olssen 'Social Class in New Zealand', p. 35.

<sup>115</sup> Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundation of Modern New Zealand Society 1850-1900*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989, p. 125.

<sup>116</sup> New Zealand Official Yearbook 1910, p. 135.

<sup>117</sup> Smith, p. 126.

'tending to be in small clusters, scattered through the communities, and in small factories', which tends to support Fairburn's thesis.<sup>118</sup> In this thesis it will be demonstrated that although rugby league was a working-class game, there was little overt discussion of class by its players and administrators.

The question of methodology is not, according to some scholars, one that overtly bothers sport historians. It is claimed by Doug Booth that most sports historians 'work within a reconstructionist epistemology'.<sup>119</sup> By this he means that they see their primary responsibility to be reconstructing the history of their chosen sports history topic by the critical examination of surviving written records. Most history, and certainly most sport history, is still written as a blend of narrative and analysis that attempts to tell what happened in the past and offers plausible reasons why it happened.

Booth has criticised this approach on the basis that it results in sports historians presuming that they can reconstruct the past unproblematically by the simple process of rereading written records. He advocates instead a deconstructionist approach whereby 'all pretexts of objectivity'<sup>120</sup> are abandoned and multiple interpretations of historical phenomena are considered. As will be discussed later, this writer is aware that one cannot simply take surviving records at face value. It is argued however, that given that so little is known about the development of rugby league in New Zealand, the first priority for historians is to ascertain, as best they can, who played the game, where and why they did so, and what responses this generated from the dominant Rugby Union code, before considering any 'deconstructionist' approach.

As there has been little written about the early years of rugby league in New Zealand, this thesis uses narrative to tell what happened and to provide the historical context for the analysis that attempts to explain the successes and failures that are revealed. While recognising that the past was

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<sup>118</sup> Smith, p. 37.

<sup>119</sup> Douglas Booth, *The Field: Truth and fiction in sport history*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 13.

<sup>120</sup> Booth, p. 12.

more than a series of individual events, it is argued in this thesis that the evolution of rugby league in New Zealand was shaped by several interacting processes, the development of which needs to be explained so that the wider patterns can be understood. Within these chapters, the thesis investigates a number of themes, including the relationship between social class and rugby league and the responses of rugby union to the introduction of league.

This thesis is organised along chronological lines with a number of distinct periods recognised. Chapter one investigates the introduction of the game to New Zealand in 1908 and the difficulties faced by its promoters. Chapter two covers the next two years during which attempts to introduce the game seemed likely to fail, Auckland being the only exception, and examines the reasons for this. Chapters three and four then chart the growth and expansion of the game in the years up to the outbreak of the Great War and seeks to explain its success during this period. The Great War had a disastrous effect on the young sport of rugby league in most provincial centres, with many leagues going into recess. Chapter five examines the effects of wartime conditions on the game and looks for reasons why it not only survived, but prospered, in the cities of Auckland and Christchurch. The game was able to make a partial recovery in the years after the war, but was never re-introduced to many districts. Where the game was re-established it was, outside of a few centres where it had strong support, not able to regain the strong position it held in the pre-war years and it became mainly a niche sport played by manual workers. This situation, one that was to prevail through much of the twentieth century, was reached in the years 1919 and 1920. Chapter six covers this period and seems an appropriate point to end an investigation into the introduction of rugby league into New Zealand.

Most of the information used in writing this thesis was obtained from newspapers of the period. An attempt to find further information was attempted by consulting local histories but they gave little coverage to sport and almost all ignored rugby league completely. An attempt was made to locate any surviving minutes, annual reports and correspondence of the New Zealand Rugby League for the period covered in the thesis. Neither the

League nor the Kiwis' Association, a group of ex-New Zealand representative players, have any surviving records, but Eric Bennett, in his 1933 Rugby League Annual, has extensive extracts from the New Zealand League's minutes from 1910 to 1920 and these have been used. An attempt to locate any provincial records was made by appealing for information in local newspapers but no responses were received. If any records have survived they are likely to be amongst bric-a-brac in someone's garage and long forgotten. In the absence of primary sources the use of newspaper records was the only available option if the thesis was to be written. Luckily newspaper reports of the period gave extensive coverage to sports news, reports of annual general meetings and of committee meetings, they also carried letters to the editor in which issues that raised controversy were challenged thus allowing historians to follow debates as they unfolded. No newspapers have survived from the towns of Waihi, Taumarunui, Rotorua and Takaka and so information on rugby league in these places is only sketchy and was obtained primarily from newspapers published in other towns. Most footnotes referring to newspapers give name, date and page number, but where page numbers are missing it is due to two reasons. Some papers did not use page numbering, and numbers were not always visible on the microfilm copies consulted.

The minutes of the Wanganui City Council were consulted but did not yield any information other than that reported in the local newspapers. To consult council minutes for all rugby league playing towns would have been a huge task and it was not felt that it would yield any significant information not covered by newspaper reports. The minutes of the Rugby Union were not consulted as this thesis is primarily about the development of rugby league and the responses of rugby union authorities towards rugby league are well covered in the newspapers.

Monetary units in this period were pounds (£), shillings and pence: twelve pence equalled one shilling, twenty shillings equalled one pound. In the early twentieth century a working man would earn about two pounds a week. In the early twenty-first century he would earn about seven hundred

dollars a week.<sup>121</sup> An approximate way of finding twenty-first century equivalents of the prices mentioned in the text is to multiply pounds by 350 and shillings by 17. For example the 3 shillings a day the 'amateur' 1905 All Blacks were paid does not seem much, but the twenty-first century equivalent would be about 50 dollars ( $3 \times 17 = 51$ ), and the £50 that the rebel All Blacks were required to find in order to join the 1907 tour would equate to about \$17,000 ( $50 \times 350 = 17,500$ ).

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<sup>121</sup> The minimum wage for all employees over 16 was \$12 an hour on 1 April 2008. The average wage was \$16.50 an hour in the June 2007 income survey.



# 1

1908 - RUGBY LEAGUE

COMES TO NEW ZEALAND

NORTHERN RUGBY UNION RULES.

**A** GRAND BENEFIT FOOTBALL  
MATCH,

In Aid of the Late  
A. H. BASKIVILLE'S WIDOWED  
MOTHER,

Will be Played at the  
ATHLETIC PARK

On

SATURDAY NEXT, 13th JUNE, 1908,

At 3 p.m. sharp.

Come and See Rugby as it is Played in  
England.

Tickets Procurable Everywhere.

Admission, 1s. Grandstand, 1s.

CURTAIN RAISER, 1.45 p.m. sharp.

"SOCCER,"

RAMBLERS v. WANDERERS.

Gates open at 1 sharp.

Bicycle Gate open at South End of  
Ground.

Special Gates for Tickets.

Rugby league was introduced into New Zealand on Saturday 13 June 1908, when the rebel All Black tourists<sup>1</sup> organised a benefit match for the widowed mother of Albert Henry Baskerville<sup>2</sup> after he died of pneumonia during the Australian leg of the tour. The match took place at Wellington's Athletic Park and was announced by a small advertisement in the local newspapers, which promoted the game as football played under Northern Rugby Union Rules, 'rugby as it is played in England'. New Zealand Railways ran a special train from Lower Hutt and Petone for spectators and the Corporation Tramways put on special trams to the ground.<sup>3</sup> The match was given a favourable reception by a crowd of between 6,000 and 7,000 spectators.<sup>4</sup> Newspaper reports 'commend[ed] the Northern Union rules as an improvement on the Rugby [union] rules, making for a much faster and more interesting game'.<sup>5</sup>

Three months after the Wellington benefit match, towards the end of the regular football season, rugby league matches had been played in towns and cities throughout the country. Many leading representative and senior grade rugby union players were attracted to the new code and before the 1908 season ended representative teams had been organised in Southland, Otago, South Canterbury, Wellington, Taranaki and Auckland.

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<sup>1</sup> The tourists had legally constituted themselves as a combination, the 'New Zealand All Black Rugby Football Team'. The British press called them the 'All Blacks', or, more often, the 'Professional All Blacks', whilst the Australian press coined the name 'All Golds' inferring that they were being paid to play. The tourists insisted, with good reason, that they were amateurs so neither 'Professional All Blacks' or 'All Golds' seem appropriate. The tourists were, however, viewed as rebels by the rugby union authorities, and saw themselves as rebels, so I choose to refer to them as the 'rebel All Blacks'.

<sup>2</sup> Baskerville choose to use this spelling of his name. The rest of his family spelled their name Baskiville and had Albert Henry Baskiville inscribed on his tombstone.

<sup>3</sup> *Wellington Evening Post*, 12 June 1908, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Wellington Evening Post*, 15 June 1908, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 15 June 1908, p. 5.

Representative matches were played between provincial teams on both islands. A Maori team was also formed, and crossed the Tasman to play a series of matches in New South Wales and Queensland. At this stage all these initiatives were undertaken on an informal basis as no national body had been formed to administer the game, although provincial leagues were established in the South Island centres.

There were features in the introduction of league that were common to all the centres and which distinguished the situation in New Zealand from that in both England and Australia. In New Zealand the introduction was very much a player-driven initiative. Players were amateurs, and so, to them, payment was not an issue. It seems to have been a desire to play the new game which motivated the players, not the hope of monetary rewards. A high proportion of those taking it up were representative union players and the desire to play league was evident in many parts of New Zealand. In this chapter four questions will be addressed: who started the game, what motivated people to play the game, who took up the game and what deterrents were there to playing rugby league?

### **Who Started the Game?**

Much work had been done before any league matches could be played. Players had to be recruited, practice grounds found, rule books obtained, fixtures arranged with other groups of players and, most importantly, pay grounds secured. How much communication there was between the organising groups is not known, but it has been suggested that even before the rebel All Black tourists left for Britain, Baskerville had set up a network of enthusiasts to gain recruits for the launching of the game on the tourists' return.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, there were reports of efforts to start league in Auckland before the 1908 tour with 'the movement being worked up... in a systematic manner, though the greatest secrecy is being observed in connection with all that is done.'<sup>7</sup> Northern Union literature was also

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<sup>6</sup> Sean Fagan, *The Rugby Rebellion: The Divide of League and Union*, Australia: RL1908, 2005, pp. 206-07.

<sup>7</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 13 January 1908, p. 2.

circulating amongst rugby players and others. And systematic efforts were being made 'to develop the professional game in New Zealand',<sup>8</sup> particularly in Auckland and Wellington, with a wealthy syndicate allegedly prepared to 'put up £20,000' to this end. All this occurred whilst the rebel All Blacks were still in England.<sup>9</sup> Certainly the speed with which events unfolded suggests there was some prior planning.

However, the situation developed differently between the two islands as only five of the twenty-six tourists were from the South Island, and four of those had stayed in England to play for Northern Union clubs, so that in the south club players rather than returned tourists took the initiative in starting the game. The Southland Rugby League was formed at a meeting in Invercargill, on Wednesday 22 July, with about 40 people in attendance, including enough players to form two teams. Senior players from the Pirates and Britannia rugby union clubs were the driving force in the launching of league in Invercargill. Two of them, G. Burgess from the Pirates club, and E. Hughes from Britannia, both New Zealand rugby union representatives, were elected as selectors for the representative team. J. G. Corson, who was not a player, was elected team manager and third selector. The Otago Rugby League was formed six weeks later at a meeting on Wednesday 2 September at the Victoria Hall, Dunedin. 'There were exactly 111 persons present; the majority being youths, with a fair sprinkling of senior [rugby union] players.' C. E. Keast was voted to the chair.<sup>10</sup> The only other officials known are F. Given and J.J. Marlow: none of the three was a player. The meeting ended with the enrolment of 62 members, who each paid a subscription of 2s, and many others were apparently intending to join.<sup>11</sup> As it is unlikely that the youths were involved in the launch of league, it would appear that once again it was senior union players who took the initiative. It is clear that league enthusiasts in Invercargill, Dunedin and Timaru were in

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<sup>8</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 13 January 1908, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 13 January 1908, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 3 September 1908, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 8 September 1908, p. 6.

communication with each other as even before the South Otago Rugby League was formed it was announced that a game against the Southland touring team was to be played. Nine South Canterbury representative union players and four ex-representatives gave their support to the new venture.<sup>12</sup> The South Canterbury League was officially formed at a meeting in McDonald's Tearooms in Timaru on Monday 7 September. The meeting was presided over by J.R. Cooke, an ex-rugby union All Black. About 35 people were present, including several from Temuka.<sup>13</sup> So again the initiative in starting league was taken by union representative players.

Attempts were made to start league in a number of other South Island centres but they proved unsuccessful. In September, at the meeting to form a league in Timaru, the chairman read a letter from the 'North Canterbury League (Kaiapoi)' suggesting a game in Timaru on Labour Day, but as a band contest was to be held on that date a game was 'out of the question'<sup>14</sup> In October, at a meeting of the 'Northern Union Amateur Football League (Otago Centre), held in Dunedin, it was reported that requests for games had been received from Wellington, Canterbury and Timaru.<sup>15</sup> Nothing further was heard of the Kaiapoi and Canterbury initiatives, so they presumably did not succeed.

In Southland over 70 men took part in the practice games leading up to the three representative matches. The representative squad, not unpredictably, comprised mainly Britannia (7) and Pirates (6) players. There was also one player from Waikiwi and one from Manawatu[!!], whilst the club affiliations of the remaining four could not be found. Three of the squad, Hughes, Hamilton and Burgess, were All Blacks and six of the rest had been Southland representative players. In Otago and South Canterbury there were claims by league organisers of strong teams, with a preponderance of

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<sup>12</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 5 September 1908, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 10 September 1908, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 8 September 1908, p.6.

<sup>15</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 1 October 1908, p.5.

representative players, and counter claims from union sources of much weaker teams.

It would seem that there were no current representative players in the Otago squad, but eleven were senior players and five were from the second grade. No club affiliation could be found for one player. Just one club, Alhambra, was the main source of players, with seven of the 17 players being from that club and all but one were senior players. Alhambra was also the club of W. Johnston, Otago's only representative on the rebel tour of Britain. Each of Dunedin's remaining nine senior clubs, with the exception of Port Chalmers and University, contributed one or two players.

Of the 15-strong South Canterbury representative squad, nine were senior club players from Timaru, two being South Canterbury union representatives (but not nine as originally selected) whilst R. J. Cook, a 1903 All Black, also played. The rest were junior players. Six of the senior players were from the Star rugby union club. It would seem that team strengths fell somewhere between the rival claims of league and union supporters. It is unlikely that the fledgling Leagues would have claimed the support of representative rugby union players without some initial interest and commitment on the part of the latter. The failure of the Leagues to field as many representative players as they initially anticipated could be due to the persuasive powers of the Rugby Union officials once they became aware of the threat from the Northern Union game.

Three representative games were played in the South Island in 1908. The representative match played in Dunedin against the Southland League team was heavily promoted with large advertisements on the front page of the *Otago Daily Times*. The match was played on the Caledonian Ground on Saturday 3 October. Admission was 1s, children half-price. Admission to the Grand Stand was 6d extra with ladies free. Prior to the game, the Mornington Band assembled in Manse Street and then marched to the ground. The match was a great success, the weather was fine, the ground was in splendid order, but a strong wind made back play difficult. A crowd of about 2,000 saw Otago win a closely fought match by 11 points to 8, and were said to be impressed by the new style of play which made the game an ideal one from

the spectators' point of view. The match at Timaru against Southland was played at the Caledonian Grounds on Thursday 1 October. Admission was 1s, with ladies being admitted at half price. After all the publicity, the attendance was disappointingly small, with 'little more than 100 persons being present, a fact due, no doubt, as much to the weakness of the local team as to the uncertain state of the weather'. The Timaru thirteen included 'three juniors, and two or three of the others were not in football condition, consequently the Southerners had no difficulty in registering a comfortable win'. A long report of the game was generally favourable to the new rugby. The final score was South Canterbury 2, Southland 19.<sup>16</sup> The third match, played at Invercargill on Wednesday 7 October, was against Otago and resulted in a victory for the home team by 30 points to 14. The game was reported as being fast, with Southland superior in both the forwards and the backs.<sup>17</sup>

In the North Island the rebel tourists were involved in the formation of teams in Auckland, Taranaki and Wellington. Nine of the twenty-seven All Black tourists were from Auckland. Two of them, G. W. Smith and L. B. Todd, stayed behind in Britain, having signed professional contracts to play with Oldham and Wigan respectively. All the remaining seven were active in the launching of league in Auckland. Following the exhibition game played in Wellington on 13 June, the rebels dispersed to their homes. The Auckland players arranged matches with teams from Wellington and Taranaki. For the first match, against Wellington on Saturday 22 August, the use of Victoria Park was secured from the Auckland City Council. The team announced included the seven rebel All Blacks; J. R. and W. T. Wynyard, H. F. Rowe, W. T. Tyler, W. M. Trevarthen, W. H. Mackrell and C. Dunning; Riley, an old Ponsonby player who had joined the All Blacks in Australia and played several games for them; Dufty, a famous goalkicker; McDonald and Hooper, two

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<sup>16</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 2 Oct 1908, p.7.

<sup>17</sup> Issues of the *Southland Times* for October 1908 are missing so details of the match, including attendance, are not known.

Auckland rugby union representative players; and Redwood and Gladding, senior players from the City rugby union club.<sup>18</sup>

In Wellington moves were afoot to introduce the Northern game even before the Baskerville Benefit match. There were rumours in early June that a number of senior rugby union players, including 'some of the most prominent exponents of the game in the district', were ready to play the new game and that two senior clubs were prepared to go over in a body to Northern Union.<sup>19</sup> Nothing appears to have come of these rumours and it was not until two months later that D. G. Fraser, 'the secretary of the New Zealand Football Club', negotiated with the Petone Borough Council for the use of the Recreation Ground.<sup>20</sup> The Wellington squad for the games against Auckland contained six players, C. J. Pearce (the only Canterbury player to stay in New Zealand after the tour), E. Tyne, A. F. Kelly, H. R. Wright, C. Bryne and D. Gilchrist, who were rebel All Blacks; G. and J. Spencer who were New Zealand representative players; Barber, McGill (a Petone player) and King, who were Wellington representatives; and Instone and House who were Petone senior players, whilst Twohill was a Poneke senior player who had been, up to the naming of the team, the club secretary.<sup>21</sup> Six of the rebel All Black tourists had played senior football for the Petone rugby union club prior to the 1907-08 tour and eight of the Wellington Northern Union representative team were present or former senior players for the club. It would seem that it was in Petone, a working-class town with railway workshops and freezing works, that there was most interest in league.

Only one rebel All Black was involved in the launching of the Taranaki representative side. A. Lile, originally from Inglewood but resident in Wellington for several years, returned to Taranaki to help start up the game

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<sup>18</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 19 Aug 1908, p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 9 June 1908, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> D.G. Fraser, ex-Petone RU player, was one of the rebel All Black tourists and also assistant secretary to the New Zealand All Black Rugby Football Club. John Haynes, *From All Blacks to All Golds-New Zealand's Rugby League Pioneers*, Christchurch: Ryan and Haynes, 1996. p.58.

<sup>21</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 19 August 1908, p. 4.

there. No other players with Taranaki connections had gone on the tour. Tom Smith, a New Plymouth player, was also involved in the launching of the game. The Taranaki team contained, in addition to Lile, five rugby union representative players: A. Hardgrave, 'the best fullback in New Zealand today'; J. Coleman, a New Zealand representative; 'Bab' Hooker, B. Frewin and E. Buckland. The remaining seven members of the side were reported to have been 'carefully selected' from players who had 'shown exceptional form' that year.<sup>22</sup> Six of the seven were senior players from the Tukapa club.

Four representative matches were played in the North Island in 1908. Auckland's first match under Northern Union rules was played at Victoria Park on Saturday 22 August, with Wellington the visitors. Considerable curiosity was shown towards the new game and between 7,000 and 8,000 spectators turned out to watch Auckland win by 16 points to 12. Despite their limited knowledge of the rules, they were said to be carried away with enthusiasm. A junior rugby union representative match, Auckland versus Taranaki, staged on the same day, offered little competition, attracting less than 1,000 spectators to Alexander Park.<sup>23</sup> Auckland travelled to Wellington for its next game, which was played on Saturday 12 September at Petone, about 12 kilometres from Wellington. Large advertisements in the local papers promoted the game and special trains were run from Wellington for the spectators. Despite the counter-attraction of a representative union match against Taranaki played at Athletic Park, 3,000 spectators made the journey to see the match, which ended in a 13 all draw.

On their return trip to Auckland, the representative team played the Taranaki representatives at New Plymouth, where they surprisingly lost, by 5 points to 3, to the enthusiastic Taranaki representatives playing their first league match. A controversy arose over this result as the rugby union correspondent of the local paper accused the Auckland team of 'throwing' the match in order ensure a big crowd for the return match in Auckland.

The play fell far short of what was expected, and the general feeling after the game was one of disappointment. The teams were

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<sup>22</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 12 September 1908, p.2; *Wanganui Herald*, 12 September 1908, p.8.

<sup>23</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 24 August 1908, p. 8.

unevenly matched. Auckland had a strong team accustomed to the game. The Taranaki team was much weaker, and unaccustomed to the Northern Union game. To counterbalance this- and probably with a future match in Auckland between the two teams in view- the Aucklanders were evidently troubled little about scoring. From their point of view it would have been a serious blunder for them to have beaten Taranaki by a large majority of points. So they contented themselves with keeping a little of the advantage of the play.<sup>24</sup>

This provoked a strong rebuttal from Tom Smith , one of the organisers of the match. In a letter to the editor, he wrote

...to protest very strongly against [the] most misleading and untruthful report of the match Auckland-Taranaki. The report states that Auckland were not trying in view of a Taranaki team going to Auckland, which is absolutely incorrect. As a matter of fact, Auckland went on the field underestimating Taranaki, as the team had not played a game together. But, to use Auckland players' own words, Taranaki paralysed them with their fine tackling combined with pace and perfect handling of the wet ball. As for Auckland contenting themselves with the advantage, I think any advantage was on Taranaki's side. Anybody could see that Auckland were playing their hardest.... Amongst the spectators there was a consensus of opinion that Thursday's match was the fastest game played this season.<sup>25</sup>

Stung by this unexpected defeat, the Aucklanders trained hard for the rematch, played at Victoria Park on Saturday 10 October. A smaller crowd of 2,000 spectators were on hand for this match and saw Auckland win by the narrow margin of 21 points to 18.

The first season of league thus ended with the Auckland representative team having played four games winning two, losing one with one game tied. The two matches played in Auckland showed large numbers of the public eager to turn out to watch the new game. However, the first year's operations had not been profitable despite the good attendances at the two Auckland games. The Wellington team had been guaranteed half the gross gate to make the trip to Auckland. Thus, despite a gate of £298, the Aucklanders were left with only £100 after paying the Wellingtonians and meeting the local expenses. This profit was swallowed up in paying for the travel expenses to Wellington for the game in that city, leaving the finances

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<sup>24</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 18 September 1908, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 22 September 1908, p. 7.

in an impoverished state. The promoters were optimistic that the game would flourish during the coming season and pledged that any profit from the visit of the Taranaki team would be used to purchase a ground of their own.<sup>26</sup>

Attempts were made to start league in at least three other North Island centres. In August there were reports that the Wanganui representative team were about to 'become professionals' and take up league, but it appeared that it was only a few of the team who were promoting the venture and the proposal had had a cold reception from most of the team.<sup>27</sup> Also in August rumours were rife in Palmerston North that 'professional footballers' were attempting to gain a foothold there. There were reports of 'a list of ten names, all good players, who had decided to become professionals'<sup>28</sup> and that the movement was well supported, with the number of players offering to take part was 'in excess of requirements'.<sup>29</sup> The third attempt was in Wairarapa where it was reported that local footballers were concerned with the rough play in union and also wanted to see the rules changed to improve the game. If nothing was done to address these issues, it was expected that Northern Union teams would be formed for the 1909 season.<sup>30</sup> Nothing developed from these initiatives.

Maori appear to have been attracted to the game from the start and the involvement of Maori in rugby league will be noted throughout this thesis. There were Maori amongst the rebel All Black tourists and several were prominent in the establishment of league in Auckland. A Maori team toured New South Wales and Queensland in 1908, before the All Blacks had even got back to New Zealand, and a second team toured in 1909. Tourists were prominent in the establishment of the Rotorua League, and there were Maori clubs in Hawkes Bay and Dannevirke, as well as there being Maori

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<sup>26</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 October 1908, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle*, 18 August 1908, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 25 August 1908, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 27 August 1908, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 1908, p. 7.

players in all the North Island Leagues. There are three factors to consider when assessing Maori involvement in league in the early twentieth century. First there were not many Maori, only about 48,000 as compared to 889,000 Europeans.<sup>31</sup> Secondly most Maori were rural dwellers; very few lived in urban areas, and thirdly many Maori had adopted British names. This third factor makes it impossible to determine how many Maori actually played league, as is illustrated by the players named for the Auckland Maori team to play the Auckland representatives on Saturday 24 August 1912. Of the seventeen named, eight, almost half, had non-Maori names.<sup>32</sup> Very similar figures are found after the war, as from the players named for the South Auckland Maori team to play a combined Lower Waikato/Taumarunui team on 24 July 1920, nearly half, seven of the fifteen, had non-Maori names.<sup>33</sup>

In 1911, T. W. Parata, president of the Bay of Plenty Rugby Union was trying to organise a tour to England by a Maori side. In his application to the New Zealand Union, which refused to allow the tour to proceed, he professed his anxiety to keep Maori players in the 'amateur ranks' as League was trying to secure a footing in the Bay of Plenty. This he saw as a danger to union as 'the League is always at work pointing out to players the advantage of playing the professional game'.<sup>34</sup> Later in the year he was part of a movement to form a 'Native Sports Union' to control sport and foster the spirit of amateurism amongst Maori saying that 'it is estimated that there are at present 200 Maori playing [rugby union] football, many of whom promise to develop into first class players'.<sup>35</sup> This is only a small number even if, as seems likely, he was referring to the Bay of Plenty region only, and suggests

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<sup>31</sup>Population figures from the 1906 census in the 1910 New Zealand Official Yearbook, pp. 116, 122-3. The Maori figure includes '7,000 half-castes of whom 4,000 were living as Maori and 3,000 as European'.

<sup>32</sup>*New Zealand Herald* 24 August 1912, p. 9. [Briggs, Bush, Bennett, Clark, Wynyard, King, Flavoul, Paul]

<sup>33</sup>*New Zealand Herald* 20 July 1920. [Aubrey, Berryman, Borrell, Cowie, Hall, Laine, Menzies]

<sup>34</sup> *Evening Post* 3 June 1911, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup>*Evening Post* 5 August 1911, p. 9. See also Ryan, 'Paradox of Maori Rugby', pp. 99-101.

that the numbers of Maori footballers was quite small. Taking these factors into consideration, it would seem that league football appealed to many Maori and that Maori players made a significant contribution to the growth of the game.

The 1908 Maori tour to Australia was another player-driven initiative, this time the work of Albert (Opai) Asher, a well-known Auckland rugby player, who seemed to have planned a tour similar to that organised by Baskerville, with the players sharing any profits. In May 1908, whilst the rebel All Blacks were still playing in Australia, Asher and a party of Maori footballers set sail for Sydney to play a series of league matches. They went at the invitation of the New South Wales Rugby League, which had advanced them their passage money, thus making the tour possible. The tour was managed by Asher, who had recruited 30 'full blooded or half-caste' Maori from 'Tauranga, Te Puke, Maketu, Matata, Rotorua, Auckland, Northern Wairoa, Hamilton, Taumarunui, Manawatu, Taranaki and Hawkes Bay'. There were 'a number of well educated' Maori amongst the team from St John's, St Stephen's and Te Aute Colleges. The tourists signed a three month's contract and war cries and dances were to be amongst the features of the team's visit.<sup>36</sup>

Problems arose from Asher's dealings with an Australian entrepreneur, R.M. Jack. Asher gave his side of the events in an interview on the return of the tourists, saying that

he received a letter from Mr R. M. Jack, asking if it was possible to get a Maori team together to tour Australia. Asher then communicated with Maoris in Rotorua, Waikato, Taranaki, Hawke's Bay, Manawatu and Auckland, and finding he could get together a team wrote to that effect. Mr Jack then wrote saying he would require five per cent of the profits for the trouble he had been put to. The Maoris demurred at the five per cent, but offered to give him a "cut" meaning something in cash for his trouble. He would not accept this, and insisted on the five per cent, and also being appointed attorney for the team, whereon the Maoris opened direct negotiations with the New South Wales League, an action which caused Mr Jack to notify Asher that if the team came to Australia under any circumstances he would claim the five per cent. As a compromise the Maoris offered him 2 1/2 per cent on the first gate, in compensation for whatever trouble he might have been put to,

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<sup>36</sup> *Wellington Evening Post*, 18 May 1908, p. 3. *New Zealand Herald*, 26 May 1908, p. 6.

but he refused this offer. An agreement was then drawn up between the New South Wales League and the Maori team, by which it was stipulated that the Maoris were to get 50 per cent of the gate after the 20 per cent ground fee had been paid. The New South Wales League advanced the cost of the return passages, Auckland to Sydney, and deducted the amount out of the visitors' share of the first gate.<sup>37</sup>

Asher had organised the tour on this basis. It started off well with nearly 30,000 spectators attracted to the Royal Agricultural Society Showgrounds, in Sydney, on Saturday 8 June, to see the Maori lose to a New South Wales team by 9 points to 18. The Maori had not played under Northern Union rules before and this was also their first game together as a team. They also lost their second game against New South Wales, by 16 points to 30, a mid-week match that attracted a crowd of 12,000. These two matches generated gross gates of £1052/3/6 and £522, which, even after deducting the 20 percent ground fee and the New South Wales League's 50 percent of the remainder, would have left more than sufficient to refund the money advanced for the Auckland to Sydney passages. The Maori won their next two matches, beating Metropolitan Sydney by 23 points to 20 and Newcastle by 15 points to two. There was trouble on the Queensland leg of the tour when the Maori, after beating Queensland by 19 points to 16 and 13 points to 5, narrowly lost the third game by 5 points to 6. They then played two games on consecutive days against teams from Warwick and Toowoomba, which they claimed were just exhibition games. An ugly brawl broke out at the Toowoomba game involving both players and spectators after Asher took his team from the field following the dismissal of a Maori player. But the real trouble started on their return to Sydney. The Maori found they were being sued by Jack over the proceeds of the tour. Then, after winning two matches, the first against an Australian national team and the second against a Metropolitan Sydney team, they found that the New South Wales League was refusing to pay them their share of the gate money. Jack had taken legal action against the New South Wales League to force them to produce their accounts so that he would know how much money was involved in his case against the Maori and the

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<sup>37</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 25 August 1908, p. 6.

League had secured a Court injunction to impound the gate money owed to the Maori in view of his actions. The gate money so far involved amounted to £164 and was lodged in a Sydney bank. The League also proposed to withhold the Maori share of the gate money from the remaining matches. Stranded in Sydney with virtually no money, the Maori therefore refused to play the next two tests against Australia as they would not be paid their share of the gate money. They returned to New Zealand broke and disillusioned.<sup>38</sup> The names of all the players have not been found, but Opie Asher and fullback Riki Papakura from Rotorua were outstanding in a team that proved to be competitive in their introduction to rugby league. Other players to tour were Ernie Asher, A and T. Haira, H. Hatana, M. Heretaunga, H. Hirinui, Moko, H and P Pakere, Honi Pihama, M. Ratete, H. Rata, A. Tarawara, R. Tuki and Witerina.<sup>39</sup>

During the 1908 football season, groups of rugby union players from six towns and cities across New Zealand came together and formed teams to play league. They organised practices, arranged matches with teams from other provinces, secured the use of pay grounds and courted spectator support through advertising. This is a very different scenario to that found in either England or Australia when league was being established.

Four features, unique to New Zealand, can be identified. The first is that New Zealand players wanted to play league and were prepared to take the initiative in forming teams in order to do so. In England, when the northern clubs broke away from the Rugby Football Union in 1895, there was no such game as rugby league. The breakaway was over the issue of payment to players for 'broken-time' and the breakaway clubs continued to play football to Rugby Union rules.<sup>40</sup> There being no such game as league, the question of wanting to play rugby league could not have arisen. The

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<sup>38</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 25 August 1908, p. 6. Gary Lester, *The Story of Australian Rugby League*, Paddington: Lester-Townsend Publishing Pty., 1988, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> I am grateful to Bruce Montgomerie for providing me with these names, gleaned from newspapers held in the Sydney Library.

<sup>40</sup> Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998, p. 148.

situation in Australia was different. By 1907, when league was introduced, the game played by the Northern Union clubs in England had altered, through a series of rule changes, and become the different and distinct game of rugby league.<sup>41</sup> Australian rugby players were aware, to various degrees, of the new code. But the split from the New South Wales Rugby Union and the establishment of the New South Wales Rugby League came about due to player grievances with the way the Union treated its players.<sup>42</sup> Most players had no particular wish to play rugby league, but were prepared to give their allegiance to the new organisation because it proposed to address their grievances. The proposal to play under Northern Union rules was only adopted by a one vote majority, and had the vote gone the other way, most players would have been quite willing to play under the old Rugby Union rules.<sup>43</sup> Only in New Zealand did players make the conscious decision to play league.

Secondly, the desire to play league was a national phenomena, again unlike the situation in either England or Australia. In England the breakaway clubs were confined to the three northern counties of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire, and the game was to remain confined to this region for almost a century. In Australia league was established in the city of Sydney and, although it quickly spread to the country districts of New South Wales and to Queensland, it remained confined to these two eastern states. In 1908 groups of New Zealand players started, or attempted to start, the game in most of the cities and large towns throughout the country.

The third feature unique to New Zealand was, as previously demonstrated, that the game was started through player initiative. Unlike the situation in England and Australia, there was no governing body to control or direct the efforts of the players and each group acted on its own. By

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<sup>41</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 208-13.

<sup>42</sup> Ian Heads, *True Blue: The story of NSW Rugby League*, Randwick: Ironbark Press, 1992, pp. 22-26.

Chris Cunneen, 'The Rugby War: the Early History of Rugby League in New South Wales, 1907-15', in *Sport in History*, Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds.), University of Queensland Press, 1979, p. 295.

<sup>43</sup> Lester, p. 16.

contrast the game in England owes its origin to the officials who met and decided to withdraw their clubs from the Rugby Football Union and set up a rival organisation: the players had little say in the matter. In Australia a similar situation prevailed: a group of businessmen, trade union officials and a few dissatisfied rugby union players decided to form a body to organise rugby so that the interests and concerns of the players were properly addressed.<sup>44</sup> Only when this body, the New South Wales Rugby Football League, had been formed did it decide to play to the Northern Union Rules and begin to recruit players and establish clubs.

The fourth unique feature of the introduction of league to New Zealand was that it did not involve the formation of clubs and the playing of club competitions, but rather the formation of provincial teams and the playing of interprovincial matches. In the north of England it was the clubs that were the driving force behind the breakaway from the Rugby Union and club competitions under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Northern Rugby Union began to be played right away. In Sydney, it is true, the first activity of the newly formed New South Wales Rugby Football League was to play three matches against the rebel All Black team on its way to England. But these matches were more about raising money to finance the activities of the newly formed League than promoting the league game. Neither team was familiar with the Northern Union rules, so the matches were played under the Rugby Union rules. They drew large crowds and so fulfilled their purpose, to raise money for both the League and the tourists.

### **Why People Wanted to Play Rugby League**

To address the second question, that of what motivated people to play rugby league football, it is first necessary to examine the position of rugby union football in New Zealand society. In 1908 rugby football had been played in New Zealand for almost four decades and had become firmly established as the country's national sport. Rugby had put down roots in

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<sup>44</sup> Murray Phillips, 'Football Class and War: The Rugby Codes in New South Wales, 1907- 1918', in *Making Men - Rugby and Masculine Identity*, John Nauright and Timothy J.L. Chandler (ed.), London: Frank Cass, 1996, p. 162.  
Lester, pp. 15-16.

most communities, clubs had developed strong loyalties, with sons following fathers to play for their clubs. The game had also become established as the sport of choice by headmasters in the secondary schools. But it had become more than just a game for many people. By the early twentieth century rugby had been adopted by the middle-class establishment: politicians, businessmen, the professional classes, all of whom found it advantageous to be associated in some way with rugby football.<sup>45</sup> Certainly during the 1905 All Black tour, and possibly earlier, the game was taken up by politicians as a symbol of New Zealand national identity and the rugby player was mythologised as the strong, rugged sportsman typifying all that was best in the egalitarian New Zealand society.<sup>46</sup>

But there was a gap between the myth and the actuality. Most rugby players were found in the towns and cities, rugby struggled to survive in many small rural communities.<sup>47</sup> Far from being an egalitarian sport, at least at representative level, it tended to be dominated by the sons of a middle-class elite who had been educated at a few exclusive secondary schools.<sup>48</sup> At national level the administration was firmly in the hands of the middle-class establishment, who shared the obsession of the English Rugby Union with the ideal of 'amateurism'. This brought it into conflict with officials from some provincial Unions, who had a more pragmatic approach to the game and wanted to initiate changes. This conflict, between what Geoff Vincent has called reform-minded 'sporting nationalists', who wanted changes made in

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<sup>45</sup>Geoffrey T. Vincent, 'A Tendency to Roughness' p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey T. Vincent, 'A Tendency to Roughness' p. 58.

Jock Phillips, 'The Hard Man: Rugby and the Formation of Male Identity in New Zealand', in *Making Men - Rugby and Masculine Identity*, John Nauright and Timothy J.L. Chandler (ed.), London: Frank Cass, 1996, p. 86.

<sup>47</sup> Greg Ryan, 'The Paradox of Maori Rugby 1870-1914', in Ryan, Greg (ed.), *Tackling Rugby Myths: Rugby and New Zealand Society 1854-2004*, Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2005. p. 91.

<sup>48</sup> Ryan, 'Paradox of Maori Rugby', p. 92. See also Greg Ryan, 'Rural Myth and Urban Actuality: The Anatomy of All Black and New Zealand Rugby 1884-1938', in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 35:1 (2001), pp. 24-26.

New Zealand rugby, and conservative 'sporting imperialists', who wanted to maintain the status quo, was brought to a head in 1908 with the return of the rebel All Blacks and the introduction of rugby league to New Zealand.<sup>49</sup> Both factions were fearful of the effects a successful introduction of league would have on union. The nationalists wanted to counter the threat from league by altering the rules of union to make the game more attractive to play and watch (making it more like league), by making it easier for working-class men to play by permitting the payment of 'broken-time' (as did league), and, if necessary, breaking away from the English Rugby Union and forming a Southern Union together with Australia. The imperialists realised that the English Rugby Union would not countenance the nationalists' proposals and feared moves to introduce them unilaterally would inevitably lead to the cessation of tours between New Zealand and northern hemisphere teams. They therefore favoured maintaining the status quo and making no concessions to the attractions of league. The conflict came to a head at a special meeting of the New Zealand Rugby Union on 9 October 1908 at which the conservatives managed to avoid making any binding decisions by delegating the Management Committee to revise the rules in accordance with the amendments made by the delegates.<sup>50</sup> The following year the conservatives engineered the rejection by the New Zealand Rugby Union of all the reformers' proposals. Thus

the campaign for radical reform of the "amateur" game mounted by the sporting nationalists had been artfully thwarted, thereby avoiding the potentially catastrophic severance of the imperial connection. Thus, neither repression nor reform triumphed in 1908. Both the "Northern Game" and the problems which the reformers had sought to remove continued to vex rugby union football in New Zealand for many years to come.<sup>51</sup>

Resentment at the way the Rugby Union avoided making any changes to the game was one reason why league was started, as is apparent from the

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<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey T. Vincent and Toby Harfield, 'Repression and Reform: Responses within New Zealand Rugby to the Arrival of the "Northern Game", 1907-8', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 31:2 (1997), p. 236.

<sup>50</sup> Vincent and Harfield, p. 248.

<sup>51</sup> Vincent and Harfield, p. 249.

criticism voiced at the meetings held in the South Island to establish rugby leagues. J.L. Corson from Invercargill criticised the New Zealand Rugby Union for its 'shabby' treatment of its players.<sup>52</sup> In Dunedin C.E. Keast criticised the Rugby Union and expressed his opinion that league had only been formed as a result of the defeat of the reformers:

...the Northern Union game had come to remain here until such time as the Rugby Union altered its rules and was agreeable to say that players would be paid for loss of time while on tour. If the rules had been altered in these two respects the Dunedin League would not have been formed at all.<sup>53</sup> They had no desire to be antagonistic to the Otago Rugby Union in any way, and if that body was to fall in with their own views with regard to the game and the payment of players for loss of time, he was quite satisfied they would be willing to give way to the Rugby Union.<sup>54</sup>

At the formation of the South Canterbury Rugby League, J.R. Cooke, the ex-rugby union All Black, spoke of there being 'a lot of dissatisfaction in New Zealand lately, mainly due to the rules of the old game of Rugby getting too hard and fast, and for that reason the Northern Union rules were coming into favour', whilst a Mr Geddes spoke about the discontent within the Rugby Union about the way it treated its players, who, he said, felt that they were being used purely to make money for the Union.<sup>55</sup> At a meeting held in Christchurch on Friday 24 July to consider adopting the Northern Union rules in local football, the large attendance was highly critical of the Rugby Union, but drew back from forming a rugby league, preferring, rather, to try and have the Union introduce reforms.

The tone of the discussion, however, was opposed to any secession from the Rugby Union, but severe criticism was directed against the New Zealand Rugby Union ignoring whatever suggestions were made by different clubs from time to time to improve the game, and the following motion was carried unanimously:- That this meeting of Canterbury footballers urges the clubs to consider the advisability of altering the playing Laws of Rugby football with a view to improving

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<sup>52</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 8 September 1908, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> This is rather ambiguous - what he appears to be saying is that the Northern Union game will remain until the Rugby Union alters its playing rules and pays its players for loss of time.

<sup>54</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 1 October 1908, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 8 September 1908, p. 6.

the game, and that the views of the clubs be brought prominently before the Union at an early date with a view to further action. A committee was appointed to further the wishes of the meeting.<sup>56</sup>

In the North Island, at a meeting held in Petone on Wednesday 16 September to consider playing football under Northern Union rules, speakers complained that the Rugby Union did not 'treat its players as well as they ought to' and that the way rugby was played needed to be improved. Other speakers, whilst conceding the need for reforming the union game, counselled the organisers to wait and see what improvements the New Zealand Union decided upon before launching out on their own. H.J. Palmer, landlord of the Empire Hotel in Petone, and manager of the rebel All Black touring team, opposed this wait-and-hope approach, saying

How are we going to get these rules altered when the New Zealand Union is controlled by the English Union? To get an improvement in the game the New Zealand centre would have to break away. We would first have to be sure that the New Zealand Union is prepared to break away.<sup>57</sup>

As well as this general discontent with the conservatism of the Rugby Union, there were other reasons why people took up league. These included local disputes within various provincial Rugby Unions, and the widespread perception of union as being a violent and injury-prone game and of league being a cleaner, faster and more skillful game.

In Southland and Taranaki, two local disputes had an effect on the introduction of league. It started in Invercargill due to the action of the Southland Rugby Union in suspending the senior players from the Britannia and Pirates clubs for their refusing to play a game scheduled for Wednesday 8 July.<sup>58</sup> The players subsequently decided to take up league. The suspended players had argued that the ground had been unfit to be played on, whilst the Union officials disagreed. The Union was no doubt sensitive to any criticism of the ground as it was newly acquired and a considerable sum had

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<sup>56</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 25 July 1908, p.10.

<sup>57</sup> *Evening Post*, 17 September 1908, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 11 July 1908, p. 7.

been spent on draining and levelling the site.<sup>59</sup> The players on the other hand considered that they had been unfairly treated and at a meeting of the Pirates club held on Tuesday 14 July determined to send a deputation to the Southland Rugby Union to put their case. Their argument was that the weather had been too bad, the ground unfit and a number of players had been incapacitated through injuries or sickness.<sup>60</sup> The Union rejected the players' arguments and referred the suspensions to the New Zealand Rugby Union, which endorsed its decision. The players then wrote to the Southland Union, pointing out that the ground had been in a bad state for several weeks. On the Wednesday previous to the suspensions games were scheduled for both eastern and the western pitches, but the state of the eastern was so bad that both games had been played on the western pitch. The Wednesday before this the eastern pitch was so bad that the Pirates' captain offered to stop at halftime and call the match a draw, even though his team had an eight point lead.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst these negotiations with the Southland Rugby Union were going on, the suspended players had started to play league. Their first game was on Wednesday 15 July, the day after a meeting of players had been held at which the 'formation of a league to forward the game in Southland was seriously considered'.<sup>62</sup> The game was played at the Bluff. The players had only a vague knowledge of the laws of the game and neither side seemed to take the game seriously. Securing a referee proved difficult and eventually a 'Portite' with no knowledge of the rules was persuaded to officiate.

Needless to say his decisions were more of a compromise to please both parties than a correct interpretation of the new game, and, that being so, players and spectators alike were quite satisfied with the first exhibition [of rugby league] in Southland.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Lynn McConnell, *Something to Crow About: The Centennial History of the Southland Rugby Football Union*, Invercargill: Craig Printing Co., 1986, p. 275.

<sup>60</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 16 July 1908, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 3 Aug 1908, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 16 July 1908, p. 8.

<sup>63</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 18 July 1908, p. 7.

The match resulted in Britannia beating Pirates by six points to three. Gate receipts were about £5<sup>64</sup>, suggesting a crowd of about 200 spectators. The players seemed already to have secured the use of a pay ground and were charging admission to recoup some of their expenses. A smaller dispute in Taranaki was to lead to the formation of a league club at Eltham. Ernie Buckland was still a teenager, but he was already a representative player in the union game. He felt that he had been badly treated by the representative coach over an incident in a match against Otago played at Hawera. As a result Buckland quit the representative team and went over to league. This resulted in nine players from the senior team of his club, Eltham, announcing they were prepared to 'take on the Northern Union game' as a protest against the treatment meted out to Buckland.<sup>65</sup>

Another motivation for playing league was concern about the violence in the union game. The prevalence of rough play in the rugby union game early in the twentieth century has been discussed by Geoffrey Vincent,<sup>66</sup>

Warnings began to be heard during 1907 that the rising tide of violence posed a serious threat to the survival of the game. One commentator insisted that with 'professional football about to make a strong fight for a footing in the colony', the amateur game 'must be absolutely clean... if it is to retain its ascendancy'.<sup>67</sup>

Most provincial unions introduced harsher penalties and considered the formation of vigilance committees to try to curb rough play. Unfortunately none of these initiatives had any effect in reducing the incidence of rough play. The promoters of league were aware this problem and made the point that league was a safer game. Geddes, at the formation of the South Canterbury League stressed that the game was 'not so dangerous to the players'<sup>68</sup> whilst the advertisements for Timaru's first league match claimed

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<sup>64</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 3 Sept 1908, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 13 October 1908, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> Vincent, 'A Tendency to Roughness' pp. 62-64.

<sup>67</sup> Vincent, 'A Tendency to Roughness', p. 63.

<sup>68</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 8 September 1908, p. 6.

that the game was not nearly as rough as union.<sup>69</sup> The press reports of Auckland's first league game brought up the same point

Many old time Rugby players present, who have withdrawn from the national game because of the tendency to roughness which is now so apparent, were loud in their praises of the new game, because of the reduction of the risk of accident to a minimum.<sup>70</sup>

Another factor that may have helped persuade players to try league was the widely held opinion that it was the 'better' game. This was even conceded by union supporters, who feared that players would desert union if rule changes were not instituted to make it more attractive, that is more like league. About 2,000 spectators watched Dunedin's first game of league and were impressed by the new style of play of which the 'one outstanding feature was its fastness, and absence of waste of time'.<sup>71</sup> Timaru's first league game was described as more open and faster than union, with passing one of its features.<sup>72</sup> Advertisements for Auckland's first game called it 'the fastest game known, no line-outs, no kicking into touch, no wing forward, 13 men-a-side',<sup>73</sup> and the spectators were said to have been carried away with enthusiasm. It was said of Wellington's first game that the 'outstanding feature of the game was its openness'.<sup>74</sup>

Another possible reason to play league, and one that would appeal particularly to superior players, was the challenge of trying, and succeeding in, a faster and more skillful game. This would bring not only personal satisfaction but could also open up possibilities of playing overseas in either Australia or Britain. The example of the rebel All Black tourists would not have been missed. Not only did these players enjoy the experience of a lifetime, but those who returned to New Zealand were considerably richer

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<sup>69</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 17 September 1908, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 24 August 1908, p. 8.

<sup>71</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 6 October 1908, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 30 September 1908, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 19 August 1908, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 1908, p. 7.

than when they left. The fact that a number of them chose to stay in Britain and play semi-professional football would have signalled to New Zealand footballers, especially those from working-class backgrounds, that such an opportunity was open to them if they were good enough. A similar opportunity existed across the Tasman also with the success of league in Australia.

### **Who took up the Game of Rugby League?**

There were no returning rebel All Blacks to help start the game in the south. Of the five tourists from the South Island, only one, Pearce from Christchurch, returned to his old life, whilst two others, McGregor and Lavery, remained in England to play and the remaining two, Turtill from Christchurch and Johnston from Dunedin, only returned to settle their affairs before returning to play football in England.<sup>75</sup> Despite this there were enough players in Invercargill, Dunedin and Timaru wanting to play the new game to ensure that the southern provinces were the first in New Zealand to form rugby leagues. Southland, as the result of the Southland Rugby Union suspending the senior teams of two of its clubs, was first off the mark, being formed in late July. Otago and South Canterbury Leagues were formed later: Otago on 2 September and South Canterbury on 7 September. Only in Southland and Otago was there time to stage a series of practice games before the 'representative' games were played at the end of the season. In Timaru only a couple of practices were held for the group of players who were to form the representative team. The new code proved to have popular support in both Invercargill and Dunedin, with practice games, played to familiarise players with the rules of league, attracting several hundred spectators and the representative matches being watched by several thousand. In Timaru the game found little support and less than 100 spectators turned out to watch the match against Southland.

Overall only about 50 players are known to have taken part in league football in the North Island and the representative games were organised by

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<sup>75</sup> John Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, Christchurch: published by author, 1987, p. 15.

the players themselves: no leagues were formed and it was only in Petone, at the end of the football season, that a meeting was held to consider forming a league. Despite the lack of a formal body governing the game, the matches played proved popular with spectators. The Auckland matches drew crowds of over 7,000 and 2,000, the Petone match 3,000, and the New Plymouth match, despite the unsuitable ground, attracted over 500 spectators.

Invercargill seems to have attracted the largest number of players, over 70 taking part in a series of practice matches, and on one afternoon two senior matches and one junior match were played, thus potentially involving 78 players. Dunedin also played several trial matches, one of which attracted so many would-be players that a 14-a-side game was played. This would suggest that at least 28 players were involved. Also a squad of 20 players was selected to train for the representative games, which suggests that it was selected from a pool of players exceeding this number.<sup>76</sup> Only one practice game was played at Timaru and one at Auckland, so at least 26 players were involved in each of these two centres. No practice matches seem to have been played in either Wellington or Taranaki, so the only indication of the number of converts are those named in the representative teams, 19 in Wellington and 16 in Taranaki. Assuming that both provinces held at least some informal practice sessions, the numbers taking part would likely have been greater than this. Taking all these factors into account, at least 200 men played league games, either practice/trial matches or representative games, during the 1908 season. This was far from a mass exodus from union and of the six centres only Invercargill and Dunedin had the player numbers to enable a series of practice/trial games to be played.

As it was only in Southland and Otago that league matches other than the seven representative matches were played, the effect of the introduction of league in these two provinces will be examined. There were certainly no large defections from rugby union. In Dunedin union was particularly strong, with ten senior clubs and a total of over 250 players playing senior football,

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<sup>76</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 28 September 1908, p. 6.

an average of 25 per team.<sup>77</sup> The lowest number of players for a team was 18 and the highest was 32. Even more took part in the senior second grade competition, with over 320 players recorded, an average of 32 players per team. The lowest number of players per team was 18 but the highest number was 43! With numbers like these it is obvious that many players were casual players who played only the occasional game of union, but even so a few dozen defections to league would have hardly been noticed.

In Invercargill, where 74 players took part in the six practice and trial matches leading up to the league representative games, numbers of casual players were also apparent in league. Seventeen played in all six matches but 14 played in only one. Eleven played in five matches, but 9 in only two. Ten played in 4 matches and 12 in 3 matches. This meant that probably less than half of those who played league in 1908 were serious about the game and this was a very small base from which to establish a club competition. Nevertheless, a core of officials and players had been attracted and spectator interest generated. The challenge for the coming season would be to hold on to the current players and attract more new players to enable club competitions to be started.

Attempts were made to find the occupations of the men who played league in its debut year in New Zealand. In Southland the names of 74 men who played at least one game are known. Of these the occupations of 30, 40.5 percent, were found by matching names from the electoral rolls for 1911. Eighteen different occupations were found. Seven labourers constituted the most frequently appearing occupation, followed by three bootmakers, two blacksmiths, two carpenters and two carters. All other occupations appeared only once. Fourteen players had unskilled occupations, 13 were skilled workers, 2 were white-collar workers, whilst the remaining player, an artist, has not been classified. Of the 16 men named in South Canterbury's representative squad, the occupations of 11, 68 percent, were found. There were nine different occupations, including two farmhands, two engineers and a clerk. There were five unskilled, five skilled, and one white-

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<sup>77</sup> The figures in this paragraph are found by counting the numbers of players appearing on team lists published throughout the season in the *Otago Daily Times*.

collar worker. The names of only six of the 17 Otago representative players, 35 percent, could be matched with names on the 1911 electoral roll. Of these three were unskilled, two skilled and one a white-collar worker.

In the North Island, players' occupations followed a similar pattern. Of Wellington's 19 players, the occupations of only six could be found, just 31.5 percent, while the occupations of nine of the 16 Taranaki players were found, a much higher 56 percent. Wellington had three skilled, two unskilled and one white-collar worker whilst a farmer appeared for the first time in Taranaki, possibly a reflection of the importance of the dairy industry in that province. There was also a bigger proportion of skilled workers, six as against only two unskilled. Auckland showed a greater difference, with white-collar workers, four, equalling in number the skilled workers, and no unskilled workers appeared. This could be accounted for by the fact that the occupations of only nine of the 21 representative players could be found and the unmatched players would be more likely to be unskilled workers who led a more transient life than skilled and white-collar workers.<sup>78</sup>

For the six provinces where league was played in 1908, the names of 163 players were found and of these 71 were matched with names on the 1911 electoral roll, 43.5 percent. This low figure can be accounted for, in part, by the fact that the only suitable electoral roll was compiled over two years after the games were played. Given the still transient nature of New Zealand workers, particularly unskilled workers, many would have moved on by this time. Nevertheless, even with this less-than-perfect sample, several things are apparent: the absence of middle-class players, the small number of white-collar workers, nine, in the sample and the fact that there were nearly equal numbers of skilled (33), and unskilled (26) workers playing league. The three I have not attempted to classify were an artist, a farmer, and a fruiterer and florist. These figures suggest that rugby league was attracting mainly working-class players, but was shunned by middle-class players, in contrast to rugby union, hockey, and cricket which were the team sports of choice of the middle classes.

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<sup>78</sup> Erik Olssen, 'Towards a New Society', in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed., Geoffrey W. Rice (ed.), Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 275.

### **Deterrents to Playing Rugby League**

Much more commitment was needed to play league than union. With schoolmasters promoting union in their schools whilst denying students the chance to play league, it was easy for, and indeed expected of, young lads leaving school to join the local rugby union club. There were often family connections with the club, and success on the field brought local kudos. Exceptional talent could lead to representative football at provincial and even national level. As well as, this the strong infrastructure supporting union ensured there need be no worries about finding grounds to play on or teams to play against, and the camaraderie, both on and off the field, would have been an added attraction.

In taking up league in New Zealand, a young man was exchanging the certainties of union for the uncertainties of a new game with no guarantees that the venture would succeed. Some turned to league following a dispute with their local rugby union, as did the Pirates and Britannia players in Invercargill, and Buckland and his Eltham teammates in Taranaki. But most of those who pioneered of the game in 1908 took it up because they wanted to play what they perceived as a faster, more open, and more skilful game. In doing so they had to do everything themselves; find grounds to practise on, acquire rule books and teach themselves how to play the new game, contact similar groups throughout the country to arrange fixtures, and find the money to finance their activities. They also had to do all these things in the face of opposition and obstruction from the Rugby Union and union supporters in their community.

The New Zealand Rugby Union had already banned for life the rebel All Blacks as soon as their names became public, so that those who joined them to play the new rugby were aware what to expect. What they were not prepared to accept was being branded as professionals. The rebel All Blacks were obviously not professionals, having, in fact, invested £50 each in order to finance their tour, but this did not stop the union establishment from condemning league as a professional sport and anyone who played the game therefore a professional also. This falsehood must have been widely

disseminated as every group that attempted to start league was at pains to deny these accusations and affirm its amateurism. J.L. Corson of the Southland Rugby League defended league from charges of professionalism, arguing that if league players were disqualified from rugby union for receiving 5s per day expenses, which is what the Southland League proposed to pay, then union players who received 3s per day must also be disqualified.<sup>79</sup> It was announced that league in Otago was to be run on purely amateur lines and it was not 'going in for professionalism', players would only be paid for time lost away from Dunedin.<sup>80</sup> At a later date Chairman C.E. Keast again protested that league was an amateur sport.

He emphatically denied the statements that were current that those responsible for the league in Dunedin had moneymaking intentions. He could assure the public that the game started by them was on a purely amateur status.... As regards payment, members would only receive payment for loss of time when on tour. They were not paying footballers for their services or their skills.<sup>81</sup>

At the formation of the South Canterbury Rugby League it was stressed that the Northern Union game 'was being promoted on strictly amateur lines' but that the fear of probable disqualification was deterring some players from joining the League. It was stressed that 'the idea was to pay only actual expenses and for loss of time and insurance for accidents. Not being professionals the Rugby Union could not disqualify them'.<sup>82</sup> In Auckland the promoters of league were optimistic that the game would flourish and made it clear that 'it was not their intention to pay players for playing in Auckland; their policy being to provide uniforms, free brake<sup>83</sup> trips to the grounds and payment only for loss of wages when away on tour'.<sup>84</sup> In Wellington, a meeting in Petone was held to consider the best way to promote football

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<sup>79</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 3 September 1908, p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> *Southland Times*, 31 Aug 1908, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 1 Oct 1908, p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 8 Sept 1908, p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> A horse-drawn passenger transportation vehicle.

<sup>84</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 October 1908, p. 9.

under Northern Union rules on an amateur basis. 'There was no intention of paying players, but as the New Zealand Rugby Union paid their men 3s per day [expenses] there was no reason why a Northern Union club could not pay their men five or seven shillings'.<sup>85</sup> Those trying to start league in Palmerston North also felt obliged to refute rumours that they intended to pay players, stating

there is no foundation for the statements, for all those who have signified they are willing to take part have signified that they do not want payment, nor will they or the promoters benefit to the extent of one shilling over the venture. The players who are to take part are most of the leading lights in Rugby, and their main object is to try and place a more attractive game before the public.<sup>86</sup>

Following from the determination on the part of the union establishment to brand all league players as professionals was the threat to ban from union any footballer who took part in a game of league. This threat, using the English Rugby Union's rules on amateurism as justification, was meant to deter men from trying league. But even in the first year of league, when provincial unions were particularly keen to suppress the new game before it could gain a foothold in New Zealand, the threat was never fully enforced. 'By November 1908, almost 80 players from the Taranaki, Wellington, South Canterbury, Otago, Southland and Auckland unions had been expelled by the NZRFU',<sup>87</sup> yet nearly 200 men had played league during the year. League being 13-a-side rugby, six teams would comprise 78 players so that 'almost 80' players would account for most of those who played in the representative matches, leaving over 100 men unaccounted for. These men would not have been reported by the provincial unions and would appear to have been quietly allowed back to union. This policy of only selectively banning players who played league continued throughout the period up to the Great War.

A third way the union establishment tried to stifle league was by trying to have the code denied the use of municipally owned sports grounds. In

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<sup>85</sup> *Evening Post*, 17 September 1908, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 27 August 1908, p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> Vincent and Harfield, p. 238.

Auckland a practice was held for potential players at the Devonport Cricket Ground in circumstances which caused dissension between members of the Devonport Domain Board. Some members, led by R.H. Froude, a member of the Auckland Rugby Union Management Committee, objected to municipal sports grounds being used for professional sport. Another member of the Board, D.W. McLean, subsequently to become an influential member of the Auckland Rugby League, had secured a ground when another sports club was unable to use it. McLean had applied to use the ground in his own name and then sub-let it to the rugby leaguers. This was possible because in the past late applications had been dealt with at the discretion of the Town Clerk. His action provoked an animated debate at the next Board meeting as to whether 'any professional club should be allowed to use any public grounds at Devonport'. Several members, led by Froude, strongly objected to the letting of the ground to professionals, whilst McLean questioned what was meant by 'professional'. After discussion as to whether local Northern Union players were professional or not, he said

I am not inclined to identify myself with anything that is going to give a man a weekly wage as a professional, but these gentlemen have told me what their plans are. They are going to play the amateur game and pay the players out-of-pocket expenses. These men are no more professional than some men here today.<sup>88</sup>

Following further discussion the Board affirmed the principle that 'no portion of the reserve should be let to any persons who practice or indulge in sport for professional purposes'.<sup>89</sup>

Promoters of league in Taranaki also experienced difficulties in securing the use of a ground. The organisers applied to use the Recreation Sports Ground and the committee which administered it gave their permission on condition that the New Zealand Rugby Union, which had provided a considerable sum of money for the development of the ground, had no objection. The Union did 'object to the ground being so granted to the Northern Union team, and would probably disqualify the ground for amateur

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<sup>88</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 September, 1908, p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 September, 1908, p. 7.

matches if it were so let'. The committee then decided not to allow the Recreation Ground to be used. Another ground at Western Park was unavailable as it was being ploughed up, and the Racecourse was hosting a North Taranaki Hunt Club meet, so there seemed little chance of the match taking place.<sup>90</sup> But 'the promoters of the match determined that it should be played, even in a "cow paddock", in order to show the people of Taranaki the advantages of the Northern Union game.' It was eventually arranged that the match should be played on the Western Park, No. 2 ground, used by the Tukapa club for practices.<sup>91</sup> This was far from ideal, the ground being so little known that the local paper felt obliged to print detailed instructions as to how to get there.<sup>92</sup> Despite the efforts of the Rugby Union, the match was a success. Advertised for three days prior to kick-off as 'the dawn of a new football era' and 'the game the public want to see', admission was one shilling with seating 6d extra.<sup>93</sup> Despite the difficulty of access, about five or six hundred spectators found their way to the ground and, 'despite the very unpleasant, wet, weather', saw Taranaki achieve a surprising victory over the more experienced Auckland team.<sup>94</sup>

The promoters of the Wellington representative team were granted the use of the Petone Recreational Ground for their match against Auckland on 12 September. The Borough Council only reached this decision after considerable discussion and it was subject to the Wellington Rugby Union's season having ended by this date.<sup>95</sup> The stipulation that the union season should have ended before the ground could be used is significant as it probably explains why all three South Island matches were played in October. The rugby unions rented the grounds for the duration of the football

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<sup>90</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 7 September 1908, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 9 September 1908, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 14 September 1908, p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 14, 15, 16 September 1908, p. 7.

<sup>94</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 18 September 1908, p. 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Evening Post*, 19 August 1908, p. 2.

season, usually to the end of September, and would not have been willing to allow them to be used for rugby league during their tenure.

### **Conclusion**

In its first year in New Zealand, league had gained a foothold in both North and South Island towns and cities, but it remained to be seen how it would fare in the forthcoming season. Lacking experienced administrators, money, and without any central governing body, the promoters of the game had, to some extent, taken the union authorities by surprise and this enabled them to get started. But their responses; branding league a professional sport, threats to ban players for life and moves to deny league organisers access to grounds, were indications of the problems ahead. On the positive side, over 200 men had played league despite union hostility and much of the sporting public had reacted positively to the game and shown a willingness to turn out to support what they considered a faster, more skillful and entertaining form of rugby.



## **2**

1909-1910

THE NEAR COLLAPSE  
OF RUGBY LEAGUE

## **Introduction**

The years 1909 and 1910 proved to be disappointing for the promoters of rugby league. Their expectations of further progress did not materialise and their earlier initiatives collapsed in most parts of the country. Only in Auckland did the game make significant progress. In this chapter the near collapse of league will be investigated, as will the importance of representative football in ensuring the survival of the game. Reasons will be sought as to why it proved to be so difficult to form clubs, and the growth of the game in Auckland will be analysed to account for the success of league in that city. Finally the question of who took up the game at club level in Auckland will be investigated, as it was only there, and in Rotorua, that a successful club competition was established.

The introduction of league football to New Zealand in 1908 had been successful to the extent that players, many of them representative rugby union players, formed representative teams and played matches against each other. Players and officials, confident that league was a superior game to union, expected a flood of players and clubs to take up the game in 1909. M. Geddes, a Southland official, was reported as saying that

at Invercargill four clubs out of six had signified their willingness to support the Northern Union movement, and it was certain the other teams would follow suit...<sup>1</sup>

whilst an official of the Otago League was reported as saying that 'the new game was going to kill the Rugby code in Dunedin',<sup>2</sup> and in Wellington it was claimed that two senior union clubs were to 'go over bodily to the professional game'.<sup>3</sup> They were all to be disappointed: no clubs switched codes and most players chose to stay with union.

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<sup>1</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 24 September 1908, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 20 May 1909, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 9 June 1908, p. 2.

During the 1909 season, the game prospered only in Auckland with the establishment of the Auckland Rugby League and the formation of four league clubs. The game collapsed in most of the South Island, with no clubs being formed and no representative games being played in Invercargill, Dunedin and Timaru. The situation was little better in the central provinces, where only one club was formed and the game was barely kept alive in Taranaki and Wellington by the playing of a few representative games. A new league was formed in Nelson, but it attracted few players and struggled to survive its first season.

The situation worsened during the 1910 season. The game was revived in Southland with the formation of two clubs, but it appeared to have died out in Dunedin and in Timaru. In the central provinces the Nelson league was still struggling to attract sufficient players to make the establishment of clubs possible, but the game seemed to have died out in both Wellington and Taranaki where no league was played. The game, though, was thriving in Auckland with both senior and second grade club competitions being played and a British Northern Union touring team attracting large crowds to its games. The game was also spreading to Auckland provincial centres, with the Rotorua League being formed in 1909 and Te Kuiti taking up the game in 1910.

Internationally two New Zealand teams, one Maori and one Pakeha, toured Australia in 1909, both organised by the New South Wales Rugby League, as New Zealand had, as yet, no national body to control the sport. This was rectified in 1910 with the formation of the New Zealand Rugby League which hosted a British Northern Union team, the first overseas rugby team to visit the country.

Throughout 1909 and 1910 opposition to league from the union authorities continued unabated. However, the introduction of league was made easier in some districts due to local problems within some provincial and district rugby unions. Problems of rough play, illegal payments to players, the desire to change the playing rules to make the game more attractive and the dissatisfaction with the national body's subservience to the English Rugby Union were all issues troubling union nationally. The Auckland

Rugby Union during its 'crisis year' of 1909 was greatly concerned with the effect that these issues were having locally, and spent much time trying to deal with them. Its preoccupation with these problems made the establishment of league in Auckland easier.

### **Collapse in the South and the Central Provinces**

In the South Island hopes of mass conversions voiced during the 1908 season came to nothing and no union clubs went over to league in 1909. More significantly, no more players took up the game and, when it became clear that the league game lacked the numbers to form clubs and play club competitions, many who had played the game in the previous year tried to go back to union.

Even in Southland, where there had been enough recruits in 1908 to make the formation of clubs a possibility for 1909, the Rugby Union, which controlled all the grounds, was in a position to deny any league club a ground to play on. The banning for life of league players may have been an effective deterrent to more players giving the new game a go. Simultaneously, the practice of quietly allowing players back into the union game at club level, appears to have been a significant drain on the league's already small player pool. The promoters of league attempted to restart the game in Invercargill,<sup>4</sup> but when it became apparent that they were not going to be able to form clubs, many players tried to get back into union. Even high profile players such as ex-All Blacks Don Hamilton and Edward Hughes appealed to the New Zealand Union to have their disqualification removed, but in their cases the management committee 'decided that the Union had no power to comply with this request'.<sup>5</sup> Hughes and A. Reid, another 1908 league player, then took up soccer and were reported to be making a 'favourable impression'.<sup>6</sup> No doubt other players also took up soccer. What other options were there? Of the approximately 75 league players in 1908, nearly one third were

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<sup>4</sup> *Timaru Herald*, 1 May 1909, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Southland Times*, 21 May 1909, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 8 July 1909, p. 10.

'casual' players who appeared only once or twice. It is unlikely that such players would have bothered to try and get reinstated to rugby union. Of the more serious players, the two thirds who played between three and seven games (not including the two representative games), about half found their way back into club rugby union. This leaves one third of the players, 20 to 25 men, to be accounted for. Some obviously took up soccer but it is possible that this group continued to play league on an informal basis, getting together for 'pick-up' games.

Nothing was reported in the press but the fact that there was continuing interest in league is evident in the request received by the Auckland League to play a series of matches in the south at the end of the season. Unfortunately, the Auckland League decided that 'in view of the approaching tour of the Kangaroos not to send a team south this season'.<sup>7</sup> The advent of league in 1908, though, had weakened union in Southland. The 1909 season started with only four senior and six junior teams, the Pirates and Britannia clubs failing to survive, and a noted lack of interest in union in Invercargill that season, attributed to many senior players retiring, prompted a call for the introduction of a district scheme to replace club football.<sup>8</sup>

League also failed to restart in Dunedin and Timaru in 1909. There had been fewer players involved in these centres in 1908 so the future of the game in 1909 depended on expanding the player base, but the league promoters, despite the high expectations voiced the previous season, failed to persuade more players to come. Once it was seen that there was no prospect of club competitions being played, players from the previous season tried to go back to union. How many were taken back is not known, but of the 17 Dunedin players named to play in the two 1908 representative league games, none was playing club rugby union in 1909. In Timaru two at most of the 15 strong 1908 representative squad were playing club rugby union in 1909. What happened to the players who did not make the representative

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<sup>7</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 19 August 1909, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Southland Times*, 1 May 1909, p. 10.

teams is not known, though they could have been quietly taken back at club level as had happened in Invercargill. The rugby union columnist of the *Otago Daily Times* wrote

Northern Unionism is not going to boom here, and there is much discontent amongst those who lent themselves to the game last year. I have heard, in more than one quarter, regret expressed that the game was ever introduced to Dunedin. Several of last year's Northern Union players propose making an effort, like their Invercargill brother Unionists, to get back to the fold of amateur Rugby this season. They will find it much harder than they anticipate!<sup>9</sup>

A week later he wrote another column lamenting the absence of rugby league in Dunedin:

What has become of the local Northern Union footballers this season? Last year I was told in all seriousness by one who should know that the new game was going to kill the Rugby code in Dunedin. It is surely time the Northern Unionists made a start - not to kill amateur rugby, but to get the 13-a-side going. In commenting on the introduction of the Northern Union game last season, I stated that it was the best [thing] that could happen [to] Rugby football, and I am of that opinion still. If we are to have the three codes played in Dunedin, by all means let them be played; there is surely room for all. I would rather see the youth of the town playing Northern Union football, association or Rugby than smoking cigarettes and looking on at these games. What we want is not so much the class distinction in football, but the players to play. It seems to me, though, we are breeding not a nation of shopkeepers, but a nation of lookers on. That is fatal, therefore, welcome any decent game which takes our youth into open spaces.<sup>10</sup>

But despite his plea, no league was played in Dunedin and the 1908 representative players did not appear to have been taken back to union. Maybe with the small number of players involved, the Otago Union, unlike the Southland Rugby Union, decided it was worth its while to take a tough stand in order to deter any other would be rugby league players from giving the game a try.

League in Invercargill staged a comeback in the 1910 season with the formation of two clubs, but the situation in Dunedin and Timaru continued to be bleak. No league was played in either centre. Attempts were made to

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<sup>9</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 13 May 1909, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Otago Daily Times*. 20 May 1909, p. 10.

Stratford (2,300), Eltham (1,500), Waitara (1,200), Inglewood (1,200), Opunake (450) and Kaponga (350).<sup>14</sup> This was due to the large number of small, family-run dairy farms supplying cream and milk to the many butter and cheese factories which were scattered throughout the province.

Small towns like these often struggled to support one rugby union club and certainly lacked the population to support competing union and league clubs. The problem was made worse by a second factor: Taranaki observed two half-day holidays, Thursday and Saturday, with some offices and businesses closing on the one day and some on the other. On whichever day a football club chose to play its matches, there would always be some would-be players unavailable due to work commitments. A third factor was the amount of travelling that Taranaki's population distribution entailed: with most towns having just one club, travelling to away matches every other week was a major problem.

The situation worsened during the 1910 season. With no clubs or club competitions, the Taranaki League had relied on its representative team to keep the game alive in 1909, but not even representative games were played in 1910. Efforts were still being made, though, as Taranaki was one of the four provinces that affiliated with the newly established New Zealand Rugby League, and a match against Taranaki was included in the initial itinerary of the Auckland representative team's southern tour, but the match never eventuated. It looked as though, after three years of struggling to establish the game in Taranaki, league was no more.

Despite being one of New Zealand's four metropolitan centres, Wellington did not prove to be receptive to league and the game barely survived in the 1909 season. Sport was popular in the city, with its large working-class population encompassing labourers, tradesmen and white-collar workers. Even prior to the attempt to introduce league, Wellington young men had a wide choice of winter team sports. In 1908, rugby union was the most popular, with 10 senior, 8 junior, 16 third grade, 12 fourth and 12 fifth grade teams being fielded each week, but hockey and soccer were

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<sup>14</sup> Population figures from the 1910 New Zealand Official Yearbook.

keep interest alive in Dunedin, but only 'in a minor degree' and no clubs were formed.<sup>11</sup> There were not enough players in Dunedin even for the city to field a team against the Auckland tourists and for the match played in Dunedin a combined Otago/Southland XIII was selected, comprising eight Otago and five Southland players. Significantly, seven of the Otago players had previously represented the province in its two matches at the end of the 1908 season. As the Otago Rugby Union had banned all the 1908 league representative players, and there is no evidence of them being reinstated, the question of what they were doing in the intervening two years arises. They had obviously not retired from football and were still keen to play league, so it is possible that they had been playing some kind of informal league both to keep fit and to try and interest other footballers in the new game.

In the central provinces, as in the south, no club football was played in either 1909 or 1910 and league was only kept alive in Wellington and Taranaki by the representative teams, whilst Nelson struggled for two years to recruit sufficient players to start a club competition.

During the 1909 season rugby league in Taranaki did not make the progress hoped for by its promoters. Only one club was formed so the proposed club competition did not take place. Only two matches were played, as was the case in 1908, both against the Auckland representative team, with Taranaki securing a narrow victory in Auckland but losing heavily at New Plymouth before about 1,500 spectators.<sup>12</sup> There appear to have been several factors unique to Taranaki that made the attempt to introduce league particularly difficult.<sup>13</sup> Unlike other provinces its population was not concentrated in one large town or city, but rather in a number of small towns spread throughout the province. New Plymouth, the province's only 'large town', had a population of only 5,400. Other towns were Hawera (2,300),

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<sup>11</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 3 October 1910, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 16 September 1909, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> W. Greenwood, 'Trying Rugby League: Early Attempts to establish Rugby Football's Other Code in the Central Provinces of New Zealand, 1908 - 1915', MA History Thesis, Massey University, 2002, p. 12.

also popular. There were 8 senior, 9 junior and 9 third-grade hockey teams fielded each Saturday whilst there was also an 8-team Wednesday competition. The Wellington Football Association fielded 8 first-division soccer teams, 6 second-division and 10 junior teams each week. Wellington's two minor sports were Australian rules, with a three-team competition, and lacrosse, with just two teams.<sup>15</sup> It was in this crowded sports scene that the promoters of league were having to compete.

Despite an apparently promising start for Wellington rugby league in 1908, the game barely survived the 1909 season. No clubs switched codes and the promoters had no success in either recruiting new players or starting clubs. The only matches scheduled were the two representative games at the end of the season. The advent of league had no apparent effect on other sports. The three major codes all continued to flourish, whilst lacrosse doubled the number of its teams from two to four. Only Australian rules suffered a slight decline in support, fielding only two teams compared with three the previous season. The Rugby Union still played matches on the Miramar grounds, which were described as 'dreary' and with long grass and broken glass on the pitch. On Saturday 1 May only '7 spectators watched the 2 senior matches and 3 were reporters'.<sup>16</sup>

Was any league, other than the two representative matches, played in Wellington during the 1909 season? It is hard to imagine a group of representative players remaining idle throughout the season and then playing two matches. It is more likely they played a number of practice matches, both to maintain their fitness and to try and attract recruits to the game. But if they did there is no mention of such games in the newspapers, though a cryptic reference in a newspaper to 'the final match of the season', (not the final representative match of the season) hints at such a situation.<sup>17</sup> Whilst the announcement, from the League headquarters in Petone, that a series of matches were planned for the 1910 season also suggests that recruitment

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<sup>15</sup> Team numbers obtained from the Wellington *Evening Post*, May - September 1909.

<sup>16</sup> *Evening Post*, 8 May 1909, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> *Evening Post*, 7 October 1909, p. 5.

had also been underway during 1909.<sup>18</sup>

The situation in the central provinces worsened during the 1910 season and it was only in Nelson that league was still being played. The proposed series of matches in Petone never eventuated and neither the Wellington nor the Taranaki representative teams played any matches. There is little evidence to show that league was even played on an informal basis, though subsequent events do suggest that it was.

### **The Importance of Representative Football**

The expectations of the promoters of rugby league had been high following the successful introduction of the game in 1908. But the mass defections they were expecting from rugby union did not occur, nor were they able to either form clubs or start competitions. The game outside of Auckland was struggling to survive, and it was only kept alive by the playing of representative football. Representative football proved popular with spectators and good crowds were attracted to inter-provincial matches. But it was the visiting British team in 1910 which gave the game a huge boost by giving it national credibility. The tourists attracted huge crowds to their games in Auckland and generated an interest in league that enabled the game to forge ahead in that city.

Despite the setbacks experienced in 1909, league enthusiasts in the south had not given up. Towards the end of the 1909 season the Auckland Rugby League received an invitation to play matches in Dunedin, Invercargill and Timaru, so the promoters must have felt confident of raising teams in the three centres. This tour did not eventuate, but an Auckland team did play matches in Bluff, Invercargill and Dunedin at the end of the 1910 season. Prior to these games, however, league was restarted in Invercargill.

The highlight of the 1910 season was undoubtedly the visit to the south of the Auckland team. The Southland Northern Union League approached the Southland Rugby Union to request the use of Rugby Park, Southland's main ground, for its match with Auckland. The president, Mr

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<sup>18</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 14 October 1909, p. 8.

Galbraith, referred the request to the New Zealand Union and received a telegram saying 'ground not available to professionals'. On the basis of this, and despite the fact that both the Southland and the Auckland Leagues were amateur bodies, the Southland League was informed that the Union 'regretted' not being able to grant the use of Rugby Park.<sup>19</sup>

A trial game was held on the Western Reserve in Invercargill on Wednesday 21 September, after which the Southland representative team was selected. The Auckland team arrived in Invercargill, by express train from Dunedin, and were entertained to a social evening by the Southland League. They left by train for Bluff the following morning and played the Bluff team in the afternoon before returning to Invercargill, where they were the guests of the Southland League at the Southland Boxing Association tournament in the evening. The next day, Wednesday, they played the Southland representative team at Queen's Park before being entertained to dinner at the Princess Hotel in the evening. The Auckland team then returned to Dunedin, where they played a combined Otago-Southland representative team on Saturday 1 October.

The three matches were well received. The first game, played at Bluff in ideal weather conditions, resulted in a win for the visitors by 42 points to 12.

The game was throughout its two spells of thirty-five minutes each a decidedly interesting one, and the brilliant passing tactics of the Aucklanders drew applause from the several hundred onlookers. As this was the first important match under Northern Union rules ever played before the Southland public,<sup>20</sup> naturally much interest, and in many quarters curiosity, was evinced in the contest and a fairly large following of footballers and others went from Invercargill to see the game.<sup>21</sup>

For Bluff, Hamilton and Burgess were the most consistent backs and McQuarrie, Cooper and Metzger the most prominent forwards. Burgess and Hamilton each scored a try and Johnstone kicked three goals. The following

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<sup>19</sup> *Southland Times*, 3 September 1910, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Maybe the reporter was unaware of or did not consider important the match between Southland and Otago played in 1908.

<sup>21</sup> *Southland Times*, 28 September 1910, p. 3.

day Auckland fielded virtually the same team in the representative game against Southland. In advertising the match, the Southland League invited the public to 'come and see this spectacular game, vastly superior to present day forward and monotonous line-out play'.<sup>22</sup>

Under ideal weather conditions at Queen's Park ...Auckland and Southland Northern Union representatives met for the first time and after an interesting and exciting contest the visitors won by 17 points to 12. The attendance at the match was good about 1,500 people being present. Much curiosity had been evinced as to how the new game would "catch on", and, it may be said, that, from a spectacular point of view, it met with the entire approval of the onlookers. Individually many of the local men were brilliant, McDermott standing out from the rest for fine all round play scoring a try and kicking 3 from 3 goals. Burgess, behind the pack, was very prominent, all through, and gave the visitors no end of trouble.<sup>23</sup>

Ogg scored Southland's only other try. The gate' of £97/10/6 was considered highly satisfactory.

The third match, played in Dunedin on Saturday 1 October, was well received by the public and 2,000 turned out to watch the match played on the Caledonian Ground, 'the majority of whom were no doubt attracted out of curiosity in the new game. The attendance, considering the lateness of the season, was eminently satisfactory'.<sup>24</sup> The newspaper reporter felt that the rule changes had made Northern Union a more spectacular game than rugby union and that the public had been 'well served' in this respect. He complained, however, that rule infringements had been ignored, making the match 'less a test of skill between the provinces than an exhibition'.<sup>25</sup>

The exhibition on Saturday, though bright, fast and open, was scarcely convincing as a test of the merits of the game, as much was sacrificed to making the spectacular. For instance, the manner of putting the ball into the scrum, even under Northern Union rules, would not be tolerated in a recognised first-class match, and a pass forward is a pass forward whether played under Northern Unionism of Rugby Unionism. These breaches, purposely ignored, no doubt with the idea of keeping the play open and fast, marred an

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<sup>22</sup> *Southland Times*, 26/27 September 1910, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Southland Times*, 29 September 1910, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 3 October 1910, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 3 October 1910, p. 3.

otherwise interesting game and robbed it of a certain amount of educational value.<sup>26</sup>

Otago/Southland were beaten by 30 points to 18 after leading by 13 points to 11 at half time. The three matches demonstrated that there was still an interest amongst at least some players for league and that respectable numbers of spectators were prepared to turn out to watch it played.

It took the forthcoming visit from an Auckland touring team at the end of the 1910 season to at last arouse the interest of Nelson players in rugby league. The prospect of being selected to represent Nelson finally convinced players to turn out, not only for the trial matches played prior to the representative match, but also for the nightly practices. The final practice match, played on Saturday 1 October at Victory Square, was the best supported of any match thus played and 'gave evidence that players and public [were at last] taking an interest in the Northern rules'.<sup>27</sup> The practice was the first game to be played in Nelson between two full teams and 'a third team could have gone onto the field if necessary, to say nothing of the first class country reserves that are in readiness to aid the League when occasion demands'.<sup>28</sup> It is possible that these reserves were from Golden Bay where interest in league resulted in the game being launched there following season.

The team to meet Auckland held practices at Victory Square on the two Saturdays prior to the match. The 'big game' took place on Wednesday 5 October and a large advertisement appeared in the local newspaper on Monday for 'Football-Northern Union rules' at Trafalgar Park, admission being 1s, ladies 6d, pavilion 6d, ladies free to the pavilion. There was a long report of the match in the local paper which included the following

The first representative match under Northern Union rules was played yesterday at Trafalgar Park, the Auckland representatives winning by 24 to 13. Heavy showers had fallen during the morning,

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<sup>26</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 3 October 1910, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 3 October 1910, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 6 October 1910, p. 6.

and shortly before the time of starting there was a squall that must have kept numbers away. To put it plainly the day was a sorry specimen of Nelson weather. There was a fair attendance, especially when it is taken into consideration that Saturday is the football day in Nelson. There was much surprise evinced that Nelson fielded the team it did considering the many difficulties that have been contended with this season.<sup>29</sup>

This match marked the end of the second season of league in Nelson and the interest it had generated gave hope that the game was at last making progress.

No club rugby league was played in Taranaki during the 1909 season but players probably got together for impromptu 'pick-up' games as it was reported prior to the playing of the first representative game that it was to be 'the first match in which the local players have been engaged this season, but for some weeks consistent practice [has] been indulged in...'.<sup>30</sup> The representative team travelled by ship to Auckland for this match, played on Saturday 7 August. Taranaki had a narrow victory by 8 points to 7, playing on a sodden ground in front of about 5,000 spectators. Taranaki should have won by a greater margin but threw away a number of chances through overeagerness whilst 'they had several fairly easy shots at goal, which should have resulted in scores, but Hardgraves' kicking was not up to its usual standard.'<sup>31</sup>

The return match took place on Thursday 16 September and this year, unlike 1908, the League appears to have had no trouble in securing the Recreation Sports Ground. It was extensively advertised as football under the auspices of the New Zealand Northern Rugby League, as 'an evolution [sic.] in Rugby Football, attractive, scientific, spectacular, the game for the people.' Admission was 1s, with exclusive seats 6d extra. The advertisements were signed by E. Watts, secretary of the New Zealand League. It was claimed to be 'the first match to be played under the auspices of the New Zealand and

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<sup>29</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 6 October 1910, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 4 August 1909, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 9 August 1909, p. 4.

Taranaki Rugby Leagues [which had both been] recently formed'.<sup>32</sup> The Taranaki team had been training since the match in Auckland and would 'turn out very fit...'. A great deal of interest was reported in the game, the outward trains from New Plymouth were to be delayed until after the finish of the match and a special train was to be run from Hawera. There was a full column report of the match in the local paper, which saw Auckland the easy winners by 27 points to 11.

The novelty of the game was sufficient to draw a crowd of about fifteen hundred. The game proved fast and open, but the crowd generally seemed to treat it rather lightly. Of course, the Northern League teams in New Zealand as yet suffer from the drawback of comparative inexperience of the game, so that it is too early to pass a final verdict on the merits of the Northern code.<sup>33</sup>

'Harpastum', a rugby columnist in the local paper, devoted a long article to the match - he was not impressed by league.

Public opinion on the matter was divided after Thursday's game, but the weight of opinion served very much against the Northern Union rules. Still there are one or two points in it that could well be introduced in the ordinary Rugby game, just as there are points in which the latter is superior.<sup>34</sup>

Although there is no evidence of league being played in Taranaki during the 1910 season, efforts were still being made to establish the game as the Taranaki League was one of the only four that affiliated with the New Zealand Rugby League that year and it was hoping to host a match against the British tourists.<sup>35</sup>

With no club football being played in Wellington during 1909, the game was kept alive by representative football. The first of the two games scheduled, and the only game to have been played in Wellington during 1909 should have taken place on Saturday 11 September. A small advertisement appeared in Thursday's newspapers announcing a game of Northern Union

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<sup>32</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 8 September 1909, p. 3. Although, in fact, the New Zealand Rugby League was not to be formed for another year and Watts was secretary of the recently formed Auckland Rugby League.

<sup>33</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 15 September 1909, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 18 September 1909, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Eric Bennett, *New Zealand Rugby League Annual, 1933*, Auckland, pp. 35, 37.

football between Wellington and Auckland representative teams. The game was to be played at Petone and special trains were to be run from the city. But it appears that for some reason the game never took place. Neither the *Dominion* nor the *Evening Post* carried any report or score in Monday's editions and the Auckland *New Zealand Herald* reported that an 'A' versus 'B' rugby league representative trial had been held in that city. One can only assume that there was some administrative mixup and that the Auckland officials were not aware that they were expected in Wellington. This would have done little for the credibility of the game in the capital. Wellington's second, and final, match of the season was a return match with Auckland and this time it was played, on Saturday 9 October at Auckland's Victoria Park, before nearly 4,000 spectators, who produced a gate of £130.<sup>36</sup> The result, Wellington 22 points, Auckland 19, suggests that the province was still capable of turning out a strong side. Jackson, one of the Wellington forwards, was the English rugby union international who was disqualified whilst on tour in 1908 for professionalism.<sup>37</sup>

Auckland was the only province in which league made substantial progress during the 1909 and 1910 seasons with both the formation of clubs and the establishment of club competitions. The popularity of the game, though, owed much to the attractions of representative football and particularly the first international games to be played in New Zealand, which were watched by exceptionally large crowds.

During the 1909 and 1910 seasons league became established in the town of Rotorua as well as in the city of Auckland. Many of the Maori players who toured Australia in the 1908 and 1909 seasons were from Rotorua and supported the establishment of the Rotorua Rugby League. Representative games were played at an early stage and generated considerable interest in the game. 1909, Rotorua's first season of rugby league, ended on a high note when the visiting Auckland junior representative team was defeated by 33 points to 8. The match was played at Rotorua on Saturday 2 October,

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<sup>36</sup> *Evening Post*, 11 October 1909, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 October 1909, p. 7.

creating 'a great amount of interest' and attracting a 'large crowd of spectators'. The Rotorua team included several members of the Maori team that had toured Australia. The much-talked-about Tiki Papakura was declared man of the match, whilst Ferguson, an Auckland player, broke his leg in scoring a try.<sup>38</sup> Early in the 1910 season, the Rotorua representative team travelled to Auckland where, on Saturday 11 June, they were narrowly defeated by 21 points to 18 before a crowd of 2,000 spectators at Victoria Park.<sup>39</sup> But the highlight of the season was, without doubt, the visit of the British Northern Union tourists, who played one of their four games in Rotorua<sup>40</sup>.

In Auckland city, few signs of activity by league promoters were reported during the early months of the 1909 season but much must have been going on. Efforts of the promoters all came to fruition in July. First, it was announced that a match had been organised against the Maori team that was to tour Australia. At least two more matches were to be played should this match be favourably received. The organisers had obtained permission from the city council to use Victoria Park, where admission could be charged, and the proceeds were to go towards forming and establishing a league for next season. The organisers went on to say 'So that there need be no misunderstanding, the League officials state the sole object, as far as the players are concerned, is to pay them all expenses, including broken time, and not a wage for actual services'.<sup>41</sup>

Large notices appeared in the daily newspapers advertising the game 'Football (under Northern Union Rules)' to be played on Victoria Park on Saturday 10 July. The Garrison Band was to be in attendance whilst the Maoris were to give an exhibition of hakas before the match. The league match was played in opposition to the Auckland Rugby Union's College Day at Alexandra Park, featuring the secondary schools' championship. The

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<sup>38</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 27 September 1909, p. 9. and 4 October 1909, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 June 1910, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> See p. 90.

<sup>41</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 July 1909, p. 8.

league match attracted a crowd of about 3,000 whilst the rugby union was watched from a packed grandstand and by a large number on the ground. Already league was competing favourably with the rival code in attracting crowd support. The league match, won by Auckland 21 points to 14, apparently featured a considerable amount of rough play and the crowd got out of hand. This took the organisers by surprise as they had not made any plans to control such behaviour,

If the local Northern Union authorities wish to gain the confidence of the public they must take steps to control the spectators. The crowd got out of bounds to such an extent that it was simply a disgrace to those in control. Every time a man got 'laid out', and it was more than once, hundreds of small boys trooped over the ground, while the crowd surged onto the field of play to such an extent that the representatives of the press were at last forced to give up attempting to report the match. Outside the attempts of one or two police officers to keep the crowd in check, there was no organised effort on the part of authorities.<sup>42</sup>

For the rest of the 1909 football season the Auckland Rugby League organised regular Saturday afternoon matches at one or other of several grounds, starting with a trial game at Victoria Park on Saturday 31 July to select a representative team. A junior match between North Shore and Newton teams was played as a curtain-raiser prior to the trial. The following week Auckland met a Taranaki representative team, again at Victoria Park, where, despite 'uninviting' weather, nearly 5,000 spectators turned up to see Auckland lose by a narrow margin whilst 'many of those who witnessed the match, ardent enthusiasts of the old Rugby game before, came away converts to the Northern Union rules'.<sup>43</sup> A representative trial game was played on Saturday 11 September and a side chosen to travel to New Plymouth for a rematch with Taranaki. Auckland comfortably won this game played on Thursday 16 September before between 1,500 and 2,000 spectators. Two more representative matches were played before the season ended. On Saturday 2 October an Auckland junior representative team travelled to Rotorua to meet the local representative team, losing heavily by 33 points to eight. The final match of the season was played on Saturday 9

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<sup>42</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 12 July 1909, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 August 1909, p. 7.

October, a day not good for football as 'a large number of cricket and tennis players and bowlers were engaged in their pastimes', and not, presumably, tempted to watch football. Nevertheless, over 3,000 spectators turned up at Victoria Park to watch Wellington secure a narrow victory by 22 points to 19. The gate takings amounted to £122.<sup>44</sup>

Auckland played few representative games in 1910, but the city hosted three of the four matches played by the British tourists, to be described later in the chapter, and these proved to be immensely popular. One of the matches was against the Auckland representative team, and the only other representative game played was against Rotorua when Auckland secured a victory by the narrow margin of 21 points to 18. Two thousand spectators were at Victoria Park to watch the match. But there were 4,000 at Eden Park to watch the union club matches.

### **The New Zealand and Maori Tours to Australia - 1909**

Maori players were presumably not disillusioned by their experiences in Australia during the 1908 tour, as when C.H. Ford, vice-president of the New South Wales Rugby League, came over to New Zealand in May 1909 to arrange tours to Australia by both a New Zealand and a Maori team, there was no lack of Maori players willing to tour. A strong New Zealand team was also recruited at short notice. Possibly because of this there were only five rebel All Blacks in the party as others approached were unable to obtain leave of absence.<sup>45</sup> There were six Wellington players, five from Auckland, two from Petone, two from Taranaki, one from Christchurch, plus S.B. Houghton, an English Northern Union player who had arrived from England the previous year. The tourists' captain, James Barber of Wellington, was interviewed by a Sydney newspaper during the tour and said that as there was no national organisation in New Zealand the team was a 'scratch' one and the men had to pay their own expenses. But the New South Wales League guaranteed the expenses and was to pay the men £2 per week

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<sup>44</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 October 1909, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 June 1909, p. 3.

during the tour. The New South Wales League was to take half the gate money and the other half was to go to the tourists. Any surplus after repaying the expenses and weekly payments was to be divided equally between the players.<sup>46</sup> He went on to say that

Our men feel they are representing their country and for the sport; and the money isn't the most prominent thing about the tour. Most of us are just over for the trip. If we get our expenses back we're quite satisfied. If there is any balance over, and there were any representative Northern Union League in New Zealand, we'd be quite satisfied to turn the balance over to the league, as is done in Sydney. We came over without having played together - without any combination. We came over in detachments, as the men could get away. Most of us haven't played football for a year. As outcasts from the Rugby Union, we don't get the chance of regular play. We're having a good trip and good sport. We're very well looked after by the New South Wales people and, professionals or not, we conduct ourselves decently, and do our best to play up for the credit of New Zealand.<sup>47</sup>

The tour was a great success despite the hectic schedule which had the tourists playing 10 matches in the space of 29 days. Huge crowds, variously estimated at between 40,000 and 60,000 in total, turned out for the first two matches, which resulted in narrow victories for New South Wales. Crowds for the remaining matches were smaller, but a handsome profit from the first two matches enabled the New South Wales League to clear its debts.<sup>48</sup> The tourists went on to win five of the ten matches played, including the first test match against Australia by 19 points to 11, the home team winning the other two by scores of 10 - 5 and 25 - 5.

A few weeks after the New Zealand players had left Sydney, a strong Maori side, once again captained by Opai Asher and including nine of the 1908 tourists, opened a ten-match tour on Saturday 24 July by beating New South Wales 24 points to 21 before 24,000 spectators at the Sydney Agricultural Showgrounds. The result was attributed not so much to visitors'

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<sup>46</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 June 1909, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Evening Post*, 21 June 1909, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Sean Fagan, *The Rugby Rebellion: The Divide of League and Union*, Australia: RL 1908, 2005, pp. 264, 267.

of the League or Northern Union rules, as to their athleticism and remarkable condition.

The Maoris are heavier than the home team, and, moreover, they play a more fearless game. They dread nothing in the way of injury to themselves or opponents, and they played that rushing, tearaway game which made the fame of the New Zealand (All Blacks) teams. As a display for the spectators it would be difficult to imagine anything more attractive. It was full of individual effort of most brilliant character, yet it was not wanting without teamwork. [sic]<sup>49</sup>

After again beating New South Wales in a mid-week match, the Maoris attracted a 30,000 crowd to the Agricultural Grounds for the first test against Australia. The home side were ahead by one point at halftime but after the break there was much unnecessary rough play and a section of the crowd felt that the referee was failing to penalise the Maoris. The Maoris finally won by 16 points to 14 and then 'in the exuberance of blithe spirits rushed across the ground and grabbed the silver cup' rather than waiting for the official presentation.<sup>50</sup> This precipitated a riot by about 500 of the crowd, who rushed onto the ground and attacked the referee and officials. The dozen or so police present were forced to use their batons to try and control the mob, but it was nearly an hour before they could safely get the referee from the ground.

The Maoris now travelled north, first losing to Newcastle by 6 points to 7, and then twice beating Queensland by 21 to 11 and 36 to 25 before taking on Australia in the second test, which the home team won by the narrow margin of 16 points to 13. On returning to Sydney, the Maoris lost the third test played on Saturday 21 August at the Agricultural Ground by 23 points to 16 before defeating New South Wales by 12 points to 8 in what was to have been the last game of the tour.

But the attraction of another big gate caused the League authorities and the tourists to agree to play an extra match as each team had won one of the two tests played in Sydney. The 'decider' was played mid-week and attracted a crowd of 10,000. The game resulted in another victory for

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<sup>49</sup> Fagan, p. 269. Quoting from the *Sydney Herald*.

<sup>50</sup> Fagan, p. 270.

Australia by 20 to 16. Both parties may well have wished the game had never been arranged as Robert Jack, who had taken legal action against the 1908 tourists, reappeared. He maintained he was still owed £213 by the Maori team and secured a court order against the nine Maori who had been part of the 1908 tour. On the morning of the match the Sheriff's officers arrested the nine at their hotel. On being informed of this, and facing having to cancel the match, the League paid Jack the money he claimed and the Sheriff then released the players.<sup>51</sup> Thus ended the second Maori tour to Australia.

The tour produced a financial windfall for the Australian League, with the gate from the first Maori test alone being over £1,100, and it turned around the fortunes of the League following the financial losses of their tour to Britain. The two tours were the last to be player-organised as the New Zealand Rugby League was formed in 1910 and undertook the organisation of all tours, beginning with the British Northern Union team of that year.

### **The British Northern Union Tourists**

The first international rugby league matches to be played in New Zealand were against the British tourists who came to New Zealand at the end of their Australian tour in 1910. The matches were organised by the recently formed New Zealand Rugby League. The British were only prepared to visit New Zealand if invited by a properly constituted national body so, two years after the introduction of league to New Zealand, a national governing body was finally established at a meeting held in Camden Chambers, Queen Street, Auckland on 25 April 1910.<sup>52</sup> This was very much an Auckland initiative and the Council members were all from Auckland. D.W. McLean was elected president, E.W. Watts, secretary and S. B. Houghton, treasurer. Delegates were present representing Otago, Nelson, Auckland and Wellington and correspondence was received from Hawkes Bay, Canterbury, Otago, Nelson, Taranaki, England and New South Wales. Four leagues, Auckland,

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<sup>51</sup> Fagan, p. 274.

<sup>52</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 April 1910, p. 8.

Taranaki, Nelson and Southland, affiliated with the New Zealand League in its first year. The itinerary of the British Northern Union team's visit was arranged by the League, which appointed E.W. Watts as liaison officer. The League had hoped that the British would play matches in all the affiliated provinces, but the British were anxious to get home after the Australian leg of their tour and also feared they would lose money on such an extended tour. They declined to include Taranaki, Nelson and Southland in their tour, much to the disappointment of these provinces, and matches were only played in Auckland province.<sup>53</sup> There was a break in the Auckland club championship rounds during July to accommodate matches against the tourists. These were to give a great boost to the popularity of league in Auckland with big crowds turning out to watch the tourists. But the matches also gave credibility to league throughout the country as it was seen, for the first time, as a nationally governed sport, capable of organising such tours. League's legitimacy was further enhanced by the increased newspaper coverage given to the matches indicating that interest in international matches transcended league's immediate constituency.

The Auckland League organised a trial game to select its team to play the tourists. The match, played on Saturday 16 July, resulted in a narrow 20 points to 18 win by the 'A' team. The first match to be played by the tourists was in Auckland on Wednesday 20 July against a New Zealand Maori team.

The weather was most unfavourable for football, a strong north east wind driving drenching showers of rain before it all through the morning and until 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The result was a ground practically under water and a ball which was almost impossible to hold. Despite the rain several thousand people attended the match and were rewarded with some good rugby and a lot of laughable incidents. Many who witnessed the game were charmed by the openness of play and the bright display which would have been impossible under the old code in similar conditions.<sup>54</sup>

On a Saturday, in better weather, over 10,000 spectators saw Britain easily beat Auckland by a score of 52 points to 9. 'The immense crowd were highly

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<sup>53</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 August 1910, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 July 1910, p. 7.

delighted...at the brilliant play of the visiting team'.<sup>55</sup> The tourists went next to Rotorua to play the local League representative team before returning to Auckland for the final match of their brief tour. The British had heard of the thermal wonderland and wanted to see it for themselves. They spent a day seeing the sights and in the evening they were entertained at a 'grand ball and euchre party' at the Lake House Hotel<sup>56</sup> so perhaps were feeling somewhat the worse for wear come match day. Though winning by 12 points to 9, the British were given a tough challenge by the local team. An interesting sidelight to the day was the refereeing of the junior curtain raiser by J. H. Houghton, the manager of the British team, whilst his son S. B. Houghton, a member of the NZRFL executive, refereed the big match.<sup>57</sup>

This match, the first test match between the two countries, was eagerly anticipated and

The tremendous interest displayed in Saturday's match was the outcome of the previous exhibition given by the British team in Auckland. Many who went to the previous Saturday's match against the Auckland representatives out of sheer curiosity were so enamoured of the game that they returned on Saturday and brought their friends.<sup>58</sup>

They turned up in great numbers to the Domain, where between 15,000 and 20,000 took advantage of the perfect weather to see another exhibition of first-class league by the British players, who outclassed the New Zealand representative team, winning by a score of 52 points to 20. In stark contrast, the rugby union match of the day, reported as Auckland versus the New Zealand Natives, attracted a meagre 2,000 spectators to Alexandra Park.<sup>59</sup> The team selected for the first official league test match to be played by New Zealand side was dominated by Aucklanders, who took nine places in the

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<sup>55</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 25 July 1910, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 27 July 1910, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 6 August 1910, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 August 1910, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 August 1910, p. 7. The New Zealand Natives were of course a Maori team.

squad named, but there were also two players from each of the Southland, Nelson, Taranaki and Rotorua Leagues. This was probably a deliberate decision by the New Zealand League to both show the public that league was a national game, and to encourage struggling provincial leagues by showing that any player, anywhere in the country could represent his country. Again this increased the legitimacy of league and gave an additional incentive to players to take up the game.

### **Auckland's Southern Tour**

Shortly after the departure of the British tourists, the management of the New Zealand Rugby League, concerned at the near collapse of the rugby league game outside Auckland province, resolved that a team representing that province should tour the South, giving exhibition games in all the important centres from Invercargill up to attempt to reignite interest in the game.<sup>60</sup> The ambitious three-week tour was to see matches against teams from Wanganui, Bluff, Southland, Otago, Nelson, Hawkes Bay and Dannevirke, and was to be a significant factor in the efforts to establish league in these centres.

It was expected that the visit of this team to the various places [would] have the effect of bringing the game prominently before the Southern public. Judging by the correspondence received and the number of prominent Southern players taking part in the matches, the exhibitions given should help the game along.<sup>61</sup>

Prior to the start of the tour, a trial match was played on Saturday 3 September at the Devonport Domain, following which the touring team was selected. The tourists then played a practice match against an Auckland selection on Saturday 17 September before finally starting the tour. The greater experience of the Auckland players proved decisive, as they won all seven of their matches against enthusiastic but inexperienced opposition. So great was the enthusiasm of the players for league that when the fledgling New Zealand League found itself without sufficient funds to finance the tour,

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<sup>60</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 August 1910, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 19 September 1910, p. 4.

the players collectively lent it the sum of £170, with no guarantee of repayment, so that it could go ahead.<sup>62</sup> So, rather than being paid to play, as rugby union spokesmen maintained, the players largely financed the tour out of their own pockets. The tour introduced league to Wanganui and Napier and led to the formation of strong leagues in both Wanganui and Hawkes Bay, it also introduced the game to Dannevirke, where a short-lived league was also formed, and invigorated the struggling Nelson League by attracting additional players thus enabling clubs to be established. It failed to re-introduce league in the South where the game ceased to be played. Despite this failure, the tour was successful in its main aim, to re-launch league as a national game and not one confined to Auckland province.

### **Difficulties in Forming Clubs**

After failing to establish a presence in the South in the 1909 season, league was restarted in Invercargill during the 1910 season. On Friday 1 July a meeting was held in Raeside's rooms, attended by about twenty players and supporters. G. Burgess was in the chair and outlined the objects of the meeting.

It was a well-known fact that certain followers of Rugby in the past were now debarred from taking part, and owing to circumstances which still existed it was desirable that the Northern Union game should be pushed on locally to enable players to follow some recreation. The speaker further treated the question from various points of view, and finally exhorted his hearers to take an active interest in Northern Unionism and have it firmly established locally. There was no question about the attractiveness of the game and if carried out on proper amateur lines would soon draw the attention of the Invercargill public.<sup>63</sup>

W. Robertson then said that

it was desirable that the game should be commenced as soon as possible. They all knew that they were there that evening for the purpose of forming a club. Once that step was accomplished it was quite possible to raise a second thirteen locally and in conjunction with a senior Northern Union combination in formation at Bluff a competition could be inaugurated locally. He did not see why the

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<sup>62</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 August 1911, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> *Southland Times*, 2 July 1910, p. 3.

game should not go ahead. It had been successful elsewhere and the public had demonstrated approval of the new code. He quoted statistics in reference to the matches recently played in Australia where the attendances were large and Rugby had been left behind in this respect.<sup>64</sup>

A letter was then read from the Bluff, saying that a meeting was being held on the same evening to form a club there. Support was apparently very strong and it was anticipated that a first-class team could be raised. 'Players had, the writer stated, come forward voluntarily and offered to throw in their lot if a team were established'.<sup>65</sup> A majority of those present expressed the view that there were plenty of players available for the new game and the motion that the Britannia club be formed was passed unanimously. Officials were then elected, the club colours were to be red and white, and the subscription for the season was to be two shillings. Training was to start on Monday.<sup>66</sup>

About 50 people were present at the meeting, held at Messrs Boyland and Fergusson's Billiard Saloon, to form a league club at the Bluff. T. Steward was in the chair and expressed his satisfaction at the large attendance. He then gave a number of reasons for calling the meeting. One was the stand taken by the New Zealand Rugby Union 'which had practically extinguished Rugby football in Bluff', another was the 'necessity for the establishment of a "footer" club as there was now no Rugby team'. He considered the formation of such a club would give 'both players and public something to take a pride in, especially as the game would be conducted on an amateur basis'. The meeting then elected officers, decided that the colours would be red, white and blue and that the subscription would be two shillings and sixpence.<sup>67</sup> The two newly formed clubs played a series of matches against each other during the rest of the season. For their first match, each club named 16 players: of these, nine of the Britannia players, including Ernest

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<sup>64</sup> *Southland Times*, 2 July 1910, p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Southland Times*, 2 July 1910, p. 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Southland Times*, 2 July 1910, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Southland Times*, 5 July 1910, p. 3.

Hughes, and eight of the Bluff players, including Don Hamilton, had played league in 1908.

The Nelson Northern Union Football League was officially formed at a meeting held at the Foresters' Hall on Friday 4 June 1909.<sup>68</sup> The driving force behind this initiative was Robert Kincaid, a painter recently arrived in Nelson from Barrow-in-Furness, in Lancashire, England. Kincaid was one of a number of British immigrants involved in the beginnings of league in New Zealand. Having previously played union, he took up league shortly after the foundation of the breakaway Northern Rugby Football Union and had played the game for the past 12 years.

Following the formation of the League, negotiations took place with the Nelson Council and the Nelson Rugby Football Union over access to grounds and an amicable agreement seemed to have been reached for sharing the use of Trafalgar Park, Nelson's only pay ground. The League also secured the use of an undeveloped ground at Victory Park. Although the League claimed that over 30 players had come over to league, it experienced difficulties in getting them to turn out for games. After holding three Saturday practice sessions, a practice match between two proto clubs, Northern and Hornets, was scheduled for Saturday 10 July, but neither team could field a full side and the same situation occurred the following Saturday. Because of these player shortages, the League was forced to yield its rights to the use of Trafalgar Park to the Rugby Union for three Saturdays and instead to play more practice matches at Victory Park.

It was not until Saturday 14 August that it felt able to advertise the '1<sup>st</sup> game in Nelson under Northern Union rules', to be played at Trafalgar Park between Nelson Hornets and Jackson's team. Only about 150 spectators turned up to watch the game and although two full teams were selected, several players failed to show up and did not bother to inform the League so that 'other willing players were not able to fill in'. The match resulted in a

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<sup>68</sup> Some of the material in this section on Nelson rugby league can also be found in W. Greenwood, 'Trying Rugby League: Early Attempts to establish Rugby Football's Other Code in the Central Provinces of New Zealand, 1908 - 1915', MA History Thesis, Massey University, 2002, pp. 15-16.

victory for Jackson's team by 31 points to 21, with the gate being a meagre £3/12/6. It would appear that 22 players took part in the match, as the Nelson Rugby Union suspended this number of players, and reported to the New Zealand Union, this number of players 'for taking part in a game on 14 August at which gate money was taken, and which was played under Northern Union rules'.<sup>69</sup> The League did not feel confident enough to schedule any more matches, but instead took up its remaining entitlement to Trafalgar Park to play two practice games without, presumably, charging for admission. Despite its modest beginnings, the Nelson League was full of confidence and was reported to be negotiating for either a New Zealand or a Wellington representative team to play a match in Nelson. It was also hoping to affiliate with the Northern Union in England and was prepared, 'if necessary, to make Nelson the official headquarters of Northern Unionism' in New Zealand.<sup>70</sup> None of these hopes was realised, but, nevertheless, Nelson was the only town in the South Island where there was any rugby league activity during 1909.

A possible explanation of the difficulties experienced in getting two full teams to turn out in the 1909 season is that, of the 30 men who had played rugby league in Nelson during the 1909 season, only 14 returned for the second season in 1910. The 16 non-returnees appear to have been mainly casual players. If only half the players were keen to play league and the other half only turned out occasionally, then it can be seen why matches between full strength teams did not take place. It will be shown that this pattern of behaviour occurred in many places.

In 1910 the 14 returnees were joined by 18 newcomers to bring the number of players up to match those of the opening season. The chance of playing for New Zealand against the touring British League team, a match which never eventuated, was used by the League as an incentive to attract potential recruits.

All town Players who wish to have a chance to represent Nelson

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<sup>69</sup> *Evening Post*, 10 September 1909, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 9 July 1909, p. 1.

against the English [sic.] team, must make up their minds without delay, as there are plenty of class players in the country who are willing and anxious to play. The Northern Union League in Nelson...is determined to do the fair thing, and only genuine Northern Union players will be recognised in the matter.<sup>71</sup>

A new attempt was made in 1910 form clubs, now named Alhambra and Kia Toa. These two proto clubs played practice matches at Victory Square during May and June as they attempted to recruit new players.<sup>72</sup>

The season was dogged by misfortune, bad weather forced several matches to be abandoned, it was again proving difficult to field full teams as selected players often did not bother to turn up and the visit by the touring British team did not eventuate. The Nelson League's hopes regarding this match were dashed by the decision of the British to abandon their southern tour, whilst an endeavour to have half the British team play Nelson after the rest had left for Australia came to nothing. Despite these misfortunes, Alhambra and Kia Toa did manage to play several matches later in the season, but not apparently with full complements of players.<sup>73</sup> It took the forthcoming visit from an Auckland touring team to at last arouse interest in the new game and give hope for growth in the 1911 season.

League officials in Taranaki and Wellington had similar problems following the 1908 representative games as they struggled to recruit sufficient players to enable clubs to be formed . Taranaki enthusiasts were active over the summer months as they attempted to form league clubs throughout the province. The secretary reported to the New Plymouth Northern Union Football League, at its annual meeting on 15 April 1909 that

pending the receipt of correspondence from Hawera and Okato, the question of forming a league would have to be deferred. One team had been formed in Hawera, and there was the probability of another being formed. He had communicated with Waitara, Inglewood, and Stratford, but had been informed that there was no chance of Northern Union teams being formed in those towns. The league, if it were formed, would be confined, from present indications, to New

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<sup>71</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 6 May 1910, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, May and June 1910.

<sup>73</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, July and August 1910.

Plymouth, Eltham, Hawera, and Okato-Warea.<sup>74</sup>

There were just thirteen members present at the meeting, which heard that the balance sheet showed a credit of £2 12s 2d with receipts for the season being £26/10/6 exclusive of the match in Auckland. The receipts from this match were £43 and the expenses £42 10s. The Chairman wished it to be clearly understood that the Northern Union players in Taranaki were not professionals. They received no payment for their services, but only their actual travelling expenses. They were, in his opinion, strictly amateurs.

At the same meeting it was decided to form a league club to be called the New Plymouth Northern Union Football Club. Twenty-six put their names forward as intending players and the club had secured the use of the Sports Ground on Saturday afternoons. The confused state of Taranaki rugby was revealed when, a couple of weeks later, in early May, the management committee of the Taranaki Rugby Union received letters from two New Plymouth rugby union clubs, Tukapa and Star, asking that the disqualifications on eleven players be removed.<sup>75</sup> Nine of the eleven, reported as being playing members of the newly formed New Plymouth Northern Union club, had been in the 1908 Taranaki representative team, and were to play in the 1909 representative matches. They would appear to have been committed to the league game and yet their former union clubs were trying to get them readmitted.

In September 1909 the 'New Zealand Rugby Club (Northern Union League) was trying to obtain grounds in Wellington for the 1910 season, as was the Wellington Rugby Union. Both bodies applied to the Hutt Council for the lease of the Hutt Recreation Ground and a recommendation that the league application 'not be considered' was referred back to the committee.<sup>76</sup> This is an example of the difficulties encountered by the promoters of league in the face of antagonism from pro-rugby union forces. The promoters of the

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<sup>74</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 16 April 1909, p.7.

<sup>75</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 1 May 1909, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> *Evening Post*, 29 September 1909, p. 8.

game persevered, though, and it was reported at the end of the season that the Wellington League, with its headquarters in Petone, had 'made definite arrangements for the commencement next season of a continuous series of matches to be played under the Northern Union style of play'.<sup>77</sup> But nothing eventuated from these initiatives as players proved reluctant to abandon the union game and no clubs were formed in 1910. Even the representative team seems to have disbanded, as no matches were played. No Wellington League became affiliated to the New Zealand League and Wellington was not included in Auckland representative team's southern tour at the end of the season. After two years League seemed to have finally died out in Wellington.

### **Auckland Rugby League 1909**

In contrast to the other provinces, 1909 was a successful year for league in Auckland, partly because the union game was preoccupied with a number of problems, which made it easier for league to become established. The pioneering work of 1908 was continued with the establishment of the Auckland Rugby League, the formation of four league clubs and the playing of a number of games, both representative and inter-club. The Rugby Union authorities claimed that they were faced with a drop in player numbers due, it was alleged, to 'too rough play'. There were also demands that the district scheme, which will be discussed later, be abandoned in an attempt to combat payment of players, and that moves should be made to have new rules adopted to open up the game and make it more exciting to watch. It is interesting to note that the official *History of Auckland Rugby*, completed for its 75th anniversary, makes virtually no reference to league,<sup>78</sup>

There were no apparent signs of activity by the promoters of league in the early part of the 1909 season, but much work was going on behind the scenes with players being recruited and grounds sought. For example the North Shore rugby union club could only field a skeleton senior team on Saturday 10 July 'the Northern Union League having enticed 6 players away

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<sup>77</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 14 October 1909, p. 8.

<sup>78</sup> I am grateful to Geoff Watson for bringing this to my attention.

from the club'.<sup>79</sup> A meeting of players and others interested in the new game of league was held on Monday 12 July, where it was decided to formalise the sport by forming a league. A meeting was called for the following Monday to do so. The amateur nature of the game was once again stressed, and a subtle dig made at the Rugby Union authorities by the suggestion that the policy of the new League 'should be similar to that recommended by the Auckland Rugby Union to the New Zealand Rugby Union, viz, that players be paid all expenses when away from home, and also that they be paid for lost time'.<sup>80</sup>

The meeting was advertised to take place on the 19 July, at the Chamber of Commerce Rooms on Swanson Street and it attracted a large attendance of about 150 players and supporters. The Auckland Rugby Football League (Northern Union Rules) was duly formed and it was resolved to affiliate with the [English] Northern Union. 'It was quite frankly stated at the meeting that no payments would be made for playing football. Reasonable expenses and payment for lost time when touring will, however be allowed.'<sup>81</sup> The meeting was told that it was expected that four clubs would be formed shortly and that a Mr. Eagleton had offered the League the use of three suitable playing grounds at Epsom, opposite Alexandra Park, which offer was gratefully accepted.<sup>82</sup> The first club match under the auspices of the Auckland Rugby League, between the City and North Shore clubs, was advertised to take place on Saturday 24 July on Eagleton's Ground, even though these clubs had not yet been formed.

Following the formation of the Auckland Rugby League, four clubs were quickly formed. A crowded meeting was held in the Council Chambers at Devonport on Wednesday evening 21 July when a club, the North Shore Albions, was formed to play and promote the game of football under the Northern Union rules. Officials were elected and about 40 playing members were enrolled. Following the meeting a team was selected to represent the

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<sup>79</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 14 July 1909, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 14 July 1909, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 July 1909, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 20 July 1909, p. 7.

club in the match against a town team on Saturday. The next evening at a meeting held in the city, at the Shakespeare Hotel, about 20 league supporters decided to form a club to be called City and proceeded to select a team to play the North Shore Club. Two more clubs were formed a week later. The Newton Club was formed by 30 supporters at a meeting held at the Oddfellows Hall on Thursday 28 July and the following evening, at a meeting held at the Leys Institute in Ponsonby, the Ponsonby United club was formed by the 50 supporters present.<sup>83</sup>

The North Shore versus City match duly took place and was won by the North Shore club by 44 points to 24. For nearly all the players it was their first experience of league, which reflected on the play, as the sports reporter wrote

On account of the heavy scoring, and the lack of experience on the part of many players, particularly in the City team, the game can only be regarded in the nature of a practice match, but nevertheless it gave the spectators an excellent idea of the possibilities of the Northern Union game played by able exponents.<sup>84</sup>

These rapid developments caused quite a stir in football circles as they followed a period of much speculation but seemingly no positive action in regard to rugby league. The launching of the Auckland Rugby League and the subsequent formation of four clubs were evidence of a lively organisation. Over the next two months five senior and three junior interclub practice matches were played<sup>85</sup> as players familiarised themselves with the rules in readiness for regular championship series to be played in the 1910 season.

### **Auckland Rugby Union's 'Crisis' Year - 1909**

The reaction of the Auckland rugby union authorities to the introduction of the rival code seems to have taken second place to the 'crisis' in the union game that occupied them throughout the season. This gave the league promoters an opportunity which they duly exploited. Early in August

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<sup>83</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 23 July 1909, p. 8.

<sup>84</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 July 1909, p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> Reported in *New Zealand Herald* between 2 August and 27 September.

rugby union clubs, particularly North Shore, reported losing players to the new code and a letter was received from the New Zealand Rugby Union instructing the Auckland Union to 'advise players who had played under Northern Union rules that they were "invited" to show cause why they should not be expelled under the rules of professionalism.<sup>86</sup> Until replies were received they were to be suspended. However, it was not until October, after the football season had ended, that the secretary of the Auckland Union was instructed to write to the secretaries of the various clubs asking for the names of those of their members who had played under Northern Union rules.<sup>87</sup> The Auckland Rugby Union did flex its muscles, though, when the North Shore rugby league club announced that a match would be played, in fancy dress, against the Devonport Volunteer Fire Brigade to raise funds for that body. It quickly stepped in and took control of the game, announcing that the Fire Brigade would now play a fancy dress match against an all comers team, to be picked at the ground, and that the match would be played under 'Amateur Rugby' rules and under the auspices of the Auckland Rugby Union.<sup>88</sup>

Early in the season, following the the New Zealand Rugby Union's annual meeting in May, members of the management committee of the Auckland Rugby Union expressed concern about the rejection by the delegates of the rule changes voted for by a conference held in Wellington the previous year. The chairman, J. Sheahan, reported that he had endeavoured to have the new rules made operative for the current season but without success. However, he had been told by the chairman that three new rules could be adopted without 'affecting the constitution of the game'. He advised the committee to accept this 'half loaf' even though players and spectators favoured more sweeping amendments to the rules, particularly the elimination of the wing forward. The rule changes allowed were to permit a player to 'play the ball after he has been collared, even though the ball touches the ground, providing he plays it immediately'; to restart play when

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<sup>86</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 5 August 1909, p. 7.

<sup>87</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 October 1909, p. 8.

<sup>88</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 23 September 1909, p. 7. and 25 September 1909, p. 9.

the ball goes in touch by 'throwing it out so as to alight at right angles to the touch-line, and not less than 5 yards therefrom' and for referees to 'place the ball in the scrummage in all cases'. The committee voted that the rules be adopted forthwith in all matches played under the jurisdiction of the Auckland Rugby Union.<sup>89</sup> These minor concessions did not satisfy the rugby union community and the rules issue, along with other problems, simmered throughout the season, and, in fact, continued to trouble the Auckland Union throughout the period covered in this thesis.

The issue came to a head at a special meeting held on Wednesday 6 October to discuss 'the present crisis in the game'. The 'crisis', it was alleged, was caused by the prevalence of rough play and the domination of the senior competition by two clubs, one of which, Ponsonby, was said to have 'one of the strongest club teams known in the history of the Dominion' but one which was noted for its foul play,<sup>90</sup> both factors causing many youngsters to refuse to play union football. A speaker said he 'knew of backs who had given up the game because they were made chopping blocks by the big, powerful forwards, and on many occasions this season he had witnessed foul play at Alexandra Park'.<sup>91</sup> Another speaker wondered 'why there were not more college boys playing [rugby union] football' rather than 'all playing hockey and other games'.<sup>92</sup> A representative from the North Shore club said there were college boys in the district who refused to play under the district scheme, whilst a representative from the Grafton club said 'the secondary schoolboys in his district absolutely refused to play in the senior grade'.<sup>93</sup> Professor Segar from the University club said that 20 years previously rugby was the only winter game, but that last season 'the University College could not place each Saturday a full second 15 in the field, whilst there had been five hockey

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<sup>89</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 27 May 1909, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

<sup>91</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

<sup>93</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

teams successfully placed in the field each week'.<sup>94</sup> Angus Campbell from the Referees Association said he did not think that anybody had 'really latched onto the causes of the game going back. One of the chief causes was brutal play. There were players who had made a study of foul play, and as a result scientific play had deteriorated.'<sup>95</sup> Another issue that caused him concern was the veiled professionalism in the district clubs.<sup>96</sup>

Following these exchanges of views, the meeting rejected a call to abolish the district scheme, opting instead to extend the residential period for newcomers to a district from four to twelve months and empowering the management committee to allot new players to weaker district clubs whilst waiting for residential qualification in the district in which they lived. It was hoped that this would discourage district clubs from 'importing players for their services during the season'<sup>97</sup> a practice that was common knowledge despite the executive's refusal to confirm it.

The widespread rough play was associated in the minds of many delegates with the district scheme. The district scheme had been introduced back in 1892 to replace the open club system as a means to even out the competition, which was then dominated by just a couple of clubs. These clubs managed to attract most of the best players, resulting in their winning all their matches by high margins. This discouraged other clubs and reduced spectator interest.<sup>98</sup> The district scheme introduced residential restrictions on players so that the existing talent was more evenly distributed. The new scheme worked well for a few years, but some clubs found ways to circumvent its residential provisions and for the past few years two clubs, City and Ponsonby, had once again dominated the senior competition, beating other clubs by big margins, which failed to produce interesting matches 'because the public likes to see

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<sup>94</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 1909, p. 9.

a game in which there is some doubt as to the outcome'.<sup>99</sup> Ways had been found to easily circumvent the residential qualifications introduced as part of the district scheme.

The district scheme destroyed the old club ties without giving anything in return; for, as many footballers are bachelors, living an itinerant existence, the district boundary is no bar to them, for they can, before the appointed time, move into lodgings in the district to which they wish to play. A season's experience at Rugby Union management committee meetings would satisfy anyone on this point, for large batches of cases of persons removing into a district about the time necessary for them to qualify are dealt with each week.<sup>100</sup>

The meeting did not end at this point as M. J. Sheahan, chairman of the Auckland Rugby Union initiated a discussion on the government and rules of the game. He referred to an article he had seen recently in a Sydney newspaper suggesting that the rules be amended so that light men could play without being knocked about. He went on to say that if the ARU had their way the game here would be played so that college boys could play without fear.

The New Zealand Union had shown apathy in regard to matters appertaining to the improvement of the game. He would like a message to go out from this union that would reach Wellington, Sydney, Durban, and even grandmotherly persons in the northern hemisphere, who would yet be compelled to follow New Zealand.<sup>101</sup>

Others then spoke both for and against secession, with Sheahan responding that he was not an advocate of secession, what he advocated was 'forcing the hands of the English Union'. Arneil, who favoured secession, suggested that the NZRU call a conference of the New Zealand, Australian, and South African Unions for the purpose of making improvements in the game. Ohlson said he did not favour secession at once. But he did favour the perpetuation of the modifications of the laws of the game brought into force last season. He then proposed

That in the opinion of this meeting the New Zealand Rugby Union should be urged to take immediate steps to carry out the provisions of the motion passed at a meeting of delegates at Wellington in October last in reference to a conference being held between New

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<sup>99</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 1909, p. 9.

<sup>100</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 1909, p. 9.

<sup>101</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

Zealand and Australia in regard to modification of the laws of the game of Rugby football.<sup>102</sup>

Another opponent of secession, Langford, seconded the motion but cautioned that the rules could not be modified whilst still keeping the connection with the English Union. The motion was put to the meeting and carried.<sup>103</sup> The sentiments expressed at this meeting cannot be taken lightly as Sheahan, Arneil, Ohlson and Langford were all members of the management committee of the Auckland Rugby Union. These concerns with the state of the union game, coupled with the dissatisfaction with the way the game was being played, created a climate favourable to the introduction of league, yet the majority of players and almost all the officials chose to remain loyal to the union game. Officials, it seems, were willing to criticise, and even defy, the Rugby Union but could not bring themselves to break away and start a rival union, let alone defect to league. The players, though, had good reason to stay with union as it would appear that they benefited financially from doing so, not necessarily 'straight cash payments, but being found a job, given time off work with pay, and wages not being stopped when... injured and unable to work'.<sup>104</sup>

### **Auckland Provincial Rugby Leagues**

Auckland province essentially covered the northern half of the North Island and the Auckland League from its formation assumed control of league throughout this large region. Its original name, the Auckland Provincial Rugby League, reflected this fact and over the next few years the League would encourage and assist with the formation of a number of district leagues.

The city of Auckland was not the only place in Auckland province in which league was played in 1909. Rotorua players had been involved in both the 1908 and the 1909 Maori tours to Australia and a league was formed in

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<sup>102</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1909, p. 6.

<sup>104</sup> Paul Neazor, *Ponsonby Rugby Club: Passion and Pride*, Auckland: Celebrity Books, 1999, p. 26.

the town in 1909. Rotorua had entered the twentieth century with just one rugby club, which organised games and undertook tours playing throughout the Bay of Plenty, Waikato and South Auckland. 1901 was apparently one of its most successful years and it was considered to be best team in the Auckland Province other than Auckland city itself. In 1903 the Rotorua Rugby Union was formed with five foundation clubs; Te Arawa, Rotorua City, Kahukara, Waikite and Whakarewarewa.<sup>105</sup>

By 1909 the Rugby Union had fallen on hard times and 'for some time past dissatisfaction had existed within the ranks of players with [respect] to Rugby football as it had existed in Rotorua for the past three years'. Matters came to a head on the evening of Saturday 31 July when 80 men attended a meeting to discuss the formation of a 'Northern Union League'. After much discussion it was decided to go ahead and the Rotorua Rugby League was formed and officers elected. This was only two weeks after the Auckland Rugby League was formed. On the following Monday the Rotorua Rugby Union held a special meeting to discuss these developments. There were about 60 present at the meeting where, 'after a long discussion during which it was ascertained that those present desired a change', a show of hands was called for to determine how many intended to stand by the Union. Only 16 hands were raised, but despite this the Union maintained that the fixtures already arranged would be carried out. It was pointed out at the meeting that the Union was going to lose nearly all its best players to league and that Rotorua, with its small population, could not support two 'Unions' and only one was likely to survive.<sup>106</sup>

Following these two meetings, considerable canvassing must have been undertaken by union officials as the Auckland Rugby Union was advised that, although the majority of union players had 'declared their intention to go over to the new code', a number now wished to withdraw from that commitment. The Auckland Union replied that such players could be

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<sup>105</sup> D.M. Stafford, *The New Century in Rotorua: A History of Events from 1900*, Rotorua: Ray Richards Publisher, 1988, p. 77.

<sup>106</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 August 1909, p. 4.

readmitted.<sup>107</sup> On receiving this advice the Rotorua Union sought the personal signatures of all players wishing to be reinstated and secured over a dozen. The number remaining loyal to the Rugby Union were then said to be close to 60. 'The disloyalty of those who defected ... stirred those loyal to work harder for the amateur game.' An enthusiastic meeting, 'with a view to a thorough reorganisation', was held on the evening of Thursday 5 August and attended by a large number of players who 'displayed great enthusiasm in the Union's welfare'.<sup>108</sup> Following this week of frenzied activities, the Rotorua Northern Union League inaugurated its first season with a game between two newly formed teams on Saturday 7 August. Attendance at the match was poor and the players had only a 'moderate knowledge of the rules'. In contrast the Rotorua Rugby Union staged a representative game against Mokai which attracted a large attendance 'notwithstanding the big counter attraction in another part of town'.<sup>109</sup> Rotorua's application for affiliation with the Auckland League was granted at the end of August, when it was reported that 'the game is progressing in Rotorua very rapidly, the League being able to put three teams in the field already'.<sup>110</sup> Although information is sketchy, it would seem that a considerable number of players were dissatisfied with the Rotorua Rugby Union and prepared to go over to league. Even after 'intense lobbying' by the Rugby Union, and offers to take back the defecting players, most of the players stayed with league and there were sufficient converts to field three teams.

At the start of the 1910 season the Rotorua League reported that the game was making good progress and that it had been given control of the game in 'the southern parts of the province'.<sup>111</sup> Three clubs, Albion, Star and

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<sup>107</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 5 August 1909, p. 7.

<sup>108</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 6 August 1909, p. 8.

<sup>109</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 August 1909, p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 August 1909, p. 7.

<sup>111</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 9 April 1910, p. 9.

Tukapa, were to comprise the local competition<sup>112</sup> and negotiations had been completed for a match against Auckland at an early date.<sup>113</sup> The Rugby Union opened the season on an optimistic note, claiming more members than last year and four clubs already formed, 'despite the fact that there is flourishing league playing under Northern Union rules in existence'.<sup>114</sup> Reality soon hit home, though, as it found that it 'had considerable difficulty this year in getting sufficient teams, owing chiefly to the exodus of players consequent on the lack of employment in the town. It was likely to have only 3 teams, all senior, compared to last season when it had 4 senior and 3 junior teams.'<sup>115</sup> If this was the case, league was already, after less than a year, on an equal footing with union, each code fielding three senior teams.

There was also early interest in playing league in the King Country. In April 1910 the Auckland League received a letter from Taumarunui asking for information to enable a district league to be set up<sup>116</sup> and in August it was reported that Te Kuiti township was the latest centre in which a club had been formed to play under the new rules.<sup>117</sup> Union does not appear to have been well supported in the Te Kuiti district and although the Maniapoto Rugby Union had five clubs under its jurisdiction in the 1910 season, clubs were continually experiencing difficulties in fielding full teams as the following extracts from the *King Country Chronicle* demonstrate: 'Te Kuiti could only field 14 men including several substitutes', 'Te Kuiti arrived 3 men short', 'Teams were continually turning up men short and trying to recruit players from the spectators', 'Mokauiti turned up with 9 men', 'Maniapoto had named 10 reserves for the match [a representative match against King Country]. Only about 6 of the selected players turned up', 'neither team was at full

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<sup>112</sup> Stafford, *The New Century in Rotorua*, p. 155.

<sup>113</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 28 April 1910, p. 7.

<sup>114</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 April 1910, p. 9.

<sup>115</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 29 April 1910, p. 8.

<sup>116</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 April 1910, p. 8.

<sup>117</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 27 August 1910, p. 9.

strength [for the Maniatoto vs Taumarunui representative game] and substitutes were included freely'.<sup>118</sup>

With union clubs experiencing difficulties fielding full teams, the prospects for league in Te Kuiti did not look good and yet in August it was reported that a club playing under Northern Union rules was being formed in Te Kuiti and affiliating with the Rotorua League.<sup>119</sup> The club was formed at 'a largely attended meeting' held at the Te Kuiti Town Hall on the night of Friday 26 August. About forty supporters were present and 'great enthusiasm' was displayed. Officers were elected and the club's colours were to be red white and blue, with a huia badge. It was to be known as the Te Kuiti Huia Club. The secretary was instructed to write to the Taumarunui club to arrange a match and to the secretary of the 'Northern Union League' for fifty rule books. 'A pleasing feature in connection with the establishment of this branch of the league was the manner in which subscriptions were handed in, the result being that the Huia Club plays its first match with a good sum of money in hand.'<sup>120</sup>

### **Rugby League's Success in Auckland - 1910**

1910 was the first full year of club competitions for the Auckland Rugby League. Three of the four senior clubs, City, Ponsonby and North Shore, also fielded junior teams, whilst a new club, Northcote Ramblers, entered a team in the junior grade to make that also a four-team competition. The highlights of the year were the games staged in Auckland against a British touring team from the Northern Rugby League and the pioneering tour undertaken at the end of the season to help start the game in other New Zealand centres.

The fears voiced during the previous season that players were reluctant to play the union game due to rough play and unevenly matched teams seem to have been allayed by the changes made to the district scheme

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<sup>118</sup> *King Country Chronicle*, 1 June 1910, 4 June 1910, 27 July 1910, 21 September 1910.

<sup>119</sup> *King Country Chronicle*, 24 August 1910.

<sup>120</sup> *King Country Chronicle*, 31 August 1910.

and rugby union in Auckland maintained its dominant position in 1910. There was a seven-team senior competition and eight teams in each of the second, third and fourth competitions. Despite fears that North Shore and Newton would be unable to field senior teams due to player losses to the new league clubs in their districts, only North Shore failed to do so.<sup>121</sup> Both clubs, though, had teams in each of the three lower grades and so remained strongly supported. The other two clubs with league competition, City and Ponsonby, were also strongly supported, with teams in all the lower grades except the third grade, where City could not raise a team.

Soccer continued to be well supported, with a six-team first division and a further 20 teams in the three lower divisions. Hockey also had six senior teams with 32 more teams in two lower grades. Both Australian rules football and lacrosse were still played, each code fielding four teams. Ponsonby was seemingly a hotbed of sport, with clubs representing all six codes operating in the district. League was clearly still in a developmental stage, fielding far fewer teams than union, soccer or hockey but already twice as many as Australian rules and lacrosse.

At the start of the 1910 season the League had already formed a referees' association and had secured grounds sufficient to accommodate six senior and four junior teams. In addition an accident insurance scheme had been adopted that would pay an injured player 25 shillings a week for up to a maximum of 20 weeks.<sup>122</sup> The need to counter allegations of professionalism was again stressed by W.D. McLean at the meeting to launch the Northcote club where he

strongly advised the new club to ride down the accusation which had been cast on the new clubs and their parent bodies. He emphatically stated that neither the New Zealand Rugby League nor any provincial League had ever paid men for playing football. He stated, however, that one of the main objects was to give the players just compensation for the time lost when on tour'.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 30 April 1910, p. 9.

<sup>122</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 18 May 1910, p. 5.

<sup>123</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 April 1910, p. 9.

The Auckland Rugby League launched its first season of club football on Saturday 12 May and the championship rounds came to an end three months later on Saturday 20 August, when about 600 spectators at Victoria Park watched Ponsonby beat City to become the first team to win the club senior championship. Three of the four senior teams were evenly matched, but North Shore struggled to compete and ended the season well behind the others. Their junior team was much more competitive, though, finishing second closely behind the winners Northcote. City and Ponsonby both trailed well behind the leaders.

The first year of club competitions had proved successful and relatively incident free. Attendances were very encouraging, but not yet rivalling those at union club matches: on 11 June there were 4,000 spectators at Alexandra Park for the union games, and 2,000 at Victoria Park for the league;<sup>124</sup> Three weeks later, on 2 July, 3,000 spectators were at Alexandra Park for the union games, and 1,000 at Victoria Park for the league.<sup>125</sup> Whilst on 18 June there were 2,000 at Victoria Park watching the league,<sup>126</sup> Five clubs had fielded teams, three in both senior and second grade, one in senior grade only and one in second grade only and all clubs appeared to have consolidated their position in their districts.

The introduction of league to Auckland was similar in a number of respects to the situation in Sydney. Sydney, with 500,000 inhabitants, was five times the size of Auckland, with its 100,000 inhabitants, but both cities had densely populated working-class suburbs all within close proximity to the city centres and to each other. It was in these suburbs that league began. Seven district clubs were formed in Sydney's suburbs over the summer of 1907 - 1908, ready for the first season of club competitions. Auckland, with its smaller population, was impressive, with four clubs being formed during 1909 season ready for club competitions in 1910. In both cities club competitions grew in strength and prospered throughout this period,

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<sup>124</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 June 1910, p. 7.

<sup>125</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 July 1910, p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 20 June 1910, p. 7.

competing successfully with union. The major difference was that the Sydney working class deserted union for league, leaving to middle-class players the task of keeping alive the older code. This never happened in Auckland, as many working-class players stayed loyal to union, which, having a much smaller player base to draw on, would have found it difficult to sustain a competition drawn only from middle-class players. The Auckland Rugby Union needed working-class players if the code was to survive.

### **Who Took Up the Rugby League Game with the Auckland Clubs?**

In this section an attempt will be made to find out the effect that the formation of four league clubs in the 1909 season had on the union game, where the players and officials of the clubs came from and what their occupations were. The names of players from the senior first teams of the North Shore, Newton, City, Ponsonby, Grafton, Parnell and Marist rugby union clubs for the 1908 and 1909 seasons were recorded and of those from the same clubs' senior second teams for the 1909 season. The players' names for the North Shore, City, Grafton and Marist senior second teams only for the 1908 season were available and were also recorded. The players for the four league clubs North Shore, Newton, City and Ponsonby were then recorded for the 1909 and 1910 seasons,<sup>127</sup> and these were compared with the available data on rugby union club players in the 1908 and 1909 seasons. The results are rather surprising. It was found that the numbers of union players going over to league were quite small, as the following discussion will demonstrate.

Nine of 46 North Shore senior first union players from 1908 and 1909 went over to league [20 percent] as did 18 of 51 senior second players. [35 percent] Fifty seven men played for the North Shore league club during the 1909 and 1910 seasons and only 27 can be traced back to the union club. This raises the question of where the remaining 30 players came from?

A similar situation is found with the Ponsonby club. Only four of the 28 senior first Ponsonby union players went over to league [14 percent] and of

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<sup>127</sup> Players' names were obtained from the teams named in the *New Zealand Herald* for 1908, 1909, and 1910.

the 25 senior second players in 1909 again only four are found playing league. [16 percent] The Ponsonby senior first league team in the 1909 and 1910 seasons had 30 men play for it, four coming from the senior first team of the Ponsonby union club and one from Grafton. A further nine players came from senior second union football; three from Ponsonby, three from City, two from Marist and one from Newton. In all 14 of Ponsonby's 30 players came from union. [47 percent]

The Newton league club had 40 players take the field for its senior first side in the 1909 and 1910 seasons. Ten came from senior first union; eight from the Newton club, one from City and one from Grafton. A further nine came from second-grade union; four from Newton, two from City, two from Marist and one from Ponsonby. In all 19 of the 40 players came from union. [48 percent] Defections to league had hardly any effect on the Newton union club. Of its 48 senior first players in the 1908 and 1909 seasons, only eleven went to league [23 percent] and of the 34 players in its 1909 senior second team, only six went to league. [17 percent]

The original City league club, founded in 1909, seems to have folded over the summer as it was reestablished at the start of the 1910 season with only one player returning from the 14 who had played during the previous season. Thirty-nine new players were recruited during the 1910 season, but of the 40 who played for the club in 1909 and 1910 only eight [20 percent] came from union. City and Newton union senior first teams each contributed one player, City senior second team contributed five players and one came from Marist senior second team. The City union club was hardly affected at all by the establishment of the City league club. Thirty-nine played for the senior first team during the 1908 and 1909 seasons and only two [5 percent] went over to league. The club had an even greater number of senior second team players, but of the total of 65, only eleven [17 percent] went to league; five to the City club, three to Ponsonby and two to Newton.

Over the two seasons 1908 and 1909 about 160 men played senior first union for the four clubs, City, Newton, Ponsonby and North Shore, which were in direct competition with the newly established league clubs, and about 200 played senior second grade union for the same four clubs. Of these

players, only 26 from senior first and approximately 50 from senior second went to league. These figures should have had a negligible effect on the four clubs and yet it was feared at the start of the 1910 season that two of the clubs, Newton and North Shore, would be unable to raise senior first teams due to defections to league. In the event only North Shore could not field a senior first team, Newton managing to do so only after a struggle to find enough players.

What was going on here? One clue is the high turnover of players from season to season. The retention rates for senior first teams between the 1908 and 1909 seasons varied from a high of 68 percent [13 from 19] for Ponsonby to a low of 26 percent for Grafton. Retention rates for other clubs were 50 percent for Parnell, 48 percent [19 from 40] for Newton, 42 percent for North Shore [14 from 33] and 40 percent [11 from 27] for the City club. Retention rates for senior second teams were even lower. The opinion that rugby players were mainly young single men, living in lodging houses, leading an itinerant life, with no ties to any particular district had been expressed at a 'crisis' meeting called by the Auckland Rugby Union the previous year.<sup>128</sup> This could be a reason for the high turnover of players, but does not answer the question of why so few went to league.

Perhaps many league players were newcomers to Auckland and took the game up in preference to union. Another possibility is that not all union players were serious players. The numbers of players recorded for the various senior first teams; 48 for Newton, 46 for North Shore, 39 for City, 28 for Ponsonby, suggest that the clubs had a core of serious players who comprised the bulk of the team, with the majority of players only taking part in the occasional game. If this was the case, the defection of a few serious players to league could have had a major impact and possibly accounts for the difficulties the Newton and North Shore clubs were reported to be having in raising a team. Rough play in rugby union could be another factor in accounting for the numbers coming to league from sources other than senior union. If, as the Auckland Rugby Union officials feared, many youths were

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<sup>128</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 1909, p. 9.

refusing to play senior union because of excessive rough play, they would be lost to the game. The advent of league, with its reputation as a clean sport in which injuries were infrequent, would have given these men the opportunity to take up rugby again by playing the 'safer' game. Auckland also had a large transient population of young unskilled men who moved around the country looking for work. These young men may have seen league as a more attractive alternative to union as, being a new sport, it would offer them greater opportunities to gain selection to representative teams. From the above analysis it would seem that playing league was a conscious decision made by many players who were not actively engaged in union, and that league found a constituency among men wanting to play an open, physical game, but one without the violence associated with union.

The occupations of the players for the four rugby league teams were investigated by attempting to match senior first team player names from the 1909 and 1910 seasons with names in the 1911 electoral rolls for the three Auckland city electorates of West, Central and East plus the Waitimata electorate and with the names in the Wise's Guide for 1911. Teams were published weekly in the *New Zealand Herald* but players' full names were seldom given. Clubs supplied either surnames only or surnames plus initials of given names. This meant that many players could not be matched with names on the electoral lists and so reduced the number who could be included in the analysis.

From the four clubs the occupations of 63 of the 183 players were identified, about one in three, [34 percent] but the numbers varied from club to club. The occupations of only six of the 40 Newton players were found [15 percent] whilst those of 16 of the 32 Ponsonby players [50 percent] were found. For North Shore and City the figures were 22 from 58 [38 percent] and 19 from 53 [36 percent]. The great majority of players were either unskilled workers who numbered 26 or skilled tradesmen numbering 23. Seven were self-employed whilst only two were white-collar workers. There were also five naval personnel, three artillerymen and two torpedomen, all from the North Shore club based in Devonport also the home of the New Zealand Naval base. The main conclusion to be drawn is that rugby league players were

overwhelmingly working men. The game was shunned by white-collar workers and of the seven classified as self employed only three could be called middle class with any degree of confidence; a merchant, a flax miller and a cordial manufacturer, the other four; a printer, a salesman, a hairdresser and a billiard saloon keeper could just as likely have had working-class beginnings. The five naval personnel would also most likely have been working men before enlisting in the navy.

Names of Auckland Rugby Union and affiliated club officials for the 1908 season were found from published reports of annual general meetings. Following the establishment of the Auckland Rugby League during the 1909 season, it became possible to obtain names of its officials for that season and the following one. The objectives were two; to see if any officials went over to rugby league and to compare the occupations of officials to see if there were any significant differences between the codes. The first question is easily answered: only one rugby union official went over to rugby league. W. D. McLean, member of the North Shore rugby union club committee and delegate from that club to the Auckland Rugby Union, was an early convert to rugby league, being instrumental in obtaining a ground on the Devonport Domain for a practice match in 1908. In 1909 he became a member of the management committee of the newly formed Auckland Rugby League and a vice-president of the North Shore rugby league club. He was later to become president of the New Zealand Rugby League. No other rugby union officials went over to rugby league.

More matches were found between names of officials and names in the electoral rolls and in Wise's Guide than had been the case with players. One reason being that reports of annual general meetings nearly always gave full names, thus allowing more matches to be made. Another reason is that there was a much greater presence of middle-class men who would be more likely to be established residents with fixed addresses.

The Auckland Rugby League in the first two years of its existence had 33 officials, this total including a number of vice-presidents, and the occupations of 20 were found. A link with the hotel business was already evident in the presence of an hotel manager, an hotel keeper and a publican

whilst another official was listed as a 'gentleman'. The publicans and other middle-class officials totalled seven, there were four white-collar workers, four unskilled workers and three skilled craftsmen. Whilst the middle class were the predominant group, there was also a significant presence of white-collar workers, skilled craftsmen and unskilled workers amongst Auckland Rugby League officials. This involvement of working men indicates a different situation to that in England where there appears to have been very few workingmen amongst league officials.<sup>129</sup> Auckland Rugby Union did not include vice-presidents amongst its named officials, so fewer names appear, but of the 13 names known the occupations of ten were found. Even with the absence of any publicans, six of the ten were middle class and there was one white-collar worker. There is no incontrovertible evidence of a working-class presence as the remaining three officials, a gas-works employee, a signwriter and a foreman freezer are difficult to categorise. This evidence does show a significant difference in the composition of the two governing bodies; the Auckland Rugby Union was firmly in middle-class hands but in the Auckland Rugby League control was spread much more widely and middle-class officials, though the largest group, shared control with other significant groups. The absence of either trade union or 'labour party' officials can be contrasted to Australian league where both these groups played a prominent part in its establishment.<sup>130</sup>

The occupations of 37 officials from the Ponsonby, City, Newton and North Shore league clubs were found compared but only 16 from the corresponding union clubs, again due to league clubs naming vice-presidents and union clubs not. Officials of the league clubs were overwhelmingly middle-class, 17, or skilled workers, 12, whilst few were either unskilled, 5, or white-collar workers, 3. With fewer known officials from the union clubs no firm conclusions can be drawn but it can be noted that those known were drawn equally from the four occupational groups.

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<sup>129</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 196-8, 242.

<sup>130</sup> Cunneen, 'Rugby Wars', p. 304, Murray Phillips, 'Football, Class and War', p. 162.



## **Conclusion**

By the end of the 1910 season, league had ceased to be played in much of New Zealand. Only in Auckland and Rotorua in the north, and Invercargill in the south were there any clubs playing league. Not even provincial 'representative' teams were playing outside of Auckland. Auckland's ambitious southern tour at the end of the 1910 season was undertaken in an attempt to revive and expand the game in the southern and central provinces.

Two player-organised tours took place in 1909. With help from the New South Wales Rugby League, both New Zealand and Maori teams toured Australia. These were to be the last player-initiated tours as from 1910 on, the newly formed New Zealand Rugby League organised all tours, starting with the short visit from the English Northern Union team in that year.

The success of league in Auckland during this period can be attributed, in part, to the troubles within the Auckland Rugby Union which distracted it from dealing with the threat posed by league. League became firmly established in the city despite attracting relatively few players from union. It appeared to be attracting a new constituency, possibly players put off by the violence prevalent in union, and itinerant workers moving into the city.

By the end of its third year in New Zealand, though it had not enjoyed the success anticipated by its promoters, league was still being played, and, while it had had little success in establishing clubs and club competitions, representative matches, and in particular those against the visiting British team, had elicited strong spectator support and established league as a legitimate international sport. This legitimacy was reinforced by the formation of the national body signalling that the game was no longer just a series of local initiatives, but a centrally organised sport in line with other sporting codes in the country. At this stage league was at a turning point, it could become either a minor regional sport played only in Auckland, or it could take off and be widely adopted throughout the country, the 'band wagon' effect.<sup>131</sup> The following chapters will demonstrate that it was the second alternative that occurred.

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<sup>131</sup> John Bale, *Sports Geography*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), London: Routledge, 2003, p. 46.

# 3

1911-1914

EXPANSION YEARS PART ONE:  
METROPOLITAN CENTRES

The 'band wagon' years, 1911 to 1914, saw rugby league become an established sport in New Zealand, with large numbers of players taking up the game, and leagues being formed throughout the country. During this period leagues were formed in the Waikato, King Country, Hamilton, Golden Bay, Wanganui, Hawkes Bay and Dannevirke all in 1911. More leagues were later formed in Thames, the Goldfields, Wellington, Marlborough and Christchurch in 1912, Gisborne in 1913 and Palmerston North in 1914.

League was put on a formal footing when, on 25 April 1910, the New Zealand Rugby Football League was formed at a meeting in Auckland chaired by D. W. McLean. Having a national body governing the sport suggested it was on the way to becoming an established part of the New Zealand sporting scene, and gave it greater credibility as it was now on a par with sports such as rugby union, cricket and hockey all of which had national governing bodies. The existence of a national body also gave legitimacy to league and made taking up the game seem a less risky undertaking for prospective players. The League's first initiative was the organisation of the British Northern Union team's 1910 tour. A second initiative was the Auckland League's end-of-season southern tour, undertaken the same year out of concern that the game was dying out south of Auckland, and in the hope that it would rekindle interest. Its third major initiative was the appointment in 1912 of George Gillett, an ex-rugby union All Black, as a full-time league organiser. Gillett toured the country as a propagandist for league and was involved in starting, or restarting, the game in Thames, the Goldfields, Gisborne, Wellington, and Christchurch.

By 1910 league had practically died outside of Auckland province, but by 1914 it was being played in three of New Zealand's four metropolitan cities, as well as many smaller centres, and appeared to be well on the way to becoming one of the country's major winter sports. This chapter and the

next will seek reasons for this dramatic turnaround, the 'band wagon effect',<sup>1</sup> and will examine the reactions of the Rugby Union to the growing popularity of league.

The chapter begins by analysing the effect in these years of the introduction of league on other sporting codes in the metropolitan centres. It then chronicles the establishment of clubs and the growth of club competitions in Auckland, Christchurch, and Wellington and discusses the reasons for league's failure in Dunedin. The importance of representative matches in the growth of league will then be examined. The occupations of both league players and administrators will be analysed to see to what extent league was a working-class game, largely shunned by the middle-class. The reasons for league's growth, both in player numbers, and in spectator support, will then be examined. Further sections will examine the difficulties faced by league, both in obtaining access to grounds from local authorities, and from the efforts of union supporters to obstruct the development of the game. Finally the way preparations for the expected war in Europe adversely affected league's progress will be considered. The difficulties faced by smaller centres and their efforts to overcome them, will be the subject of the next chapter.

By the start of the 1911 season league was already an established part of Auckland's sporting scene and its support continued to increase up to the Great War. It was not until 1912 that the game was introduced into Christchurch, and re-introduced into Wellington, but over the next three years it became an established sport in both cities. Only in Dunedin did attempts to introduce the game fail and no league was played prior to the start of the Great War.

A comparison between the metropolitan centres of Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington shows that the growth of the game followed a similar pattern in the early years for all three centres. In Auckland, from 1909, when clubs were first formed, to 1911 the number of teams nearly doubled, from seven to thirteen. In Christchurch, over the three years from

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<sup>1</sup> Bale, p. 46.

the introduction of league, the number of teams grew from none in 1912 to eight in 1913 and sixteen in 1914. In Wellington the four teams of the inaugural 1912 season had increased to nine by 1914. [see table 1]

Following three seasons of steady but unspectacular growth, the Auckland league experienced a massive increase in the number of teams during the 1912 season. The number leapt from thirteen to thirty-three, as more clubs were formed and lower-grade competitions were launched. This high level of support was maintained over the next two seasons, so that the 1914 season saw league fielding as many teams as union; each code having thirty-nine teams. [see table 1] Whether the Wellington and Christchurch leagues would have experienced similar growth following their first three years will never be known as the Great War was to seriously affect all sports, but especially league.

### **Rugby League and Other Sports**

As a new sport, league had to compete in the metropolitan cities with established sports, particularly union. But union was by no means predominant during this period. Men's hockey and soccer were both strongly supported, whilst lacrosse and Australian rules enjoyed some support. [see table 1] But it was only league that attracted the hostility of union authorities, as it drew its support from their players, whilst soccer and hockey players were little attracted to either rugby code. Soccer and league, both being working-class games, enjoyed a friendly relationship, league players being always welcome to play soccer, and the two codes were helpful to one another when ground problems arose. Support for the various codes differed between cities. Prior to the introduction of league, there were about the same number of union, hockey and soccer teams in Auckland; in Christchurch rugby union and hockey dominated, with soccer a very minor sport, only slightly more popular than Australian rules; whilst in Wellington it was soccer that closely rivalled union with hockey having less than a third the number of teams. [see table 1]

By 1914 league had had the biggest impact in Auckland, where it had joined union and hockey as the most popular winter team sports, whilst

**TABLE 1** NUMBERS OF WINTER SPORTS TEAMS - ALL CODES

	AUCKLAND 1908 TO 1914				CANTERBURY 1912 TO 1914				WELLINGTON 1912 TO 1914			
	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1912	1913	1912	1913	1914
<b>Rugby Union</b>												
Senior	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	8	8	10	7	8
Second	6	8	8	6	8	10	9	8	8	12	10	7
Third	6	7	8	14	10	11	10	14	14	17	7	15
Fourth	8	9	8	8	6	5	8	6	8	13	8	11
Fifth					8	6	6	2	0	7	9	10
Sixth										8	4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Rugby League</b>												
Senior	4	4	4	5	6	6	6	4	4	4	4	4
Second	3		4	4	6	6	8	4	4		6	5
Third				4	9	10	12					
Fourth					7	6	13					
Fifth					5	0	0					
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Men's Hockey</b>												
Senior	8	9	6	8	10	9	6	9	7	7	6	7
Second	12	12	18	18	6	10	8	10	8	10	10	11
Third	8	8	14	12	10	12	8	11	12	5	11	0
Fourth					4	6	7	10	10			
Fifth						7	8					
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Soccer</b>												
Senior	6	8	6	7	6	10	8	7	6	10	12	10
Second	2	8	10	8	8	9	12			10	7	10
Third	4	7	6	4	4	6	6			11	9	6
Fourth	6	4	4	5	6	6	0			6	8	0
Fifth										12	7	0
Sixth										14	5	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Australian Rules</b>												
Senior	4	5	4	2				3				
Second	2	0	0	2								
Third	2	0	0	0								
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>				<b>3</b>				
<b>Lacrosse</b>												
Senior	3	4	4	2	4	6	4			4	4	4
Second				2	0	0	0					
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>			<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>

soccer had fallen behind. But this had not been at the expense the other codes, as all sports had benefited from the rapid increase in the city's population which had risen by fifty percent, from 43,000 to 65,000<sup>2</sup>, between December 1909 and April 1915. Overall, the number of sports teams had risen by over 40 percent, from 100 to 143, so that even with the spectacular growth of league, there were also more teams playing union and hockey and almost the same number playing soccer.

At the outbreak of war in 1914, league, having only been played for three seasons, had had a much smaller impact on the Christchurch and Wellington sporting scenes. In Christchurch union and hockey were still the dominant codes, with each fielding over a third of the total teams, but both league and soccer had made significant gains. Soccer was now fielding twenty-two teams, 17 percent of the total, whilst league was not far behind with sixteen teams, 12 percent of the total. As in Auckland, team numbers for all codes in Christchurch were up, from 88 teams in 1912 to 130 in 1914, despite the city's population remaining almost static at about 57,000, although the metropolitan region had a modest increase of 10 percent from 79,000 to 88,000.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Auckland and Christchurch, the number of sports teams in Wellington fell during the three seasons during which league had been played, but this was in no way due to the introduction of the new game. Wellington was also the only city which experienced a population fall in this period, from 72,000 to 67,000, a decrease of 7 percent.<sup>4</sup> League had had little impact on the other three codes, starting with four teams in 1912 and expanding to nine teams in 1914, two seasons later. That the impact of the game in the city was minimal can be seen when it is realised that over half the teams came from the nearby towns of Petone and Lower Hutt, with

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<sup>2</sup> Figures rounded to nearest 1,000 from *New Zealand Official Yearbook* for 1910, p. 119, and for 1915, p. 118. Note that metropolitan Auckland, city plus suburbs, had had a less spectacular, but still substantial, increase of 20 percent from 98,000 to 118,000, in these years.

<sup>3</sup> Figures rounded to nearest 1,000 from *New Zealand Official Yearbook* for 1910, p. 119, and for 1915, p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Figures rounded to nearest 1,000 from *New Zealand Official Yearbook* for 1910, p. 119, and for 1915, p. 118.

populations of 7,000 and 5,000 respectively. Although the number of teams in all codes fell, union actually increased its dominance, fielding nearly half of all teams, whilst soccer lost almost half its teams and its share of teams fell by 10 percent. Hockey lost the fewest teams and maintained its share overall but was still well behind soccer despite that code's losses. Lacrosse maintained a small presence in both Auckland and Wellington but Australian rules had died out in all centres by 1913. [see table 1]

### **Establishing Clubs and Survival**

The clubs affiliated with the Auckland Provincial Rugby League in 1911 reported a membership of 386 and about 250 players took part in its competitions: this was a big increase on the previous season, when 150 players had taken part. A new club, Eden Ramblers, was formed, covering the Point Chevalier, Avondale and Mount Albert districts and the club entered a team in the senior competition along with the four established clubs. The only union club to be so badly affected by league that it could not field a senior team was North Shore, which could muster only eight senior players and had to drop out of both first and second grade competitions, entering teams only in the third and fourth grades. Newton again struggled to field a senior team, but just managed to recruit enough new players.

Auckland league came of age in 1912 in its third full season of club competition. Over 500 players, double the past season's numbers, took part in its competitions, playing in two senior grades with 12 teams and three junior grades with 21 teams, 33 teams in total. Four new clubs, Manukau Rovers, Hobsonville, Ellerslie and Otahuhu, were admitted to the League during the season and three district leagues, Goldfields, Thames and Hamilton, became affiliated. These new teams showed the increased geographical spread of the game, with Manukau, Hobsonville and Ellerslie all being about ten kilometres from the city centre, Manukau situated on the Manukau Harbour to the south, Hobsonville at the head of the Waitemata Harbour to the north west, and Ellerslie in the south east of the Auckland peninsula. Otahuhu was even further out, being 13 kilometres to south. Financially the League also prospered, with receipts over the season being

£1,064/3/5 and expenditure £962/10/7, leaving a credit balance of £101/12/10.<sup>5</sup>

For the 1913 season the League decided to limit the number of senior teams to six so that the standard of play could be improved. 'Properly played the League game is well worth watching, but it produces a sorry spectacle when untrained and unskilful men play it.'<sup>6</sup> This decision was justified as during the season two senior teams, Eden and Manukau, found it hard to field full teams and experienced some heavy defeats. Efforts to have the two teams amalgamate failed and both were disbanded, which led to the League ending the senior competition early. To extend the season it decided to play a knock-out competition involving the four remaining senior clubs. This attracted considerable public support.

Far from being weakened by the suspension, by the New Zealand League, of the whole executive of the Auckland League from the previous season,<sup>7</sup> league in Auckland appeared to enjoy greater support than ever in 1914. Players were not prepared to forgo the chance to play in order to support the suspended members of the old executive and over 900 players were registered with the League.<sup>8</sup> A record number of teams were entered in the various grades at the start of the season. Three new clubs applied to join the senior competition; Grafton, formed at the end of the previous season in the inner-city suburb of that name; Sunnyside, from across the harbour in Devonport; and Otahuhu from south Auckland. They, together with the established clubs of North Shore, City, Newton and Ponsonby, numbered seven, so the new rule restricting the number of teams to six was invoked, and Sunnyside was denied a place in the senior competition. The second grade, where Sunnyside were now to play, comprised eight teams. The third grade, with teams from new clubs Hobsonville, at the head of the Waitemata Harbour, and Remuera in east Auckland, had a total of 12 teams.

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<sup>5</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 15 April 1913, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 19 April 1913, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>The Savory Affair - see appendix four.

<sup>8</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 31 March 1915, p. 4.

Player support for league had shown a tremendous increase from 1910, when 150 or so took part in the first season of club competitions, to over 900 in 1914. Similarly the number of teams playing had risen from eight in 1910 to 39 in 1914, surpassing both soccer and hockey and equalling the number of union teams.

Although league was not started in Christchurch until 1912, four years later than its introduction to Auckland, there are similarities in both the introduction and development of the game, but also significant differences. League was introduced through the playing of representative matches, as it had been in Auckland, but the Canterbury Rugby League was formed prior to the matches being played, not a year later as in Auckland. In both centres the formation of clubs occurred after leagues had been formed and representative games played. The opposition from union authorities was also much greater than in Auckland. The abortive attempt to start league in 1908 had brought to light considerable discontent with the New Zealand Rugby Union and its administration of the game, yet players were reluctant to break with the Union, preferring to try to exert an influence for change from within. By 1911 this had obviously failed and growing discontent amongst both players and officials within the Canterbury Rugby Union led to a number of semi-secret meetings of football supporters being held to discuss the possibility of introducing league. Prominent amongst these supporters were W. S. E Moyle, A. R. Brunsden and rebel All Black C. J. Pearce.<sup>9</sup>

These meetings led to league supporters coming into the open in the 1912 season and introducing league despite many would-be supporters backing out once the movement went public.<sup>10</sup> The New Zealand Rugby League took an active part in the introduction of the game. In July the president, D. W. McLean, spoke<sup>11</sup> of the great progress that the code was making in the North Island and revealed that it was intended to introduce the

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<sup>9</sup> Eric Bennett, *New Zealand Rugby League Annual 1933*, Auckland: publisher not given, 1933, p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> When interviewed by a reporter from *The Press*.

code to Canterbury by having the touring New South Wales team play a game in Christchurch so that the public could judge the merits of league. Discussions were taking place amongst some of Canterbury's finest footballers and a committee was formed to try and establish the new code. A meeting was held on 17 July at which the first subscriptions were collected, 'one enthusiast, Mr Rolton, giving five pounds, which bespoke enthusiasm'.<sup>12</sup> These meetings were attended mainly by young footballers who were disillusioned by the old style of football and the way in which the Rugby Union was administered. Most of them had been Canterbury rugby union representatives and though not all were convinced that it was time for a change, the majority were impressed by the potential of the streamlined rules of league and were determined to press ahead.<sup>13</sup>

A public meeting held on 26 July to launch league attracted a good number of senior footballers and a greater number of supporters. D.W. McLean was back to address the meeting and claimed that union had been losing players in Canterbury, to soccer and hockey for the past decade as old and conservative thinking had lessened its appeal. A motion was proposed that

this meeting is of the opinion that the time is now opportune for a material change in the game and control of Rugby football, and, further, we are convinced that by the adoption of the League game it will be a step in the direction of effecting a long-looked-for change.<sup>14</sup>

The motion was carried, there being only a few 'noes', but many abstentions. The meeting then proceeded to form the Canterbury Rugby League and elect officers, with Dr Henry Thomas Joynt Thacker as president. An offer from the Canterbury Agricultural and Pastoral Association to lease the Show Grounds, at a nominal rent, was accepted.<sup>15</sup> The League confined itself to staging

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<sup>12</sup>Bennett,, p. 129.

<sup>13</sup>John Coffey, *Canterbury XIII: A Rugby League History*, Christchurch: publisher not given, 1987, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup>Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, p.24.

<sup>15</sup>Bennett, pp. 127-135.

representative matches during its first season.

Dr. Thacker was a prominent figure in Christchurch having been in private practice there since 1898. He had been a prominent rugby player, representing Canterbury in 1889 and 1891 before going to Edinburgh to study medicine where he also gained a rugby blue. He was active in community life being president of the South Island Brass Bands' Association, a rowing administrator, and a supporter of both hockey and cricket. He was a Liberal MP for Christchurch East from 1914 to 1922 and was Mayor of Christchurch in 1919.<sup>16</sup>

The major objectives of the Canterbury Rugby League in 1913 were to secure grounds and to encourage the formation of clubs so that a club championship competition could be played. Clubs were formed early in the year, the first being Addington, formed at a meeting held at the local Oddfellows Hall on 31 January. The meeting was chaired by Councillor J. McCullough who, as an old footballer and resident of the district, was 'agreeably surprised to notice the large number of supporters present'. He said that 'though he had little knowledge of Rugby League...he had witnessed one of Canterbury's home matches in 1912 and considered it had many superior attractions'.<sup>17</sup> Unlike Thacker who was an 'establishment' figure, unusual in rugby league, McCullough was another example of the working-class involvement in the game. He emigrated from Belfast in 1880 when 20 years old. He settled in Christchurch in 1882 where he worked as a tinsmith at the Addington railway workshops. A strong trade unionist and socialist he was a founder of the Christchurch Socialist Church in 1896 and of the Canterbury Fabian Society in 1908. He was secretary of the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council 1898 and became president in 1901. In 1907 he became the workers representative in the Court of Arbitration.<sup>18</sup> Others to address the meeting were W.S.E Moyle, the Canterbury League secretary,

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<sup>16</sup>Rice, Geoffrey W. 'Thacker, Henry Thomas Joynt 1870 - 1939'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007. URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

<sup>17</sup>Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, p. 28.

<sup>18</sup>Nolan, Melonie, 'McCullough, John Alexander 1860 -1947'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*

A.R. Brunsdon, the League selector and Walter Johnston, 'a former president of the Addington Rugby [Union] Club and a Rugby enthusiast who said he was sure League had come to stay in the area'.<sup>19</sup> Other clubs quickly followed. The Sydenham club was formed on 7 February at a meeting held in the Club Hotel with Labour Councillor F. Burgoyne in the chair. He said he had not taken any active interest in football for years, but as a representative for the district would assist any movement to further the interests of the borough. The Linwood club was formed on 12 March and two nights later Christchurch's fourth club, St Albans, was formed, Councillor A. Williams chairing the meeting at which it was launched.<sup>20</sup> Wide support for the League, including that from a part of the middle-class establishment, is indicated by the fact that both city councillors and ex-rugby union officials were active in the formation of the clubs. All four clubs were located in the inner, working-class, suburbs of Christchurch and each had recruited enough players to field both senior and junior teams. By May 1913 the Canterbury League had over 200 members and was running a four-team senior and a four-team junior competition, it had also introduced an insurance scheme for players costing them 6d per game.<sup>21</sup> The advent of eight teams playing league in the 1913 season had no noticeable effect on other sports, except possibly Australian rules, which ceased to be played, so the game, as in Auckland, seemed to be finding its own constituency.

The game made further progress in 1914 with two new clubs being formed, whilst a third-grade competition was launched to cater to the needs of younger players. The number of league teams doubled from 8 to 16 with the formation of the two new clubs, City and Federal. City joined the senior ranks, making a five-team competition, whilst Federal played in the junior competition, which now comprised six teams. There were also five teams in the newly formed third-grade competition. The idea of the City club was to have a club separate from the four suburban clubs, presumably to cater to

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<sup>19</sup> Coffey, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> Coffey, pp. 28-30.

<sup>21</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 10 May 1913 .

players from other parts of the city.

No league was played in Wellington city during the 1911 season, but proponents of the game continued with their efforts to establish it and a Wellington Rugby League was admitted to provisional membership of the New Zealand Rugby League on Friday 12 May. This move would appear to have been somewhat premature as, on Friday 6 October, the Council empowered T. Cunningham to convene a meeting 'for the forming of a Rugby League in Wellington'.<sup>22</sup> This meeting resulted in a committee of players being elected to establish the game in the city. The committee was active over the summer months in laying the foundations to enable this to take place. Grounds were secured, representative games arranged and prominent personalities recruited to support the game. It was emphasised that 'there was no idea of entering the professional ranks, but members of travelling teams would receive 10s a day for loss of time'.<sup>23</sup>

The New Zealand League helped the launching of league in Wellington in the 1912 season by promising financial backing and a visit from the New South Wales touring team. It also sent George Gillett, its recently appointed national organiser, to assist with the launch. Gillett had toured Britain with the 1905 union All Blacks and was to have been a member of Baskerville's rebel 1908 All Blacks, but pulled out at the last moment having received an offer of £70 to stay with rugby union.\* He finally went over to league in 1911 and toured Australia with the New Zealand national team. In the same year he became one of the four New Zealand players in the Australasian team that toured Britain the same year. An advertisement appeared in the Wellington newspapers on Friday 10 May headed 'Northern Rugby League' and inviting applications from active players to take part in senior, junior, third and fourth grade competitions. All applications were to be kept strictly confidential until the League had formed clubs. Applicants were asked to write to M. J. Reardon at the Wellington Trades Hall.<sup>24</sup> Reardon was the secretary of the

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<sup>22</sup> Bennett, p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 October 1911, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Evening Post*, 10 May 1912, p. 8.

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\* Mike Latham, 'Gold Standard', *Rugby League World*, 318, September 2007, p. 52.

General Labourers Union and obviously a person of some prominence in working-class circles who could be trusted to maintain the confidentiality of would-be players. In an interview Reardon said that on a recent trip to New Plymouth and Napier he had been asked by officials there to interest himself in the game. On his return to Wellington he had offered his services to the local officials and they now had overcome the grounds problem sufficiently to start recruiting players. His name was a guarantee that player confidentiality would be respected until clubs had been formed. He stressed that the league was not out to make money and players would be playing solely for the love of the game. The chance to be selected to play against Australian and English national teams were the only inducements offered.<sup>25</sup>

[see Appendix One]

Following these moves the Wellington Rugby League was formally established at a meeting held on Thursday 23 May 1912 at the Trades Hall. The meeting was advertised in the local newspapers, addressed to footballers 'interested in the formation of a Provincial League to supervise the playing of the Northern Union game in Wellington province'. The League, it was stated, had 'secured suitable grounds in and about Wellington' and the point was emphasised 'that the mere attendance of Rugby players at the meeting... will entail no penalty of disqualification'.<sup>26</sup> About 75 footballers and supporters, including 'many prominent Rugby Union players', attended the meeting, which was addressed by George Gillett. He gave an assurance that 'all necessary assistance in placing the game on a sound footing in Wellington would be forthcoming'.

A motion to form a League was carried unanimously and officers were elected, including T.M. Wilford,<sup>27</sup> Liberal, and A.H. Hindmarsh, Labour, two local MPs, amongst the vice-presidents. It was intended to start a club competition as soon as possible and a number of representative games had

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<sup>25</sup> *Evening Post*, 10 May 1912, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Evening Post*, 22 May 1912, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Mr. Wilford was also patron of the NZ Ladies Hockey Association, information provided by Geoff Watson.

already been arranged, including one against the touring New South Wales team. The meeting was informed that a club had been formed in Petone, that one was being formed in Lower Hutt, and that Bert King and William Wilson had undertaken to form clubs in the city.

Two representative games were played at the beginning of June and four clubs were formed, Athletic and Newtown in Wellington, and Petone and Hutt in the Hutt Valley. Despite the two Wellington clubs having to play on an unsatisfactory ground, the first season of club football was successful, with over 100 men playing. The Wellington Rugby League continued to prosper during the 1913 season, although grounds problems continued to retard its progress. The same four clubs, Athletic, Newtown, Petone and Hutt comprised the senior competition, but a junior competition was also launched for the first time. City was a new club, only formed at the beginning of May, which decided that it would only field a junior team in its first season.

League, now in its third season, was expected to make further progress during 1914, but exceptionally bad weather, continuing ground problems, transportation difficulties, and the outbreak of war severely disrupted the season. Petone, Hutt and two city clubs, Newtown and Suburbs, made up the senior competition. The City club did not return for a second season, probably becoming part of the new Suburbs club and Athletic made only a brief appearance, with its junior team playing just one game. This left only one junior team, from the Suburbs club, in the city. Together with two Petone teams and two Hutt teams, it constituted a five-team junior competition.

Meanwhile, league enthusiasts in Dunedin were attempting to revive the game there. A recurring theme in the attempts to introduce league in Dunedin was the non-availability of grounds. Grounds were at a premium in a hilly city such as Dunedin and established sports were not prepared to relinquish their existing rights to a new sport. So long as league promoters could not obtain grounds, would-be league players would not commit to the new sport, and without players league's case for being allotted grounds was slim. Despite this stalemate, league promoters were active, albeit unsuccessful, throughout this period.

The 1910 match against the Auckland touring team did not lead to any league being played in Dunedin during the 1911 season, but efforts by local enthusiasts to start the game continued during the next three seasons. These activities were worrying enough to union supporters to evoke responses belittling the chances of the game in Dunedin. In August 1912 rugby columnists in the Dunedin press were writing of 'another threat of the introduction of the Northern Union code', but held out little hope for success in Dunedin where the majority were 'solid and loyal to the Rugby game'.<sup>28</sup> '[E]ven if certain of our union players desired a change they would hesitate to leave the security of Rugby as controlled and played in Dunedin to join forces in a code at the outset so precarious as the Northern Union must inevitably be'.<sup>29</sup> The 'threat' arose from the efforts of league supporters to secure a ground so that the touring New South Wales team could play an exhibition match in Dunedin.<sup>30</sup> In 1913, as in 1912, there were rumours of league being started. A rugby union columnist wrote that it was

probably consequent on the statement that a League game is to be played in Dunedin some time this season between an Australian and a New Zealand team. Prominent players are alleged to have been approached; but these in their wisdom are silent, and complete ignorance of the position leaves them nothing to say. I believe a section would "go over" for no better reason than that it was a novelty, and not because they thought it was a better game. Few Northern Union converts have been converted by the proof that the game is better. Some are playing Northern Union football because they have been debarred from playing Rugby, others are playing the rival code because it is a new game: others, again, in the hope of getting something out of it. Few, I should say, are playing because they think it is a better game than Rugby.<sup>31</sup>

In 1914 the rugby league correspondent of the *New Zealand Herald* wrote

there are many League enthusiasts in Dunedin and if it were possible to secure a ground then the game would undoubtedly soon be on a sound footing in the Southern City. One of its chief Dunedin supporters is Mr. D. Bannatyne who in a letter to the New Zealand Council during the week asked that every effort should be made to

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<sup>28</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 8 Aug 1912, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 10 Aug 1912, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 29 Aug 1912, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 26 June 1913, p. 10.

ensure the appearance of the British team in Dunedin. "It would be the chance of our lives to get the game going here" said Mr. Bannatyne.<sup>32</sup>

It would seem that there was interest in playing league in Dunedin but players were not prepared to commit themselves unless a ground could be guaranteed. As will be discussed later,<sup>33</sup> this could not be done, despite the New Zealand League being prepared to find over £275 in an attempt to secure the lease on the Caledonian Ground. So Dunedin remained the only metropolitan centre in which league was not played, as most of the sports grounds were controlled by the rugby union authorities who refused to allow access to league.

### **Representative Games and Crowds**

Representative matches had been the means by which league had been introduced into Auckland in 1908 and had continued to play a big part in the growth of the game there. The first attempt to introduce league to Wellington in 1908 had been made through representative matches, and the second, this time successful, attempt in 1912 saw representative matches being the first games played. 1912, the first year of league in Christchurch, saw only representative games played, but the interest generated led to the successful launch of club competitions the following year.

Vincent, writing of late nineteenth century Canterbury, argues that, even though provincial government had been abolished, provincial loyalties remained strong throughout most of the country and that 'contests between representative sports teams...[were seen as a]...means of maintaining provincial identity and expressing civil pride'.<sup>34</sup> These loyalties were still strong in the twentieth century and would account for the popularity of representative football. Certainly representative matches, both inter-

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<sup>32</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 30 May 1914, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> See section **Ground Problems** later in chapter.

<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey T. Vincent, 'To Uphold the Honour of the Province: Football in Canterbury c. 1854-c. 1890', in *Tackling Rugby Myths: Rugby and New Zealand Society 1854-2004*, Otago: Otago University Press, 2005, p. 18.

provincial and international, played a big part in raising the profile of league in the three cities, both by creating public interest and by attracting large numbers of spectators. But they were also important as a means of generating income for both the provincial leagues and the New Zealand League.

1911 was the only season in which no international team toured the country, but Auckland entertained representative teams from four provinces, plus a Maori team from Hawkes Bay. All except the Maori team played before big crowds. [see table 2] The Maori game was played on the North Shore and spectators disliked having to take the ferry across the harbour. It was also the last game of the season, following four representative games played on the previous five weekends at Victoria Park in central Auckland, so it was little wonder that only a few hundred were present at the Takapuna Racecourse to see it. The four matches at Victoria Park attracted 18,000 spectators in total and, as the Auckland League had Council permission to charge admission, considerable income would have been generated.

Two games were reported to have been played in 1911 by a 'Wellington representative team', but were in fact played by the representative team of the newly formed Wanganui Rugby League. Despite the decision of the NZRFL Council to admit a Wellington Rugby League to provisional membership in May, the existence of a League in Wellington is doubtful, which poses the question as to whose idea it was to claim the Wanganui team was a Wellington representative team.<sup>35</sup> The matches were against Auckland and Taranaki representative sides and advertised in both centres as being against the Wellington representative team. In Auckland the match was promoted as being a challenge for the Northern Union Cup, but in Wanganui it was reported as being for the 'Grand Challenge Shield'.<sup>36</sup> The reason for this confusion lies in the conditions set down by the English Northern Rugby Union when it presented a cup to the NZRFL at the end of

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<sup>35</sup> A photograph of the Wanganui representative team captioned the 'Wellington Provincial Representative Team' was recently sold at auction in Wanganui.

<sup>36</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle*, 2 August 1911, p. 8.

## TABLE 2

### AUCKLAND REPRESENTATIVE RUGBY LEAGUE MATCHES 1911-1914

	DATE	RESULT	VENUE	ATTENDANCE	GATE
1911	Saturday 3 August	Auckland 16 'Wellington' 8	Victoria Park	4,000	
	Saturday 19 August	Auckland 17 Hawkes Bay 13	Victoria Park	3,000	
	Saturday 26 August	Auckland 36 Nelson 12	Victoria Park	5,000	
	Saturday 2 September	Auckland 25 Taranaki 15	Victoria Park	6,000	
	Saturday 9 September	Auckland 22 Hawkes Bay Maori 10	Takapuna Racecourse	a few hundred	
1912	Saturday 15 June	Auckland 16 New Zealand Reps 38		5,000	
	Saturday 27 July	Auckland 'B' 6 Thames 12			
		Auckland 26 Taranaki 8	Victoria Park	4,000	
	Saturday 10 August	Auckland 'B' 20 Waikato 12	Hamilton		
		Auckland 16 Wellington 0	Victoria Park	7,000	
	Saturday 17 August	Auckland 41 Waikato 0	Eden Park		
	Saturday 24 August	Auckland 30 Auckland Maori 6	Eden Park		
	Saturday 31 August	Auckland 10 New South Wales 3	Victoria Park	10,000	
	Saturday 7 September	Auckland 'B' 27 Goldfields 14	The Domain		
	Saturday 21 September	Auckland 2 New South Wales 25	The Domain	9,000	
1913	Saturday 28 June	Auckland 10 Counties 8	Victoria Park	3,000	£117
	Saturday 12 July	Auckland 24 Taranaki 8	Victoria Park	5,000	£200
	Saturday 26 July	Auckland 34 Hawkes Bay 7	Victoria Park	5-6,000	
	Saturday 2 August	Auckland 16 Nelson 2	Victoria Park	3,000	
	Saturday 9 August	Auckland 48 Canterbury 12	Victoria Park	6-7,000	£229/15/-
	Saturday 23 August	Auckland 12 Wellington 11	Victoria Park	8,000	
	Saturday 30 August	Auckland 2 New South Wales 27	The Domain	15,000	£560
	Saturday 25 July	Auckland 12 England 34	The Domain	over 18,000	£649/2/-
1914	Saturday 15 August	Auckland 35 Taranaki 4	Victoria Park	4,000	£110
	Saturday 22 August	Auckland 10 Wellington 6	Victoria Park	5,000	£200

its 1910 tour to New Zealand. The Northern Union Cup was to be for competition between provincial representative teams. Wanganui, being only a part of the Wellington Province, could not challenge Auckland for the Cup, but Wellington could. Whose idea it was to promote the game as a challenge for the Northern Union Cup by a Wellington Provincial team, and whether it was done in the hope of boosting the attendance, is not known. Similarly one wonders why the Taranaki League chose to promote the match with Wanganui as being against a Wellington Provincial team when it could not have been a challenge for the NU Cup as that was held by Auckland. The two matches were barely mentioned in the Wellington press, just small items giving the results that were picked up from the Auckland and Taranaki press. This episode does demonstrate, though, that provincial loyalties remained strong, despite provinces having long been abolished.

Representative football played an important part in the launching of league in both Christchurch and Wellington, with a Canterbury representative team playing three games in 1912 to launch the game in Christchurch, and a Wellington representative team playing eight games in the capital's first season of league. [see table 3] Meanwhile Auckland played eight senior and three junior representative games as well as hosting the New Zealand versus New South Wales match, the first test match between the two teams on home soil.[see table 2] All-in-all a busy season of representative football for all three provinces.

Wellington's first full season of league was launched in 1912 by two representative matches and, following the club championship rounds, a further six representative matches were played towards the end of the season. Only one, against the New South Wales tourists, was a home game. There was a three-match northern tour, playing Auckland, Rotorua and Wanganui, and two trips to the South Island to play Canterbury and Marlborough. The League was making a big effort to attract rugby union converts with this extensive representative programme and was helped by the New Zealand League scheduling a match against New South Wales for the capital. This was the undoubted highlight of Wellington's first season of league. For it the League secured the use of Newtown Park and there was

**TABLE 3**

**WELLINGTON REPRESENTATIVE RUGBY LEAGUE MATCHES 1912-1914**

	DATE	RESULT	VENUE	GATE
1912	Monday 3 June	Wellington 37 Hawkes Bay 24	Anderson Park	1,000
	Saturday 8 June	Wellington 19 Nelson 6	Duppa Street	a 'handful'
	Saturday 3 August	Wellington 24 Rotorua 10	Rotorua	
	Saturday 10 August	Wellington 0 Auckland 16	Auckland	
	Saturday 17 August	Wellington 14 Wanganui 14	Wanganui	
	Saturday 24 August	Wellington 13 New South Wales 45	Newtown Park	
	Saturday 7 September	Wellington 5 Canterbury 4	Christchurch	
	Saturday 5 October	Wellington 8 Marlborough 8	Blenheim	
1913	Saturday 16 August	Wellington 26 Canterbury 8	Newtown Park	200
	Saturday 23 August	Wellington 11 Auckland 12	Auckland	
	Saturday 6 September	Wellington 22 Wanganui 8	Palmerston North	
	Saturday 13 September	Wellington 18 New South Wales 34	Newtown Park	5,000
	Saturday 27 September	Wellington 33 Auckland 18	Newtown Park	5,000
	1914	Wednesday 3 June	Wellington 33 Hawkes Bay 6	Napier
Saturday 11 July		Wellington 7 England 14	Newtown Park	6-7,000
Saturday 25 July		Wellington 3 Canterbury 12	Christchurch	
		Wellington 6 Canterbury 9 (Juniors)	Christchurch	
Saturday 8 August		Wellington 62 Hawkes Bay 12	Basin Reserve	over 1,000
Saturday 22 August		Wellington 6 Auckland 10	Auckland	

**CANTERBURY REPRESENTATIVE RUGBY LEAGUE MATCHES 1912-1914**

	DATE	RESULT	VENUE	GATE
1912	Saturday 7 September	Canterbury 4 Wellington 5	Showgrounds	5,000
	Saturday 14 September	Canterbury 15 New South Wales 28	Showgrounds	5,000
	Saturday 21 September	Canterbury 10 Hawkes Bay 8	Napier	
1913	Saturday 5 July	Canterbury 5 New Zealand Repls 32	Showgrounds	'excellent'
	Saturday 9 August	Canterbury 12 Auckland 48	Auckland	
	Saturday 16 August	Canterbury 8 Wellington 26	Wellington	
	Saturday 23 August	Canterbury 5 New South Wales 45	Showgrounds	'excellent'
	1914	Saturday 25 July	Canterbury 3 Wellington 13	Showgrounds
		Canterbury 6 Wellington 9 (Juniors)		
Saturday 1 August		Canterbury 25 Hawkes Bay 8	Showgrounds	

considerable interest in the game, which resulted in an easy victory for the New South Welshmen by 45 points to 13. The League's advertisements for the match said

EVERY TIME the public get an opportunity to see the LEAGUE GAME properly played more enthusiasts are won over  
NEW SOUTH WALES PLAYERS are admittedly the best exponents of the RUGBY LEAGUE GAME in the Southern hemisphere.  
Watch the match against Wellington at NEWTOWN PARK  
TOMORROW SATURDAY and judge for yourselves.<sup>37</sup>

The Mayor of Wellington gave the New South Wales team a civic reception and M. J. Reardon, president of the Wellington League, arranged for 6,000 free tickets to be sent to Wellington schoolmasters for distribution amongst their students.<sup>38</sup> The rugby columnist of the *Evening Post* wrote a long critique of the game, conceding that it gave many footballers food for thought. Most spectators, he noted, seemed pleased with the game, which he had to concede was fast, clean and open due to the alterations to the old rugby rules. He gave several reasons for the superiority of the league game: the reduction in the number of players, the absence of line-outs, the quicker scrum, the elimination of the direct kick to touch, and the passing movements of the forwards. He criticised the conservatism of the Rugby Union for ignoring the rule changes introduced in league and warned that the Union would have to adopt similar rule changes to retain spectator interest. He ended by saying that the best way for the Rugby Union to combat the 'professional game' was to offer the public an equally attractive game.<sup>39</sup> [see Appendix Two] Both the involvement of the Mayor and the long report by the rugby union columnist show the willingness of the middle-class establishment to be associated with league if international matches were involved, and hence the importance of international matches in legitimising league.

Rugby league was launched in Christchurch in 1912 when a

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<sup>37</sup> *Evening Post*, 23 August 1912, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Evening Post*, 24 August 1912, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> *Evening Post*, 31 August 1912, p. 14.

representative team played matches against Wellington, New South Wales, and Hawkes Bay. A squad of 18 players was named by the newly formed Canterbury Rugby League to train for these matches, to be played in September. Twelve of the squad had been members of the committee responsible for starting the game, which further illustrates the point that players were eager to take an active role in its establishment.

Canterbury made 'a very auspicious debut' in their first game against Wellington before a very large crowd of about 5,000, 'a lot of them no doubt, attending out of curiosity, and despite the cold easterly, they seemed to thoroughly enjoy the new game'. The report by the *Christchurch Star* rugby union columnist broadly echoed the sentiments of his counterpart in Wellington's *Evening Post*. He admitted that the league game had distinct advantages over union. He was particularly impressed by the elimination of the dull, forward slogging and tussling so prominent in union and the absence of line-outs. He was also impressed that despite both teams lacking experience of the league game there was hardly a dull moment in the match and play was fast and exciting. He felt that, whilst the match provided an excellent afternoon's entertainment, if played by two experienced teams, rugby league would provide exhilarating football.<sup>40</sup> [see Appendix Three] Both considered league superior to the established rugby union game both for players and spectators.

The New Zealand League fulfilled its promise to help launch the league game in Christchurch by having the New South Wales tourists play against Canterbury there in 1912. The New South Welshmen arrived in Christchurch on the Friday and were welcomed by Dr Thacker, at the Royal Hotel, before a large gathering of citizens. He said that the visitors were 'inaugurating a new era of sport in Canterbury'. Councillor A. S. Taylor, on behalf of the City Council, said that he 'believed that the match tomorrow would show that League football was worthy of support. This is a further example of the willingness of the establishment to be associated with international league. The match attracted another crowd of around 5,000 spectators to the Show

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<sup>40</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 7 September 1912, p. 7.

Grounds, where the two teams provided 'a fine spectacular display of football'. The visitors, as expected, proved too good for the local team,

but the Canterbury men played surprisingly well and it was not until the final stages of the match that their condition gave out and they became an easy mark for the fleet, clever and well-trained men from Sydney. The play was full of exciting incident, and at times very fast, and the public were continually simmering with excitement, while now and again enthusiastic cheering and applause greeted some fine piece of play.<sup>41</sup>

Canterbury only trailed by one point at half-time but tired in the second half to lose by 28 points to 15. The third match, against Hawkes Bay at Napier, resulted in Canterbury's first league victory by the narrow margin of 10 points to 8.

Auckland opened its 1912 representative season with a match against the New Zealand team about to tour Australia and, as a curtain-raiser, an Auckland 'B' team played a team from the newly formed Thames Rugby League. This was the first of five games against teams from districts within Auckland province, played to encourage league outside Auckland city. The 'B' team travelled to Hamilton to play a Waikato side and also played a Goldfields team as a curtain-raiser to the New Zealand versus New South Wales test match at the end of the season. The Waikato team also came to Auckland to play the full Auckland team, losing comprehensively by 41 points to 0. Taranaki and Wellington were the other provincial teams to play in Auckland, whilst a Maori versus Pakeha match was played, as it had been noted that 'a number of natives play the league game - the fast open game suits them - and they could put a strong combination on the field'.<sup>42</sup>

The representative games all attracted large crowds of up to 7,000, but the games against New South Wales attracted even greater numbers. They were played at the end of the season and both excited considerable enthusiasm. 'Long before two o'clock all the available seating accommodation at Victoria Park was taken up, and when play commenced at 3 o'clock there

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<sup>41</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 1912, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 17 July 1912, p. 5.

were fully 10,000 people present'.<sup>43</sup> The game was marred by rough play when Auckland took the lead and the New South Wales players commenced to 'play-the-man', culminating in the dismissal of a New South Wales player. Auckland emerged winner by 10 points to 3, giving New South Wales the only defeat of their tour.<sup>44</sup> The following week an even greater crowd, estimated at 20,000, turned out on the Domain to watch the test match against the New Zealand team. Auckland's second match against New South Wales was played two weeks later before 9,000 spectators. 'Heavy showers after the interval made it difficult for players to keep their feet and the ball became very slippery hindering back play of both teams', but there was no repetition of the rough play that had marred the first meeting and Auckland were soundly beaten by 25 points to 2.<sup>45</sup>

During the 1913 season the New Zealand League continued its policy of giving active support to the Wellington and Canterbury Leagues by scheduling attractive representative fixtures in both centres as well as in Auckland. Auckland entertained six provincial teams and the New South Wales tourists, as well as hosting one of the test matches against the tourists. Both Wellington and Canterbury travelled to play their provincial fixtures, but each played the tourists at home whilst Wellington also hosted the second test match and Canterbury played the New Zealand representative team in a match in Christchurch.

Auckland opened a busy 1913 representative season with a narrow win over a Counties team at Victoria Park before a crowd of 3,000, who paid £117 at the gates. The Counties team was selected from players in the Thames, Goldfields, Rotorua, Waikato and Hamilton Leagues.<sup>46</sup> Over the next ten weeks the Auckland representative team played matches against representative sides from Taranaki, Hawkes Bay, Nelson, Canterbury, Wellington and the touring New South Wales team. These matches attracted

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<sup>43</sup>New Zealand Herald, 2 September 1912, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 2 September 1912, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 23 September 1912, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 28 June 1913, p. 4.

large crowds despite the miserable weather. Over 5,000 turned up at Victoria Park on a cold, bleak day with frequent heavy showers, to see Auckland beat Taranaki, and paid £200 at the gates.<sup>47</sup> Two weeks later between 5 and 6,000 people were at Victoria Park, defying the rain and heavy showers that fell throughout the game, to see another Auckland victory, this time over Hawkes Bay.<sup>48</sup> Then followed victory over Nelson, again at Victoria Park and again with a heavy downpour throughout most of the game. Despite the conditions, there were 3,000 at the game.<sup>49</sup> The weather improved for the next game against Canterbury and a crowd of nearly 7,000 saw another Auckland victory and paid £229/15/- at the gates.<sup>50</sup> Crowds kept increasing and there were 8,000 spectators for the next game at Victoria Park, which resulted in another victory for Auckland, this time over Wellington. The other rugby code attracted a crowd of 5,000 at Alexandra Park for its club championship match.<sup>51</sup> For Auckland's final match of the season the opposition was provided by the New South Wales representative team and the game was played on the Auckland Domain. A huge crowd of close to 15,000 paid £560 to watch Auckland suffer its first defeat of the season. An even larger crowd turned out the following Saturday for the test match also played on the Domain. Over 18,000 spectators turned out to watch New South Wales beat the New Zealand team and paid £627 at the gates. Such attendances illustrated not just the attraction of international football, but also the popularity of the league game.

Both Wellington and Canterbury had fewer representative games than Auckland in the 1913 season, but both centres were once again allocated international fixtures by the New Zealand League. Canterbury's first game was against the 'League All Black football team', which had just returned

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<sup>47</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 14 July 1913, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 28 July 1913, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 August 1913, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 August 1913, p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 25 August 1913, p. 9.

from a tour of New South Wales and Queensland. Three local players, Mitchell, Shadbolt and Auld, had been on tour with the "All Black" team, and Shadbolt and Auld were to play for Canterbury.<sup>52</sup> The game was played in showery weather and with a strong south-west breeze blowing, but the ground was in good order and the match was witnessed by 'an excellent attendance of the public, the big grandstand being packed'.<sup>53</sup> Then followed a short North Island tour to play Auckland and Wellington and the final match of the season against the New South Wales tourists. They arrived in the city on Friday to a hearty welcome by league followers and were given a formal reception at the City Hotel. The next day they proved much too powerful for the Canterbury team at the Show Grounds where, despite the dull cold day with a fresh easterly blowing, and with slight rain falling throughout the second half, there was an excellent attendance to see Canterbury overwhelmed by the New South Welshmen. The game could be summed up in a few words

The local men were altogether too slow for the fleet Sydneysiders. They also showed a decided lack of initiative, their fielding was poor and they were not sufficiently versed in the finer points of the game to take advantage of their opponents' mistakes, or to anticipate their clever, snappy movements.<sup>54</sup>

Wellington's 1913 representative season got off to a sorry start at Newtown Park, where Canterbury were the visitors. The League could not match the expenditure of the Rugby Union on advertising. Friday's newspapers carried just a small advertisement for the league game whilst a big two-column advertisement appeared promoting the union representative game against Marlborough at Athletic Park. The League had advertised special trams from all parts of the city, but they were hardly needed as bad weather discouraged would be spectators. The rain and mud made the ball heavy 'but the players threw it about nevertheless'. It said much for 'the enthusiasm of League followers that some 200 people watched the match

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<sup>52</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 3 July 1913.

<sup>53</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 5 July 1913, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 23 August 1913.

from the shelterless banks of the Park'.<sup>55</sup> Wellington then travelled to Auckland to challenge for the Northern Union Cup and were narrowly defeated. A practice game, Representatives against all-comers, to have been played at Newtown Park, had to be 'postponed as sufficient players failed to put in an appearance'.<sup>56</sup> This suggests a lack of commitment on the part of some players. But the following Saturday the representative team played the Wanganui representative team in Palmerston North in a match to help promote the game, which had just been started in that city.

The two 'big' matches of the season took place in September when Wellington played New South Wales at Newtown Park and then the New Zealand representative side took on New South Wales at the same venue. The Wellington League made a big effort to promote its game against New South Wales. As in the previous season, 6,000 complimentary tickets were distributed to schoolchildren, showing a commitment by the League to promoting the game amongst schoolboys. As there were only about 9,000, overwhelmingly middle-class, secondary school pupils nationwide at this time,<sup>57</sup> nearly all of the tickets must have gone to primary schools, suggesting that the League was looking to attract children from working-class families. Also, the Mayor was approached to give the visitors a civic reception.<sup>58</sup> A good crowd of about 5,000 turned out in ideal weather to watch. A junior representative trial was played as a curtainraiser. The attendance was not as good as the League had hoped for as 'probably many people put off their visit [to Newtown Park] till the match against New Zealand', which took place the following Saturday. It was noted that 'amongst the most interested spectators were some two thousand schoolboys who watched the play with a keen appreciation of its good points'.<sup>59</sup> The following

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<sup>55</sup> *Evening Post*, 18 August 1913, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Evening Post*, 1 September 1913, p.4.

<sup>57</sup> Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, pp. 130, 154.

<sup>58</sup> *Evening Post*, 9 September 1913, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> *Evening Post*, 20 September 1913, p.14.

week slightly more spectators, between 6 and 7 thousand, saw New South Wales record an easy victory against New Zealand. The last match of the season, again at Newtown Park, attracted another good crowd of 5,000 spectators, who witnessed an easy victory for the locals over Auckland.

The outbreak of war in Europe on 4 August 1914 evoked a wave of patriotism in New Zealand, and Auckland sports officials, including league officials, felt that it was disloyal to those men who had enlisted to continue playing sports. With these sentiments in mind, the Auckland League decided to restrict the representative programme for the season to three home matches and to cancel a planned junior tour and the proposed southern tour to play games in Wanganui, Wellington, Nelson and Christchurch. This was much to the disappointment of the southern centres, which looked forward to a match against the Auckland team to boost the popularity of the game locally.<sup>60</sup>

The opening match of Auckland's abbreviated 1914 representative season was against the touring English Northern Union team.

Most unpropitious weather prevailed for the English team to play Auckland on Saturday [25 July]. Heavy rain fell in the morning and at intervals through the afternoon but this did not deter football enthusiasts from attending in large numbers and over 18,000 paid for admission at the Domain.<sup>61</sup>

The gate takings amounted to £649/2/-. The Auckland League's share was £209/19/6 and with expenses of £111 the League made a profit of £98/19/6. The team were given a Mayoral welcome and at an official reception, hosted by the New Zealand Rugby Football League, the manager, J. H. Houghton, spoke for the visitors and emphasised that in England there were more amateurs than professionals playing Northern Union football.<sup>62</sup> An even bigger crowd turned up at the Domain the following week, when, despite the showery weather, almost 20,000 spectators saw an evenly fought test match

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<sup>60</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 1914, p. 8.

<sup>61</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 27 July 1914, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 27 July 1914, p. 4.

narrowly won by England.<sup>63</sup> Auckland then entertained Taranaki and Wellington teams in challenges for the Northern Union Cup. The matches, played at Victoria Park, attracted crowds of 4,000 and 5,000 with gate takings of £110 and £200.

The importance of representative games in the success of league in Auckland was not just their crowd appeal, though they attracted many spectators, but the fact that the League's main source of income came from gate takings. Lacking a pay ground of its own, the League was forced to use city-owned public parks, and the Council was only prepared to allow admission charges to be made on a limited number of occasions. In order to maximise its income, the League saved the days on which it could charge admission for its representative fixtures, at which it expected the biggest crowds.

The war caused Canterbury, like Auckland, to cut short the representative part of the season. Proposed matches against Auckland and Taranaki were abandoned and only two senior and one junior game were played. A large hometown crowd at Addington Showgrounds witnessed a double-header in which both senior and junior representatives lost to Wellington but on the following Saturday Hawkes Bay were defeated. Wellington, on the other hand, despite having to cancel home matches against Canterbury and Manawatu, managed to play home-and-away fixtures against Hawkes Bay and travel to Christchurch and Auckland, but the highlight of the season was the hosting of the English touring team. The Wellington League took out big advertisements in the press to promote the match, played at Newtown Park.

The Match of the Year  
Come and see the Englishmen.  
Conquerors of the redoubtable Australians  
Come and see real football, played by  
the finest exponents of the league game.<sup>64</sup>

The match was under the patronage of their Excellencies Lord and Lady

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<sup>63</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 August 1914, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> *Evening Post*, 10 July 1914, p. 2.

Liverpool, admission was one shilling and special trains and tramcars were run to the ground. Following the match the League treasurer reported that total gate receipts had been £258/13/-. The City Council took £38/16/-, 15% of the gate, as its rental fee, League expenses were £5/14/- leaving a balance of £214/3/-. The English team's share of this was 65 percent leaving the Wellington League with a net profit £58/14/6.<sup>65</sup> There was a long, two-column report of the match which the English won by a surprisingly narrow margin of 14 points to 7. The match created a tremendous amount of interest and a crowd of between six and seven thousand were at Newtown Park to witness it. The crowd would have been much larger had the game not been played in drenching rain. Nonetheless distinguished guests his Excellency The Governor (the Earl of Liverpool), the Prime Minister (the Right Honourable W. F. Massey), and the Mayor of Wellington (Mr. J. P. Luke) occupied special seats and stayed throughout the match. Despite the weather, the match was thoroughly enjoyed by the spectators many of whom had never seen a league game before and the game appeared to have generated much interest in the code.<sup>66</sup> A month later, according to the *Evening Post*, a much smaller crowd of just over 1,000 paid one shilling admission to see Wellington secure an easy victory over Hawkes Bay at the Basin Reserve. The Wellington team included five locals who were also New Zealand representatives, an indication of the quality of the local players.

### **Players and Administrators**

The names of players and officials involved in Canterbury and Wellington league during the 1912 season were used to ascertain to what extent rugby league was a working-class game.

Twenty-seven members of the committee responsible for introducing league to Christchurch in 1912 have been identified, of whom seventeen, 63 percent, could be matched with entries on the 1911 electoral rolls or in Wise's Directory for 1911. Of these, ten were skilled workers, three were

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<sup>65</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 14 July 1914, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> *Evening Post*, 13 July 1914, p. 10.

unskilled workers, one was the secretary of the Stevedore's Union and there were three from the middle class. Whilst being too few in number for any definite conclusions to be drawn, the heavy involvement of working men and the minimal involvement of the middle classes is in line with the trend noted in other centres. Canterbury's first season of league consisted of three representative matches and eighteen players took part in one or more of the matches. The occupations of 13, 72 percent, of the players were found. There were no middle-class players, just one white-collar worker, whilst the rest comprised five skilled and seven unskilled workers. This indicates that league was a game that appealed primarily to workers, particularly the unskilled, but was shunned by middle-class players.

It was reported that a large number of league players were married men and that 'in last Saturday's senior games no fewer than fifteen married members were taking part'.<sup>67</sup> As there were four senior teams playing, this would suggest between a quarter and a third of players [29 percent] were married. This was apparently so unusual as to deserve special mention.<sup>68</sup> In its first three years the Canterbury Rugby League had become an established part of the Christchurch sporting scene, but where the league players came from is a mystery common to other centres. If the 200 league players recorded for the 1913 season were divided evenly between the two grades, there would be about 100 senior players. The names of 70 senior players have been found and of these only 14 were from senior rugby union, so, on a pro rata basis, it can be assumed that not more than 20 senior rugby union players changed codes. Even an unlikely mass conversion of Australian rules players could not account for the 'missing' players. No analysis has been undertaken of the origins of the 100 or so junior players, but it is hard to avoid the explanation that, as in Auckland, league created its own constituency of young men who had not previously played rugby football. Some might have been men deterred from playing union because of the violence commonly associated with the game, especially married men who

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<sup>67</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 24 May 1913, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 24 May 1913, p. 3.

**TABLE 4****PLAYER OCCUPATIONS - AUCKLAND, WELLINGTON AND CANTERBURY**

	<u>Total Players</u>	<u>Occupations Found</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Unskilled</u>	<u>Skilled</u>	<u>White Collar</u>	<u>Middle Class</u>
<b><u>Wellington</u></b>							
<b><u>Representative</u></b>							
<b><u>Players 1912</u></b>	34	13	38	9	4	0	0
<b><u>Wellington</u></b>							
<b><u>Club Players 1912</u></b>							
	84	26	31	15	9	1	1
<b><u>Canterbury</u></b>							
<b><u>Representative</u></b>							
<b><u>Players 1912</u></b>	18	13	72	7	5	1	0
<b><u>Auckland</u></b>							
<b><u>Representative</u></b>							
<b><u>Players 1908-09</u></b>	43	15	35	4	5	4	2
<b><u>Three City's Players</u></b>	179	68	38	35	23	6	3
<b><u>Totals</u></b>							

**OFFICIALS OCCUPATIONS-AUCKLAND, WELLINGTON AND CANTERBURY**

	<u>Total Officials</u>	<u>Occupations Found</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Unskilled</u>	<u>Skilled</u>	<u>White Collar</u>	<u>Middle Class</u>
<b><u>Wellington</u></b>							
<b><u>Officials 1912</u></b>							
	27	14	52	0	5	2	7
<b><u>Canterbury</u></b>							
<b><u>Officials 1912</u></b>							
	27	17	63	3	10	1	3
<b><u>Auckland</u></b>							
<b><u>Officials 1909-10</u></b>							
	33	19	58	4	3	4	8
<b><u>Three City's Official</u></b>	87	51	59	7	18	7	18
<b><u>Totals</u></b>							

would have liked to play rugby but considered the union game to be too dangerous compared with league.

The working-class nature of league is further illustrated in Wellington, where, as in Christchurch and Auckland, the great majority of players were workingmen. The occupations of 13 of the 34 representative players for 1912 were found, 38 percent, and all were workingmen, nine unskilled and four skilled. No middle-class players were identified. The situation was very similar at the club level, although the occupations of only 26 of the 84 club players identified could be found, 31 percent. Of the nine Athletic players whose occupations were found, nine were unskilled and two were skilled. Newtown had a mixture of three skilled and four unskilled. Petone had the only middle-class player found, a woolen mill manager, as well as the only white-collar worker, a clerk. Of its other players identified, four were skilled and three unskilled workers. Though the numbers are small the trend is obvious; nearly all league players were workers, very few were middle class. The occupational mix of officials presents a different composition. Of the 27 officials identified in the 1912 season, the occupations of 15, 56 percent, were found, seven were workers, seven were middle class and one was 'a well known cricketer'. The involvement of the liquor trade is evident in the four officials who were either hotel keepers or hotel managers. The working-class officials were either skilled or white-collar workers; there were no unskilled workers amongst the officials.

The question of where the Wellington league players came from also presents a problem. Of the 34 who played representative football during the 1912 season, 14 came from senior rugby union and six from junior rugby union, but this still leaves 14 unaccounted for. The situation is similar in club football, where 84 players have been identified from three of the four clubs. Only one club, Athletic, recruited a majority of its 30 players from union. Nineteen, 63 percent, were from union, leaving 11 unaccounted for. The other two clubs, Petone with 9 of its 28 players from union, and Newtown with 9 of 26 from union, had a much greater number unaccounted for, with only between 32 and 35 percent coming from union. Again it appears that league not only attracted union players, but also found support from men

who were not, for whatever reasons, involved with union, but to whom league appeared an attractive game.

If these results from Wellington and Christchurch are compared with figures from the early years of league in Auckland, some generalisations can be made. [see table 4] The percentage of players whose occupations were found is, with one exception, quite low, between 30 and 40 percent. Canterbury representative players were the exception, with the occupations of over 70 percent being found. But all exhibit a very similar pattern; most players were 'blue-collar' workers with the unskilled predominating. There were few white-collar workers, whilst middle-class players were a rarity.

The occupations of a much higher percentage of officials were found, nearly sixty percent, possibly due to the likelihood of their being older the players and possibly also a reflection on the more settled lifestyle of the middle classes, whilst workers, especially the unskilled, were probably more likely to be on the move in search of work. But there was still a strong working-class involvement in the administration of the game, almost twice as many as from the middle-class. White-collar workers also had a greater presence, equalling the unskilled, and together these two groups equalled the number of skilled workers. Unlike the situation with players, there was a strong middle-class element in the administration of the game, with nearly one in three officials being from the middle class.

### **Growth in Public Support: Auckland**

Representative matches attracted good crowds in all the cities, but spectator numbers at club matches were seldom reported and sufficient information from which to draw any conclusions is only available for Auckland.

Whilst representative matches had been popular with the Auckland public since they were first played in 1908, spectator numbers at club matches were slower to build up. During the 1911 season would-be spectators were reluctant to take a ferry across the harbour to watch rugby league at Takapuna. However, there was little improvement during the following season even though the League had secured the use of Eden Park:

inner-city spectators were reluctant to make the journey to this ground also. It was only in the next two seasons, 1913 and 1914, when the League used centrally located City Council grounds, close to where many workers lived, that spectator numbers at club matches began to surpass those at rugby union matches. Unfortunately for the League, Council policy only allowed admission to be charged on a limited number of days each season and the League tended to keep these days for representative matches. This meant that it could not benefit financially from the big increase in crowd numbers at club matches.

Unfavourable weather, with rain and a cold bleak wind, marked the opening of the 1913 rugby union season, with only 1,500 spectators at Alexandra Park, but there was a fairly large crowd at the Devonport Domain, across the harbour, for the rugby league.<sup>69</sup> Crowd numbers improved as the season advanced and two weeks later, on Saturday 24 May, both union and league attracted crowds of around 3,000 at Alexandra Park and Victoria Park respectively, despite weather conditions not being good.<sup>70</sup> The following week, for a change, there was magnificent weather, and 3,000 spectators were at Alexandra Park for the union and there was a very large crowd at Victoria Park for the league.<sup>71</sup> The League could not charge admission for its games at Victoria Park, but they were so popular that 'even if a charge were made for admission it is practically certain that the attendances would not suffer to any appreciable extent'.<sup>72</sup> By now league was attracting at least as many spectators as union. Support improved even more later in the season, when the League introduced a knock-out competition. This was well supported, with between 3 and 4,000 turning out to see championship leaders North Shore fail to score in losing by 17 points to Newton in the first semi-final and City beating Ponsonby by 14 points to seven in the second. The following week a crowd of nearly 4,000 saw City win the final by 25

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<sup>69</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 12 May 1913, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 26 May 1913, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 2 June 1913, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 4 June 1913, p. 9.

points to 5 over Newton. The League's finances would have benefited considerably had it been able to charge admission to these games, but it had to be content with taking a collection in aid of players injured during the season.<sup>73</sup>

Early in the season an on field incident precipitated a trial of strength between the Auckland and the New Zealand Leagues. The captain of the North Shore senior team appeared at the management committee meeting of the Auckland League on Wednesday 28 May and accused Savory, a Ponsonby player, of dirty play in the match against his team the previous Saturday. The committee decided that Savory was guilty of the charges made and disqualified him for life. Savory, not unnaturally, was upset at such a harsh penalty and appealed against the sentence to the New Zealand League. This was the beginning of a dispute that was to drag on throughout the season, escalate into a trial of strength between the executives of the Auckland and New Zealand Leagues and threaten to have the Auckland League break away from the national body.

At Savory's appeal it was revealed that the incident took place when Savory, who was dribbling the ball, kicked a North Shore player who had dived on the ball at his feet. The incident was seen by the referee and two linesmen, but no action was taken and play continued. The referee had considered the kick a pure accident, which led the New Zealand League to decide that the penalty was too severe and directed the Auckland League to retry the case, considering only the evidence of the match officials. The Auckland League executive now had the opportunity to hear the evidence of the match officials and clear Savory of the charge or at least impose a lighter penalty, but refused to retry the case. The New Zealand League then ruled that on the basis of the evidence of the match officials Savory was not guilty of dirty play and ordered the Auckland League to reinstate him. The Auckland League refused and in October was suspended by the national body.

The next ploy of the Auckland League was to argue that by suspending it, the New Zealand League had effectively suspended itself as

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<sup>73</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 5 July 1913, p. 10.

most of its executive were also members of Auckland clubs. With the position of the Council unresolved it received a deputation from the suspended Auckland League but the meeting only produced more acrimony. Mr. Brigham, who headed the deputation, wanted to bring up the question of whether the Council members had suspended themselves when they suspended the Auckland League but Mr. McLean, chairman of the New Zealand League, ruled that only the Savory case was to be considered and asked Mr. Brigham if the Auckland League was prepared to re-register the player. Mr. Brigham argued that the Auckland League had the absolute power to suspend a player and that Savory's appeal had not been suppressed but had been merely 'tabled for six weeks'. The New Zealand Council maintained that Savory had a perfect right to appeal against his suspension to the Council and that his case must be settled before any other issues could be considered. The meeting ended with the Council adopting a conciliatory position by deciding that if the Auckland League was prepared to lift the suspension on Savory, and re-register him, the Council would lift the suspension imposed on the Auckland League. The League was given until 20 November to comply. The Auckland League spurned this chance to heal the rift and its executive continued to defy the New Zealand Council by calling two meetings in succession to consider the ultimatum and then boycotting them so that they both lapsed due to the lack of a quorum. With the 20 November deadline passed and no response from the Auckland League the New Zealand Council gave it still another chance by once more requesting a decisive answer. The Auckland League finally replied stating that if the suspension on the Auckland League was lifted then the executive would consider the question of re-registering Savory. This answer was received by the Council at its 4 December meeting and its members finally lost patience with the recalcitrant Auckland executive. The Council expressed its opinion that the suspended Auckland executive were 'merely trying to hedge the questions' and finally took decisive action. On 4 December the New Zealand League rescinded its earlier motion suspending the whole Auckland League and passed a new resolution suspending 14 named members of the Auckland League executive and called on all clubs, sub-leagues and referees

associations to elect a new executive at a meeting on 12 January 1914. The Savory affair was sadly concluded when Corporal C. Savory, one of the first to enlist for war service, was killed in action in the Gallipoli campaign in May 1915.

During the 1914 season, club matches continued to attract large numbers of spectators, over 5,000 at Victoria Park on 20 June, and 3,000 at the Devonport Domain on 4 July. The next week over 4,000 were at Victoria Park for the final match of the senior championship. At this point two teams were equal on points and well ahead of the other teams, so the League cancelled the final round and substituted a play-off between the top two teams for the championship. The playoff, for which the League used one of its charge days at Victoria Park, attracted 7,000 spectators, a record attendance for a club match, who paid over £300 at the gates. The League was unhappy at not being able to charge admission to most of the club matches, prompting the lament that

The Auckland League is unfortunate in that it does not possess a ground of its own, and consequently Saturday after Saturday the public is provided with free football of such a kind that nobody would hesitate to pay to see were such a course necessary.<sup>74</sup>

The situation that the Auckland League found itself in was very different to that enjoyed by the Rugby Union, which was very pleased with its new ground at Eden Park, where it staged two senior matches each week during the 1913 season. Gate takings over the first three Saturdays of club competitions totalled almost £200 and the Union anticipated doing extremely well financially over the season, with big crowds expected to attend the representative matches at the end of the season.<sup>75</sup> With league games attracting considerably greater crowds than union, lack of a pay ground of its own meant a considerable loss of potential income was incurred every season by the Auckland League.

Fears had been expressed by some that the dispute between the Auckland League executive and the New Zealand Council over Savory's

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<sup>74</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 20 June 1914, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 3 June 1914, p. 9.

suspension, which had taken up most of the 1913 season, would weaken the game in the city during the 1914 season and even that a rival rugby league, loyal to the suspended executive, would be formed. Savory had been suspended by the Auckland League for dangerous play but appealed to the New Zealand League, which ruled, on the basis of the evidence, that he was not guilty and ordered his reinstatement. The Auckland League refused to do so and the dispute escalated into a trial of strength between the two bodies.<sup>76</sup> These fears proved unfounded despite support being expressed for the old executive by some clubs. The first task of the new executive, with the support of the New Zealand Council, was to set about reforming the Auckland League. 'One of the stumbling blocks of the League game in Auckland in the past had been the contradictory and in many cases poor rules under which the game had been conducted. The new management committee undertook to review and revise [these] rules.'<sup>77</sup> First came a change of name from the Auckland Provincial Rugby League to the Auckland Rugby Football League. The management structure was streamlined; whereas previously each club and district league had a member on the management committee, now only clubs having a senior team were allowed a member and one member was to represent all the district Leagues. New rules governing the disqualification of players were introduced to avoid a repeat of the situation which had led to the rupture between New Zealand Council and the previous committee over the Savory affair. Before any player could be summoned to appear before the management committee for alleged rough play, he had to be reported, in writing, by the referee in charge of the match and within 48 hours of the alleged occurrence. Only the referee and line umpires officiating at the time of the alleged offence could give evidence and any player suspended or disqualified by the Auckland League had the right of appeal to the New Zealand Council. The rule regarding the payment of players was rewritten and now read as follows

The members composing a representative Auckland Rugby Football

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<sup>76</sup>The Savory dispute. [see Appendix Four]

<sup>77</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 29 April 1914, p. 9.

League team, and who are required to play away from home shall have their travelling expenses paid. Payment of members of such touring team for loss of time during or incidental to any tour shall be left entirely to the option of the committee of management, who shall be guided by its financial success or otherwise. Married men shall receive preference. The maximum amount per diem that may be paid to any player shall be the sum of 10s.<sup>78</sup>

Another rule was adopted with the aim of maintaining a high standard of play. This rule restricted the number of teams allowed in the senior competition to six and allowed the management committee to decide, should the applications exceed this number, which entries to accept, having regard only to the relative playing strengths of the teams.<sup>79</sup>

The trial of strength between the national body and New Zealand's strongest provincial league resulted in the strengthening of the authority of the New Zealand League and demonstrated that provincial leagues, however strong, could not defy its authority.

### **Ground Problems**

As shown in the previous chapter, one of the major problems faced by 125the promoters of league was that of acquiring access to suitable grounds. Another problem was that of financing the new sport. Promoters were faced with finding the money for such things as ground rent, equipment, travel expenses and advertising. To raise this money, they needed, not just any ground, but an enclosed ground so that admittance could be charged. The promoters of league faced difficulties in both these areas, but it is significant that the greatest difficulties were encountered in Wellington and Dunedin, hilly cities where sports grounds were at a premium. Auckland and Christchurch, situated on generally flat land, seemed to have sufficient sports grounds to meet the increased demands created by the introduction of league though access to pay grounds remained a problem. A third problem, seemingly confined to Auckland, was that of crowd control when unfenced grounds were used for matches which attracted large crowds.

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<sup>78</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 29 April 1914, p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 29 April 1914, p. 9.

If we exclude the half-dozen volcanos, Auckland was a city on a plain, so there were sufficient sports grounds to accommodate the greater number of teams resulting from the advent of league. Yet league experienced ground problems throughout these years. Its problems were not a lack of grounds to play on, but the lack of an enclosed pay ground, which would have enabled it to charge admission to its weekly senior club competition matches. Given its strong spectator support, the league was losing significant sums of money. It also felt that there was a deliberate lack of co-operation from the City Council, which controlled Victoria Park, the main sports ground. In its defence, the Council expressed concern at the unruly crowd behaviour at some league games, but there would appear to be more in it than this as the Council seemed to be deliberately obstructing league on other occasions, as will be shown.

In 1911 the League experimented with playing its senior matches on the north shore of the harbour at the Takapuna Racecourse, rented from the Takapuna Jockey Club. The experiment proved unsuccessful as spectators disliked the idea of a ferry trip in order to watch a match. Also the ground proved to be in a bad state.<sup>80</sup> Even representative games, usually big crowd pullers, failed to attract the public to Takapuna. Two games were played against the New Zealand representative team in June and July, on the north shore. The League sold tickets for one shilling to cover both the ferry ride and the ground admittance, but heavy rain prior to the first match greatly reduced the attendance as city people were reluctant to risk the journey in such conditions. Ironically the sun shone throughout the match, which New Zealand narrowly won by 16 points to 14.<sup>81</sup> The second match, won by Auckland by 11 points to three, was again ruined by the weather and the state of the ground.

Pelting rain and a slippery field forced New Zealand to make a poor showing against Auckland. Parts of the field were under water at the start of the game and soon became a sea of mud. Bunches of

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<sup>80</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 17 April 1912, p. 9.

<sup>81</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 12 June 1911, p. 9.

spectators shivered under umbrellas on the terrace.<sup>82</sup>

Securing grounds was still a problem in 1912 and, with Takapuna Racecourse having proved unsuitable the previous year, the League secured the use of Eden Park at Kingsland, two grounds in Victoria Park, one in the Domain Cricket Ground, and one in the Devonport Domain. The League was disappointed with attendances at its new ground, Eden Park. Following the large attendance at the opening matches of the season, only about 600 turned up to the next round of matches. This was put down to 'the new ground being comparatively unknown, and to one senior match being played at Devonport'.<sup>83</sup> But the same thing happened the next weekend as again only 600 spectators watched the league on a bright and sunny day. By way of contrast, over 5,000 were at Alexandra Park to watch two top union teams clash.

In 1913 the use of Eden Park, the League's headquarters during the previous season, was lost to the Auckland Rugby Union, which had reached agreement with the Auckland Cricket Association for a 21-year lease of the ground. The Union had decided to erect a grandstand to seat between 2,500 and 3,000 people on the 13-acre ground and construction was to start immediately.<sup>84</sup> This left the League dependant on council-owned grounds at Victoria Park and the Domain. These grounds were used by all sporting codes and the City Council only allowed admission charges to be made on a limited basis. The council granted the League permission to charge for admission on eight occasions, six days at Victoria Park and two at the Domain.<sup>85</sup> The League decided to save these days in order to accommodate its representative fixtures. This seriously affected its finances as spectators were able to watch championship matches for free. The Council's policy of limiting the number of occasions on which the League could charge was not the only

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<sup>82</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 31 July 1911, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 20 May 1912, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 April 1913, p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 15 April 1913, p. 9.

problem the League had with the Council over its grounds. The Council refused to allow the League to use the main ground in front of the grandstand at Victoria Park on the pretext that league football damaged the playing surface. Several thousand attended each week but the matches were played on the ground next to the road where there was no stand and no means of keeping the crowd back. 'In several instances, reported in the *New Zealand Herald*, players have lost certain scoring opportunities due to crowd obstruction whilst on one occasion a spectator who was in the way got a very severe bump'. Other codes attracted practically no spectators and the stand remained empty whilst spectators walked across to the stand interfering with hockey, lacrosse and other games in progress. League officials did not accept the Council's contention that league players damaged the ground to any greater extent than did other codes.<sup>86</sup> Evidently changes were made as the match on Saturday 14 June was

played on the pitch before the Grandstand to the great satisfaction of all concerned. The stand was well filled and some 5,000 spectators witnessed the match in comfort for the first time this season. Moreover other games on the park were not forced to submit to several hundred people strolling across playing areas when games were in progress.<sup>87</sup>

The League also sought to control spectator encroachment onto the playing area at the Domain by applying to the Council for permission to erect a fence round the playing area for its representative matches, but

Notwithstanding the fact that the League was going to supply the fence, Council asked for no less than £4 for each Saturday [the ground was used] on condition that more than one match was played. In the event of only one Saturday being required the charge would be £5. The local council is evidently following in the footsteps of the Wellington Council which demanded such a big percentage of the gate for the proposed New Zealand versus Wellington match. Needless to say the local League did not consider the terms of the Council.<sup>88</sup>

These problems highlighted the need for the Auckland League to acquire a

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<sup>86</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 June 1913, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 18 June 1913, p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 14 June 1913, p. 10.

ground of its own near the city centre. Efforts were made to locate such a ground and towards the end of the season it was reported that 'At present a very central one is under consideration. This ground if secured will do a very great deal towards making the game even more firmly established here'.<sup>89</sup>

The problem of crowd control at league matches was not confined to New Zealand, with rowdy behaviour seemingly a working-class way of dealing with stressful situations, as it was also prevalence in league matches in England in this period.<sup>90</sup> In Auckland, crowd control again proved a problem at the first of the two matches in the 1913 season when opposition was provided by the New South Wales representative team, the games being played on the Auckland Domain. Unfortunately the occasion was marred by a section of the crowd erupting onto the pitch. Police and League officials had considerable difficulty in clearing them and play had to be stopped on several occasions before the spectators were eventually forced outside the ropes. The Mayor of Auckland, C. J. Parr, who was present at the game, told the New Zealand Rugby League Council that unless steps were taken to keep the crowd back he would take personal responsibility for cancelling the permit to play the test match at the Domain the following Saturday. The League promised that the trouble would not be repeated and arranged for more officials to be on duty for that match.<sup>91</sup> The Mayor apparently took the League at its word as the following week an even greater crowd of 18,000 paid £627 to watch New South Wales beat New Zealand by 33 points to 19 and there were no reports of crowd misbehaviour.<sup>92</sup>

In 1914 the League was able to secure sufficient grounds to accommodate all its teams, with two at Devonport, one each at Northcote, Victoria Park and The Domain, three or more at Otahuhu and one at Remuera, but still lacked a pay ground in the city. Devonport Domain was a pay ground, but a boat ride across the harbour from the city. The City Council

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<sup>89</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 17 September 1913, p. 9.

<sup>90</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 200-207.

<sup>91</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 2 September 1913, p. 9.

<sup>92</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 8 September 1913, p. 4.

had given permission for the League to charge spectators for admission to Victoria Park on seven days throughout the season, so this would be its main source of income.<sup>93</sup>

The strong spectator support, coupled with the fact that both the Domain and Victoria Park were unfenced grounds, led once again to problems with crowd control. Early in the season a League commentator wrote of a game at the Domain where

spectators persistently encroached upon the field and incited players to rough play. Officials [were] given credit for doing their best to maintain order but the crowd was too big for them. Spectators encroached on the field throughout the second half but more serious trouble occurred within a few minutes of the end of play, that is after North Shore had assumed the lead. Play became very rough and two players were ordered off. Authorities must be firm in these matters and would be well advised to take steps to prevent such incidents occurring again.<sup>94</sup>

Two weeks later there had been no improvement and the problem of encroachment onto the playing area prompted another complaint

It is very apparent that something will have to be done to keep spectators at 1<sup>st</sup> grade matches from encroaching on the playing area. This nuisance is very noticeable of late and responsible for any rough play that occurs. Last week the referee had to bear much opprobrium from spectators and another official who was attempting to keep the crowd back was thrown heavily to the ground and almost dislocated his shoulder. If such behaviour keeps on it will injure league football in Auckland and possibly lead to permission to use Victoria Park and the Domain [being] withdrawn.<sup>95</sup>

For its matches at Victoria Park on Saturday 20 June, the League had the ground fenced, which had a very beneficial effect on the play. Well over 5,000 spectators paid about £100 admission and there were no encroachments on the line and the game was consequently not interfered with in any way.<sup>96</sup> Two weeks later 3,000 spectators assembled on the Devonport Domain to see

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<sup>93</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 30 May 1914, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 June 1914, p. 9.

<sup>95</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 20 June 1914, p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 22 June 1914, p. 4.

North Shore beat the City team and provided a profit of £25 for the League.<sup>97</sup> Following the match, the North Shore officials wrote to the Auckland League to express their appreciation of the efforts of the police in keeping back spectators.<sup>98</sup> Unfortunately the crowd at Victoria Park once again proved to be unruly and the League resolved that

To avoid repetition of the disgraceful encroachment that took place at Victoria Park on Saturday a fence is to be put round the playing area for today's match, or as far round as possible, and players should have no cause for complaint of interference from spectators.<sup>99</sup>

These further examples of unruly crowd behaviour would seem to suggest that spectators at league matches were mainly workingmen reacting to stress in the same way as working-class spectators at Northern Union matches in England.<sup>100</sup> Over 4,000 spectators watched from behind the fence as Ponsonby beat City by 5 points to 2 and there were no reports of crowd encroachment on the pitch. In another senior game at the Domain on the same day, Newton were only able to field eight men, but 'whilst the match lasted it provided plenty of amusement for spectators, especially when two of them, minus coats and collars, threw in their lot with Newton'.<sup>101</sup>

In the six seasons from its introduction in 1908, the Auckland League had had problems, not so much in obtaining grounds to play on, but in obtaining the regular use of enclosed pay grounds to enable it to profit financially from its increasing popularity. Allied with the loss of potential income was the difficulty in controlling large crowds encroaching upon the unfenced pitches. To overcome both these problems, the League was searching for a ground it could purchase and develop for its own use.

There seemed to have been no shortage of sports grounds in Christchurch, a city on a plain, and this seems to have resulted in much less

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<sup>97</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 6 July 1914, p. 10.

<sup>98</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 11 July 1914, p. 4.

<sup>99</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 11 July 1914, p. 4.

<sup>100</sup>Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 200-207.

<sup>101</sup>*New Zealand Herald*, 13 July 1914, p. 10.

opposition to the allocation of grounds to league. The first priority of the Canterbury Rugby League in 1913 was to secure grounds and a deputation was appointed to approach the City Council regarding this. The meeting resulted in grounds being obtained in each of the suburbs in which there was a league club. The relative abundance of grounds is shown by the fact that each of the eight senior rugby union clubs had a ground of its own. The league had already secured the lease on the Agricultural Grounds, an enclosed pay ground, which was to be the venue of two senior games each week. Also, right from the start, each of the clubs also secured clubrooms which were very popular up until the war.

The Wellington League, unlike its Canterbury counterpart, was hampered in its efforts to popularise the game by difficulties in securing grounds. The city is hilly and sports grounds were not plentiful, whilst some were in a poor state and/or in out-of-the way locations. Existing sporting bodies were understandably reluctant to give up 'their' grounds to league. But the City Council was also reluctant to help, with a rugby union faction opposed to renting any Council grounds to the League, accusing it of being a professional body. The League also believed the Council discriminated against it by demanding higher rental than other sports for pay grounds. The Wellington League had difficulty securing a suitable ground for its representative match, against Nelson, on Saturday 8 June 1912 and was forced to play it on the St. Patrick's College ground at Duppa Street; a very unsatisfactory ground for an important match. The Nelson team described it as 'the worst they had ever played on'<sup>102</sup> and to make matters worse the match was played in a gale with heavy rain falling.

At the 1913 annual meeting of the Wellington League, the executive commented on the great difficulty in securing grounds for the 1912 season. It had only managed to obtain two, one in the city and one at Petone. Its objectives for the coming season were to put the league on a firmer footing by securing more grounds, so that a junior grade could be started to offer young players the opportunity of playing the game under good conditions. It

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<sup>102</sup>*Nelson Evening Mail*, 10 June 1912, p. 3.

had already secured three grounds at the Hutt and one in the city and was hopeful of securing two more pitches on city reserves. The Chairman made a plea to the City Council for fair treatment in the allocation of grounds. Some 'other bodies', presumably the Rugby Union, were, it was asserted, creating difficulties for the League in raising the question of the 'morality' of leasing city reserves to a 'professional sport'. He hoped the City Council would not be influenced by these arguments, but would 'deal out even-handed justice' to the League.<sup>103</sup> [see Appendix Five] This highlights a big problem faced by the League: the fragmented nature of its support, with two clubs in the Hutt and only two in the city. Although Petone and the Hutt were only about 12 kilometres from central Wellington, at the turn of the century travel between the two was a major undertaking. Players were reluctant to make the journey, yet the only pay ground obtained by the League was at the Hutt.

The league columnist of the *Evening Post* complained in his first column of the 1913 season that the League had ground disadvantages, with neither the Hutt ground or Wakefield Park being suitable 'as far as situation goes, and it is situation that will count largely in regard to the popularity of the game'. He went on to say that 'a match must be well worth seeing (or the people must be led to think it will be) before they will go far to see it.' He was also critical of the poor form of many players who lacked a 'close association' with the game and feared that unless the players 'brighten up and practice hard' the favourable impression of the game would not be maintained.<sup>104</sup> His fears as to grounds seemed justified as the season 'did not open under auspicious circumstances', [t]he southerly wind was very keenly felt' and there were only about 50 people present to watch Athletic beat Newtown by 9 points to 5 at Newtown Park.<sup>105</sup> The following week the ground was described as 'ploughed-up, crisscrossed with slides and dotted with bogs'.<sup>106</sup> Newtown Park, distant from the centre of the city, was not the best place for

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<sup>103</sup> *Evening Post*, 3 April 1913, p. 4.

<sup>104</sup> *Evening Post*, 3 May 1913, p. 14.

<sup>105</sup> *Evening Post*, 5 May 1913, p.3.

<sup>106</sup> *Evening Post*, 12 May 1913, p.3.

gaining public support, but the crowds that attended were generally encouraging.<sup>107</sup>

League officials felt they were being unfairly treated by the Council Reserves Committee when in May their application to use Basin Reserve, a pay ground, for a representative match was turned down as the Reserve had just undergone extensive repairs. The League was offered Newtown Park instead, with the Council demanding 50 percent of the gate takings. The League feared a heavy loss and declined. They pointed out that other sporting bodies had been charged only 20 percent of the gate takings to use the Basin Reserve. They maintained that the Council should not discriminate between sporting bodies and that the attempt to extract 150 percent more from the League unfair and unjustified.<sup>108</sup> No representative match was played, so presumably there was no compromise from the Council.

In 1914 the League again faced ground problems as it attempted to secure a suitable ground for its representative match against the touring English team on Saturday 14 July. The League executive could not agree on where to play the match. Permission had been obtained from the City Council to use the Basin Reserve, which would have seemed ideal for the event as it was a well-known, centrally located, pay ground with good facilities. Its supporters argued that playing at the Basin Reserve would increase the reputation of league in the city. The opponents' main objection was that, with a capacity of 7,000 people, it was not big enough for such a prestigious event and that Newtown Park would hold two or three times as many. It was also considered that Newtown Park was 'ideal from the spectators' point of view, owing to the raised terraces on three sides of the ground, which enables everyone to gain an uninterrupted view of the game'.<sup>109</sup> It was finally decided, on the casting vote of the chairman, to play the match at Newtown Park.<sup>110</sup>

Bad weather at the start of the season, the effects of the war at the

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<sup>107</sup> *Evening Post*, 4 October 1913, p. 14.

<sup>108</sup> *Evening Post*, 26 May 1913, p. 9.

<sup>109</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 July 1914, p. 10.

<sup>110</sup> *Evening Post*, 30 June 1914, p. 4.

end, and grounds troubles throughout, made 1914 a difficult year for the Wellington League. Whilst bad ground conditions due to the adverse weather were one factor in making the League's grounds unavailable, the use of Newtown Park and the Duppa Street grounds in Wellington by the military also made the grounds unavailable and then left them in an unplayable condition. Newtown Park was apparently a 'handy and comfortable' ground, but Duppa Street had 'little accommodation'.<sup>111</sup> The League had more grounds in the Hutt Valley, both at the Petone Recreation Reserve and the old Hutt racecourse which were 'particularly good ones', but lost two pay grounds to rugby union. The grounds were on the Hutt Recreation Reserve where the League had outbid the Rugby Union to obtain the grounds the previous year. This year its bid of £21 plus 50 percent of the gate takings was topped by the Union bid of £25 plus the whole of the gate takings!<sup>112</sup> It would seem that the Union was prepared to go to extreme lengths to deny the League grounds, even renting them under conditions that ensured they would lose money.

The problem with the grounds in the Hutt was that it was not convenient to have to play all matches so far from the city. 'Players have to rush away from work, and their whole afternoon is fully taken up for the sake of one game; and in some cases the cost of travelling from town is a matter which has some little weight.' The problems would be solved if the League had a ground of its own and there was 'reason to believe that if a suitable ground could be found the New Zealand League would give substantial help to purchase it'.<sup>113</sup> A different kind of problem was faced at Petone, where the League shared the Recreation Reserve with the Rugby Union, with the two codes playing on adjacent pitches. Both Union and League could charge admission, but the League had to use an entrance which was much further out of the way.

There [was] nothing beyond the personal inclination of League followers to make them use the League gate, because whichever way they enter they can see either match of both; and the position of the

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<sup>111</sup> *Evening Post*, 6 June 1914, p. 18.

<sup>112</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 22 April 1914, p. 9.

<sup>113</sup> *Evening Post*, 6 June 1914, p.18.

respective entrances simply means that the takings at the Rugby gate are likely to be much larger than those collected at the new entrance, because the former is so much more convenient. Whichever game is more attractive, the Rugby authorities stand to gain something from the patrons of the League, unless the latter can be persuaded by the mute signboards now in position to "go up further".<sup>114</sup>

Dunedin is a very hilly city so finding suitable playing grounds there has always been a problem for all sports codes there. Sean O'Hagan has written of these problems and the rivalry between cricket and rugby authorities over the use of grounds.<sup>115</sup> There was always competition for grounds as there was little flat land and much of that was originally swamp, making conversion to sports grounds difficult.<sup>116</sup> The inability to find a ground for league was the reason for the game failing to take hold in the city. The problem was summed up by the rugby correspondent of the *Otago Daily Times* when in 1913 there were once again rumours of league being introduced

prominent players are alleged to have been approached but these realise that there is no hope for League football in Dunedin while the Rugby Union controls the leading grounds. Caledonian, Carisbrook and Tahuna Park grounds are controlled by the local union in the football season, and if a League match is to be played on one of these grounds it will have to be played out of the Rugby season.<sup>117</sup>

The same year C. O'Connell wrote to the New Zealand League, urging that a game against the New South Wales team was 'all that was needed to put the game on a good footing' and that the ground problem could be overcome by using the 'Wingatui Racecourse seven miles from Dunedin to which an excursion could be run', but he was informed that it was impractical to send the New South Wales team to Dunedin. O'Connell also informed the League that the Rugby Union's lease on the Caledonian Ground expired the next year and this gave the League a chance to secure a ground. It was

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<sup>114</sup> *Evening Post*, 2 May 1914, p. 14.

<sup>115</sup> Sean O'Hagan, *The Pride of Southern Rebels*, Pilgrims South Press, Dunedin, 1981. pp. 130-141.

<sup>116</sup> O'Hagan, p. 130.

<sup>117</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 28 June 1913, p. 4.

suggested that he confer with D. Bannatyne, the New Zealand League's representative in Dunedin.<sup>118</sup> The New Zealand League felt confident enough in the prospects of the game in Dunedin, once a suitable ground could be obtained, that it took up O'Connell's suggestion and entered a tender of £276/10, a considerable sum of money, for the Caledonian Ground. The Rugby Union tendered £295, an increase on its previous year's tender of £250, but the Football Association, with a tender of £300, managed to secure the ground for soccer.<sup>119</sup> Thus once again rugby league was without a ground in Dunedin.

### **Rugby Union Opposition and 'Professionalism'**

The opposition of the rugby union establishment to rugby league went well beyond the natural reluctance to do anything to help a rival code. It took on more of the aspects of a moral crusade to save New Zealand sport from the perceived evils of professionalism. It was a war in which any means were justified to achieve the destruction, or at the very least the marginalisation, of league. Accusations of professionalism were persistently levelled at the game, forcing league authorities to be constantly on the defensive and refute such charges.

When D.W. McLean, president of the New Zealand Rugby League, was in Christchurch in 1912 to help launch the game in that city he felt constrained to deny that there was any professionalism in league, pointing out that New Zealand's population was too small to support the payment of players.<sup>120</sup> Yet a few days later L.M. Isitt, a local MP, who was to have chaired a public meeting to launch league, declined at the last minute as he had heard, obviously from rugby union sources, that 'the game had to do with professionalism'.<sup>121</sup> When D.W. McLean addressed this meeting, he spoke

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<sup>118</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 22 Aug 1913, p. 4.

<sup>119</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 9 Oct 1913, p. 10.

<sup>120</sup> Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, p.19

<sup>121</sup> Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, p. 23, Eric Bennett, *New Zealand Rugby League Annual 1933*, Auckland: publisher not given, 1933, p. 129.

again on the topic of professionalism

When they [the New Zealand Rugby League] applied for affiliation with the Northern Union they said they wished to play the game, but did not wish to deal with the by-laws relating to professionalism, and the Northern Union, in a broadminded manner, recognising the different circumstances out here, acquiesced.<sup>122</sup>

A professional man, he went on, was a man who made his living from the game and there was no room for him in New Zealand. But McLean defended the policy of compensating players for loss of time, as this avoided making football the sole preserve of the wealthier classes. He challenged anyone to prove that league players were paid in their own local competitions and again asked why working men should be barred from football for financial reasons. He claimed that, in Canterbury, union had been losing players to association football and hockey for the past decade as old and conservative thinking had lessened its appeal.<sup>123</sup> The topic of professionalism came up again (in 1913) when clubs were being formed. Councillor McCullough chaired the meeting to form the Addington club and remarked that 'he failed to understand why one code paying three shillings a day was considered amateur, and another compensating its players 10 shillings a day was termed professional'.<sup>124</sup>

An accusation of professionalism was made against a club by an 'oppositionist', who claimed he had correspondence to prove that 'a certain member had received reward for services'. The League secretary gave the report an 'absolute denial' after inquiring into the incident and said that 'the statement must be either made good or further action will be taken'.<sup>125</sup> Professionalism was still an issue in 1914, when the League president Dr. Thacker declared to its annual general meeting that

the game was going to flourish, without disparaging the older game of Rugby, but Rugby Union was the older man and the League was the virile son. The League was flattered this season, in that the Canterbury Union had adopted three of its cardinal rules, and he expected that in a very short time, the Union would withdraw two or

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<sup>122</sup> Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, p. 23.

<sup>123</sup> Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, p. 23.

<sup>124</sup> Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, p. 28.

<sup>125</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 21 June 1913, p. 3.

three men from each team, and all the players would practically be League players. They may call us the professional branch of it [but] this is the big scarecrow, as far as the public are concerned, against the League game. They pillory us because we recompense our men, who could not get away unless they were paid enough to keep their home going.<sup>126</sup>

Club practices, held prior to the opening of the season, took place in the face of 'hostility displayed by opposing forces to prevent players from joining the movement, and many active participants who had promised their support were coaxed back to the Union fold',<sup>127</sup> whilst many who had thoughts of trying the new game would no doubt have been deterred by such rugby union pressure. These setbacks did not deter the clubs from pressing ahead, and many well-known union players still came over to league.<sup>128</sup> Players were prepared to defy the union authorities and give league a go, whilst the Rugby Union was prepared to quietly welcome back any players who did not find league to their liking, rather than force them to stay with league. It was reported that some footballers, who had tried the league game but been unable to secure a place on a team, had gone back to play union.<sup>129</sup> Throughout the season, the League continued to gain recruits from union. As the League columnist in the *Christchurch Star* noted

As each Saturday comes and goes, in the first division teams one occasionally sees fresh faces from the Rugby Union ranks. As the Addington side lined out on the field on Saturday, I noticed Priest, the Merivale senior Rugby forward, amongst the members, and judging by his play on Saturday it will not be long before he becomes a successful League Player.<sup>130</sup>

Also one player, disqualified by the local Rugby Union, 'openly stated his intention of flouting the Union officials by playing under the League code', but the League executive would not allow him to do so.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 30 March 1914, p. 3.

<sup>127</sup> Bennett, *Rugby League Annual*, p. 135.

<sup>128</sup> Bennett, p. 135.

<sup>129</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 14 June 1913, p. 3.

<sup>130</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 19 July 1913.

<sup>131</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 14 June 1913, p. 3.

George Gillett, the New Zealand League organiser, was in Wellington in 1912 to help get league started and spoke of professionalism as it related to both league and union. He said

he wished to make it clear to any man who was building on making enough out of the game to keep himself that he was making a big mistake. It was clearly laid down in the rules that no player could be recompensed for taking part in games in his leisure hours. No one would be paid when playing on home grounds. but when on tour players would be recompensed for loss of wages etc.

On professionalism within union he alleged that

lots of prominent players had received money under the table and were still receiving it. As a matter of fact he, personally, had had his share. One season he had threatened not to play unless he was paid a sum, and he had not long to wait for the money. He did not wish to reflect on the Union at all, and had nothing against those who played Rugby, but he was against the legislators of the game.<sup>132</sup>

The formation of the Wellington League in 1912 prompted 'Dropkick', the *Evening Post* columnist, to devote the greater part of his weekly column to the introduction of the game to the city. He wrote of the rumours that prominent union players were to go over to the game and that several were present at the meeting. After stating that it was not his intention to 'condemn the game as a game' and that 'no doubt it is a very excellent game when properly played', he went on to cast doubts as to its ability to be successful. 'No game, whether Union or League, can thrive on an empty purse, and [funds]<sup>133</sup> must undoubtedly come from the "gate" and for 'some time at least the League game will have to be confined to obscure grounds'.

Even granted that the new departure will be more popular than Rugby, it is hard to see that it will altogether eclipse the old order of things, and it would surely have to do this to prove a financial success. There is another aspect of the case which surely deserves consideration. Any Rugby player who secedes burns his boats absolutely, and necessarily stands small chance of reinstatement should the new cause fail. Again, it is hard to see why any player would leave the Union for the League on a speculative venture. It is safe to say that if any of these prospective Leaguers were to be told that they contemplated a change merely for what was to be got out of the new game, they would be indignant. The New Zealand organiser of the League has said that only on tour will the players be

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<sup>132</sup> all the above from *Evening Post*, 24 May 1912, p. 3.

<sup>133</sup> 'friends' is the word printed but this is obviously a misprint.

paid, but the proverbial thin end of the wedge is here, and it would not be surprising to see this rule nullified and footballers being remunerated for their inter-club games. The Northern League game might be welcomed even by Rugby adherents if it were to be played on a strictly amateur basis, but once the element of pay creeps in, sport goes out the back door.<sup>134</sup>

Following the formation of the Wellington Rugby League, the management committee of the Wellington Rugby Union discussed the possible consequences of the introduction of league to Wellington. Some considered that the Union should send speakers to the club's gyms to address the players on the subject, whilst others thought it was a matter for the clubs themselves to deal with. A speaker asserted that 'most of those who had seceded were disappointed players' and 'so long as the Union looked after the younger players it had nothing much to fear from the League. At present players knew very little about League football and they were apt to be misled'.<sup>135</sup>

League officials in 1913 were pleased with the progress of the game in the capital, as a league columnist wrote, whilst also sounding a warning note

As the season advances the League game shows signs of gaining in popularity. Each Saturday sees a large attendance of the public at the Newtown Park match, and, no doubt, if some reasonable arrangement could be made, representative games would prove very successful from the financial point of view. Unfortunately, the executive officers have to fight against strong prejudices in the form of ideas that their game is a game played for money and not for the love of pure, clean sport. Of course, this will be worn down in time, but at present it presents a formidable obstacle to advancement.<sup>136</sup>

An incident in the 1914 season, which led to the postponement of the matches scheduled for Saturday 30 May, was reported as resulting from either a silly trick or deliberate sabotage. If the latter, it could have been perpetrated by rugby union opponents of the game.

In the forenoon notices were posted stating that the games were "off", having been inspired by some unofficial source. They were taken down early but not before most of the players had seen or

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<sup>134</sup> *Evening Post*, 25 May 1912, p. 14.

<sup>135</sup> *Evening Post*, 6 June 1912, p. 4.

<sup>136</sup> *Evening Post*, 14 June 1913, p. 14.

heard of them. Consequently very few of the town players went to Petone for the matches which were to have been played at Hutt Park and Petone Recreation Ground.<sup>137</sup>

Unlike the 1912 New South Wales team, the English team visiting Wellington in 1914 was not given a civic reception. Mayor J. P. Luke refused 'as it was his fixed rule not to accord the formal official welcome of the corporation to people who come to the Dominion for profit'<sup>138</sup> This was despite the fact that all sporting bodies touring New Zealand, amateur or professional, came hoping to make a profit to cover expenses. The Mayor did, however, join the welcoming committee comprising M. J. Reardon, president of the Wellington Rugby League; J. Carlaw, president of the New Zealand Rugby League; and D.W. McLean, chairman of the New Zealand Rugby League Council. Both J. Carlaw and S. Bruce, secretary of the Wellington League, spoke of the game being handicapped by a lack of suitable grounds, whilst Carlaw once again stressed that league was no more professional than union - it was 'all a question of price'. The Rugby Union paid its touring players six shillings a day whilst the League allowed a maximum of ten shillings a day. 'The one was no more professional than the other.'<sup>139</sup>

The Wellington League postponed all club matches for Saturday 25 July, as its representative teams were in Christchurch, but it had arranged an interesting fixture for Newtown Park on that day. A Wellington league side was to play a match against the crew of a visiting British warship the HMS Philomel.<sup>140</sup> But this was not to be, as the long arm of prejudice reached half way round the world.

Why did not the promised match against a man-of-war team eventuate last Saturday? The answer is easy. The naval footballers belong to the Naval Footballers Association, and it was feared that for them to play against a League team would render them subject to disqualification at Home. In the circumstances it could not be helped,

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<sup>137</sup> *Evening Post*, 1 June 1914, p. 4.

<sup>138</sup> *Evening Post*, 11 July 1914, p. 14.

<sup>139</sup> *Post*, 9 July 1914, p. 4.

<sup>140</sup> *Evening Post*, 21 July 1914, p. 4.

and the League simply had to accept the position with the best grace possible.<sup>141</sup>

The introduction of league to Christchurch in 1912 elicited a much greater reaction from union authorities than when the game was introduced into Auckland. This is possibly due to the very ambivalent attitude that many Canterbury union supporters had to the game. Many acknowledged that it was a better game, and some even wanted the Canterbury Rugby Union to adopt the Northern Union rules for matches under its jurisdiction, but few were prepared to go this far and risk precipitating a break with the New Zealand Union.

The meetings held in 1912 to introduce league to Christchurch created panic amongst members of the Canterbury Rugby Union and at a management committee meeting on 24 July, two days before D.W. McLean was to speak at the Chamber of Commerce Hall, the matter of 'Northern Union emissaries in the city' was raised. It was said that 'amateur' football faced a crisis and that rugby union in Canterbury would suffer 'so long as they adhered to the New Zealand and English Unions'. If the league game got one or two strong men to support it, it would get a stronghold in Christchurch, especially if the league supporters secured the use of the Showgrounds, as was reported. S. W. Wilson, an Albion club delegate and national selector, went further and said that, whilst not wishing to boost the Northern Union game, he considered it was a better game to watch and suggested that the Canterbury Union adopt its rules and thus cut away the ground from the feet of the semi-professional camp. As there was not room for two codes of rugby in Christchurch, he suggested the clubs be given the chance to decide whether or not to adopt the Northern Union game out-and-out as an amateur game.

The chairman, G. H. Mason, said it would not be proper to invite the clubs to discuss 'going over' and that he personally believed that very few local players would go over to the League. F. D. Kesteven said he considered Rugby League would prosper at the expense of union and suggested the

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<sup>141</sup> *Evening Post*, 1 August 1914, p.14.

Union should merely change the rules and run the show itself. The meeting was reminded by F. T. Evans that altering the rules would mean having to leave the New Zealand Rugby Union and on that account he was against adopting Northern Union. He was also against paying players 'though he might not be adverse to paying men two or three shillings a day for loss of time'. After considerable animated debate, it was decided to circularise the clubs, asking them to hold special meetings to consider the encroachment of league football and to appoint delegates for a special meeting to further consider the matter.<sup>142</sup>

Obviously there were some on the management committee who considered league to be a better game than union and wanted to see it played in Christchurch, provided it was controlled by the Rugby Union, but had not thought through the consequences such a step. Had they gone ahead with the idea, the existing Canterbury Rugby Union would have been expelled by the New Zealand Union and a new Union, loyal to the New Zealand Union, formed. This would have left the Canterbury Union with no option but to seek to amalgamate with the Canterbury Rugby League. There were too many prejudices and old loyalties to be overcome for such a thing to happen, but neither could the discontented bring themselves to leave the Rugby Union to join the Rugby League. In the end they chose to stay with the Rugby Union and pursue the forlorn hope of having the rules of that game radically changed. The club meetings, that of the middle-class Old Boys' club is discussed below, ended in 'professions of loyalty to the Rugby code, but often with a significant proviso that New Zealand should secede from the English Union, or with suggestions for altering the game'.<sup>143</sup>

The day after the management committee meeting, the *Christchurch Star* printed an editorial which debunked the Rugby Union's stance on professionalism, about which, it said, a lot of nonsense was talked. It pointed out that in New Zealand league was, in fact, an amateur sport. It went on to predict that once league became established in Christchurch many leading

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<sup>142</sup> For all above see Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, pp. 19-22.

<sup>143</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 28 September 1912.

union players would be attracted to the game. It commended the Canterbury Rugby Union for taking the right course in inviting the clubs to discuss the situation, but suggested that if the majority of players preferred league, the Union should accept the inevitable and adopt the league rules even though this would lead to the loss of many union supporters. It predicted that should the clubs stay loyal to union they would face stiff competition from league. The editorial ended by deploring the fact that so much was made of the bugbear of professionalism in the rugby world as it did not seem to cause any problems in cricket, and suggested that, if the league rules were an improvement on those of union, the New Zealand Rugby Union should adopt them and stop trying to uphold the illogical traditions of the English Union.<sup>144</sup> [see Appendix Six]

There was a large attendance at a meeting of the High School Old Boys' rugby union club, a middle-class club, to judge by its name, held on Monday 19 August to discuss, as requested by the Canterbury Rugby Union, the 'encroachment of League football on the older established game of Rugby, as it has been played since the beginning in Christchurch'. E. Byrne said that 'there was still such a thing as honour in football circles, and he did not think that either school or college players would ever adopt a professional game. Personally he would prefer playing on a paddock if an amateur game was not available'. L. Campbell said that 'school football had traditions worth preserving, and the club should strongly oppose any attempt to introduce an alien game'. He also maintained that the introduction of league was 'an agitation engineered by malcontents' who had been unsuccessful in attempts to get on the management committee. 'The Northern Union game' he said 'was an attempt to make a business of football, and the introduction of payment for time off would mean pure professionalism'. T. Bain 'opposed the payment of players, believing that any man picked for a representative team should regard the tour as his annual holiday'. He was strongly opposed to breaking away from the Union as 'the new game was contrary to the spirit of the club's rules, which were to foster the game for its own sake'. G. Scott was

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<sup>144</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 25 July 1912, p. 2.

opposed to 'the payment of players on any pretext, remarking that in the old days members of teams had been glad to pay for the privilege of going on tour. He had been glad to hear the assurance of the headmaster of the High School that no school team would be allowed to play the Northern Union game'. C. Buchanan, the chairman of the meeting, said that

many of those embracing the league game were better out of the amateur ranks, and...its introduction had cleaned up Rugby. The game was not likely to last, as there were men playing senior League football who were not fit for junior Rugby. Nevertheless, the rules of the amateur game badly required revision, and the fault lay largely with the delegates, who re-elected the same old management committee in Wellington year after year. A clean sweep of that body would have a wholesome effect.<sup>145</sup>

The meeting finally passed the following motion-

This meeting of the Old Boys' Football Club expresses its determination to uphold the amateur game of rugby and pledges itself to do all in its power to prevent any possible encroachment of professionalism. This Club is perfectly satisfied with the Management Committee, and considers that it invariably does its duty in the interests of Clubs and the public alike, and at the annual election of office-bearers for the Canterbury Rugby Union the Club's delegates be instructed to vote against any candidate expressing approval of the Northern Union game.<sup>146</sup>

The members showed an ingrained prejudice in vilifying league as a professional sport introduced by union malcontents. They condemned the payments to representative league players whilst knowing that union also paid its representative players. Suggestions that representative players should regard tours as their annual holiday, and that in the old days teams were glad to pay for the privilege of touring, harked back to the nineteenth-century British class society, as did the remark that league players were better of out of the amateur game and their defections 'cleaned up' union.<sup>147</sup> But the same members then conceded that the union rules badly needed revision, blamed New Zealand Rugby Union officials for not doing so, and finally advocated a clean sweep of that body.

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<sup>145</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 20 August 1912, p. 4.

<sup>146</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 20 August 1912, p. 4.

<sup>147</sup> See Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 116-157, for an analysis of the class divisions in English rugby.

### **Preparing for War**

Whilst the government had instituted compulsory military training for males between age 14 and 21 under the Defence Act of 1909, such training had had little effect on sports until the 1914 season. Although the 1914 football season was almost over when the Great War started in August, increased military training and cadet camps had been evident throughout the year and caused major disruptions to all sporting activities. Earlier in the season the Auckland League had considered postponing its junior competitions because so many players were away at territorial army camps,<sup>148</sup> but instead decided to end the competitions early.<sup>149</sup> The season ended with a couple of novelty matches and a carnival to raise money for the Patriotic Fund. The outbreak of war also halted what could have become a regular, and no doubt popular, innovation. At the end of August the League received a cable from the South Sydney club that the New South Wales League had authorised a visit by the club to New Zealand at the end of the season and requesting two games at Auckland in August or September. Whilst negotiations were underway, the League was also contacted by the Eastern Suburbs club which also wanted to play two matches. The Auckland League decided to accept the South Sydney club's proposal, subject to being able to obtain a suitable ground.<sup>150</sup> The war prompted the League to postpone the South Sydney tour, but they were optimistic enough to hope to entertain the Sydneysiders the following year.<sup>151</sup>

In Christchurch the 1914 senior competition ended early due to the Show Grounds being taken over by the military as preparations were made for the European War. The last games of the season were played on Saturday 8 August, shortly after New Zealand entered the war, which caused the management committee to suspend fixtures for the next week 'because of the

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<sup>148</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 August 1914, p.4.

<sup>149</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 August 1914, p. 4.

<sup>150</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 August 1914, p. 4.

<sup>151</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 1914, p.8.

unsettled affairs of the local forces'.<sup>152</sup> The Defence Department took over the Show Grounds shortly after and the League found itself without a ground, so the season was ended. No more league was played and other representative games were abandoned, as were two Thacker Shield challenges from Auckland and Wellington. Some union, soccer and hockey games continued to be played through September.

Military preparations disrupted Wellington's 1914 season as early as Saturday 23 May, when two of the three junior matches were called off 'because of cadet reviews which required the attendance of a number of players' and partly because the Duppa Street ground was unplayable.<sup>153</sup> The looming prospect of war had soon begun to affect the senior club competition as men went off to the army. For a match on Saturday 1 August, Petone could only muster 8 players and Athletic 7. The game was ended after twenty minutes with Petone leading by 18 points to 0 with Athletic conceding. On Saturday 15 August 'enlistments in the Expeditionary Force had their inevitable effect on league football... all the clubs being more or less affected'. The teams were so reduced that the games had to be played as seven-a-side matches.<sup>154</sup> Despite these setbacks, league continued to be played until the end of August. With many of their players enlisting, both union and hockey halted all competitions early,<sup>155</sup> but continued to play representative matches, whilst soccer managed to continue by playing a seven-a-side competition.

Although the war did not start until close to the end of the 1914 football season, cadet camps and enlistments in the armed forces were already making it difficult to field teams in the various competitions. A full season of football under wartime conditions loomed for the 1915 season: how the codes coped will be seen in later chapters.

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<sup>152</sup> Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, p. 39

<sup>153</sup> *Evening Post*, 25 May 1914.

<sup>154</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 17 August 1914, p. 4.

<sup>155</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 18 August 1914.

## **Conclusion**

Although Auckland's 1910 southern tour was successful in the launching of the game in the central provinces, it did not have a similar success in the south. Despite several thousand watching the match in Dunedin, this did not result in any league being played the following season. It would seem that the Rugby Union was able to exert strong pressure on would-be converts, whilst the inability to secure playing grounds was also make them reluctant to change codes. No grounds meant no players, and the Rugby Union controlled all suitable grounds. Although league enthusiasts made a series of efforts to overcome this impasse right up to the outbreak of war, they were unsuccessful.

The Aucklanders did not even include Christchurch in their tour itinerary, yet a significant number within the Canterbury Rugby Union were impressed by the league game and wanted the Union to consider playing to the league rules. When it became obvious that this was not going to happen, many chose to stay loyal to union, but enough players were prepared to take up league that once the Canterbury Rugby League was formed in 1912 it was able to establish four clubs, and it then went on to increase its support from both players and spectators. By the outbreak of war, league had become firmly established in Christchurch.

After several years of effort to establish league in Wellington, the game appeared to have died out by 1912. However, another attempt to launch the game was made that year and clubs were formed in both the city and in nearby Petone. Like Dunedin enthusiasts, the Wellington promoters experienced ground difficulties but managed to overcome them to a sufficient extent that league had become established by the outbreak of war.

Auckland was the success story of league in these years. Player support increased dramatically and competitions were established for senior, junior, third, fourth, and fifth grade players. By the outbreak of war, league had more players and attracted considerably more spectators than did union. It was disadvantaged financially by the lack of a pay ground of its own, having to rely on council-owned facilities, but its growing support caused considerable concern to the Auckland Rugby Union, which resorted to defying

the New Zealand Union and playing to revised rules in an attempt to compete with league.

From its initial stage when the numbers playing league were small, and the survival of the game hung in the balance, league had, in three of New Zealand's cities, managed to consolidate its position, and its survival now seemed secure. It had gained legitimacy through the formation of a national body to govern the sport and the New Zealand Rugby League had increased its credibility by its organisation of international tours by British and Australian teams. The hosting of an overseas national team was recognised as a major event by city dignitaries, and, whatever their private opinion of league was, they were eager to entertain the visitors and to be seen at the game. This patronage, however fleeting, by the middle-class establishment helped foster the view that league was a legitimate New Zealand sport. The visits also led to increased exposure of the game in the national press, furthering its acceptance by the general public. These years were a time when the game greatly increased its player numbers, many drawn to the game by its skills, speed, and the absence of rough play and violence associated with union. The game was thus creating its own constituency, distinct from union. League could be said to have moved out of the initial stage of its introduction and into the second stage when the 'bandwagon' was rolling.<sup>156</sup>

With league having become well established in three of New Zealand's four cities in the years prior to the war, it remained to be seen what success it had in the smaller centres and what effect the war would have on the burgeoning sport.

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<sup>156</sup> Bale, p. 46.

# 4

1911-1914

EXPANSION YEARS PART TWO:

TOWNS (large and small)

## **Introduction**

At the start of this period rugby leagues were active in only three centres, Auckland city and Rotorua in the north, and Invercargill in the south; the prospects for the game outside of Auckland seemed bleak. But, due to the missionary efforts of Auckland league officials and the recently formed New Zealand Rugby League, a major expansion of the game in both Auckland province and the central provinces took place.

Although Auckland's southern tour at the end of the 1910 season had failed to reintroduce league to Dunedin, and the game had ceased to be played in Invercargill after the 1911 season, it was successful in introducing of the game into the central provinces. The period 1911 to 1914 saw rugby league prosper in the central provinces, and new leagues were formed at Wanganui,<sup>1</sup> Hawkes Bay, Dannevirke, Gisborne, Marlborough and Palmerston North, whilst the Nelson and Taranaki<sup>2</sup> leagues were revitalised. This second wave of league bore similarities to the way in which the game was introduced to New Zealand in 1908. Most new leagues were started by first recruiting players to take part in representative matches. These games attracted union representative players keen to try the new game and also generated spectator support.

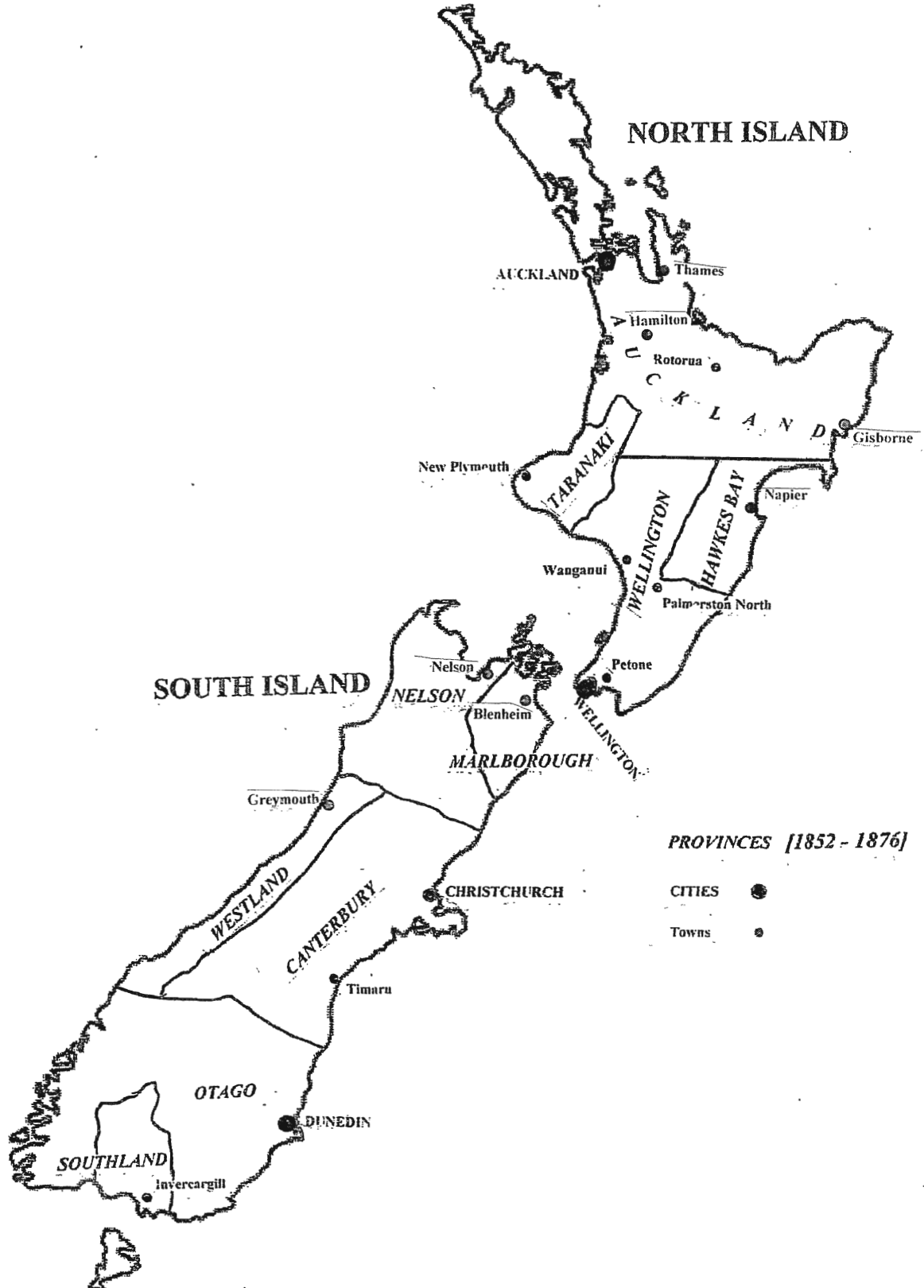
During this period, Nelson was the only locality in New Zealand, other than the four metropolitan centres of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, classified as a city. But Nelson, with a population of about 8,000, hardly warranted the title and there were six other towns with greater populations. These were Invercargill (population 17,000), Wanganui (15,000), Timaru, Palmerston North and Napier (each 12,000), and Gisborne (11,000), whilst a seventh town, Petone, had just over 7,000 inhabitants.

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<sup>1</sup> William Greenwood, 'The "Famous Northern Union Game": The Introduction of Rugby League to Wanganui, 1910-1915', History research exercise, Massey University, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> William Greenwood, 'Trying Rugby League, Early Attempts to Establish Rugby Football's Other Code in the Central Provinces of New Zealand, 1908-1915', MA History Thesis, Massey University, 2002

# NEW ZEALAND



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These seven centres I have called large towns and league was played, to some extent, in all of them during this period. Below these large towns there were 74 small towns with populations ranging from under 1,000 to nearly 6,000, although most (50) had populations of less than 2,000.<sup>3</sup> League was played in only about twenty of these small towns.

The chapter begins with a survey of the fortunes of league, first in the towns of Auckland Province, and then the towns of the central provinces and the south. [see Table 5] Next the evidence for league to be regarded as a working-class sport, despite most working-class players staying with union, will be presented, then the difficulties faced by league in towns, especially small towns, due to geographic and demographic features will be considered. The importance of representative football in attracting players from union, in generating spectator support, in establishing national recognition of the game, and even forcing the middle-class establishment to acknowledge its existence, will then be considered. The various ways in which rugby union authorities sought to impede the growth of league, denying access to grounds, accusations of professionalism, banning of players, and keeping league out of schools are then examined. Finally the way league was helped in becoming established by discontent and disputes within rugby unions in some parts of the country will be shown.

### **Auckland Province**

Although provincial government had had only a brief existence, from 1852 to 1876, [see map page 185] New Zealanders in the early twentieth century still maintained strong provincial loyalties.<sup>4</sup> This was very apparent on the sporting scene, where all codes played representative games against teams from other provinces, and such fixtures attracted strong spectator

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<sup>3</sup> Figures are taken from the *New Zealand Official Yearbooks* for 1910 and 1915 and rounded to the nearest 1,000

<sup>4</sup> Greg Ryan, *The Contest for Rugby Supremacy: Accounting for the 1905 All Blacks*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2005, p. 40, and Geoffrey T. Vincent, 'To Uphold the Honour of the Province: Football in Canterbury c. 1854-c. 1890', in *Tackling Rugby Myths: Rugby and New Zealand Society 1854-2004*, Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2005, p. 18.

support. League followed this tradition and, as has been shown, the game was introduced to New Zealand by the playing of interprovincial matches. The New Zealand Rugby League was, from its formation in 1910, organised on a provincial basis, with only provincial leagues being allowed to affiliate. This meant that league in small towns was under the control of the provincial league in the province in which they were situated.

Auckland was the largest province in both population, which grew rapidly from 211,000 in 1906 to 290,000 in 1914, and area, covering the whole of the top half of the North Island. At its formation on 6 April 1910, the Auckland Provincial Rugby League signalled, by the title adopted, that it intended governing the game throughout the whole of the province. Present at the meeting was a representative for the already established Rotorua District Rugby League, the first league to be formed in the province. Throughout this period the Auckland League was active in encouraging and assisting in the formation and development of district leagues.

Five district leagues were formed, and functioned with varying degrees of success up to the war years. The King Country Rugby League was formed by officials of the Te Kuiti Huia Northern Union Club, formed the previous year, at a meeting in the Town Hall on Thursday 6 April 1911. The League hoped to include 'a number of newly formed clubs with Te Kuiti as centre'.<sup>5</sup> Few clubs appear to have been formed and only a few games seem to have been played, though games between Taumarunui teams may have been played.<sup>6</sup> Te Kuiti played a team from Marunui, a small settlement 6km south of Taumarunui,<sup>7</sup> and a combined Marunui/Kakahi team,<sup>8</sup> Kakahi being another small settlement about 12 km south of Taumarunui, and a team from Hamilton.<sup>9</sup> They also travelled to Rotorua for a match and the team 'had a

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<sup>5</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 April 1911, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> No Taumarunui newspapers have survived so any such games cannot be verified.

<sup>7</sup> *King Country Chronicle*, 27 May 1911.

<sup>8</sup> *King Country Chronicle*, 28 June 1911.

<sup>9</sup> *King Country Chronicle*, 6 September 1911.

splendid time, and were shown the sights during their stay'.<sup>10</sup> Only the Te Kuiti club survived the 1911 season and, having no other clubs to play against, it too went out of existence and league ceased to be played in the King Country.

The Lower Waikato District Rugby League was formed on 17 March 1911 at Ngaruawahia, following a visit by B. Brigham, chairman of the Auckland League, in 1910,<sup>11</sup> and the Auckland League sent a referee to control the first match played, between Ngaruawahia and Huntly on Saturday 22 April 1911. Early in April the Ngaruawahia rugby union club had, after correspondence with the Auckland League, voted to go over to league,<sup>12</sup> and the Huntly union club took up league and became Huntly Rovers. Some union, however, was still being played. In 1912 a third union club, Taupiri went over to league and this defection proved to be the final straw for the union game in the district.<sup>13</sup> No union was played in 1912 and the Waikato Rugby Union was reported to be defunct.<sup>14</sup> Up until the war years, and with no union competition, the three league clubs fielded senior, junior and third grade teams in club championship competitions and the matches proved popular with spectators. In 1914, after three successful years, the Lower Waikato League felt confident enough to consider the possibility of secession from the Auckland League and securing direct affiliation to the New Zealand League.<sup>15</sup> In its application the Lower Waikato League stated that 'it had 112 players<sup>16</sup> on the field each Saturday and prospects for the game in the district were growing brighter every day.

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<sup>10</sup> *King Country Chronicle*, 9 August 1911.

<sup>11</sup> Bennett, p. 87.

<sup>12</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 5 April 1911.

<sup>13</sup> Copies of the *Huntly Press* were unavailable for most of 1912 so information is from Hamilton and Auckland newspapers.

<sup>14</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 2 April 1912.

<sup>15</sup> *Huntly Press*, 22 May 1914.

<sup>16</sup> Where the figure of 112 comes from is rather a puzzle as nine teams of 13 players would need 117 players, so the figure could be a misprint.

League was started in Hamilton towards the end of the 1911 season when a representative match between Auckland and the Lower Waikato was played in that town. Following the match, a well-attended meeting at the Commercial Hotel was addressed by B. Brigham, president of the Auckland League, who outlined the advantages of the league game. The Hamilton United rugby league club was formed at the meeting.<sup>17</sup> The Hamilton Rugby League was formed the following year, on Saturday 4 May 1912, at a meeting at the Hamilton Hotel, called by officials of the Hamilton United club who became officials of the newly formed League.<sup>18</sup> Three new clubs were formed, one taking the name of the original United club,<sup>19</sup> the other two were the Albion and the Ramblers Rugby League clubs.<sup>20</sup> The League was successful in securing the use of Steele Park, Hamilton's main sports ground, and conducted a successful club competition there as well as staging a number of representative games.

In 1913, the same three clubs were set to compete for the Innes Shield, presented to the League the previous year. The season opened at Steele Park with a practice match for 'all players and intended players'<sup>21</sup> followed by a match against Ngaruawahia from the Lower Waikato but

...the men were palpably in no form to play a strenuous game and if league's followers wish to hold their own with the Rugby game, which has come up this season like a giant refreshed, this will not do, and the exponents of the Northern game will have to take themselves a little more seriously.<sup>22</sup>

With union strong, six senior and four junior teams, and four senior hockey teams in a small town, league was unable to recruit enough players and clubs struggled to field teams, only three club games were played and players were

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<sup>17</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 15 August 1911.

<sup>18</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 8 May 1912.

<sup>19</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 8 May 1912.

<sup>20</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 13 and 15 May 1912.

<sup>21</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 1 May 1913.

<sup>22</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 19 May 1913.

returning to union.<sup>23</sup> Representative matches provided games for the keen players during the year but any hopes of reviving the game in 1914 came to nothing. The loss of support for union, down to four senior teams, even with the return of many league players, made it even more difficult for the League to attract players, and the outbreak of war dealt it the final blow. It was not until after the war that a second attempt was made to start the game.

The Rotorua Rugby League was the first league to be formed in the North Island and by 1911 it was already well established, with three clubs, Albion, Star and Tukapa, fielding both senior and junior teams. Sometime during the years 1911 - 1914 they were joined by a fourth club, Huimai and the four clubs competed in the club championship competitions.<sup>24</sup> The League was badly affected by the outbreak of war in 1914, and though the clubs competed for the Meihana Cup and Anderson Shield, possibly awarded to the winners of the senior and junior competitions, only one representative game was played and the League went into recess for the war years.

League was introduced to the Goldfields district in 1911 after the Auckland League received numerous requests for information from residents and decided to play an exhibition game in the district.<sup>25</sup> Following this match, Messrs McLean and Oliphant from the Auckland League addressed an evening meeting where it was decided to form a club in Waihi.<sup>26</sup> A second meeting early in 1912 resulted in the formation of the Goldfields Rugby League.<sup>27</sup> The Goldfields League comprised three clubs, Waihi, Karangahake and Paeroa and they played a six-match series during the season. The third club, Waihi, would appear to have been experiencing difficulties in fielding full sides as, for its last two matches with Karangahake, it borrowed players from Paeroa and played as a combined Waihi/Paeroa team. Little is known

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<sup>23</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 18 June and 2 July 1913.

<sup>24</sup> Little is known of rugby league in Rotorua as no local newspapers have survived.

<sup>25</sup> Little is known of rugby league in the Goldfields as no local newspapers have survived.

<sup>26</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 17 Oct 1911, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 April 1912, p. 6.

of the 1913 season, the Karangahake and Paeroa clubs were still in existence<sup>28</sup> but the only match reports are of a junior match between Piako and Paeroa played at the Te Aroha,<sup>29</sup> and a match played by Paeroa against the Rotorua representative team. There are no reports of the Waihi club, which probably ceased to exist.

In 1912, the Thames Rugby league was formed when George Gillett spoke at a well attended meeting in the Salutation Hotel on Wednesday 1 May.<sup>30</sup> In the days following, meetings were held to form clubs<sup>31</sup> and by the middle of the month the League announced the formation of three clubs, City, Suburbs and Hauraki.<sup>32</sup> Nothing is known of the fate of the Suburbs club, presumably it was unable to recruit enough players and ceased to function, but the remaining two clubs played against each other in a series of matches throughout the season. Efforts to have the Thames and Goldfields Leagues amalgamate came to nothing,<sup>33</sup> so both leagues were granted affiliation by the Auckland League as independent district leagues in June.<sup>34</sup>

What happened to the Thames League in 1913 is a mystery! Prior to the opening of the season, it was reported that football under league rules had made rapid progress in Thames the previous year and that the opening match should be both interesting and spectacular.<sup>35</sup> The local paper carried advertisements for the opening matches in both rugby codes. In the league game the Thames and Hauraki clubs were to play each other at the Shortland Sports ground,<sup>36</sup> and the players for the two teams were named. Ten of the

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<sup>28</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 April 1913, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 9 September 1913, p. 9.

<sup>30</sup> *Thames Star*, 2 May 1912, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Thames Star*, 2 May 1912, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Thames Star*, 23 May 1912, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 30 May 1912, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 6 June 1912, and 14 June 1912, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 May 1913, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Thames Star*, 9 May 1913, p. 1.

16 players named for the Thames club were returnees from the previous season, whilst the Hauraki club named 14 of whom 9 were returnees. Neither result nor report of this match appeared in local newspapers, and there is no further mention of league for the rest of the season. It could be that administrative failure was responsible as there seems to have been players willing to take to the field, and it is even possible that some informal league was played. Certainly interest in league continued, as it was restarted in 1915.

### **The Central Provinces and the South, 1911-1914**

Rugby league was slow to gain acceptance in New Zealand's central provinces. In 1910 there were only three leagues in the region, in Wellington, Taranaki and Nelson, and all three were struggling to survive. In Wellington and Taranaki a few players tried to keep the game alive by playing as a representative team whilst the Nelson League had spent two seasons unsuccessfully attempting to recruit a sufficient number of players to enable clubs to be formed. Only in Invercargill in the far south were there any clubs playing league. The outlook for league looked bleak and this situation alarmed the newly formed New Zealand Rugby Football League and the Auckland League, and the southern tour by the Auckland representative team at the end of the 1910 season was to try and revitalise the game. As a result of this tour, three new leagues were formed; at Napier, Wanganui and Dannevirke, and the Nelson League took on a new lease of life.

League was introduced to Napier in 1910 by J.C. Gleeson, one of the 1907 rebel All Black tourists, who called a meeting that authorised him to arrange for the Auckland League to send a team to play a Hawkes Bay representative team.<sup>37</sup> Once Napier was included in Auckland's southern tour, Gleeson, called another meeting which voted to form the Hawkes Bay Rugby League. The meeting was well supported by many prominent union players and seven union referees offered their support.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 21 April 1910, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 21 September 1910, p. 3.

A series of well supported meetings, held in the weeks following the formation of the League, led to the formation of six clubs. Ahuriri, Kia Ora, Westshore and Clive were union clubs that had defected to league, City was a new club formed in Napier, whilst Petane was a marae-based Maori club. These teams took part in four-team senior, and five-team junior competitions during the 1911 season. Early season matches were often played short handed, when selected players failed to turn up, a problem shared with union. Despite this, the first season of league was considered successful, with the matches attracting as many spectators as did union. But it was hockey, which did not charge admission to its matches, which drew the biggest crowds.<sup>39</sup> It was feared that, with the advent of league, there were too many different sports being played in Napier and that one, possibly union, would 'drop through'.<sup>40</sup>

Third and fourth grade competitions were started in the 1912 season, but efforts to start a team in Hastings failed despite a large crowd attending a Charity Cup match played there late in the season.<sup>41</sup> There was an increase in support for union in the 1913 season, and more players were taking up that game, including returning league players. This adversely affected league and the City club had to withdraw from all competitions, and two more clubs could only field senior teams. Despite these setbacks, about 370 played league during the season, only slightly fewer than the previous year. Another attempt to start league in Hastings was made by playing a senior championship match there, and again a good crowd of spectators was attracted, but, yet again, no club was formed.<sup>42</sup> 1914 was another successful season and, despite more players returning to union, senior, junior, third-grade and fourth-grade competitions were again staged. This suggests that, as in other centres, league was attracting players other than from union and creating its own constituency. Schoolboy league was introduced with a team

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<sup>39</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 13 May 1911, p. 3. (Supplement)

<sup>40</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 13 May 1911, p. 4. (Supplement)

<sup>41</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 26 August 1912, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 12 May 1913, p. 3.

from the Napier Technical College competing in the fourth grade competition and winning all its matches.

A committee to promote league was formed in Wanganui in September 1910, with W.J. Perrett as secretary. A fixture with the touring Auckland representative team was arranged and was played at Cook's Gardens on Thursday 22nd of September,<sup>43</sup> arousing considerable public interest. The Wanganui Rugby League arranged a number of representative games for the 1911 season in order to maintain this interest, whilst players were recruited and clubs formed. Three were formed, with many senior players from the Pirates rugby union club involved in the formation of both the City and St. John's league clubs, but the club itself remained loyal to rugby union relying on its junior players to keep going. The third club was formed when the Eastern rugby union club decided that the club should split into separate league and union clubs with the Eastern rugby league club emerging as a result of this split.<sup>44</sup> The Eastern rugby union club had only been formed the previous year and after the split struggled to survive and disbanded before the next season. The league club had a strong presence right up to the war. These three clubs fielded teams in both the senior and junior competitions in the 1912 and 1913 seasons and games proved popular with spectators.

The League experienced problems in the 1914 season with fewer returnees from the previous season, forcing clubs to promote many juniors to their senior teams. This left the junior teams relying mainly on new recruits, and although the St. John's and Eastern clubs tried to field junior teams, their attempts failed and the junior competition was abandoned. Although fewer players turned out for the senior teams, they were mostly experienced senior and promoted junior players from previous years.

Dannevirke was only a small town and the match that introduced league to the town was only reluctantly undertaken by the 'Auckland team [which] was prevailed upon to break their journey home at Dannevirke and

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<sup>43</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle*, 13 September 1910, p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 24 August 1911, p. 6.

give the local enthusiasts, who are endeavouring to implant the game there, the benefit of their experience'.<sup>45</sup> The Dannevirke Northern Union League was formed at a well-attended meeting held on Saturday 1 April 1911. Also formed at the meeting was the Rovers rugby league club, and hopes were expressed that clubs could be formed at Woodville and several other outlying districts' as well as from the town itself.<sup>46</sup> Dannevirke's second club was formed at another meeting on Saturday 22 April at which a good number Maori were present, and it was decided that they should form a separate club,<sup>47</sup> which was called the Kiatere club.

The other hoped-for clubs never eventuated and the League started the 1911 season with just two teams, Rovers and Kiatere, both from Dannevirke. The two clubs played each other a number of times during the season but the Rovers club had difficulty recruiting players, and this situation continued in the 1912 season with Rovers only managing to play two matches before the club ceased to exist after defaulting a number of games. The Maori club had plenty of players but, with no other team to play, did not survive the season and many players went back to union.<sup>48</sup>

The Nelson League had had a two-year struggle for survival prior to its match against the Auckland tourists in 1910. But the chance to play against the tourists brought an influx of new players and made it possible, for the first time, for clubs to be formed. Two clubs were formed in 1911, the Albion Northern Union club<sup>49</sup> and the St. Mary's club, formed by members of the congregation of the St. Mary's Catholic Church.<sup>50</sup> These two clubs were to play each other a number of times, in both friendly and Cup matches, in each of the next three seasons, but the League seemed to be stagnating. A

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<sup>45</sup> *Dannevirke Advocate*, 13 October 1910, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Dannevirke Evening News*, 3 April 1911, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Dannevirke Evening News*, 24 April 1911, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Geoff Watson, *Aotea Sports Club Centennial Booklet: 100 Years of History 1903-2003*, Dannevirke: Aotea Sports Club, 2003, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 3 April 1911, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 7 April 1911, p. 3.

significant development occurred in the 1913 season when an influx of younger players made it possible, for the first time, for the clubs to field both senior and junior teams. The seniors once again played each other for the Tall Cup, whilst the juniors played for the Cann-Nelson Cup. The influx of juniors doubled the number of players over previous years, making the formation of another club for the 1914 season a real possibility. This did not happen as, for whatever reason, no organised league was played in the 1914 season and the outbreak of war meant the end of league in Nelson for many years.

League also had a strong presence in Takaka during this period and, despite its isolation and small population, the district produced players talented enough to represent both Nelson province and New Zealand. Two clubs are known to have played in the Golden Bay District League as the Kiatoa club beat the Kaikahu club in the final of the club championship in 1912 and then travelled to Nelson, where they beat the St. Mary's club to win the Tall Cup.

Taranaki was another league that had struggled to survive for a number of years. Taranaki was a province of small towns, most of which lacked the population to support more than one rugby club and, with no league clubs being formed, the game was only kept alive by a few enthusiasts who, as a representative team, played the occasional inter-provincial match. The spread of league to neighbouring central provinces, and the arrival of a capable organiser, W.J. Perrett, from Wanganui, led to renewed attempts to form clubs in 1912. These attempts resulted in a number of 'informal' club games being played.<sup>51</sup> Further advances were made in 1913, with more club football played together with six representative games. The Eltham rugby league club was reported to be 'going strongly' and playing other clubs. On the other hand, the Eltham rugby union club was struggling to survive. Several games were reported involving players from Eltham, Stratford, Inglewood, New Plymouth, Waitara, Kaponga and

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<sup>51</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 10 May 1912, p. 6.

Opunake, but as most of these small towns lacked sufficient players to form stand-alone clubs, the matches usually involved combined teams.

A club competition was finally launched in 1914, with clubs established in New Plymouth, Eltham and Mangatoki, and players in a number of other small towns wanting to play. In order to have just three strong clubs, players from these other towns joined the club nearest them to form a composite team.<sup>52</sup> The club competition had a successful start but the imminent threat of war, and the enlistment of many players, meant that not all fixtures could be played later in the season.

Two new leagues were formed in 1912. The Marlborough 'League (Northern Union)' was formed at a meeting held on Tuesday 3 September,<sup>53</sup> and the first game of league in Marlborough took place on Saturday 21 September when the first of two trial games were played at Blenheim, the second trial took place the following week at Picton. Following the trials a representative team was chosen which played two games against Wellington and Nelson.<sup>54</sup> At the start of the 1913 season over 40 players were turning out for league practice matches even though no clubs had yet been formed.<sup>55</sup> Efforts to form clubs at Picton and Seddon failed, so the season started with just two clubs, Omaka, in Blenheim, and Awarua, from the small town of Spring Creek.<sup>56</sup> Awarua and Omaka met in a number of matches played early in the season for the McArtney Banner, but the Awarua club recruited sufficient players to field two teams, so for the rest of the season three teams, Awarua 'A', Awarua 'B', and Omaka played a series of matches for a new trophy, the Rofe Banner.

Another successful season could have been expected in 1914, but instead the Marlborough League collapsed. A revitalised Rugby Union secured

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<sup>52</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 9 June 1914, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 3 September 1912, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 14 October 1912, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 16 May 1913, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 23 May 1913, p. 8.

all the grounds in Blenheim and difficulties in travelling to the Spring Creek ground caused the Omaka and the newly formed Wairau club to disband. The Awarua club was still strong and tried to keep the game alive by playing some friendly games with the Wairau club before it disbanded, and then planned to play as a representative team against other provinces later in the season. These plans came to nothing with the outbreak of war and league ceased to be played in Marlborough.

Attempts were also made to start rugby league in two more towns, Palmerston North and Gisborne, in this period. Attempts to introduce the game to Gisborne in 1911 and 1912 were unsuccessful, but a third attempt in 1913 was successful. The Gisborne Rugby League, soon renamed the Poverty Bay Northern Rugby League, was formed on Wednesday 16 April 1913 at a meeting in Lucas' Tobacconist Shop. Three clubs were quickly formed but a fourth, Maori, club failed to eventuate. Two clubs, Turanganui and Gisborne, were town-based whilst the third, Taruheru, was formed by workers at the local freezing works. The three clubs played each other five times during the season and the games generated considerable spectator support. A representative team entertained the Napier club Kia Ora early in the season and later travelled to Napier for a return match and also to play the Hawkes Bay representatives.

The successful 1913 season should have been followed by an equally successful season in 1914, but this was not to be. Clubs were finding it difficult to recruit players, causing the opening of the season to be delayed for a month with only friendly games being played. Even when the season finally opened, the League was dogged by misfortune with bad weather and territorial army parades causing a number of cancellations. Only three games were played in a six-week period, the seventh week the Kia Ora team was again in Gisborne to play the representative side and the following week all codes cancelled their fixtures, feeling unable to compete with a two-day steeplechase meeting. This lack of games caused players to lose interest and no more league was played for the rest of the season.

**TABLE 5****AUCKLAND PROVINCE - DISTRICT RUGBY LEAGUES 1911-1914 - CLUBS****GOLDFIELDS**

Karangahake 1912, 1913  
Paeroa 1912, 1913  
Waihi 1912

**ROTORUA**

Albion 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
Star 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
Tukapa 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
Huimai between 1912 and 1914

**HAMILTON**

United 1911, 1912, 1913  
Albion 1912, 1913  
Ramblers 1912, 1913

**LOWER WAIKATO**

Huntly Rovers 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
Ngaruawahia 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
Komokarau 1911  
Taupiri 1912, 1913, 1914  
Huntly Brickworks Ramblers 1913, 1914  
Moehaka Maoris 1913, 1914

**THAMES**

City 1912  
Hauraki 1912

**KING COUNTRY**

Te Kuiti Huias 1911, 1912  
Taumarunui Kiwis 1912

**CENTRAL AND SOUTH PROVINCIAL AND DISTRICT LEAGUES 1911-1914 - CLUBS****HAWKES BAY**

City 1911, 1912  
Ahuriri 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
Kia Ora 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
Clive 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
Petane 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
Westshore 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914

**WANGANUI**

St. John's 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
Eastern 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914  
City 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914

**NELSON**

Albion 1911, 1912, 1913  
St. Mary's 1911, 1912, 1913

**DANNEVIRKE**

Rovers 1911, 1912  
Kiatere 1911, 1912

**TARANAKI**

Eltham 1912, 1913, 1914  
New Plymouth 1912, 1913, 1914  
Mangatoki 1914

**GOLDEN BAY**

Kia Toa 1911 to 1914 about  
Kia Kahu 1911 to 1914 about

**GISBORNE**

Turanganui 1913  
Gisborne 1913  
Taruhuru 1913

**MARLBOROUGH**

Awarua 1913, 1914  
Omaka 1913  
Wairau 1914

**SOUTHLAND**

Britannia 1910, 1911  
Bluff 1910

**Other clubs with only a brief existence**

Marunui and Kakahi (King Country)  
Piako (Goldfields)  
Eureka (Hamilton)  
Havelock (Hawkes Bay)  
Mahakipawa (Picton, Marlborough)  
Roxburgh (Southland)

Following an unsuccessful attempt to introduce league to Palmerston North in 1908, interest was renewed in 1912 and it was reported that seven or eight Manawatu representative players had decided to throw in their lot with Northern Union and were to play in Wellington for the remainder of the season before trying to start the game in Palmerston North the following season.<sup>57</sup> There are no reports of any league being played in Palmerston North in 1913 until near the end of the season, when the Wanganui and Wellington representative sides played a match to generate interest in the game. The Manawatu Rugby League was formed following the match by a large number of enthusiasts who attended a meeting called by H. McGuire, one of the players who had played in Wellington the previous year.<sup>58</sup>

Efforts to establish the game were made in 1914 and an early season exhibition game was played between teams from Palmerston North and Wanganui. Practices were held throughout the season as attempts to form clubs were made but, despite out-of-town reports of four clubs being formed,<sup>59</sup> and of large numbers of players anxious to take up the game,<sup>60</sup> there is no evidence of this in the local papers. Clubs or no clubs, there were enough league players to form a representative side and travel to Wanganui to play the local representatives on Saturday 18 July, a match reported in the Wanganui papers but ignored by the Palmerston press.<sup>61</sup>

In Invercargill two clubs, Bluff and Britannia, had played club football during the 1910 season and there had been plenty of spectator support for the four games, yet the code died out in 1911. Some Bluff players wanted to return to union and a petition supported by leading residents was circulated to have the Rugby Union lift their suspensions.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile the Britannia club

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<sup>57</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 27 July 1912, Supplement, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup>*Manawatu Evening Standard*, 9 September 1913, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 2 May 1914, Supplement, p. 4, 16 May 1914, Supplement, p.4.

<sup>60</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 1914, Supplement, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup>*Wanganui Herald*, 16 July 1914, p. 7, *Wanganui Chronicle*, 20 July 1914, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup>*Southland Times*, 23 May 1911, p. 3.

had secured playing grounds and held practices throughout April and May, but with the Bluff club no more, and with no other clubs to play against, it too ceased to function. The New Zealand League though was still hopeful that the game would survive and selected three southerners for the 1911 tour to Australia.

### **A Working-Class Sport**

The view that league is a working-class sport was commonly held right from its early years in New Zealand. A Napier rugby union columnist in 1911, speculating on 'the probable effects of the professional game on Rugby', wrote

if anything it will have a beneficial tendency, from the fact that it will weed out many players who were always a disturbing element, and at the same time get rid of several factors which prejudicially affected the welfare of the sport from the purely amateur aspect.<sup>63</sup>

Two approaches will be taken to investigate working-class involvement in the game; the rugby union clubs that were involved in the establishment of the game will be examined as will the occupations of rugby league players and officials in regions where the game was established.

Unlike England, where most clubs in the north went over to league,<sup>64</sup> leaving only a handful of middle-class clubs to keep the union game alive, few New Zealand clubs went over to the new game. However, in those districts where they did, it was working-class clubs which changed codes. In the Waikato clubs from the small coalmining townships voted to leave the union game and take up league. Studies have demonstrated that miners in the region constituted

a distinctive cohesive community with group attitudes, norms of behaviour, social patterns, a shared history, much of it identified with radical unionism and strong socialist outlook<sup>65</sup>

and

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<sup>63</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 15 April 1911, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, pp. 158-62.

<sup>65</sup> Evelyn Stokes, *Huntly Coal Miners*, Hamilton: University of Waikato, 1978, p. 3.

The Huntly miners in origin, occupation, institutional and political allegiance and self conceptualisation were a "distinct" group socially isolated from the regional community surrounding them.<sup>66</sup>

Significantly, it was only in this 'tight' working-class community that league completely displaced the union version of rugby. In the Hawkes Bay it was working-class clubs, such as Kia Ora and Awahuri, from the town of Napier that took up league leaving the middle-class Napier Old Boys as the sole senior union club in the town, whereas the efforts to introduce the game to nearby Hastings, a service centre for the surrounding farming community, met with failure.

Although few clubs changed codes, players from working-class communities and from clubs with strong working-class connections were active in introducing the game and in forming clubs. Workers from the Huntly brickworks formed a club and played in the Lower Waikato League. Goldminers from Waihi and Karangahake formed clubs and launched the Goldfields League. In Taranaki players from the working-class Tukapa club in New Plymouth were prominent in introducing the game. When the Gisborne League was formed in 1913 one of the founder-member clubs was established by the employees of the Nelson Brothers freezing works at Taraheru, and the company provided a playing field near the entrance to the works.

In Wanganui it was players from the Pirates rugby union club which constituted most of the representative team who introduced the game to the town, and the Pirates club drew its players from the local meatworks, whilst another club, Eastern, was started by workers at the railway workshops in Wanganui East. Sixty-five players were named to play in two inter-club matches in Wanganui towards the end of the 1911 season and over half, thirty-six, are known to have played union for one of Wanganui's four rugby union clubs in the 1910 season. The overwhelming majority came from just two clubs, the working-class Pirates and Eastern clubs, which accounted for 31 of the players, only 5 came from the Wanganui and Kaierau clubs,

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<sup>66</sup>P. E. J. McLaughlan, *Huntly: The Genesis and Development of a Coalmining County*, Hamilton: University of Waikato, p. 3.

Wanganui's two middle-class clubs. Whilst there is ample evidence of the involvement of players from working-class clubs in launching league, there is no evidence of players from middle-class clubs showing any inclination to take up what was perceived as a working-class game.

Further evidence of the attraction of league to working-class players is found by analysing the occupations of league players. To do this the names of players who appeared on team lists published in local newspapers were compared with 1911 electoral rolls in order to find their occupations. The 1911 rolls are the only ones available for this period, which means that only players 21 years of age or older in 1911 can be traced. Many players must have been of a younger age and therefore untraceable. This could be a reason why many players' names did not appear on the electoral rolls, the percentages varying from a low of 25 percent in Marlborough to a high of 62 percent in Thames.

Occupations were divided into five categories; 1) skilled workers such as blacksmiths, butchers, bakers, carpenters, painters etc.; 2) unskilled workers such as general labourers, factory hands, miners etc.; 3) non-manual workers such as clerks, shop assistants, etc.; 4) middle-class people either self-employed such as shopkeepers and businessmen, or professionals such as schoolteachers and managers; and 5) farmers.<sup>67</sup> The findings strongly support the hypothesis that league players were predominantly working class. [see table 6] Skilled and unskilled manual workers, in approximately equal numbers, accounted for the overwhelming majority of players. Labourers, the largest category of unskilled workers, are also likely to be under-represented as many would be young and mobile and therefore less likely to appear on the electoral rolls. This fact would put the percentage of players who were manual workers even higher.

The numbers of non-manual workers and men from middle-class occupations amongst players are small and account for only a few percent. As league was played mainly in towns and cities it is not surprising that very few players were farmers, but there are several provinces where there were

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<sup>67</sup>See Introduction for a discussion on 'class' in New Zealand.

a significant number of farmer players. Golden Bay, with the occupations of only nine players known, could well be an anomaly with four farmers, four labourers and a cordial manufacturer, but in both Taranaki and Marlborough there were significant numbers of farmer players. In both provinces there were many small, family-run, dairy farms, but no large towns and farmers were likely to come from a working-class background unlike the large landowners who farmed most of the country and who had middle-class values. The analysis of players from two clubs in the Lower Waikato League revealed an unexpected result. Whilst seven of the nine Huntly players whose occupations were found were miners, in the nearby town of Ngaruawahia only one of the twenty-six players whose occupations were found was a miner but eight were farmers living in a number of small settlements within a few kilometres of Ngaruawahia.

League can also lay claim to being a working-class sport through the involvement of workingmen in the administration of the game. The hostility of most of the middle-class establishment to league meant that workingmen who wanted to play the game were forced to undertake much of the organisational work themselves. Names of both club and league officials were obtained from newspaper reports from the period and the 1911 electoral rolls were used to find the occupations of those who appeared on the rolls. A high percentage of officials' names were matched with names on the electoral rolls, which would be as expected as officials would be older men, more likely to be settled and so to appear on the rolls. With few exceptions, [see table 7] workingmen, both skilled and unskilled, were prominent amongst both club and league officials. Non-manual workers and middle-class people had a greater presence than they did amongst players, with almost a third being middle class. However, most of the middle-class officials could be called 'lower middle class', hotel keepers and shopkeepers. There were hardly any 'upper middle-class' people involved in the administration of league, the 'establishment', businessmen, professionals, and teachers, generally stayed with the union game. Until the introduction of league, sports administration had been considered the prerogative of the establishment and few workingmen were involved. The introduction of league changed this, and

**TABLE 6****RUGBY LEAGUE PLAYER OCCUPATIONS 1911-1914**

	<u>Skilled</u>	<u>Unskilled</u>	<u>Non-manual</u>	<u>Middle-class</u>	<u>Farmers</u>
<b>WANGANUI: 14 (50%) of 28 representative players 1910-1911</b>	5 (36%)	7 (50%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	none
<b>WANGANUI: 23 (35%) OF 65 club players 1911</b>	9 (39%)	10 (44%)	none	4 (17%)	none
<b>HAWKES BAY: 21 (60%) of 35 representative players 1911</b>	6 (28%)	12 (57%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	none
<b>HAWKES BAY: 72 (53%) of 137 club players 1911</b>	23 (32%)	37 (51%)	5 (7%)	7 (10%)	none
<b>NELSON: 27 (54%) of 50 representative players 1909-1913</b>	12 (44%)	7 (26%)	5 (19%)	1 (4%)	2 (7%)
<b>NELSON: 64 (43%) of 148 club players 1909-1913</b>	28 (44%)	17 (27%)	11 (17%)	6 (9%)	2 (3%)
<b>GOLDEN BAY: 9 (56%) of 16 representative players 1911-1913</b>	none	4 (45%)	none	1 (10%)	4 (45%)
<b>TARANAKI: 28 (33%) of 86 club players 1910-1915</b>	7 (25%)	10 (36%)	2 (7%)	3 (11%)	6 (21%)
<b>MARLBOROUGH: 18 (44%) of 41 representative players and trialists 1912</b>	none	9 (50%)	2 (11%)	none	7 (39%)
<b>MARLBOROUGH: 32 (25%) of 130 club players 1913-1914</b>	7 (22%)	21 (66%)	1 (3%)	none	3 (9%)
<b>THAMES: 24 (62%) of 39 representative players 1912</b>	6 (25%)	8 (33%)	5 (21%)	2 (8%)	3 (13%)
<b>THAMES: 24 (45%) of 53 club players 1912</b>	9 (38%)	10 (42%)	2 (8%)	1 (4%)	2 (8%)
<b>GOLDFIELDS: 8 (38%) of 21 representative players 1912</b>	none	7 (88%)	none	1 (12%)	none
<b>GISBORNE: 29 (27%) of 106 club players 1913</b>	9 (31%)	14 (48%)	1 (3%)	4 (14%)	1 (3%)
<b>HAMILTON: 30 (46%) of 65 representative players 1911-1912</b>	12 (40%)	14 (47%)	1 (3%)	3 (10%)	none
<b>HAMILTON: 18 (21%) of 86 club players 1912</b>	6 (32%)	10 (53%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	none
<b>LOWER WAIKATO: 35 (48%) of 73 players 1911</b>	7 (20%)	13 (37%)	3 (9%)	3 (9%)	9 (26%)
<b>ALL LEAGUES: 476 (40%) of 1179 players</b>	146 (31%)	210 (44%)	42 (9%)	39 (8%)	39 (8%)

heavy involvement of workingmen in its administration, it became possibly New Zealand's first working-class sport, although further research may show that soccer, played by many working class immigrants, shared this honour. With most the upper middle classes shunning League, responsibility for its administration was thrust upon workingmen who had, together with lower middle-class enthusiasts, to take on the organisation of the game. In doing this they were following the example of the rebel All Blacks who undertook to introduce league to the country.

### **Geographic and Demographic Factors**

New Zealand's two main islands are both very mountainous. In the North Island only small patches of lowland are dotted around the coast and at the mouths of rivers. In the South Island, the Canterbury Plains, the country's only large lowland region, are separated by the Southern Alps and other mountain ranges from other small lowland regions. This largely dictated where British settlements were located in the nineteenth century. These small, isolated, coastal settlements grew into towns and cities which, in turn, became the centres of provincial life, their isolation from each other helping maintain strong provincial loyalties that persisted long after the short period of provincial government had ended. Outside of the four metropolitan cities of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, even large towns were small, with populations around 10,000, and isolated. Few roads being in existence, towns were reliant on sea-going vessels for communication until railway lines were built towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>68</sup> These factors, small populations and geographical isolation, had important effects on sport, and especially league.

In the industrial north of England, where there were many towns and cities in close proximity to each other, and Australia, where most of the population was concentrated in a few large coastal cities, league players had no great difficulty in finding clubs to play for nor in travelling to play teams

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<sup>68</sup> James Watson, *Links: A History of Transport and New Zealand Society*, Wellington: GP Publications, 1996, p.110.

**TABLE 7**  
**RUGBY LEAGUE OFFICIALS 1911-1914: OCCUPATIONS**

	<u>Skilled</u>	<u>Unskilled</u>	<u>Non-manual</u>	<u>Middle-class</u>	<u>Farmer</u>
<b>TARANAKI:</b> 15 (62%) of 23 officials 1911-1915	2 (13%)	9 (60%)	none	3 (20%)	1 (7%)
<b>MARLBOROUGH:</b> 17 (49) of 35 league and club officials 1912-1914	none	8 (47%)	2 (12%)	6 (35%)	1 (6%)
<b>WANGANUI:</b> 27 (54%) of 50 league officials 1912-1915	9 (33%)	4 (15%)	7 (26%)	6 (22%)	1 (4%)
<b>WANGANUI:</b> 19 (43%) of 44 club officials 1913-1914	5 (26%)	6 (32%)	3 (16%)	5 (26%)	none
<b>HAWKES BAY:</b> 31 (58%) of 107 league officials 1911-1912	7 (23%)	9 (29%)	7 (23%)	8 (26%)	none
<b>NELSON:</b> 19 (68%) of 28 league officials 1909-1913	11 (58%)	none	4 (21%)	3 (16%)	1 (5%)
<b>NELSON:</b> 38 (69%) of 55 club officials 1909-1913	10 (26%)	5 (13%)	7 (19%)	13 (34%)	3 (8%)
<b>GOLDFIELDS:</b> 34 (59%) of 58 club officials 1912-1913	3 (9%)	18 (53%)	2 (6%)	11 (32%)	none
<b>THAMES:</b> 10 (83%) of 12 league officials	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	none	7 (70%)	none
<b>LOWER WAKATO:</b> 28 (56%) of 50 club officials 1911, 1913, 1914	7 (25%)	7 (25%)	3 (11%)	7 (25%)	4 (14%)
<b>HAMILTON:</b> 31 (41%) of 76 club and league officials 1912	8 (26%)	5 (16%)	4 (13%)	13 (42%)	1 (3%)
<b>ALL LEAGUES:</b> 269 (53%) of 538 officials	64 (24%)	72 (27%)	39 (15%)	82 (30%)	12 (4%)

from other nearby clubs. Also, in these situations, clubs became identified with one town, or one suburban community, and developed strong local ties and loyalties. Thus both these countries quickly developed strong club competitions and did not have the need for representative football to maintain interest in the game. In New Zealand, on the other hand, sports clubs, including league clubs, could not undertake, on a regular basis, the long journeys that playing clubs from other towns would entail. Although the Saturday half day was becoming widespread, many workers could not afford to take extra time off work to travel out of town, even if reliable transport was available.

With league having failed to become established in the southern provinces of the South Island, leagues were only to be found at its northern tip, where they were isolated from both the North Island by Cook's Strait and from the rest of the South Island by mountains. Not only that but the three leagues, Nelson, Golden Bay and Marlborough, were also isolated from each other.

One of the earliest leagues to be formed in New Zealand was at Nelson, a well-established town with a population of about 9,000. Enthusiasts had formed the Nelson Rugby League in 1909 and unsuccessfully spent that and the 1910 season in trying to recruit enough players to establish clubs. Because of its isolation it was difficult for Nelson to attract other provincial teams to the town, and without the prospect of representative games it was difficult to tempt players to take up the game. The influx of players at the end of the 1910 season, lured by the prospect of playing against the Auckland team, provided the impetus needed for the launching of clubs. The Nelson League planned a North Island tour for the end of the 1911 season and hoped to play Auckland, Hawkes Bay, Dannevirke, Taranaki and Wanganui. In the end, only three games were played, against Auckland, Taranaki and Wanganui, but several trial games and practice matches prior to the tour had offered more variety to Nelson players and spectators.

Return visits were expected in 1912 from the Auckland, Taranaki and Wanganui teams, together with games against the newly formed Wellington League and a touring New South Wales team, but teams were reluctant to

travel to Nelson so the New South Wales game never eventuated and only Wanganui amongst the northern provinces was prepared to play in Nelson. Wanganui played two games, one against Golden Bay and one against Nelson. The gate takings for the Nelson match were £13/17/6, indicating a crowd of about 500, whilst a large crowd watched the Golden Bay match at Takaka. The Nelson team had to take ship to Wellington for its next match and even for a match against the Golden Bay League at Takaka. The first attempt to play this match was foiled by rough seas forcing the steamship sailing to be cancelled, the second attempt was successful and a 'large crowd' watched the match. Gate takings of £9/-/- (180 shillings) suggest that, with admission of either six pence or a shilling, between 200 and 400 were present.<sup>69</sup> This would have ended the representative season but for a late challenge being received in October from the newly formed Marlborough League, The Nelson League accepted the challenge and pioneered a new mode of travel when its team travelled overland to Blenheim on Newman's special coach over a newly opened road.<sup>70</sup> Again the representative matches, and trial games, enlivened, for players at least, another otherwise dull season.

Over the three seasons 1911-1913, Nelson played 14 representative games, but only four were home games, against Wanganui, Marlborough, Golden Bay and New South Wales. This shows the difficulties Nelson faced due to its isolated position. At least Nelson, unlike Blenheim, was a large enough town to have a population base able to accommodate both league and union clubs, but its difficulty in attracting teams from other provinces proved to be an obstacle to the development of the game.

New Zealand's most isolated League must have been Golden Bay. A district league affiliated to the Nelson Provincial League, Golden Bay was based on the small town of Takaka with a population of less than 1,500. It suffered under the additional handicap of isolation, the district being about 100 kilometres from Nelson and accessible only by sea. It is surprising that

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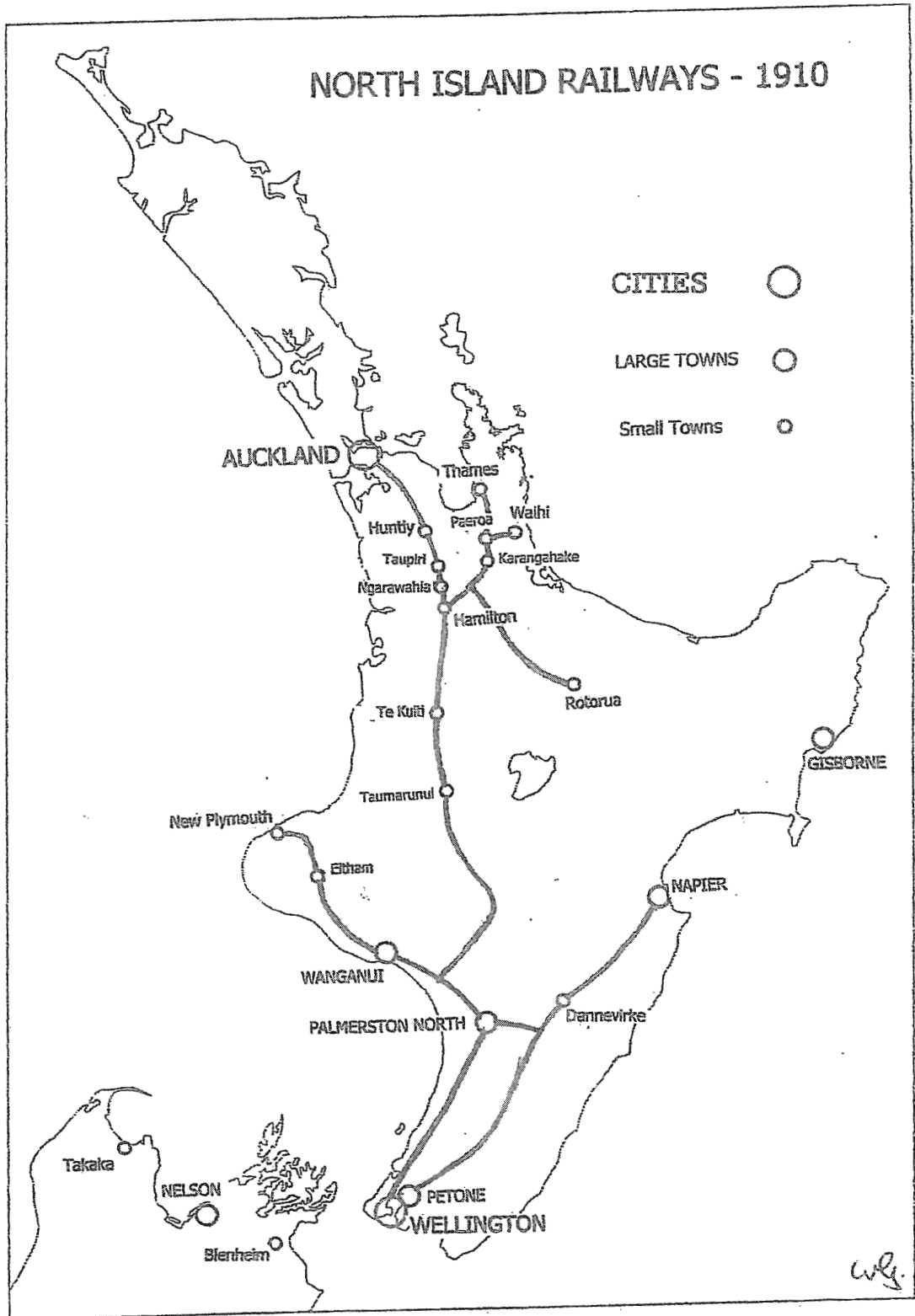
<sup>69</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 29 July 1912, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 7 October 1912, p. 7.

there was sufficient interest from such a small and isolated spot for a league to be formed. Unfortunately little is known of this League, information being only to be found in news items from the *Nelson Evening Mail*. It is not known when the League was formed, but the district produced some fine footballers. In 1910 one of its players, B. Feary, was a Nelson representative, and in 1911, Feary together with five more players, R. Beckley, D. Fauchelle, K. Feary, D. Mason and Harold Sparrow represented Nelson, whilst in 1912 L. Barnett, J. Beckley, J. Byrne, P. Byrne and Ralph Sparrow represented Nelson. More remarkable still, all eleven played for Nelson province during the 1913 season. Three of the players, B. Feary, D. Mason and J. Byrne, also represented New Zealand; a remarkable record for such a small district.

The third league at the tip of the South Island was Marlborough, where league was introduced in 1912. The total population of the province was less than 18,000, making it much smaller than any other province except Westland. Its largest town, Blenheim, had a population of only 3,500 and the only other towns with populations even approaching 1,000 were Picton and Spring Creek, halfway between it and Blenheim. If any province lacked the population to enable league to compete successfully with union, it was Marlborough. Add to this, its isolated situation, which precluded contacts with most North Island centres and the rest of the South Island, and the chances of the new code succeeding should have been slim. Yet the game was introduced by means of representative games with neighbouring province Nelson and Wellington, and a successful club competition was conducted the following season. The Marlborough League hoped to consolidate its support in 1913, its first full season of league, by entertaining representative teams from Auckland, Wellington, and Canterbury as well as the New South Wales side, but none of these games eventuated as teams were reluctant to visit such an isolated province.

Three leagues in the North Island, Taranaki, Dannevirke, and King Country, all had to contend with the same problems of isolation and small populations as the South Island leagues, though not to the same extent. The recently completed Wellington to Auckland railway meant that now all North



Island leagues were in rail connection with each other, [see map page 219] thus reducing their isolation and making provincial representative games much easier to arrange. The problems of small populations were, however, something that these leagues had to face.

Taranaki, like Marlborough, was a province of small towns, but a population of over 43,000 made it more than twice as populous as that province. This meant that although its towns were small they were bigger than those of Marlborough, and there were more of them. New Plymouth, the largest, had a population of about 5,500 in 1909, rising to 7,500 by 1915. Other towns were much smaller, with populations of mostly in the 1,000 to 2,000 range or less. Demographic reality dictated that only New Plymouth had the population to support more than one football club. Taranaki was also part of the North Island railway network, with a line from New Plymouth through Wanganui to Palmerston North where it branched north to Hawkes Bay and south to Wellington. Communication with Auckland, however, was still easier by sea. The small population of most towns made the formation of clubs difficult, but the rail links to other league centres enabled enthusiasts to keep the game alive by organising games against representative teams from throughout the lower North Island.

Dannevirke, with a population of 3,500, was another small town where isolation and small population were major obstacles to the establishment of league. Situated in Hawkes Bay, it was quite isolated despite being on the railway line to Napier. There were several small towns in southern Hawkes Bay, but all with populations of less than 2,000, and between 27 and 60 kilometres from Dannevirke. In 1911 the town could only support two senior rugby union teams, and two hockey teams. The union teams joined a team from the township of Woodville, 27 kilometres away, to play a three-team competition, whilst the two hockey teams joined with teams from Woodville and Pahiatua, 42 kilometres away, to make a four-team competition. League, which had been introduced to the town the previous season when the Auckland touring team played a Dannevirke selection, thus had to compete for players from a very limited number of young men in a town where other, established, codes were forced to travel long distances to find opposition.

The King Country was the most isolated and sparsely populated region of the North Island in which league was played. Its only towns, Te Kuiti and Taumarunui, each had populations of barely 1,000, were 80 kilometres apart, and their only link the recently completed north/south railway between Wellington and Auckland. The Te Kuiti Huia Northern Union Club, formed the previous year, was instrumental in the formation of the King Country District Rugby League in 1911 and Te Kuiti enthusiasts struggled to keep the game alive by travelling, by rail, to Hamilton and Rotorua to play 'representative' games but finally gave up the struggle in the 1912 season.

League was most successful in the three lower North Island towns of Wanganui, Napier and Gisborne. All had large enough population to support both league and union teams<sup>71</sup> and whilst Gisborne suffered from its isolation, both Wanganui and Napier had rail links with all the major North Island centres. All three towns were able to establish sufficient clubs for club competitions to be held, and with the help of the railway Wanganui and Napier were able to carry out extensive representative programmes.

Gisborne suffered from its isolation and attempts to arrange representative fixtures proved unsuccessful as other provinces were reluctant to make the long journey and the newly formed Gisborne League would be unlikely to be able to find the finances for away trips. In 1913, its first season, its request to Auckland to send a team was rejected and plans for representative games with Rotorua, Taranaki and Wanganui did not eventuate. The only out-of-town team to visit Gisborne was the Napier club Kia Ora.

The small towns of Auckland province did not suffer from isolation to the extent of other parts of New Zealand. All were connected by rail to each other and to the rugby league hotbed of Auckland. Even Rotorua, over 100 kilometres from Hamilton, had little difficulty attracting representative teams as it was already a tourist town catering to visitors eager to see its thermal wonders. Although its population was small, about 4,000 Pakeha and over 1,000 Maori lived in the district, the Rotorua League was able to conduct

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<sup>71</sup>Populations: Wanganui 10,000, Napier 11,000 and Gisborne 7,000.

club competitions and play representative games against teams from all over the North Island. Hamilton, another small town of about 3,000 population, was the centre of an agricultural and pastoral district with dairy factories, creameries, soap factories, a flax-mill and a brewery besides other local industries,<sup>72</sup> and had a substantial working-class which provided support for the club competition that was established. It was also close enough to Auckland to attract club teams from that city to play the local representative team.

However, the most successful district league was the Lower Waikato League, based in the small mining townships along the Waikato River between Hamilton and Auckland. Located only a few kilometres apart, and with both rail and river communications, the small townships of Ngaruawahia, Taupiri and Huntly were able to maintain club competitions as well as play a full programme of representative fixtures, despite their small populations; Huntly had about 1,000 inhabitants and the other two townships had only half this number. The Lower Waikato was also the only district in New Zealand where league completely displaced union.

Just as the Lower Waikato League drew its support from coal miners, so the Thames and Goldfields leagues relied on goldminers for support. As well as rail connections with towns in the Goldfields League and other North Island centres, Thames had regular steamship services to Auckland. This made the town a destination for Auckland clubs looking for an end-of-season trip and a game against local opposition. The rail link with the Goldfields also made representative games against that district a regular occurrence.

### **The Importance of Representative Football**

Representative football played a very important part in the establishment of rugby leagues in towns throughout New Zealand. In smaller towns especially, there were too few players to support more than a couple of teams. This meant that few club matches were played each season, and that representative games against teams from other districts, or provinces,

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<sup>72</sup>*New Zealand Official Yearbook 1910*, p. 806.

## TABLE 8

### AUCKLAND DISTRICT LEAGUES - REPRESENTATIVE GAMES 1910-1914

1910	Saturday 11 June	Auckland 21	Rotorua 18	Auckland
	Saturday 6 August	Rotorua 9	Great Britain 12	Rotorua
	Saturday 8 August	Rotorua 25	Te Kuiti 10	Rotorua
1911	Saturday 15 July	Lower Waikato 15	Rotorua 10	Ngaruawhaia
	Saturday 5 August	Rotorua 27	King Country 2	Rotorua
	Saturday 12 August	Lower Waikato 22	Auckland 35	Hamilton
	Saturday 26 August	Lower Waikato 17	Hamilton 3	Huntly
	Saturday 9 September	Hamilton 13	King Country 9	Hamilton
	Saturday 16 September	Rotorua 7	Lower Waikato 12	Rotorua
		Te Kuiti 16	Hamilton 12	Te Kuiti
	Saturday 23 September	Lower Waikato 16	Hawkes Bay Maori 7	Hamilton
	Saturday 30 September	Hamilton 3	Lower Waikato 5	Hamilton
	Saturday 14 October	Hamilton 14	Rotorua 5	Hamilton
	Counties 20	Auckland 10	Waihi	
1912	Saturday 11 May	Thames 5	Goldfields 0	Thames
	Saturday 18 May	Thames/Goldfields 18	Auckland 12	Thames
	Saturday 8 June	Hamilton 3	King Country 5	Hamilton
	Saturday 15 June	Auckland 'B' 6	Thames 12	Thames
	Saturday 22 June	Goldfields vs Thames	[no score]	Karangahake
	Saturday 29 June	Hamilton 4	Ngaruawhaia 27	Hamilton
	Saturday 13 July	Thames 6	Paeroa 7	Thames
	Saturday 27 July	Hamilton 12	Auckland 'B' 20	Hamilton
	Wednesday 31 July	Hamilton 14	Hawkes Bay 24	Hamilton
	Saturday 10 August	Goldfields 14	Thames 10	Mackaytown
		Rotorua 37	Hamilton 5	Ngaruawhaia
	Wednesday 14 August	Rotorua 10	Wellington 24	Rotorua
	Saturday 17 August	Paeroa 0	Thames 10	Hikutaia
		Auckland 4	Hamilton 0	Auckland
	Saturday 24 August	Thames vs Paeroa	[no score]	Thames
		Hamilton 5	Lower Waikato 23	Hamilton
		Hamilton 'B' 0	Lower Waikato 'B' 10	Hamilton
	Saturday 7 September	Auckland 'B' 27	Goldfields 14	Auckland
	Saturday 14 September	Lower Waikato 15	Hamilton 6	Huntly
		Hamilton 'B' 6	Ponsonby Juniors 19	Hamilton
Saturday 21 September	Hamilton 'B' 8	Rotorua 'B' 7	Hamilton	
Saturday 5 October	Rotorua 37	Hamilton 10	Rotorua	
1913	Saturday 17 May	Hamilton 0	Ngaruawhaia 6	Hamilton
	Saturday 24 May	Hamilton 11	Taipiri 14	Cambridge
	Saturday 28 June	Auckland 10	Counties 8	Auckland
	Saturday 5 July	Hamilton 30	Eureka 12	Eureka
	Saturday 19 July	Hamilton 10	City Rovers[Auck]21	Hamilton
	Saturday 26 July	Lower Waikato 13	Hamilton 12	Huntly
	Saturday 2 August	Lower Waikato 17	Rotorua 0	Huntly
		Lower Waikato juniors 11	Hamilton juniors 0	Huntly
	Wednesday 6 August	Hamilton 14	Nelson 12	Hamilton
	Saturday 16 August	Rotorua 16	Lower Waikato 5	Rotorua
	Saturday 23 August	Lower Waikato 6	Hamilton 3	Ngaruawhaia
	Wednesday 3 September	Rotorua 16	New South Wales 53	Rotorua
	Thursday 4 September	Waikato 14	New South Wales 20	Hamilton
		Lower Waikato juniors 17	Hamilton juniors 2	Hamilton
	Saturday 13 September	Rotorua vs Paeroa	[no result]	Rotorua
		Hamilton 'B' vs City Rovers	[no result]	Auckland
		Lower Waikato juniors 19	Rotorua juniors 0	Huntly
Saturday 13 October	Rotorua juniors 10	Lower Waikato juniors 0	Rotorua	
1914	Saturday 4 July	Lower Waikato 6	Rotorua 6	Huntly
	Saturday 8 August	Waikato 14	Auckland 29	Auckland
		Rotorua 11	Auckland 'B' 29	Auckland

were needed to extend the season to a reasonable length, and to maintain interest amongst both players and spectators.

An Auckland representative team toured the central and southern provinces during the 1910 season, and also took an active part in the introduction of the game to towns in the northern province in the 1911 and 1912 seasons. In 1911 a combined team from the already established Rotorua and Lower Waikato Leagues travelled by train to Waihi to play an Auckland, team which had come by steamer.<sup>73</sup> The object of the game was to introduce league to the Goldfields district. Although bad weather resulted in a less-than-anticipated attendance, considerable interest was aroused and resulted in the formation of the Goldfields Rugby League in 1912. Similarly, the game was introduced to Hamilton in 1911 by Auckland sending a team to play a Lower Waikato team. The match was to 'give the public in these parts an excellent opportunity of judging the merits of the new game'.<sup>74</sup> The match, the first under Northern Union rules at Hamilton, was played, on Saturday 12 August, at the Caledonian Ground at Frankton. As the game was new to most of the spectators they found it puzzling at first but as it progressed they became more enthusiastic.<sup>75</sup> Following the match the Hamilton United Rugby League club was formed.

The game was introduced to Thames in 1912 when the local representative team played the Goldfields representatives, but the next game played, on Saturday 18 May, was a combined Thames/Goldfields team against the Auckland representative team. A month later, on Saturday 15 June, the Thames representative team were in Auckland where they played the Auckland 'B' team as a curtainraiser to the 'A' team's match against the New Zealand side. The representative team went on to play a further six games before the season ended. The Goldfields League representative team played six representative games in its first season, and Hamilton played five.

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<sup>73</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 9 October 1911, p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 29 July 1911, p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 14 August 1911.

In Taranaki, Marlborough, and Manawatu representative union players were responsible for the introduction of league. In Taranaki the players who formed the first representative team in 1908 stayed loyal to the game despite the failure to establish clubs. The inability to obtain access to a ground in 1910 meant that the proposed match against Auckland as part of its southern tour had to be cancelled and no games were played in that season, although the players were still keen and kept fit by playing soccer. Representative football returned in the 1911 season when four games were played, three were played in 1912, but a fourth game, against Wellington, had to be cancelled when the Wellington League were unable to raise a team. Six games were played in 1913, including a match against New South Wales played at Hawera, a south Taranaki town. The outbreak of war caused the 1914 season to be curtailed and only three matches were played. Representative football in Taranaki did not attract as many spectators as it did in the bigger centres, crowds of between 300 and 500 watched inter-provincial games in New Plymouth, but overseas teams attracted much bigger crowds, over 1,000 were present to watch the New South Wales match at Hawera in 1913, and over 2,000 watched the match against Great Britain played at Eltham in 1914.

The Marlborough Rugby League was reported to have been formed in the aftermath of the visit of the local rugby union representative team to Wellington in late August 1912. The visit coincided with the New South Wales rugby league tourists' match, played before a huge crowd at Newtown Park and the Marlborough representatives were impressed by the support for the league game. Seven of the representative team went over to league and one of them, Roy McArtney, became secretary of the League. Following a trial game and an exhibition match, the new League played its first representative match against Wellington on 5 October when, despite extensive advertising, the crowd was 'not a large one',<sup>76</sup> this being attributed to Wellington only sending its 'B' team and to the 'gale which blew throughout the match'.<sup>77</sup> The

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<sup>76</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 7 October 1912, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 11 October 1912, p. 8.

response to the second match, against Nelson, played on 12 October, was again disappointing, attracting only a 'poor' attendance.

Some of the union representative players who had gone to Wellington in 1912 to play league were back in Palmerston North when league was introduced to Palmerston North at the end of the 1913 season when a match between the Wellington and Wanganui representative teams was played. During 1914 they were active in the attempts to form clubs but, although regular practices were held throughout the season, only one game was played, when a Manawatu representative team went to Wanganui and lost to a much more experienced team.

The Poverty Bay League, formed in 1913, attracted some talented union players and five, A. and B. Morrison, W. Smith, Carrington and Hayes were selected for the Hawkes Bay representative team to play Auckland. They travelled from Gisborne by steamship and met up with the rest of the Hawkes Bay team in Auckland.<sup>78</sup> Two of the players, Smith and Carrington, impressed the Hawkes Bay selectors sufficiently to be later included in the team to play New South Wales in Napier.<sup>79</sup>

Early in the 1912 season a number of prominent union players from Thames went over to league and it was reported that for Thames' first rugby league match 'the whole of the players [were] old representative men under Rugby rules'.<sup>80</sup> They included players such as the brothers Edgar, Harold and Morgan Hayward and Thomas Brownlee. Harold and Morgan, together with Brownlee, were good enough to tour Australia with the New Zealand League side later in the season.

With most league centres only able to support a small number of clubs and with only a few club matches being played, representative football provided the extra games needed to maintain the interest of players and provide a challenge to the better ones. Even well-established leagues like Rotorua and the Lower Waikato could only field three senior teams, whilst

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<sup>78</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 17 July 1913, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 16 September 1913.

<sup>80</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 May 1912, p. 2.

newly formed Hamilton League could only support two. This meant that representative matches were a significant part of the season. In 1911, Rotorua played three games and contributed players to a combined Rotorua/Waikato team, Lower Waikato played six games, and Hamilton played five. In 1912, Rotorua only played two games,<sup>81</sup> Lower Waikato four senior and one junior game, and Hamilton nine senior and three junior games. In 1913, Rotorua played six senior and two junior games, Lower Waikato three senior and three junior games, as well as contributing players to a combined team to play New South Wales, and Hamilton played six senior, two junior, and two exhibition games. The 1914 representative season was affected by the outbreak of war and only two representative games were played, Lower Waikato vs Auckland and Lower Waikato vs Rotorua. [see table 8]

Even large towns like Wanganui were only able to support a limited number of clubs and relied on the extra games provided by representative fixtures to maintain interest. The major part of 1911, its first season of league, was taken up with representative football. This was a deliberate policy to maintain the interest of players whilst clubs were forming. The season began with a visit to Napier to play the Hawkes Bay team. Then followed home-and-away games against Taranaki, a trip to Auckland, a return match against Hawkes Bay, and visit by the Nelson team. Seven representative matches were played in the 1912 season in addition to a full season of club football. A pre-season trip across Cook's Strait was undertaken to play Golden Bay and Nelson teams, whilst the remaining five matches against Taranaki, Hawkes Bay, Wellington, South Taranaki and New South Wales were all played at Wanganui's Cook's Gardens. Fewer representative games were played in 1913; Taranaki were played home and away, a trip was made to Napier to play Hawkes Bay, and another New South Wales team visited the city. Wanganui's four representative games in the 1914 season were all played at Cook's Gardens, the first being against Taranaki, then came a visit by the Manawatu League's team from Palmerston North, playing

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<sup>81</sup> As no Rotorua newspapers survive this record could be incomplete.

their first game of league, the weather was good and a fair number watched this game, but the main attraction of the season was the visit by the British touring team.

Hawkes Bay had the greatest number of clubs outside of Auckland but still managed to play a good number of representative games. In 1911, it opened its first season of rugby league with two representative matches played over the Easter weekend when it entertained Wanganui at Napier and then travelled to Dannevirke to play the newly formed Dannevirke League. In mid-season, two further matches, a home-and-away series, were played against Dannevirke before Hawkes Bay made a northern tour at the end of the season, playing Auckland, Rotorua and Wanganui. The highlight of the 1912 season was the visit of the New South Wales touring team, but Hawkes Bay representative teams also travelled to play Wellington, Dannevirke, Auckland and Wanganui and entertained Dannevirke and a team from the newly formed Canterbury League. Fewer representative games were played during the 1913 season, when Wanganui and a Poverty Bay team from Gisborne were visitors and Auckland were played in that city. The big attraction of the season, was again the visit of a New South Wales touring team. The 1914 representative season featured, for the first time, a visit from a Great Britain touring team, Wellington were entertained early in the season and a three-match tour at the end of the season took the representative team to Canterbury, Wellington and Wanganui.

The Poverty Bay League started its first season, 1913, with a three-team club competition but few representative games were played, probably due to its isolated position. Early in the season a team from the Hawkes Bay Kia Ora club were in Gisborne for Poverty Bay's first 'representative' game and at the end of the season the representative team travelled to Napier, where they met the Hawkes Bay representative team and the Kia Ora team once again. Kia Ora were back in Gisborne early in the 1914 season to play what was to be Poverty Bay's only representative game of the season.

In 1913 the Hamilton league played six senior representative matches, but two, against Nelson and New South Wales, attracted the most interest. The Nelson match was played on Wednesday 6 August at the Caledonian

Sports Ground at Frankton, the ground was in 'perfect order, and with ideal weather conditions a good crowd turned up to see the game'.<sup>82</sup> A close and interesting match resulted in a narrow win for Hamilton by 14 points to 12. The Nelson team were given an official reception on arrival and deputy mayor J. E. Hammond welcomed the team to Hamilton. 'He had to confess that so far he had not seen a Northern Union game, but intended being present [that] afternoon when he hoped to see a real good game.'<sup>83</sup> J. Graham, president of the Waikato League, congratulated the Nelson players for being the first football team from the South Island to visit the district and W. Richards, manager of the Nelson team, replied that he hoped it would not be too long before a team from the Waikato visited the South Island where they 'would have some good matches and be hospitably entertained'.<sup>84</sup>

A month later, on Thursday 4 September, Hamilton was host to what was undoubtedly the highlight of the 1913 season, the match between a Waikato side and the New South Wales tourists. Planning for the match began well ahead of the event with the setting up of a joint committee of Hamilton and Lower Waikato League members who reported that

the Mayor of Hamilton, Mr A. E. Manning, has kindly consented to give a civic reception at the Town Hall to the New South Wales team. Satisfactory arrangements have also been made with the Railway department for delayed trains, etc., which will be duly advertised. The railway authorities have also under consideration excursion fares between Mercer, Taupiri, Ngaruawahia, Paeroa and Cambridge, which the committee trust will be favourably received. It is also the intention of the committee to use their best endeavour to get the half holiday transferred from Wednesday to Thursday. The prospects are very encouraging to the officials, and given fine weather a big gate should be the result.<sup>85</sup>

The match was heralded as a new era in Waikato football as it was the first occasion an overseas football team had played in the district.<sup>86</sup> The visitors

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<sup>82</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 7 August 1913.

<sup>83</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 31 July 1913.

<sup>84</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 6 August 1913.

<sup>85</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 21 August 1913.

<sup>86</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 2 September 1913.

arrived from Rotorua by train at 1.20 pm and were driven by motor car to the Town Hall for a civic reception and after the match both teams were entertained to a meal at the Strand Café. The following advertisement appeared in the Monday edition of the local newspaper

New South Wales v. Waikato Football Match

In response to a general request, I invite business people to CLOSE THEIR PREMISES between the hours of 2.30 and five o'clock on the afternoon of Thursday next 4<sup>th</sup> September the day fixed for the above match.

A. E. Manning, Mayor.<sup>87</sup>  
[upper case letters in original]

There was a good attendance at the match from all parts of the district though not, apparently, up to the League's expectations.

Those who went to see the match did not go to see a contest; they went to see the visitors play up to their reputation, but those who went to scoff remained to witness a very interesting and exciting match, in which the local men, considering that they have scarcely had a match together, put up an excellent fight, characterised by pluck and endurance, which constituted [the best] the visitors have encountered since they set foot in New Zealand.<sup>88</sup>

At the after match function League chairman, F. T. Wilson, said

He considered that the exhibition of football seen at Claudelands that day was the finest ever shown in Hamilton, and even Rugby enthusiasts who were on the ground in large numbers had to admit that their game was inferior.<sup>89</sup>

and the Australian manager said 'the match was a great surprise for his team as they [had] expected an easy win'.<sup>90</sup> There were four Hamilton and nine Lower Waikato players in the Waikato team that was narrowly beaten by New South Wales, the final score being 20 points to 14.

In Taranaki, where the game was kept alive by the playing of representative matches, nearly 1,000 spectators watched the New South Wales tourists play at New Plymouth in 1912. Big crowds were also attracted to matches against overseas teams when played in smaller Taranaki towns.

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<sup>87</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 1 September 1913.

<sup>88</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 5 September 1913.

<sup>89</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 5 September 1913.

<sup>90</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 5 September 1913.

Over 1,000 watched the 1913 New South Wales tourists play Taranaki in Hawera, but the biggest crowd assembled at Eltham, another small town, to see the 1914 British tourists play. League supporters came by rail from as far afield as Wanganui, and from New Plymouth and Hawera,<sup>91</sup> as the railways put on special trains from these towns. The game was also extensively advertised and over 2,000 spectators were on hand to see an easy victory by the tourists.

The 1913 season was Nelson's busiest as far as representative football was concerned, with seven games being played, a second North Island tour was undertaken, and the New South Wales team was entertained. A return match against Marlborough was played at Trafalgar Park before about 500 spectators but many more were present for the final match of the season, the visit of the New South Wales team. This was a big event for Nelson as overseas teams, in any sport, were a rarity. The visitors were given a civic reception by the Mayor, and Wednesday, match day, was declared a half-day holiday, train departures were delayed to enable country visitors to see the whole match.<sup>92</sup> The match was a huge promotional success for the League and 1,500 people were present, giving a huge boost to the games profile in Nelson.

Outside of Auckland, league was probably most strongly supported in Napier, centre of the Hawkes Bay Rugby League. Here inter-provincial matches attracted crowds that only overseas teams generated in other centres. Visitors Wanganui played before a crowd of 1,000 at Easter 1913 and later in the season the Poverty Bay team from Gisborne played before 1,500 spectators. Early in the 1914 season Wellington attracted a crowd of 1,000, and other inter-provincial matches drew similar crowds. But again it was the overseas teams that generated the greatest interest. Four thousand spectators watched the New South Wales team in 1913 and well over 4,000 watched the British team the following season. The British team were given an enthusiastic welcome by the Napier public, the Mayor gave them a civic

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<sup>91</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 17 July 1914, p. 7.

<sup>92</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 22 September 1913, p. 6.

reception, and the Council undertook to improve the Nelson Park ground for the occasion and gave permission for the stand from McLean Park to be relocated for the event, but at the League's expense. Extra trams were commissioned to take spectators to the ground and a special train was run from the country districts. Admission was one shilling, but a large number of reserved seats in the stand were sold for four shillings. Matchday was fine and well over 4,000 spectators were present from all parts of the province.<sup>93</sup> The Rugby Union had prudently decided to cancel all its games at Napier on the day.

As in other centres, sportsmen turned out in force in Wanganui when given the opportunity of watching an overseas team. In 1912 a crowd of 3,000 were on hand to see the first overseas team to visit the town. The New South Wales tourists gave an exhibition of fast, open, and spectacular football, running out easy winners over the local representative side. The main attraction of the 1914 season was the visit of the British touring team late in July. The team travelled down the Wanganui river by boat from Taumarunui and was given a civic reception by the Mayor. Weather conditions for the match were good, despite rain falling before kick-off, and a big crowd of 3,000 watched the match. Wanganui's last representative match, and last league match to be played in the town for over 30 years, was against Hawkes Bay the following week.

The only matches played in Gisborne by the Poverty Bay representative team were against the Napier club side, Kia Ora, and both attracted good crowds. In 1913 there was a good attendance of between three and four hundred spectators, notwithstanding a strong counterattraction on the Domain, where the biggest crowd of the season, over six hundred people, watched a rugby union club match between United and Kaiti-City.<sup>94</sup> In 1914 the Rugby Union which controlled Victoria Domain, Gisborne's enclosed pay ground, would not allow the League representative match against Kia Ora to be played there, so the 'Grand Spectacular' rugby

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<sup>93</sup> *Napier Daily Times*, 4 July 1914, p. 6, 7 July 1914, p. 3, 14 July 1914, p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 30 June 1913, p. 6.

league match had to be played on Childers Road Reserve where the League was unable to charge admission, and had to rely on a collection to help defray expenses. The Rugby Union charged 6d admission at Victoria Domain to watch club matches played that day. The bad weather, with a 'cold biting wind with occasional showers of rain making grounds damp and miserable for spectators and players',<sup>95</sup> was blamed for the poor attendance at the union games. Across town, the league match, played on the Childers Road Reserve before a good number of enthusiasts, provided a fast and spectacular exhibition.<sup>96</sup>

Representative matches, and in particular those against overseas teams, were popular with both spectators and players. For players, the opportunity of meeting a higher standard of opposition, and of representing their province, was an inducement for them to take up league. Provincial loyalties and the attraction of overseas teams, drew big crowds to representative matches and generated much needed funds for the leagues. An added benefit for the promoters of league was eagerness of civic leaders to be associated with such matches and the coverage given to them in the local press. Such positive publicity did much to raise profile of league and legitimise its claim to be a national sport.

### **Ground Problems**

Most of the fledgling leagues faced ground problems of one sort or another. Some were due to the understandable objections of other codes at the prospect of giving up their grounds to the new code, some to local councils, which controlled most grounds, putting various obstacles in the way, and some to a deliberate policy of rugby union officials to have league denied the use of council grounds. This could involve attempts to 'blackmail' councils into refusing to rent publicly owned grounds to League authorities, or by deliberately renting all available grounds. J.L. Short, manager of the New Zealand Universities rugby union team touring Australia in 1911,

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<sup>95</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 29 June 1913,

<sup>96</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 29 June 1914.

boasted, in an interview with a Sydney newspaper, of the use of this tactic, saying that 'there is not a single [rugby league] club in Wellington and there is not likely to be either because they could not get a ground to play on', he went on to say that 'the Rugby Union has been very far-seeing in this respect for they have collared all the grounds'.<sup>97</sup>

Evidence of ground problems is sketchy for the five district leagues in Auckland Province. As no newspapers survive for this period from either Rotorua or the Goldfields, nothing is known of any possible ground problems in these districts. The Te Kuiti club in the King Country seemed to have had no problems in securing the use of the local domain for its, admittedly few, matches, whilst the clubs in the Lower Waikato League, union clubs that had gone over to league had no problems using the local grounds as there were no union clubs to dispute their use. The Thames League acquired the use of a ground, the Shortland ground, on its formation in 1912, and, considering the short period available, made improvements so that it was in fair condition. With further work it was anticipated that it would provide a good pitch. For the League's first game there was 'a fair attendance inside, whilst, many witnessed the game from the road', presumably to avoid paying the 6d admission to the ground.<sup>98</sup> The League was able to remedy this situation before the next game by erecting a 7 foot fence on the eastern side and it also made several alterations for the comfort and convenience of patrons.<sup>99</sup>

The Hamilton League considered it was being unfairly treated in the allocation of grounds for the 1912 season and 'though F. Jolly had again placed the Frankton ground at the disposal of the club free of charge; ...the club had received no consideration when the allotment of grounds was being considered by the Waikato Sports Association'.<sup>100</sup> The League was hopeful however that justice would be done when representations were made to the Domain Board who made the final decision. The club had only asked for the

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<sup>97</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 5 July 1911, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 May 1912, p. 2.

<sup>99</sup> *Thames Star*, 16 May 1912, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 18 April 1912.

use of Steele Park every fourth Saturday which it thought to be 'a fair and reasonable proposition'.<sup>101</sup> It was recognised that the Rugby Union had prior claim to this ground but the League did not think it equitable that it should be wholly deprived of the use of the Hamilton East ground. It was decided to approach the Domain Board on the matter and bring to the notice of its members the unfair way in which [the League] had been treated by the Sports Association.<sup>102</sup> But the matter seems to have been amicably resolved as the League was using Steele Park during the season. In the 1913 season the Rugby Union even went out of its way to help the League stage its match against New South Wales. The League asked permission to use the rugby ground at Claudelands for the game and the Rugby Union executive unanimously passed the following resolution

That seeing Steele Park [used by the League] will have been ploughed before the above match takes place, the Hamilton Rugby Union will not offer any objection to the League using their ground on that date.<sup>103</sup>

and instructed the secretary to inform both the League and the Waikato A and P Association of the decision. The day before the match the Hamilton Rugby Union proved even more helpful by deciding that 'in order to keep the #1 ground in good order for the New South Wales v. Waikato League match tomorrow, it ...[would] not play on that ground today'.<sup>104</sup> The game in question was a representative game against King Country.

Leagues in the central provinces experienced more grounds problems, with some local authorities seemingly deliberately obstructing the leagues. The town of Wanganui was fortunate in having two council-owned pay grounds within a few hundred metres of each other near the centre of town. The Recreation Ground (now Spriggin's Park) was leased to the Rugby Union during the football season, but the other ground, Cook's Gardens, was rented

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<sup>101</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 18 April 1912.

<sup>102</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 18 April 1912.

<sup>103</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 24 July 1913.

<sup>104</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 3 September 1913.

out by the council to whatever group were prepared to pay the rent. The newly formed Rugby League was fortunate in having such a pay ground, with open and covered stands, available in a central location, and it was able to go head-to-head with the Rugby Union by renting Cook's Gardens for the 1911 season, and both codes drew good crowds to their games. Realising the threat posed by league, the Rugby Union requested that the council allowed them to use Cook's gardens for some games during the 1912 season and the council agreed provided the League was allowed to use the Recreation Ground on the days that Cook's Gardens was used by the Union.<sup>105</sup> The Union refused to allow this as some league players had been suspended by the New Zealand Rugby Union, but it agreed to refer the matter to the national body. The New Zealand Rugby Union, predictably, refused to allow the Recreational Ground to be used for league.<sup>106</sup>

At the 1913 annual general meeting of the Wanganui League dissatisfaction was expressed at the terms of its lease for Cook's Gardens. It was felt that the council was overcharging the League which had been charged £65 the previous season whilst the Cricket association was given a more favourable lease during the summer. It was suggested that the League drop Cook's Gardens, get a loan from the New Zealand League, and secure a ground of their own. The incoming officials were charged with looking into this. Meanwhile Cook's Gardens was leased for another season.<sup>107</sup> Further dissatisfaction with the leasing terms for Cook's Gardens led the League to reject them in 1914 and opt to play its games at the Racecourse. This proved unpopular with spectators, even though no admission was charged, and very few turned up to watch the opening games. The Racecourse was abandoned and with no ground to play on, the third round had to be played on an open field. For the next two rounds the League was back at Cook's Gardens, but this was only temporary and it was forced to end the competitions early as

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<sup>105</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 1 August 1912, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 9 August 1912, p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 10 April 1913, p. 6.

it could not find any alternate grounds to play on.<sup>108</sup> This problem appeared to only affect the club competition and the League continued to use Cook's Gardens for its representative games.

The Hawkes Bay League officials felt they were badly treated by the Napier Council in the allocation of grounds for its first season in 1911. The popularity of the league game, following the Auckland match the previous year, had caused the collapse of senior rugby union in Napier, so the League expected its request to have the use of the Recreation Ground to be approved. But the council decided otherwise and, despite there now being only one senior rugby union team, the Rugby Union's lease of the Recreation Ground was renewed and the League was given the use of a new ground recently given to the Napier Council by the estate of P. S. McLean.<sup>109</sup> This ground, named McLean Park, was in a poor state and subject to flooding if it rained so that playing conditions were unsatisfactory and matches had to be called off on several occasions. The League complained to the council about the state of the ground<sup>110</sup> and improvements were carried out in July, which necessitated playing all fixtures at Farndon Park in Clive for several weeks. The ground was finally ready for use again in August after having been drained and playing conditions were reported to be much improved.<sup>111</sup>

At the start of the 1912 season the League was involved in a dispute with the council over the rental terms for McLean Park. This delayed the opening of the season but was eventually settled, as the League continued to use the Park.<sup>112</sup> A similar dispute in 1914 caused the start of the season to be put back for two weeks due to grounds not being allocated to the satisfaction of the League.<sup>113</sup> A meeting between League officials and the

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<sup>108</sup>*Wanganui Herald*, 13 May 1914, p. 2.

<sup>109</sup>*Napier Daily Times*, 15 November 1910, p. 6.

<sup>110</sup>*Napier Daily Times*, 29 May 1911, p. 3.

<sup>111</sup>*Napier Daily Times*, 7 August 1911, p. 3.

<sup>112</sup>*Napier Daily Times*, 18 May 1912, p. 4. (Supplement)

<sup>113</sup>*Napier Daily Times*, 27 April 1914, p. 3.

Mayor was needed to resolve the dispute.<sup>114</sup> The problem was the unavailability of McLean Park, which was the League's charge ground, and the solution proposed by the council, was to give the League the use of Nelson Park in conjuncture with the Rugby Union, the two codes playing side-by-side on adjacent pitches. This severely disadvantaged the League as neither code could charge admission, so that the League was unable to derive any income from club games, although the town clerk made one concession and allowed the league to charge admission to the stand.<sup>115</sup>

In 1912 the hostility between the two codes led to an incident that received nationwide publicity. The Hawkes Bay Rugby Union erected a temporary wooden stand to help accommodate the large crowd expected when it hosted the inter-Island fixture. The union had not dismantled it when, a few weeks later, the Rugby League was hosting the touring New South Wales team. The League approached the Union to consider leasing the stand, but the Union asked what was thought to be an exorbitant amount and the two bodies had still to reach a mutually satisfactory figure by the eve of the match. A group of union supporters then dismantled the stand and stored the timber at a nearby yard. When news of this got out, incensed league supporters retrieved the timber and, working through the night and the next morning, re-erected the stand ready for the match. This is one occasion where sympathy was with the Rugby League and the Union was derided for its behaviour.<sup>116</sup>

At Gisborne the opening match of the inaugural season was played at Taruheru, a small settlement outside the town. The Taruheru club was formed by workers at the Nelson Brothers freezing works and the management had given the club the use a ground near the entrance to the works.<sup>117</sup> The League hired brakes to take the Gisborne team to the ground. In the town, the Rugby Union had the exclusive use of the Domain, the main

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<sup>114</sup>*Napier Daily Times*, 5 May 1914, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup>*Napier Daily Times*, 9 May 1914, p. 4. (Supplement)

<sup>116</sup>*Marlborough Express*, 17 September 1912, p. 6.

<sup>117</sup>*Gisborne Times*, 19 May 1913, p. 6.

sports ground, but the League managed to secure the use of another centrally located ground. This was an old rugby ground known as Tucker's Paddock located on Carnarvon Street and Cobden Street. A paddock does not sound the best location for a football ground, but at least it was an enclosed ground and so allowed the League to charge admission.<sup>118</sup> The ground was lent to the League by Lady Carroll, the wife of Sir James Carroll, who was patron of the Poverty Bay Rugby League.<sup>119</sup>

The Taranaki League had been denied the use of the Recreational Ground in New Plymouth for its inaugural match in 1908, due to Rugby Union pressure on the town Council, and no matches were played in the 1910 season as it could not secure any grounds. Threats by the Rugby Union to disqualify grounds, which had worked in earlier years, were not successful in later years and the Recreational Ground was used by the League in 1911 and 1913.

During this period the League also played representative games at Taumata Park in Eltham without any problem, but the Union again attempted to browbeat council officers at Hawera in 1913. This time the League booked the use of the Showgrounds to take its match of the season, against New South Wales, to south Taranaki. When posters appeared advertising the match, the Rugby Union went into action and threatened to disqualify the Showgrounds should league be played there and the council at first bowed to the threat and cancelled the booking. But the League called the Union's bluff, pointing out that league had already been played on council grounds at both New Plymouth and Eltham, and the Union had not carried through on its threats. The absurdity of the Union's position was also pointed out by a correspondent of the *Taranaki Herald*, saying 'the Rugby Union does not own one ground in Taranaki, and its disqualification [of the Hawera Showgrounds], instead of hurting the Leaguers, would rather kill its own game'.<sup>120</sup> The council reconsidered its decision, backed down and reversed

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<sup>118</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 23 June 1913.

<sup>119</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 21 August 1913, p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 29 July 1913, p. 8.

it, the game going ahead on the Showgrounds. The Rugby Union, of course, did not carry out its threat to 'disqualify' the ground.

In Blenheim, the newly formed Marlborough League was able to secure the use of the Wairau cricket ground for the 1913 season only due to the Marlborough Rugby Union being in disarray.<sup>121</sup> The following season, and with a new, invigorated, executive, the Union managed to secure the use of the cricket ground as well as all other suitable grounds, leaving the League with nowhere in Blenheim to play. The landlord of the Junction Hotel made an offer of a ground, but it was not taken up and one of the Blenheim clubs disbanded.<sup>122</sup> The other club opted to travel the 10 kilometres to Spring Creek to use the Awarua club's ground, but this arrangement proved too difficult and this club also disbanded. The Awarua club's plans to keep the game alive by playing teams from other provinces came to nothing due to the war and league died out in Marlborough.

Not all leagues had to contend with ground troubles. The Nelson League amicably shared the use of Trafalgar Park with the Rugby Union, and the Union even lent its goalposts to the League for the final of the Tall Cup 1912.<sup>123</sup> Nor is there any evidence that the Dannevirke League, during its brief existence, had any ground problems.

### **Hostility to Rugby League**

Rugby Unions' efforts to deny Leagues access to grounds has been examined above, but other ways of obstructing the development of league were more insidious and hypocritical. Rugby Unions, and supporters within the establishment, carried out an unremitting campaign to brand league a professional sport, and leagues throughout this period felt the need to repeatedly repudiate these accusations.

W.J. Perrett, secretary of the Wanganui League, speaking at the meeting to form the Eastern rugby league club in 1911, stressed the fact that

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<sup>121</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 13 May 1913, p. 5.

<sup>122</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 8 June 1914, p. 7.

<sup>123</sup> *Nelson Evening Mail*, 30 September 1912, p. 2.

league was as amateur a sport as union, the only difference being that league allowed representative players 10 shillings a day expenses whilst rugby union only paid 3 shillings a day.<sup>124</sup> At the meeting to form the Te Kuiti District Rugby League also in 1911, the newly elected president 'particularly impressed upon the members present that the idea prevalent among so many people that the Northern Union game to be adopted was "professional" was absolutely a mistaken one'. Many members spoke of the false impression that they were paid to play under Northern Union rules and said that the 'insinuation is distinctly resented by members off the Huia Club'. It was further pointed out that the only difference between Northern Union and Rugby was that the champions of the former say 'it is a very unfair thing to ask men who are dependent upon some trade for their livelihood to leave their business and travel away without having their expenses paid', but this was their only remuneration.<sup>125</sup>

In a similar vein, B. Brigham, president of the Auckland League, refuted statements that the game was professional: 'this was entirely incorrect, as they did not entertain any ideas of professionalism although they compensated players for lost time'.<sup>126</sup> George Gillett addressed the meeting to launch league in Thames in 1912 and explained that 'the game was not a professional one, but emphasised the fact that the rugby union football players of New Zealand had swelled the coffers of the head body and provincial unions at great sacrifice to themselves and without receiving in return the consideration that players were entitled to'.<sup>127</sup> At a meeting to introduce league to Gisborne, officials from the Hawkes Bay League stated emphatically that 'although the term Northern Union has come to be associated with professionalism...the game was played in their district on a purely amateur basis,<sup>128</sup> and, at another meeting a week later, it was

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<sup>124</sup> *Wanganui Herald*, 24 August 1911, p. 6.

<sup>125</sup> *King Country Chronicle*, 12 April 1911.

<sup>126</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 14 August 1911.

<sup>127</sup> *Thames Star*, 2 May 1912, p. 3.

<sup>128</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 1 April 1912, p. 7.

emphasised that the game in Gisborne was to be played on a strictly amateur basis.<sup>129</sup> Marlborough League officials in 1912 were similarly anxious to make it clear that the game was being established on a purely amateur basis and players would not be debarred from competing in other amateur sports.<sup>130</sup>

The issue of professionalism was addressed by the Mayor of Hamilton following the Waikato versus New South Wales match in 1913. He considered 'the League game deserved fostering as from what he had seen that afternoon the game was far superior to Rugby'. He trusted the League would keep itself clean from professionalism which he did not think would be tolerated under any circumstances in New Zealand and concluded by saying that 'he certainly thought that when a man provides a spectacle for large crowds of people he should be reimbursed for his day's wages'.<sup>131</sup>

Rumours of the imminent introduction of league to Marlborough sparked a spate of letters to the editor of the Blenheim newspaper on the subject of professionalism. One writer claimed to have 'personal knowledge that Unions have allowed professionalism to be carried on and the money to be passed under the table'.<sup>132</sup> In another letter it was stated that 'it is a notorious fact that many of our leading players in Marlborough require something of this kind [money] before they can be induced to play the game',<sup>133</sup> and a league supporter wrote

It is very unsportsmanlike to term the players of the new game in New Zealand "pros.," meaning, of course, that they receive payment for playing. They are, in fact, just as good amateurs as the players of the Rugby code. They are not paid to play in any match (club or representative); but in the case of a representative match the players receive payment equivalent to the amount they have forfeited through absence from their regular employment. This method of recouping players for actual monetary loss has frequently been advocated by the Rugby Union in New Zealand, and it has far more to commend it than the surreptitious method of paying certain Rugby players which goes on every season, even in Marlborough.

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<sup>129</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 10 April 1912, p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 26 September 1912, p. 5.

<sup>131</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 5 September 1913.

<sup>132</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 28 August 1912, p. 7.

<sup>133</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 28 August 1912, p. 8.

Players are not won over to the League game by the lure of "filthy lucre," but by the attractiveness of the game itself.<sup>134</sup>

George Gillett, speaking at a meeting in Dannevirke in 1912, maintained that league was no more professional than union and emphasised that the only money a league player received was when he was away from work and losing wages. He went on to describe some of the 'many despicable means' used by rugby unionists to combat league. He stated that he knew of hundreds of union players who moved from one town to another with the promise of a job to get them to play for a particular club, whilst he and other prominent players were offered, and accepted, £20 to join the Ponsonby club.

It would seem that despite no proof of payments to league players being produced by the Rugby Union, and the generally held opinion that under-the table payments were being made to union players, the Union's attempts to brand league as a professional sport were succeeding and the game's promoters still felt it necessary to protest that league was an amateur sport in New Zealand.

Another means of undermining the efforts to promote league was to make sure that it was not played in schools. This was not too difficult a task as most schoolmasters were middle-class supporters of union and most unlikely to allow what they chose to believe to be a professional game to be played in school. But the New Zealand Rugby Union actively promoted discrimination against schoolboy league. A circular sent to all provincial unions in 1912 warned them to be on their guard against League representatives influencing schoolboys, as 'a number of young players have been misled by misleading statements...to play the League game in the belief that they would retain their amateur status.' It went on to suggest that circulars be issued by the unions to counter the possibility of League influence and advise the boys 'as to the evils of professional football, making

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<sup>134</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 29 August 1912, p. 8.

it clear that the League's constitution is essentially professional.' The Unions were asked 'to treat the matter as important in the interests of Rugby'.<sup>135</sup>

For a school to allow its students to play league was so unusual that when the Stoke Industrial School, a Catholic orphanage for boys, was about to take up league in 1911,<sup>136</sup> it was reported by the press nationally. Up until this time no football had been played at the school, so when some members of the Nelson League offered to coach the boys, their offer was accepted. The response of the Nelson Rugby Union was immediate. An emergency meeting was called and a letter [see Appendix Seven] despatched to the Ministry of Education, warning of the 'danger of corruption' if a 'professional element' of 'indulging in sport for individual monetary gain should be inculcated in the boys'. It further intimated that once they played league they would be 'debarred from all the privileges of amateur football' and, after leaving school, would 'experience a great hardship'.<sup>137</sup> A delegation from the Union also approached the manager of the school and persuaded him to change his mind so as not to 'prejudice [the boys] in any way' once they left the institution.<sup>138</sup> The School was then admitted to the Rugby Union schools' championship.

Napier was the only town in which league was known to have been played in schools. A team from the Technical School played in the fourth-grade competition in 1914, and won all its matches. The team was ready to take part in the 1915 season but the war forced the Hawkes Bay League to abandon its lower-grade competitions so league ceased to be played in the school. League was also reported as being played at one Otago school, Holy Cross College at Mosgiel, whose rector would not allow union but allowed

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<sup>135</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 29 August 1912, p. 3.

<sup>136</sup>*Nelson Evening Mail*, 12 May 1911.

<sup>137</sup>*Nelson Evening Mail*, 17 May 1911, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup>*Nelson Evening Mail*, 18 May 1911.

league as he considered that the boys were less liable to get hurt,<sup>139</sup> and at Levin Industrial School.<sup>140</sup>

It is unclear whether or not schools in the Lower Waikato played league. The Huntly School wrote to the Huntly Rovers rugby league club asking if they were 'prepared to afford that support accorded by senior to junior clubs'. The Club decided 'to help the youngsters by presenting them with a ball and a small sum of money' to show 'their interest in, and encourage, junior football in the town'.<sup>141</sup> It is not clear whether the league club was encouraging the union game or the Huntly school was allowed to play league. The schools' competition was open to all Waikato schools, including Hamilton, and under the control of the Waikato Schools' Rugby Union, but also included schools from the league towns of Ngaruawahia and Taupiri.<sup>142</sup> With lack of evidence to the contrary, it would appear that union authorities and supporters within the teaching profession were successful in ensuring that schoolboys were denied the opportunity of playing league.

The New Zealand Rugby Union policy of banning amateur league players from playing union was a most contentious issue, with provincial unions banning, or turning a blind eye to the return of, league players according to which course of action was most advantageous to them. Even before the introduction of league to New Zealand, supporters within the Rugby Union of more liberal approaches to rule changes and payment of players had been outvoted by the more conservative elements, who were determined that New Zealand should adhere to the rules of the game, and of professionalism, as laid down by the English Rugby Union.<sup>143</sup> (see Appendix Eight)

Thus the New Zealand Union regarded all league players, regardless of whether they were paid or not, as professionals and subject to

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<sup>139</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 1913.

<sup>140</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 17 June 1911, p. 3. (Supplement)

<sup>141</sup>*Huntly Press*, 1 May 1914.

<sup>142</sup>*Huntly Press*, 13 June 1913.

<sup>143</sup>Vincent, and Harfield, pp. 234-249.

disqualification from playing union. But the national Union relied on provincial unions to notify it of any union players who had played league. Provincial unions were reluctant to do this as they wished to keep as many players as possible within the union ranks. Clubs were equally reluctant to inform their provincial union of members who had played league. This led to persecutions of individual players, whilst others were allowed back under a variety of pretexts. Clubs often quietly took back players and the provincial unions turned a blind eye to this. Even the New Zealand Rugby Union was prepared to bend the rules of professionalism when it suited its purpose.

In 1914 the Marlborough Union wrote to it saying 'that a number of players who had taken part in a League practice game had been suspended as a lesson to them and to act as a deterrent to others'. It went on to say that as the 'matter was trifling' it had removed the suspensions and asked for the New Zealand Union's approval.<sup>144</sup> The Union gave its approval provided the match they played in was not advertised and no gate money was taken. This was in line with an earlier ruling that any player who had taken part in a league game where no charge had been made at the gate could still play union, but where a charge had been made the players were liable to suspension, though players who were under 17 years of age could be reinstated on application. It also pointed out that players who had not been reported to the New Zealand Union were eligible to continue playing union as they were not under the ban of disqualification,<sup>145</sup> a blatant invitation to provincial unions to quietly take back league players.

All this exposes the double standards espoused by the New Zealand Union, which maintained that league players in matches to which gate money was charged were deemed professionals but union players under similar circumstances remained amateurs. It could hardly do otherwise as gate money was charged at most union games and to be consistent it would have had to either recognise league players as amateurs, ban most union players

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<sup>144</sup> *Manawatu Daily Times*, 23 May 1914, p. 6.

<sup>145</sup> *Manawatu Daily Times*, 16 May 1914, p. 3.

as professionals, or stop charging gate money at union games and face financial disaster.

Fear of league's popularity was another factor that made provincial unions, particularly those from smaller centres, anxious to take back league players. The introduction of league to Invercargill in 1908, and the formation of the Britannia and Bluff clubs in 1910, had had a serious effect on the union game there. The policy of the New Zealand Union in banning for life players who had tried the league game was opposed by the Southland Rugby Union as being detrimental to their interests as a small union. At the 1911 annual general meeting the president, R. Galbraith, said

The Northern Union game had not proved a great success hereabouts, but it had divided interest in football and he regretted very much that the NZU had not seen their way to reinstate players of the other code, who had been forced into their present position. Amateur athletes forfeiting their status were not debarred for life from reinstatement, and he could not see why the same should not apply in connection with Amateur Rugby football. It was all very well for those in big centres, where they had plenty of players, to ignore the Northern Union followers, but they should remember that a division of interest in smaller centres was not for the good of the game.<sup>146</sup>

This theme was continued at a later committee meeting when there was a long discussion regarding the expulsion of Northern Union players. It was decided to approach the New Zealand Union with a request that steps be taken for their reinstatement. It was felt that rugby footballers should be on an equal footing with other amateur athletes, whose respective ruling bodies had power to confer reinstatement, while this right did not obtain under Rugby Union rules.<sup>147</sup> Following the, not unexpected, rejection of the Bluff petition by the New Zealand Union, some interesting points were made when the rejection was discussed by the Southland Union.

1. Men had played the game purely for recreation, and had never received remuneration, and had never played on a ground on which gate money was charged.
2. It was dangerous to create a body of outcasts, a strong body and one that would fight.

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<sup>146</sup>*Southland Times*, 1 April 1911 p. 3.

<sup>147</sup>*Southland Times*, 14 April 1911, p. 3.

3. These men played Northern Union rules to show their independence of their own union, but the professional game was not a success in Southland, and now the players, realising that they had made an error of judgement, asked for reinstatement.
4. If professional football had been a success in Invercargill there would have been no petition.
5. Reinstatement of players would kill Northern Union football in Southland and would help the amateur game.
6. Some of the disqualified players had taken up Association football.
7. Southland narrowly escaped losing three clubs last season owing to this trouble.<sup>148</sup>

This exposes the fear felt by the Southland Union of the threat from league. If the three clubs considering going over to the league game had in fact done so, union would indeed have been in deep trouble. Considerable pressure must have been brought to bear on the clubs and players to keep them in the union fold. Even so, one club that had lost players to league the previous season was forced to disband. The Pirates club, that had been only able to field a third -grade team in 1910, had only ten members attend its annual general meeting and they decided to disband the club.<sup>149</sup> A report in the *Southland Times* comments on the strong feeling in football circles regarding the rival game and goes on to say 'every effort is being made by the Union to hinder the development of the League.'<sup>150</sup>

The football correspondent of the *Nelson Evening Mail* was prompted to write a long article on the hypocrisy of the local Union in ignoring the rules of professionalism. The incident was prompted by a complaint from the Nelson Old Boys club that M. Palmer, one of the Riwaka club's team, had previously played league. Palmer admitted this, but maintained that as he did not receive any money he was not breaking any rule.<sup>151</sup> The Union accepted this explanation and decided to take no action despite being aware of the League possessing a signed receipt from Palmer for £1/2/6 for expenses

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<sup>148</sup>*Southland Times*, 16 May 1911, p. 3.

<sup>149</sup>*Southland Times*, 1 April 1911, p. 3.

<sup>150</sup>*Southland Times*, 18 May 1911, p. 3.

<sup>151</sup>*Nelson Evening Mail*, 17 May 1911, p. 2.

incurred in playing league.<sup>152</sup> Also a committee member pointed out that two of the Old Boys junior team had also played league.

A similar incident was reported from Gisborne when, in June 1912, A. P. Kaipara, a well-known Poverty Bay back, was called before the Union to explain charges of 'flirting' with league. He had earlier been asked to join the New Zealand touring team to Australia and been offered £3/10/- per week expenses. He eventually declined the offer but not before indiscreetly talking to a reporter, saying that he had considered the offer and had asked what advantages he would get by 'deserting amateur Rugby'. Kaipara told the Union that as he had rejected the offer and had not played any league, he had done nothing wrong. Asked if he did not think he had been indiscreet in talking to the press he replied that

he thought it was an honour to be selected to represent New Zealand, and he wanted to let it be known. He did not think he was casting a slur on his colleagues. He had no intention of going at all.

The Union decided that, even though Kaipara had been indiscreet, it would take no further action.<sup>153</sup>

The same year E. R. Lutterall, a United rugby union club player, appealed to the Poverty Bay Union against his disqualification. During the 1911 season, Lutterall had been convenor of a meeting called to try and form a league in Gisborne, this action leading to his disqualification.<sup>154</sup> Lutterall's defence was that no league had eventuated from the meeting and that he was under the impression that 'a man had to receive money or play a game before he would lose his amateur status'. Under questioning, Lutterall stated that he had a list of players who had signed to play the Northern game but refused to hand it over to the Union as he maintained that it was confidential. The Union resolved to inform the New Zealand Union of the case and Lutterall's refusal to hand over the list.<sup>155</sup> What the outcome was is not

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<sup>152</sup>*Nelson Evening Mail*, 24 May 1911 p. 2.

<sup>153</sup>*Gisborne Times*, 18 June 1912, p. 7.

<sup>154</sup>*Gisborne Times*, 21 May 1912, p. 6.

<sup>155</sup>*Gisborne Times*, 18 June 1912, p. 7.

known, but Lutterall played his first union game of the season for his club in July.

The Marlborough Union was particularly inconsistent in its reaction to the introduction of league. When, in 1912, rumours were circulating that league was to be introduced to Blenheim, the Marlborough Rugby Union met in August to consider this threat and decided to take a hard line with anyone who played rugby league. It resolved to advertise in the local press informing players thinking of taking part in league practice games that they would render themselves liable to expulsion. The Union promised it would take 'a very firm stand in the matter, and anybody doing so will be disqualified'. The following notice duly appeared in the *Marlborough Express*.

**Football! Notice to RUGBY PLAYERS.**

The Marlborough Rugby Union desires to inform all players that anyone taking part in a League practice match renders himself liable to EXPULSION, and as far as this Union is concerned it intends to strictly enforce such provisions.

R. Wanden, secretary. Marlborough Rugby Football Union.<sup>156</sup>

This threat proved ineffective and the Union quickly backed down. Following Marlborough's first representative league matches played in September, it announced that 'it was not the Union's intention as yet to deal harshly with players who had taken part in practice games on private grounds or in cases where there were extenuating circumstances'. It then proceeded to disqualify, 'under the rules of professionalism', twelve players, a referee, and two touch judges, and to suspend a further eleven players, all of whom had taken part in the representative matches, but took no action against a further seventeen players who had taken part in the practice matches only.<sup>157</sup> A further three who had played in the representative matches could not be contacted and were assumed to have left the district.

More contradictory messages were sent out in 1914 when the Marlborough League was unable to secure grounds to play on in Blenheim.

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<sup>156</sup>*Marlborough Express*, 27 August 1912, p. 3.

<sup>157</sup>*Marlborough Express*, 8 October 1912, p. 5.

The Marlborough Union again softened its policy towards league players wishing to return to rugby union. It removed the suspensions and disqualifications imposed on players at the end of the 1912 and 1913 seasons and hoped that the New Zealand Union would back its policy.<sup>158</sup> This policy of readmission of league players was not popular with all union supporters as it was felt that it was 'establishing a precedent which might have a far reaching effect in years to come'.<sup>159</sup> Despite the Union's seeming willingness to welcome back league players, it was to spend much of its time during the 1914 season with problems created by returning players, and appeared to be sending out conflicting messages to both clubs and players. In May someone informed the Union that a player for the Waitohi club from Picton, in its match against the Awatere club, was disqualified for having played league. Both teams and the referee were aware that an ex-league player was taking part, but no action would have been taken had not the Union been informed. The Union wrote to the Waitohi, club pointing out 'that this action had rendered them liable to disqualification, and if a repetition occurred the Union would have no option but to suspend the team'.<sup>160</sup> It went on to point out that Awatere should not have agreed to play the match. This letter caused considerable upset to the Waitohi, club which felt it had been unfairly singled out as it was well known that 'other League players are allowed to participate in Rugby contests'.<sup>161</sup> The Union denied this despite the fact that an ex-league player, A. Neal, was playing for the Moutere team. The Union's explanation was that 'Neal may have participated in a League practice game, but on no occasion, so the Union understands, has he played in a match which renders him liable to suspension under the rules of the New Zealand Union'.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 12 May 1914, p. 5.

<sup>159</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 21 May 1914, p. 3.

<sup>160</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 29 May 1914, p. 2.

<sup>161</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 12 June 1914, p. 3.

<sup>162</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 12 June 1914, p. 3. Neal was a regular player with the Awarua league club in the 1913 and early part of the 1914 seasons.

More empty threats were made by the Union when J. McDonald, a regular league player for Awarua in 1913, appealed to have his disqualification lifted. He had been disqualified for playing in the league final the previous year, but no mention was made of his regular appearances in club games. McDonald maintained that the game was only a 'scratch' match and that he only took part for 'about ten minutes'. The Marlborough Union accepted his explanation after he produced a legal declaration that he had not taken part in a recognised league match, and asked the New Zealand Union not to enforce the disqualification.<sup>163</sup> Whilst the New Zealand Union was considering the appeal, McDonald was allowed to play in a junior union match between Opawa and Moutere, despite implicit instructions that he was not to play. His club captain was blamed for allowing the match to be played. The Marlborough Union's only response was to point out that all players who took part in the match were, strictly speaking, liable to disqualification, but took no further action.<sup>164</sup>

Eventually the New Zealand Rugby Union acceded to Marlborough's appeal and removed the disqualification. The reason why the Union backed away from enforcing the rules of professionalism was that had it done so it would have had to disqualify most of its players for taking part in matches involving a league player. To do so would have destroyed the Marlborough Rugby Union.

Napier rugby union had been seriously weakened by many of its players going over to league in 1911, so in 1912 it was anxious to take back any players who wished to return. To this end it tried to have the New Zealand Union agree to the reinstatement of 'all professional footballers, and, failing that, of all under the age of 21.'<sup>165</sup> Informally, any league player who wished to return to union was quietly taken back. This annoyed the League which, naturally, did not want its players returning to union, but its response,

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<sup>163</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 23 June 1914, p. 5.

<sup>164</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 21 July 1914, p. 2.

<sup>165</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 3 April 1912, p. 3.

## PLAYER APPEARANCES PER SEASON FOR SELECTED CLUBS

Number of Games	Number of Appearances													
	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
<i>Wanganui Rugby League</i>														
<b>EASTERN SENIORS 1912</b>										7	1	4	6	9
<b>CITY SENIORS 1912</b>									10	2	2	1	0	5
<b>ST JOHN'S SENIORS 1912</b>										8	3	2	4	9
<b>EASTERN JUNIORS 1912</b>									3	3	5	7	5	12
<b>CITY JUNIORS 1912</b>									6	4	5	2	3	6
<b>ST JOHN'S JUNIORS 1912</b>									8	5	0	2	2	8
<b>EASTERN SENIORS 1913</b>							2	5	3	2	5	0	7	10
<b>CITY SENIORS 1913</b>								5	7	0	1	3	5	9
<b>ST JOHN'S SENIORS 1913</b>									0	1	1	5	14	20
<b>EASTERN JUNIORS 1913</b>											6	4	5	20
<b>CITY JUNIORS 1913</b>												10	3	11
<b>ST JOHN'S JUNIORS 1913</b>									8	3	4	2	2	9
<i>HawkesBay Rugby League</i>														
<b>NAPIER CITY SENIORS 1911</b>			6	0	3	4	1	0	1	1	1	0	3	5
<b>KIA ORA SENIORS 1911</b>				0	7	1	2	1	3	2	3	2	1	16
<b>AHURIRI SENIORS 1911</b>				1	7	0	1	1	2	3	5	2	2	9
<b>CLIVE SENIORS 1911</b>							5	2	1	4	1	3	7	7
<b>AHURIRI SENIORS 1913</b>	2	1	4	3	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	6	12
<b>KIA ORA SENIORS 1913</b>		1	3	6	0	3	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	5
<b>PETANE SENIORS 1913</b>				6	1	1	2	2	2	1	3	2	6	6
<b>AHURIRI JUNIORS 1913</b>		6	3	1	1	0	4	1	1	2	0	2	2	1
<b>PETANE JUNIORS 1913</b>							0	1	6	5	3	4	8	14
<b>WESTSHORE JUNIORS 1913</b>							4	3	2	1	2	6	2	13
<i>Thames Rugby League</i>														
<b>THAMES SENIORS 1912</b>										7	3	5	2	7
<b>HAURAKI SENIORS 1912</b>										6	4	3	3	13
<i>Hamilton Rugby League</i>														
<b>HAMILTON SENIORS 1911</b>							6	3	1	1	3	5	3	11
<b>TOTALS</b>	2	8	16	11	26	10	28	26	58	76	64	79	104	247

banning all returning players from league, would not have helped matters. In an interview given whilst in Auckland for a representative game in 1912, the captain of the Hawkes Bay league team accused the Hawkes Bay Rugby Union of

adopting tactics that have so far not been resorted to by any other Rugby body. Some of our players who have failed to get a game in the representative team have been reinstated by the Rugby Union, and although they played under the Northern Union flag during the competitions throughout the season, have now been chosen for the big Rugby matches in Napier.<sup>166</sup>

This action, undertaken without the assent of the New Zealand Union, particularly incensed the League authorities as they naturally wanted to keep their best players, but it also exposed the hypocrisy of Union authorities who openly flaunted the rules of professionalism when it suited their purposes .

The Dannevirke District Union had no qualms in welcoming back league players following the collapse of league in the town in 1913. Many players applied for reinstatement and the Dannevirke Union wrote to the New Zealand Rugby Union supporting their applications.<sup>167</sup> The benefits were immediately apparent as the 1913 senior competition saw the appearance of two new clubs, Excelsior and United, to join the two existing teams, Dannevirke and Old Boys, to constitute a five team competition together with neighboring Woodville.

It was not all hostility though, and an example of generous behaviour on the part of a union club comes from Wanganui. At its 1911 annual general meeting, the Pirates rugby union club, which had lost most of its senior players to league the previous season, passed a motion wishing the defectors success and thanking them for their past services.<sup>168</sup> The Wanganui Rugby Union was not so gracious, expelling, for 'professionalism' five of the organisers of league in the city.

There were two recurring features of league in this period which suggest that young men were not deterred from trying the game by the

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<sup>166</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 30 July 1912, p. 3.

<sup>167</sup>*Dannevirke Daily News*, 15 May 1913, p. 5.

<sup>168</sup>*Wanganui Chronicle*, 29 March 1911, p. 8.

threats from union authorities. Most leagues experienced a high turnover of players from season to season, and many men were casual players who took part in only one or two league games. Most teams had a core of 'serious' players who took part in most matches but who were not enough to make up a side, so that teams had to turn to 'casual' players to make up the numbers. [see table 9] This lack of commitment suggests sport was regarded in a different light in the early twentieth century than it is nearly a century later. With there being few clubs, those men, and there appeared to be many of them, who just wanted the occasional game, had to be catered for alongside the serious players in the same club. Half the players for the Te Kuiti team in 1911, its first season, did not play in the following season. A similar situation existed in Hamilton, where only half of the 1911 players were back the following season. In the Lower Waikato two-thirds of the Huntly club players from 1911 did not play for the club in the 1912 season, and two-thirds of the 1912 players did not play in 1913. The situation only improved slightly in 1914, when half the previous year's players returned.

A similar situation was found in the large towns such as Napier, where of the 260 men who played for one or another of the four senior and four of the five junior teams in 1911, only 117 played in the 1912 season. This reveals a low retention rate of only 45 percent. On the other hand, 119 new players tried league the following season, outnumbering the returnees. In Wanganui, another large town, 65 players took part in league games in 1911, but only 20, about a third, were amongst the 73 who played in the 1912 senior competition. Things improved in 1913 with two-thirds of the 1912 senior players returning, but returnees were back to a third in 1914. The Nelson League had only 20 of the 50 players from the 1910 season return in 1911, whilst in 1912 only 23 of the 63 players from 1911 returned. The last year in which league was played, 1913, saw only 18 players return, less than a third of the 1912 players. In each year the new recruits greatly exceeded the returnees.

These figures not only show that many men were prepared to give league a try, but, because only a minority stuck with the game, league authorities were faced every year with the task of recruiting new players just

to keep the game viable. Of the teams surveyed, 45 percent of the 484 senior players took part in one or two games only, whilst only 25 percent took part in all, or all but one, of the games. The figures for junior games are very similar, 47 percent of junior players took part in one or two games only, whilst 30 percent played in all, or all but one, games.

The realities driving the conflict between the two codes was brought out into the open by the president of Marlborough Rugby Union in a long letter printed in the *Marlborough Express*. In the letter, headed 'Rugby's Future', [see Appendix Nine] he blamed the conflict on the 'hidebound and conservative attitude of those controlling the game [rugby union] in England'. He stated that the New Zealand Union only 'pretend that their object is to nip professionalism in the bud, when actually professionalism is only a side issue' as the New Zealand Union 'will disqualify for life a man who plays League football even if he does not accept a penny'. This is because they 'do not so much fear the bogey of professionalism as the influence of a more skilful and more attractive game'. He then advocated that the New Zealand rugby authorities 'divorce' themselves from the English Union and adopt rule changes to make the union game as fast and skilful as league. He pointed out that Blenheim [and by implication most New Zealand towns] lacked the population to support any professional sport and that union authorities knew this yet continued to oppose the league game because they feared the better game. The final paragraph reads -

To summarise, therefore, let us kill professionalism in football by adopting some of their rules and so encourage our schoolboys to play the better game. Let us be honest about it; we are out to beat professionalism, not the League game. Let us play the ball, not the man.<sup>169</sup>

Unfortunately for league, this attitude was unusual from union supporters and accusations of professionalism, and hostility to the game continued throughout this period.

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<sup>169</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 3 September 1912, p. 6.

### **Discontent within Rugby Union**

During this period there was discontent with the ways union authorities were running the game and with their treatment of players. In 1912, when the Lower Waikato club Taupiri voted to play under Northern Union rules, it stated that 'the club in the past [had] been treated so badly by the Lower Waikato Rugby Union that the sympathies of the members for the Rugby game [had] been entirely alienated'.<sup>170</sup>

When league was introduced to Hamilton in 1911 union was at a low ebb in the town. At the start of the season Hamilton had only three union clubs, each fielding a senior and a junior team. Hockey was in a much healthier situation with over 100 active players in seven clubs fielding 18 teams, whilst the town's only soccer club had to rely on other Waikato towns for its opposition. Local union players felt they were being neglected by the authorities and overlooked by provincial representative team selectors. A special general meeting of the Hamilton Rugby Union was called in 1911 to consider what could be done to revive interest in the game. The president, J. Varney, said that

it was necessary to do something to stir up more interest in Rugby football. The game, as it is at present, is more or less dead, and the standard of play not as good as it should be.

He thought that a club system would be better supported and proposed that 'the present boundary system be abolished and the club system be adopted'. The motion was carried.<sup>171</sup>

B. Brigham, president of the Auckland League, was attempting to capitalise on this discontent when he spoke at a meeting called to form a league club in Hamilton. He said that 'there seemed plenty of material in Hamilton for the constitution of three teams. There was one thing that his League did and that was to foster country clubs'.<sup>172</sup> He predicted that league was about to take off in the Waikato with union players talking of going over as the Auckland League would treat country players better than the Union

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<sup>170</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 2 April 1912.

<sup>171</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 4 August 1911.

<sup>172</sup> *Waikato Argus*, 14 August 1911.

had done. District Leagues would have representatives on the Auckland Provincial League and country players would be given every chance to secure positions in provincial representative teams.<sup>173</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the Taranaki Rugby Union within the small town of Eltham's rugby union club gave league its opportunity. There had been interest in playing rugby league within Eltham's football community from the first introduction of the game to Taranaki in 1908, but although several Eltham players took part in representative matches, they did not have the numbers to form an Eltham club. Discontent with the Rugby Union persisted, though, and in 1911, following a representative league game played at Eltham, it was reported that there was every possibility of a league club being formed for the next season.<sup>174</sup>

The next year, 1912, found the Eltham rugby union club experiencing difficulties in getting enough members to hold its annual general meeting. It succeeded at a second attempt only by enlisting the help of a few rugby league supporters, but found it was unable to raise a team as some players had left the town, some had 'had enough', and others had gone over to league.<sup>175</sup> Meanwhile, the Eltham league club played its first league match against New Plymouth.<sup>176</sup> The club was reported to be 'going strongly' in 1913 and playing other clubs. On the other hand, the Eltham rugby union club was struggling to survive. It tried to restart its senior team but it was forced to withdraw the team from competition due to lack of players, with the result that more players went over to league.<sup>177</sup> Its president was quoted as saying that union in Eltham was as 'dead as Caesar'.<sup>178</sup>

The dysfunctional Marlborough Rugby Union had given league the opportunity it needed to introduce the game in that province. (Appendix Ten)

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<sup>173</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 August 1911, p. 9.

<sup>174</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 11 September 1911, p. 8.

<sup>175</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 11 April 1912, p. 8.

<sup>176</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 9 August 1912, p. 5.

<sup>177</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 12 June 1913, p. 8.

<sup>178</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 25 June 1913 p. 4.

The start of the 1912 season found union in a sorry state, there was little interest in the opening matches of the season and only a handful of spectators turned out to watch them.<sup>179</sup> Prior to the start of the season one of the few clubs, Awatere, went into recess, being unable to raise a team.<sup>180</sup> It was predicted that, with the game deteriorating, support for soccer growing, and the likelihood of league being introduced, the season would see the death of Marlborough rugby [union].<sup>181</sup> This was the first indication that there was the possibility of league being introduced to the province, but now rumours of its introduction became the 'all-absorbing topic' of town gossip in Blenheim.

Following the rugby union representative team's visit to Wellington it was reported that the majority of the team were ready to go over to league.<sup>182</sup> The lack of interest in union was commented on by the rugby correspondent of the local newspaper, who attributed this to the local Union's failure to address the wants and needs of the players. He went on to say that the league game was too fast for the average club footballer and advocated reforming the rules of union to incorporate some of the league rules.<sup>183</sup>

Problems within the Marlborough Rugby Union, apparent the previous season, only got worse in 1913 and allowed league to build on its successful introduction the previous season. Early in the season the Union was exhibiting an 'incorrigible exhibition of apathy', failing to hold its annual general meeting, or to organise any competitions, leaving the clubs, which feared its apathy was 'opening the door to the League game', to arrange their own.<sup>184</sup> Its apathy also allowed the local League to start a club competition by securing the use of the Cricket Ground for the season, which it was felt the Union should have done.<sup>185</sup> The annual general meeting was

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<sup>179</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 20 May 1912, p. 5.

<sup>180</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 14 May 1912, p. 5.

<sup>181</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 4 July 1912, p. 3.

<sup>182</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 27 August 1912, p. 3.

<sup>183</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 21 October 1912, p. 3.

<sup>184</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 6 May 1913, p. 3.

<sup>185</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 13 May 1913, p. 5.

finally held and an almost completely new body of officers elected, which decided to take strong action against the League by stringently enforcing the rules of professionalism. Clubs were warned that if they included a league player in their team the match would be forfeited to the opposing side.<sup>186</sup> Despite these strong words, clubs continued to include league players in their teams.

### **Looming Shadows of War**

When war broke out, league, being a relatively new sport, had not yet had time to put down roots in the towns in which it was played, and lacked the cadre of old players and officials which older established sports had. This cadre could step in and keep their game going in times of emergency; league, on the other hand, lacking this depth of support, was much more susceptible to sudden unforeseen events. The inability of league officials in Blenheim in 1913 and Wanganui in 1914 to secure grounds led to the cessation of league in these two towns. The Nelson League experienced problems in 1914 which prompted Golden Bay officials to complain that it was 'fulfilling its duties in a most unsatisfactory manner, and that the game had come practically to a stand still in the district.'<sup>187</sup> The New Zealand League was requested, in the interests of the game, to change the headquarters of the Nelson League to Takaka. This request was acceded to in order to 'give the game in Nelson a new lease of life'.<sup>188</sup> The Nelson League seemed to be functioning again later in the season and it applied to re-affiliate with the New Zealand League, but no organised league was played and the game died out. Something happened in Thames in 1913 following a successful first year of league in 1912. Teams were announced for the opening games and a successful season was predicted, but no games were reported being played. This was obviously not due to a lack of players, but for whatever reason, with no games being organised, players went back to union.

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<sup>186</sup> *Marlborough Express*, 7 July 1913, p. 3.

<sup>187</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 25 July 1914, p. 4.

<sup>188</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 25 July 1914, p. 4.

The Waihi club, formed by goldminers, could not have been formed at a more inauspicious time. In 1912 Waihi was in the midst of an industrial dispute which lasted from May to November of that year. The escalation of violence on the part of the mineowners, culminating in the death of one of the striking miners and in the forceful eviction of militant unionists from the town by company blacklegs,<sup>189</sup> would have accounted for the difficulty the Waihi club experienced in raising a team later in the season, and the club did not survive the year.

Most of these unforeseen events could no doubt have been overcome given time, but league was running out of time and the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914 set in motion events which were to almost destroy league as one of New Zealand's national sports.

Although the war did not begin until August, it had been widely anticipated and army training camps throughout the year disrupted all sports as young men were required to attend leaving clubs short of players. In Hawkes Bay both the territorial army and the cadet corps held camps in May, causing both codes to postpone the start of their competitions. Once the league competitions started there were frequent cancellations of club games because army training took prior call over players.<sup>190</sup> In Wanganui one of the reasons the League had difficulties finding grounds was that the army was using sports grounds for training.

There were greater problems later in the season as many players rushed to enlist as soon as the war began, this time making it difficult to field not only club but representative teams. The Taranaki League was hard hit when, after a number of years of unsuccessful attempts, it finally succeeded in launching a club competition, only to have many of its players enlist and be forced to abandon the competition later in the season. It also had to curtail its representative programme and for its last match of the season,

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<sup>189</sup>Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, pp. 87-91.

<sup>190</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 30 April 1914, p. 3. and 14 May 1914, p. 3.

against Auckland, Taranaki had to field a weakened team as it was without the services of several of its players who had already left for the war.<sup>191</sup>

The Hawkes Bay League was caught unprepared when war broke out, as it had planned a three-match end-of-season tour to play Canterbury, Wellington and Wanganui beginning in the first week of August - the week the war broke out. It was decided to go ahead with the tour anyway, but people's minds were on things other than football and few turned out to watch, making the tour a financial disaster, with the League losing £80.<sup>192</sup>

Rotorua was the first League to succumb to wartime exigencies when, in August, having already lost many players to the war, both the secretary and treasurer were called to camp with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, forcing the League to suspend operations for the war years.<sup>193</sup>

In Marlborough, despite the collapse of club football, the Awarua club was still hoping to keep league alive by arranging for some representative matches to be played later in the season.<sup>194</sup> However, the outbreak of war put an end to all such plans, and league ceased to be played in Marlborough.

Any hope of restarting league in Nelson ended with the outbreak of war which prompted such a large number of rugby players to volunteer for active service that the Rugby Union was forced to abandon the senior competition and cancel all matches in all grades and close the season.<sup>195</sup> Obviously, in these circumstances, league would have been unable to recruit sufficient players.

## **Conclusion**

From near collapse in 1910, league made a remarkable come back in the years 1911 to 1914. When war broke out in August, league had spread to most large, and a number of small, towns in the North Island and was also

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<sup>191</sup>*Taranaki Herald*, 19 August 1914, p. 7.

<sup>192</sup>*Napier Daily Times*, 13 August 1915, p. 3.

<sup>193</sup>D.M. Stafford, *The New Century in Rotorua: A History of Events from 1900*, Rotorua: Ray Richards Publisher, 1988, pp. 155- 156

<sup>194</sup>*Marlborough Express*, 25 June 1914, p. 3.

<sup>195</sup>*Nelson Evening Mail*, 12 August 1914, p. 3.

played in Nelson and Marlborough at the top of the South Island. Geographic and demographic factors favoured the North Island. Not only did it contain more towns, but they were less isolated than those in the South Island, due to the recently completed railway network.

That league was a working-class game is shown both by the predominance of workmen amongst its players, and by the almost complete absence of middle-class players. Clubs were formed by goldminers in Waihi, coal miners in Huntly, freezing-workers in Gisborne and Wanganui, and workers from the railway workshops in the latter town also. Being shunned by the middle classes, league had also to rely largely on workmen for its administrators, possibly a first for New Zealand sport.

The success of league in Auckland had a spin-off for the small towns in Auckland Province, as the Auckland League gave assistance to leagues being started up there. Representative and club teams played in the various towns and the attraction of playing against such teams was a factor influencing the many representative players who came over to league. Hostility to league was probably greater in small towns as there union had more to fear from league, which was competing with it for a limited number of players. Union in small towns could ill afford to lose players, and informal pressures on players who took up league, or were considering doing so, were likely to be greater than in the big cities.



# 5

1915-1918

THE WAR YEARS

The Great War had a devastating effect on league in much of New Zealand as loss of players forced most leagues to suspend operations. Three leagues; Hamilton, Rotorua and Marlborough, went into recess during 1914, and 1915, the first full season under wartime conditions, saw a further nine; Gisborne, Taranaki, Wanganui, Manawatu, Wellington, Nelson, Thames, Goldfields and West Coast suspend operations, the last three having only been formed, or re-formed, at the start of the season. Waikato ceased to function in 1916, leaving league still being played only in the cities of Auckland and Christchurch. However, in these two cities league grew in popularity. There is some evidence that league was still being played during the war, at least on an informal basis, in parts of Auckland province, as several Auckland clubs were given permission to send teams to Rotorua<sup>1</sup>, Waikato<sup>2</sup> and Waihi<sup>3</sup> to play teams from these centres.

Many young New Zealand men welcomed the outbreak of war and within a week 14,000 men with an average age of 23 had volunteered. By October 1915, the end of the Gallipoli campaign, 43,000 had enlisted 'but had little idea of what they were letting themselves in for'.<sup>4</sup> 'Almost frantic with excitement, naive and conditioned by military training and imperialist schooling, they welcomed war and seemed keen to fight it'.<sup>5</sup> Most were motivated by 'adventure, travel, curiosity, and the colonial love of a fight'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 29 June 1917, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 September 1917, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 July 1917, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1988, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Baker, p. 17.

But following the carnage of Gallipoli, men's attitudes changed as 'the horrible character of war [was] brought home',<sup>7</sup> and 'volunteering lost its fatal allure and never regained it'.<sup>8</sup> Resistance to the social pressures to volunteer, and, when it was introduced in May 1916, to conscription increased. Many men avoided being conscripted by various means, and, despite the tremendous efforts to shame the 'shirkers' into 'going to France', only about half the 240,000 eligible men volunteered and a further 32,000 were conscripted.<sup>9</sup> Resistance was both overt and covert, with unskilled and semi-skilled workers being most likely to fail to register, or go into hiding, whilst 'skilled workers and the middle class also resisted the pressure to fight, but tended to try to do so covertly',<sup>10</sup> and 58 percent of men selected for conscription were rejected for medical reasons.<sup>11</sup>

According to Belich, the government and strategic unions came to an unofficial agreement that in return for industrial peace unionists in essential industries would be given virtually automatic exemptions from conscription.<sup>12</sup> This meant that workers in such industries as mining, shearing, shipping (dockers and seamen), freezing works, butter, cheese, leather and boot factories and munitions works, were able to avoid conscription.<sup>13</sup> Workers from industries such as these formed the main constituency of rugby league and, with many men also exempt for medical reasons, would have ensured there were enough players available to keep the game going in the cities. The situation in the small towns was different. With much smaller populations, the loss of even a small number of players would have been

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<sup>7</sup> Baker, *p. 23*.

<sup>8</sup> Belich, pp. 34-5.

<sup>9</sup> Belich, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> Belich, p. 102.

<sup>11</sup> Baker, p. 106.

<sup>12</sup> Belich, p.101.

<sup>13</sup> Baker, pp. 117, 119.

sufficient to ensure that club competitions were no longer viable, and force leagues into recess. This is what appeared to have happened and no leagues outside the main cities were functioning during the war years, and even in Wellington league was unable to survive.

The death toll at Gallipoli in 1915 brought home to New Zealanders the 'horrible character of war',<sup>14</sup> and put paid to hopes of an early end to hostilities and the resumption of club and representative football. In 1916, club competitions were played only in three leagues, Waikato, Auckland and Canterbury, and Waikato went into recess at the end of the season. The continuing call for soldiers, the cessation of representative football, unavailability of new recruits from union, and the introduction of conscription in 1916, made it increasingly difficult for clubs to field teams and only Auckland and Canterbury were able to do so throughout the war years. The loss of players to the forces in both these cities badly affected all sports, but league was affected least, as its popularity increased both with players and spectators.

Patriotic feelings ran high in the war years and sporting bodies had to face the question of whether sport should be played at all in wartime. It will be shown that the two rugby codes responded somewhat differently; initially the rugby unions, whilst proud of the numbers who volunteered, continued to allow games to be played, arguing that to do so kept men in good condition ready for military service, but they did not allow men of military age to play. Leagues were equally proud of the numbers of players enlisting, but did not stop anyone from playing. Both codes showed their patriotism by donating gate monies to patriotic organisations and by organising special events to raise further money. Where league was played during the war, many men, unable to play union, turned to league, which consequentially saw an increase in both the number of players and the standard of play,

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<sup>14</sup> Baker, p. 23; 2,090 casualties including 555 dead.

which in turn led to an increase in crowd support. This caused union authorities to relax their policies of not playing men of military age and, in Auckland, to adopt modified rules to try and make the union game more attractive. Despite these moves, league in both Auckland and Christchurch, emerged from the war much stronger than before.

The reasons for the collapse of league in many districts will first be explored and then the reasons for its increased popularity in Auckland and Christchurch will be explained. The differing responses of league and union authorities to the wartime conditions will then be investigated as will their patriotic activities. The growth in support for league in Auckland, and union's attempts to combat it will next be examined. Finally the problem of whether or not to play representative football in wartime will be addressed.

### **Wellington- 1915**

Wellington fared the worst of the metropolitan cities during 1915 the first full year of war. The League's annual report started off optimistically, claiming increased support during the 1914 season from both players and spectators, and 'look[ed] forward to a successful season, in spite of the inroads which the war has made into the ranks of its players...'.<sup>15</sup> A new club, Central, had already been formed, and it was also hopeful of more junior teams. Then the report went on to lament that the 1914 season had 'tailed off miserably into dullness and despair, owing to the clamour of war',<sup>16</sup> but expressed optimism that despite the loss of some good players the game should 'move along comfortably'. However, 'sports should not be allowed to occupy too much attention, to the detriment of more serious matters'.<sup>17</sup> The report ended on a note of ill-founded optimism:

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<sup>15</sup> *Evening Post*, 8 May 1915, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 8 May 1915, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 8 May 1915, p. 12.

Everyone must hope, too, that before the season ends, players will be able to put into their performances the extra heart that will be given them when they learn that the struggle in Europe is over, and that the old world is trying to shake down into peaceful affairs again.<sup>18</sup>

Due to enlistments, clubs struggled to field full teams and Newtown had to disband without playing a match. The five junior teams (Petone A and B, Hutt, Suburbs and Central) were particularly hard hit as their players were often called up to bolster under-strength senior teams. This resulted in many junior games being defaulted, much to the annoyance of the players. The situation led the League to form a Junior Advisory Board to control all matters relating to junior football.<sup>19</sup> This seemed to have been successful as more junior games were played thereafter. The senior competition did not fare as well. The first four rounds were completed during May, but then patriotic activities meant all sporting fixtures were cancelled for most Saturdays in June. These major disruptions badly affected most sports and far fewer teams were subsequently playing either union or soccer. However, league was the worst affected and, despite efforts to resurrect the senior competition during July, there were not enough players for games to be played. The competition was officially called off and the Athletic club, which had won all its games in the early part of the season, were declared champions.<sup>20</sup>

Junior games, though, were played throughout July, with the city clubs Central and Suburbs being much stronger than the Petone and Hutt clubs. Central beat Suburbs by 10 points to 5 to win the junior championship on 31 July, the last league match played in Wellington until league's revival after the war. The fact that Wellington was a late starter to league, with the first club championship being played only in 1912, meant that the League had not

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<sup>18</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 8 May 1915, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Evening Post*, 22 May 1915, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> *Evening Post*, 8 July 1915, p. 2.

had time to build up a solid support base before the outbreak of war. This made it more susceptible to wartime problems than the more established codes, and less able to keep the game alive.

### **Wanganui - 1915**

If player enlistments caused problems in the major cities, they proved disastrous for league in the much smaller provincial towns. Despite the war, both the Wanganui and Taranaki Leagues were in an optimistic mode as the 1915 season started, but ground problems which had previously troubled the Wanganui League finally came to a head. At its annual general meeting in May, the chairman, A. Veitch MP, struck a surprisingly optimistic note, reporting that

...a satisfactory year had been experienced and the game had gone ahead. Owing to the war the League had lost a number of their good men, but the same remark applied to all branches of sport, as athletes had provided the best type of men at the front. The financial position of the League was satisfactory and he was very pleased to say that the game was making headway.<sup>21</sup>

A more realistic stance was taken in the League's annual report, presented at the meeting, which stated that

...owing to a difficulty in obtaining grounds the operations for the year [1914] were not as successful as could be wished. Despite the great crisis the outlook for the game was bright. The League players had responded well to the Empire's call, 26 players having gone to the front. There was an element of doubt regarding competition matches as the local League was having difficulty finding grounds. The local League, like the hockeyites, are under a great disability in regard to playing areas, and, until a solution is found no great headway can be expected. It is too much to ask every footballer to remain idle, perhaps for several Saturdays in succession, simply for the reason that a place cannot be found for recreative purposes.<sup>22</sup>

The report added that 'Certain negotiations are in progress however, and it is quite possible that the ground difficulty may be got over in a satisfactory

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<sup>21</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle*, 13 May 1915, p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle*, 13 May 1915, p. 8.

manner.<sup>23</sup> Shortly after this the Hockey Association was granted the season's use of Cook's Gardens, previously used by the Wanganui League.

What happened subsequently to this is a mystery. Now with nowhere to play, the Wanganui League was still actively in pursuit of a suitable ground as late as July, when the New Zealand League considered a request from Wanganui for a grant to help with ground rent and voted to advance it £30 for that purpose.<sup>24</sup> However, no league was played in Wanganui during 1915, and even had a ground been secured, the prospects for survival were not good with the loss of so many players to the war. In fact the game did not survive and it was not restarted until thirty years later, following the second world war.

### **Taranaki-1915**

Following a very successful 1914 season when, for the first time, a three-team club competition had been played, the Taranaki League was in an optimistic mode for 1915. There were delegates from six towns, Mangatoki, New Plymouth, Kaponga, Waitara, Eltham and Stratford at the annual general meeting held at Inglewood on 22 April,<sup>25</sup> and

A good deal of discussion took place as to the advisability of playing cup fixtures [during the season]. Finally it was decided that as so many league footballers [would] be fighting in the trenches at any moment, it would be unfair to continue the cup fixtures, but a few friendly games and representative matches [would] be played to keep the game going.<sup>26</sup>

The delegates decided it inadvisable to consider the future prospects for the game at this time 'on account of the unfortunate international war' and decided it would be 'advisable to play as little as possible this season; just

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<sup>23</sup> *Wanganui Chronicle*, 13 May 1915, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 27 July 1915, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 22 April 1915, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 24 April 1915, p. 7.

sufficient to keep the men in good trim'.<sup>27</sup> The delegates appeared to expect the war to be short, but events proved otherwise and its effects on the game greater than anticipated. There is no record of friendly games being played and with many players enlisted it became impossible to keep the game alive and league ceased to be played in Taranaki.

### **Gisborne 1915**

Hopes of the Gisborne League surviving in 1915 rested on the Kaiti-City union club making good its threat to take up league following a dispute with the Poverty Bay Union. However, the New Zealand Union ordered the local Union to reverse its decision to award the senior championship to the YMP club<sup>28</sup> and award it instead to the Kaiti-City club, which then decided to stay with union. Soccer officials obviously did not expect the League to continue when, at the start of the season, it was reported that 'a special welcome [was] being held out to Northern Union players, new arrivals in the district, and to junior players'.<sup>29</sup>

Union was also having difficulties in wartime conditions. At the start of the season the Poverty Bay Union adopted a district scheme<sup>30</sup> as it felt it was 'imperative that some radical changes be made in order to work up a better state of affairs as interest from both players and public had been most discouraging during the past two years'.<sup>31</sup> This could possibly be due to the introduction of league. Meetings called to form three city clubs generated little enthusiasm, with one unable to be formed due to lack of interest, and a proposed country club never eventuated. A three-team competition was

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<sup>27</sup> *Taranaki Herald*, 24 April 1915, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 1 April 1915. The club name came from its association with the Young Maori Party.

<sup>29</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 30 March 1915.

<sup>30</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 17 April 1915.

<sup>31</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 24 April 1915.

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eventually started with the admission of a club representing the Mangatu Sub-Union which had ceased operations due to the number of its players lost to the war.

The competition got off to a bad start with the Kaiti-City club unable to raise a team for its first match.<sup>32</sup> Players were reported to be 'so keen to get to the front that they do not care to risk meeting with accidents'<sup>33</sup> by playing. Together with continuing enlistments, this led to ongoing difficulties in raising teams and the district scheme was soon abandoned. In such circumstances the chances of league continuing were slim indeed and the game ceased to be played in Gisborne.<sup>34</sup>

### **West Coast 1915**

All was not bad news for league in 1915; the game was started on the West Coast and re-started in both Thames and the Goldfields. The game was launched on the West Coast due to the efforts of Dr. Thacker and W.S.E. Moyle, respectively the chairman and secretary of the Canterbury Rugby League. In early June 1915 they took a Canterbury representative team to the Coast. This involved taking the steam train to Arthur's Pass, crossing the Alps by stagecoach, and making another train journey of several hours from Otira to Greymouth. A difficult journey and an example of the difficulties league had to face in trying to start up in districts isolated by geographic features and lacking rail communications.

The Canterbury team comfortably won the three matches played and the West Coast Rugby League was formed at a subsequent meeting held at the Greymouth Club Hotel. Moyle spoke at meetings following the next two matches and was instrumental in setting up clubs in Blackball and Hokitika. On June 14 the Kohinoor club from Greymouth voted to leave the West Coast

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<sup>32</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 14 June 1915.

<sup>33</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 28 June 1915.

<sup>34</sup> *Gisborne Times*, 28 June 1915.

Rugby Union and play league. The newly formed League was then joined by the Grey [Athletic] rugby union club so that a four-team competition was played in the inaugural season.<sup>35</sup> The competition ended in early October with Blackball the winners. The final was played at Victoria Park, Greymouth, before a 'fair number of spectators', but the play was 'not of a very high order' and the 'majority of players were sadly lacking in form'.<sup>36</sup> This was the last game of league played on the West Coast until the League was re-formed in 1919.

### **Thames 1915**

League made a reappearance in Thames in the 1915 season, capitalising on the failure of the local Union to run any competitions. Early in May the Thames Hockey Association annual general meeting noted the loss of a number of older players to the war but was determined to carry on. The Thames Rugby Union at its annual general meeting, also decided to continue its competitions as 'all young men who for good reason were not able to take their place in the firing line should keep fit in case of emergency [and there was] no better means of doing so than the Rugby game'.<sup>37</sup> Despite this decision, no competitions took place and the only union played was at the end of the season when teams from Auckland visited Thames. Marist Brothers senior club and the 4 Company Cadets played a Thames senior fifteen and the Thames Cadets on Saturday 11 September,<sup>38</sup> and the following Saturday a Thames senior fifteen played the Grafton senior team.<sup>39</sup> The season ended on 9 October with the 35 Company cadets from Parnell

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<sup>35</sup> John Coffey, *Canterbury XIII-A Rugby League History*, Christchurch: Published by the author, 1987, p. 41.

<sup>36</sup> *Greymouth Evening Standard*, 4 October 1915, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Thames Star*, 8 May 1915, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Thames Star*, 8 September 1915, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *Thames Star*, 16 September 1915, p. 4.

playing the 20 Company cadets from Thames.<sup>40</sup>

With no union being played in Thames, league was able to make a comeback. A small advertisement appeared on the front page of the local newspaper of Tuesday 13 July informing those interested in rugby league of a meeting in the County Chambers that night.<sup>41</sup> There was sufficient support for the Thames Rugby League to be formed, or more accurately, re-formed, and the first meeting of the management committee was held two days later. A letter was received from the Auckland Rugby League stated that they intended to send a representative team to play in Thames in September.<sup>42</sup> Two senior clubs, City Rovers and Tykes, were formed and the opening of the season was put back a week so that players could pay their last respects to the late Tom Brownlee,<sup>43</sup> and letters of sympathy were sent to the widow and father of their late comrade.<sup>44</sup>

The League obtained the use of Paul's Paddock at Parawai and; for the next two months, the two teams played each other six times, with City winning twice, Tykes twice and two matches ending in draws.

The Thames Rugby League could be pleased with the season's activities during which six inter-club matches were played plus home-and-away representative matches against teams from Auckland and Waihi. Judging by the team sheets, it appeared that, maybe as a result of no union being played, the two clubs had no difficulty in fielding full teams for their matches. At least 90 men played league during the season, 46 for Tykes and 44 for City Rovers, but nearly half played in only one game. There were considerably fewer regular players; 13 Tykes players and 14 City Rovers

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<sup>40</sup> *Thames Star*, 8 October 1915, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Thames Star*, 13 July 1915, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Thames Star*, 16 July 1915, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Brownlee had been a well-known union player before switching to league in 1912 when he both represented Thames and played for New Zealand against Australia.

<sup>44</sup> *Thames Star*, 16 July 1915, p. 4.

players took part in three or more games. Why no union was played is a mystery: it appeared that players were available, possibly due to the large railway workshops in the town<sup>45</sup> being considered an essential industry, but union could not field teams and yet league could.

### **Goldfields-1915**

The game was also revived in the Goldfields sometime during the 1915 season. The Auckland Rugby League received a report from Waihi in August that the game was likely to be introduced there and also at Paeroa. The Thames League was reported to be endeavouring to organise an excursion train from the Goldfields district to Thames in September, when the Auckland representative team were to play, so that 'members of the Thames League might have an opportunity of meeting those who had the matter of the formation of a League in hand'.<sup>46</sup>

It seems likely that league was being played in the district earlier in the season, and there is some evidence that clubs might have been formed, or rather re-formed, at Waihi, Paeroa and Karangahake. The team sheets for the two representative games against Thames in September and October give the club affiliations of the Goldfields players. There were 4 Waihi, 6 Paeroa and 3 Karangahake players who took part in both of the games, whilst a further 2 Waihi, 1 Paeroa and 1 Karangahake players took part in only one game, and another 5 reserves were named without their club affiliation.<sup>47</sup> So either some club matches had been played earlier in the season, or the players had just got together for the games against Thames. The return match was played at Waihi where 'a good number' of spectators saw a 'fast and interesting game' and witnessed 'an exposition of clean, clever tactics'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Bob Stott, *Prices of Thames*, Wellington; Southern Press Ltd., 1983, p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 Aug 1915, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Thames Star*, 24 September 1915, p. 4. and 8 October 1915, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Thames Star*, 11 October 1915.

This second attempt to launch the game in the Goldfields was made as New Zealand entered its first full year of war, when many young men were enlisting and all sports clubs were experiencing difficulties. It is unlikely that a newly formed League with no infrastructure or pool of experienced players would survive in the circumstances and it does not appear to have done so.

### **Hawkes Bay 1915**

The Hawkes Bay League, like a number of other leagues, took an overly optimistic attitude to the effects of the war. Its annual report stated the outlook was not bright, as due to enlistments player numbers would be severely depleted and teams would find fielding teams difficult. Nevertheless, 'if all the visits owing to them eventuated, it was considered the season would be the most successful in the history of the League...'<sup>49</sup> Enlistments caused three clubs to withdraw from competitions and, although a new club, Old Boys, was formed,<sup>50</sup> a further attempt to form a club in Hastings was unsuccessful. The season ended with just three senior clubs still active.

Of greater concern was the collapse of junior football. Early attempts to play junior, third and fourth-grade matches were made, but after several games had had to be called off due to a lack of players, the competitions were abandoned. Spectator support for league remained high though, but the competition was interrupted on two Saturdays in June due to the Napier Park Racing Club meetings. The League had been unable to cope with the exigencies of war, greatly underestimating the effects of player enlistments. When it was announced at the end of the season that '130 players [had] left the district to go the front',<sup>51</sup> the situation was clearly unsustainable. Potential recruits from union had also enlisted in large numbers so were unavailable to make good the losses, and the collapse of junior football cut off another

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<sup>49</sup>*Napier Daily Telegraph*, 13 April 1915, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 3 May 1915, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 2 September 1915, p. 3.

major source of replacements. With insufficient players for a club competition and no representative football being played, the League had to cease operations for the war years.

Rugby union was much better able to cope with wartime conditions, and despite many players enlisting it justified the continuation of its competitions as

such sport and training it entailed constituted the soldier's best preparation, and that any further calls for volunteers during the season would be responded to as promptly and generously as they had been in the past.<sup>52</sup>

To continue its competitions it relied heavily on young players and school teams, it abandoned its junior competition, it promoted school teams to its senior competition, and it maintained its third- and fourth-grade competitions. Two school teams, Te Aute College and the Maori Agricultural College, were promoted to make up a six-team senior competition, and school teams were included in a both a seven-team third- and a four-team fourth-grade competition.<sup>53</sup> With no league competitions being played, young, would-be, league players were forced to play union and were lost to league.

### **Lower Waikato 1915 - 1918**

Another smaller league that did manage to continue playing in 1915 was the Lower Waikato, although it struggled. The three senior teams from Huntly, Ngaruawhaia and Taupiri were to play the usual three-round competition starting late in May and ending in mid-July. Prior to this a benefit match, Huntly versus the Brickyard Ramblers, was played on Saturday 24 April to help Alf Peckham, a stalwart of the Huntly Club who was in Hamilton Hospital slowly recovering from injuries sustained in a mine disaster.<sup>54</sup> At least two clubs, Huntly and Ngaruawahia, also had junior teams. No league was

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<sup>52</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 29 April 1915, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 1915, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Huntly Press*, 23 April 1915.

played for six weeks following the end of the senior championship but then several representative games against Auckland teams ended the season.

Despite its having been replaced by league, there was still some support for union football in the district and the game briefly re-emerged towards the end of the 1915 season with a match on the Huntly Recreation ground

between a Pakeha team from Churchill<sup>55</sup> and a Huntly Maori team. The two teams met the previous Saturday with the Maoris winning by a handsome margin. The launch bringing the Churchill men broke down and they arrived very late in the afternoon. They were also short of men and borrowed several from Huntly. The match was shortened but even so finished in the dark. The game was played in the best spirit, and it was quite a treat to see a good game of Rugby football once more.<sup>56</sup>

Lower Waikato started its 1916 club competition late in the season, apparently due to the Taupiri club having difficulties finding players. It was reported in May that

Taupiri Football Club which for the past four years has proved such a redoubtable combination, is sadly depleted in its ranks. It is expected, with the help of Gordonton and Orini players to raise a team during the coming season.<sup>57</sup>

Gordonton and Orini were small settlements about 15 kilometres south east and north east respectively from Taupiri. The club eventually managed to find sufficient players and the competition finally got underway on Saturday 15 July when Huntly beat Ngaruawahia by 13 points to 5. Only two of the proposed three rounds of competition took place as it would seem that player shortages precluded the final round being played. 'Representative' matches were organised to provide games for the remaining players. On 23 September, in what was advertised as the 'game of the season', Huntly were to play a team from Pukemiro, but it is doubtful as to whether the match took

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<sup>55</sup>Churchill was a small Waikato River township, 20 kilometres downstream from Huntly.

<sup>56</sup> *Huntly Press*, 20 August, 1915.

<sup>57</sup> *Huntly Press*, 3 May 1916.

place.<sup>58</sup> Pukemiro was a small settlement about 15 kilometres south west of Huntly with no previous association with league. This game would have been the last to be played in the Lower Waikato until the League was reformed in 1919.

### **Auckland 1915-1918**

The loss of many young men to the armed forces had a major effect on all codes in the city, but not all were affected equally. League had a very successful 1915 season despite two hundred league players having enlisted by the start and another 200 reported as being 'fit and well and "in form" ready to join Kitchener's army'.<sup>59</sup> By the end of the season, 487 of the 740 players registered with the League had left for the front, 'a record of which the league is rightfully proud'.<sup>60</sup> By way of comparison, over 500 union players also enlisted during the year and senior teams were only kept going with difficulty.<sup>61</sup> Union was the code worst affected by player losses, with the number of teams entered in its five grades falling from 39 to 30. League, despite losing many players, managed to field 45 teams in five grades, an increase of six teams. Soccer, with 43 teams in six grades, and hockey with 35 teams in its five grades, both fielded more teams than union, but lacrosse ceased to be played. The Rugby Union, though, vigorously promoted schoolboy rugby, with competitions involving 12 secondary schools, 27 primary schools and 11 senior cadet teams, giving it a considerable advantage over league, which was excluded from the schools. Significantly, and unlike Australia and England, no codes abandoned club competitions during the war years. English rugby union abandoned all club and county rugby during the war years but there was a big growth in armed services games, games in

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<sup>58</sup> *Huntly Press*, 22 September 1916.

<sup>59</sup> *New Zealand Herald* 12 April 1916, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> *New Zealand Herald* 12 April 1916, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *New Zealand Herald* 8 Sept 1915, p. 11.

which the military authorities included league players in their teams, a practice which the Rugby Union was forced to acquiesce to. But it quickly reverted to banning all league players after the war.<sup>62</sup> In Australia, rugby union club competitions were abandoned during the war years but league competitions were played throughout the war. Indeed, Murray Phillips has demonstrated that the decision of Australian league administrators to continue its competitions during the war years was a significant factor in consolidating league as the leading rugby code in New South Wales.<sup>63</sup>

The decision of the Auckland Rugby Union to restrict its 1916 competitions to players under twenty years of age will be discussed later, but it resulted in league, which did not impose any restrictions, starting the season as the code with by far the greatest player support, with 42 teams from 14 clubs and over 800 registered players. A sixth-grade competition was also inaugurated, catering primarily to school-age boys. Even though the loss of players through enlistment forced Mangere, Remuera and Northcote to withdraw from the League, 35 teams from 12 clubs completed the season.<sup>64</sup> The Rugby Union, in contrast, ran only three competitions; a first grade for players under twenty, a second grade for players under 18 and a third grade for those under 16.<sup>65</sup> There were only 16 teams in the three competitions, making union by far the weakest code in terms of player numbers, although soccer only enjoyed marginally more support, with 19 teams in four grades. There was also a big drop in player numbers for hockey, which fielded 24

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<sup>62</sup> Tony Collins, 'English Rugby Union and the First World War', *The Historical Journal*, 45, 4 (2002), pp. 802, 804, 806-7, 815.

<sup>63</sup> Michael McKernan, 'Sport, War and Society: Australia 1914 -18', in *Sport in History - The Making of Modern Sporting History*, in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (ed.), St Lucia, Queensland University of Queensland Press, 1979, pp. 6-7, and Murray Phillips, 'Football Class and War: The Rugby Codes in New South Wales, 1907-1918', in *Making Men - Rugby and Masculine Identity*, John Nauright and Timothy J.L. Chandler, London: Frank Cass, 1996, pp. 166-7.

<sup>64</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 30 April 1917, p. 8.

<sup>65</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 May 1916, p. 4.

**TABLE 10**

**AUCKLAND WINTER SPORTS TEAMS - ALL CODES - 1908 TO 1920**

	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
<b>Rugby Union</b>													
Senior	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	6	8*	6	6	8	8
Second	6	8	8	6	8	10	9	6	5*	6	4	8	9
Third	6	7	8	14	10	11	10	8	3*	6	8	9	10
Fourth	8	9	8	8	6	5	8	6	0	6	8	7	8
Fifth					8	6	6	4	0	5	0	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Rugby League</b>													
Senior	4	4	4	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7
Second	3		4	4	6	6	8	8	5	5	4	6	10
Third				4	9	10	12	11	7	5	5	2	7
Fourth					7	6	13	10	6	9	6	8	9
Fifth					5	0	0	10	6	6	7	8	9
Sixth									5	4	6	6	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Men's Hockey</b>													
Senior	8	9	6	8	10	9	6	5	4	4	4	9	6
Second	12	12	18	18	6	10	8	6	4	2	6	9	8
Third	8	8	14	12	10	12	8	10	6	6	7	9	6
Fourth					4	6	7	7	4	5	6	9	6
Fifth						7	8	7	6	4	4	9	8
Sixth									6	4	4	9	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>81#</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Soccer</b>													
Senior	6	8	6	7	6	10	8	6	4	5	4	8	8
Second	2	8	10	8	8	9	12	10	4	5	0	5	10
Third	4	7	6	4	4	6	6	7	0	4	4	0	6
Fourth	6	4	4	5	6	6	0	7	0	5	4	5	6
Fifth								8	4	11	7	6	14
Sixth								5	7	0	9	8	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>56+</b>
<b>Australian Rules</b>													
Senior	4	5	4	2									
Second	2	0	0	2									
Third	2												
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>									
<b>Lacrosse</b>													
Senior	3	4	4	2	4	6	4						
Second				2	0	0	0						
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>						

Notes  
 \* restricted to under 20, under 18, under 16 grades only  
 # plus 9 team 7th, 8th and 9th grades  
 + plus 18 teams from the YMCA

teams in five grades. League was, then, the only code that maintained its player numbers in the second season of wartime sports; the other three codes all experiencing sharp declines.

1917, the third season under wartime conditions, opened with all four codes feeling the effects of the loss of many players to the armed forces, but somehow they managed to complete their competitions. League, with 35 teams in six grades, still fielded the most teams but was closely followed by union, with 29 teams in five grades, a big increase. Soccer, with 30 teams in five grades, also saw a big increase on the previous season, but hockey numbers were virtually unchanged, with 23 teams in five grades. In 1918, replacing enlisted players was increasingly difficult but still most clubs managed to survive, though a number were forced to withdraw teams from various grades as the season advanced. One of league's casualties was North Shore, one of the founder clubs from 1909, which was forced to withdraw after defaulting some early games through lack of senior players. Despite these difficulties, the number of teams in all four codes remained almost the same as in the previous season, with league still fielding the greatest number. [see table 10]

Throughout the war league in Auckland grew in both strength and popularity, fielding more teams than its rival code, and consistently attracting bigger crowds to its matches. This was, it will be argued, a reflection on the more attractive football played under the Northern Union rules, a fact acknowledged by the union authorities. Fear over the inroads being made into its support base prompted the Auckland Union to defy the New Zealand Union and adopt modified rules to make the game more like league in an attempt to retain its supporters. Both codes supported the war effort and raised money for patriotic causes, but the Union adopted a more censorious attitude to military age players whilst the League's more liberal policies were a reason for union players to switch codes.



### **Canterbury 1915-1918**

For Canterbury, 1915, its third season of league, was, despite the war, fairly successful. Although two clubs, City and St Albans, did not compete, two new clubs, Northern Suburbs and Hornby, were formed and senior, junior and third grade competitions were all completed. Despite many players enlisting, about 120 men still played senior league and, with nine lower-grade teams also competing, there must have been, in all, over 300 playing league during the season. With fifteen teams in three grades, league had lost only one team from the previous season. Other codes suffered greater losses: union was down from 43 teams to 36, hockey down from 49 to 42, whilst soccer lost almost half its teams, falling from 22 to 12. League, it would seem, suffered relatively smaller losses than the other codes. Although the loss of players enlisting meant that some senior games were played with under-strength teams, apart from two early defaults, all games were played. Although no representative matches were played, a Canterbury representative team introduced the code to the West Coast. The season ended with Sydenham, the senior champions, entertaining Athletic, the Wellington senior champions, in a challenge for the Thacker Shield. Sydenham won the match before a large crowd.

The situation in Canterbury was similar to that in Auckland in 1916, with neither code running senior, open-age, competitions. The Rugby Union ran just two age-restricted competitions, other than those for schools, and the Rugby League ran junior, third- and fourth-grade competitions, but allowed senior players to take part in the junior competition. League was the code least affected by the war, losing only three of the fifteen teams of the previous season. All other codes, except soccer, also fielded fewer teams under wartime conditions. Union and hockey were the worst affected; union with just two age-restricted grades had less than half the number of teams than in the previous season, 16 as against 36, whilst the number of hockey teams fell by almost a half, with 26 teams as compared with 42, even though

still conducting a senior competition. League, despite not having a senior competition, suffered only a slight fall in the number of teams from 15 to 12, whilst the number of soccer teams increased. [see table. 11]

The season was relatively uneventful, although bad weather forced games in all codes to be called off on three Saturdays and on another due to an army cadet parade. The preference of sportsmen for horseracing was shown once again when the Grand National Race Meeting was held in Christchurch. The Rugby League decided to bow to the inevitable and called off all fixtures for race day; other sports tried to play the fixtures as scheduled but many players failed to turn up and most teams were forced to play 'short-handed'.

The 1917 season was a watershed for Canterbury league, with more teams and more spectators. The senior competition provided very competitive football and ended with a 'play-off' for the championship. Hornby had beaten Federal in an early season game but Federal had protested and the New Zealand Council had ordered the game to be replayed. The regular season had ended with Hornby and Sydenham equal on points with the disputed match still to be replayed. A win or a draw would have given Hornby the championship but Federal won, necessitating a play-off. The play-off generated great interest in Christchurch, and a record crowd of over 2,000 enthusiastic spectators were at Sydenham Park to see Sydenham beat Hornby and claim the championship.<sup>66</sup> The junior competition was much more one-sided with Addington winning all its matches by large margins, so the league closed the competition early and started a knock-out tournament for the juniors. The season was judged as 'the most successful experienced since the thirteen-a-side game was established in Christchurch', the standard of play was high, and every game 'clean fast and interesting', whilst the code had 'grown in public favour to an extent beyond the expectations of the most

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<sup>66</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 28 August 1917, p. 6.

optimistic enthusiast'.<sup>67</sup>

League made further advances during the 1918 season, with a large influx of young players making it possible for a record number of teams to enter the various competitions. Due to it being a city on a plain, Christchurch had established sports grounds in every suburb so that accommodating the increased demand for pitches was not a problem.<sup>68</sup> The only difficulty was the lack of a pay ground to take advantage of the increased spectator support. Meanwhile, clubs were putting down roots in their communities. The Hornby club, with both finances and membership flourishing, was able to open and equip a 'training hall' which, 'thanks to the generosity of one enthusiast, is being electronically lighted'.<sup>69</sup> A league commentator also noted that

As each week goes by, new recruits and converts are being won by the code. On Saturday last, teams of all grades included players who never previously had played the game. On the touchlines increasing crowds gather. there can be little doubt that the thirteen-a-side code is making rapid strides as the season advances...<sup>70</sup>

Competitions were conducted for all four grades until Saturday 6 July, when they were interrupted for a seven-a-side tournament involving teams from all four grades. The massive response, 31 teams and 217 players, meant that there was not enough time to play all the games in the one day, so the semi-finals and finals were played the following Saturday. The tournament, attracted crowds of over 1,000, was an

illustration of the progress the code has made in these parts. But it was not in numbers alone that supporters of the League had reason for satisfaction. All round, the junior players were particularly good types of youth - clean-limbed, keen, well conducted, and in every way promising lads.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 24 July 1917, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> The league had grounds at Sydenham Park, St Alban's Park, South Park, Linwood Park, Woolston Park, Riccarton Domain and at Hornby.

<sup>69</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 4 June 1918, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 4 June 1918, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 6 July 1918, p. 10.

Unfortunately the weather spoilt much of the rest of the season. All sports fixtures had to be cancelled on the next two Saturdays, so there were no club competition matches for a month. In the circumstances the League decided to close the senior and junior competitions, declaring Sydenham the senior champions and Addington the junior champions. While a knock-out competition was to close the season for these two grades, third and fourth grades carried on.<sup>72</sup> The first round matches of the knock-out competitions never took place due to heavy snow and rain and a second attempt on the following Saturday was abandoned due to the state of the grounds. No further attempts were made to play the knock-out competition, but the League anticipated the return of representative football with a trial game, on Saturday 17 August, in which Sydenham, the senior champions, beat the Probables by 15 points to 0.

The last two years of war were the most successful ones experienced by the Canterbury Rugby League. In 1917 both league and union had reintroduced senior grade football, with a resulting increase in teams, league from 13 to 16 and union from 16 to 22, but still well below its pre-war team numbers. An influx of enthusiastic young players in 1918 saw the number of league teams increase by a third, from 16 to 26, and the introduction of an 8-team fourth-grade competition. League had risen during the war years from relative insignificance to become a serious threat to union's previously unchallenged supremacy.

### **Reactions to the War**

Football authorities were faced with a number of problems caused by the war; how to continue competitions with many players lost to the military, whether football should be played at all, and if so whether men of military age should be allowed to play, should football be restricted to local competitions or should representative games continue to be played? League and union

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<sup>72</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 29 July 1918, p. 3.

authorities reacted differently to these problems.

Patriotic feelings were strong within both codes in Auckland and league and union authorities were both keen to support the war effort. Both were proud of the number of their players who enlisted in the armed forces but neither body formally refused to accept players of military age into their competitions during 1915. The Rugby Union, though, made it clear that such players were both unpatriotic and unwelcome. The Rugby League was less judgmental, as demonstrated by the number of union players turning to league. The League had determined to carry on as usual 'so as to maintain the physical fitness of the many players then awaiting orders, and who have since sailed for the front'.<sup>73</sup>

Rugby League like other athletic bodies has felt the war and some of the local clubs have lost the services of many of their most prominent players. However the men promoted from the junior ranks and recruits obtained from rugby union clubs have, taken collectively, done excellently...<sup>74</sup>

Patriotic sentiments governed the actions of both union and league officials at the start of the 1916 season in Auckland. A special meeting was held by the Rugby Union to discuss the suggestion that no men of military age be permitted to play football. It was proposed that players over 20, rejected by the military authorities as unfit, be allowed to play, but this, it was argued, would be a mistake as hard-and-fast rules were needed to avoid numerous applications for 'exemptions'. The meeting eventually unanimously agreed that no player exceeding 20 years of age in April 1916 should be allowed to play in the Union's competitions.<sup>75</sup> The Rugby League, on the other hand, decided to continue holding open competitions with the predictable result that many union players aged over 20 defected to league. This decision, though, was not free from criticism from within league ranks. Its

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<sup>73</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 12 Apr 1916, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 23 June 1915, p. 4.

<sup>75</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 8 April 1916, p. 5.

correspondent in the *New Zealand Herald* wrote

It seems hardly fair, apart from the ethics of the football codes, that a body which is endeavouring to assist the country in times of grave national peril should lose players to another body, the officials of which apparently do not consider that recruiting should concern them.

The people must supply the men to the military authority, and the Rugby Union, in order to assist, drew the line at which players could play the old-established game at 20 years of age.

If the Rugby League officials had decided not to accept Rugby Union players eligible for military service in its ranks, and still permitted its own eligible men to play, the situation would have been bad enough. No sports body should cater for single men of military age; their place is in the ranks with their brave comrades, whose athletic training helped to win renown for New Zealand arms.<sup>76</sup>

Faced with such opposition to its policy of unrestricted entry, the Auckland Rugby League decided not to permit union players eligible for military service to take part in its competitions.<sup>77</sup> This still left it possible for union players who were not eligible for military service to play league and did not restrict the right of existing league players of any age to play.

The Rugby Union's hard line on player eligibility, adopted in 1916, caused it to lose many players to league, and the resulting mediocre competitions attracted little spectator interest, with many preferring the more attractive league games. Faced with the fact that its policy had greatly benefited the league game, the Auckland Union called a special meeting prior to the start of the 1917 season. It was decided there, after considerable discussion, to revert to an open senior grade with a second grade for under 21s, a third grade for under 18s, and a fourth grade for those under 16. This had the desired effect and, despite player losses to the armed forces, two new teams appeared in the relaunched senior grade, one, the Railway Workers club, going on to win the competition and then create considerable media interest by deserting the union game for league.

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<sup>76</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 17 May 1916, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 18 May 1916, p. 5.

The Auckland Rugby League continued with its policy of open competitions in 1917, but the Chairman, James Carlaw, 'emphasised the fact that the playing teams comprised married men, ineligible, returned soldiers etc',<sup>78</sup> implying that all players eligible for military service had enlisted. He also spoke of the problems faced by the League due to the Council taking away the fencing around Victoria Park. 'It would be difficult to carry on during the coming season, as there would be no revenue coming in from the public till the new grounds were available, on which a lot would have to be spent.'<sup>79</sup> Six hundred league players had enlisted thus far, of whom 25 had given their lives, and junior clubs 'were being largely depleted by men going to the front and some would not be able to field teams'.<sup>80</sup>

In Christchurch, the Rugby Union decided to impose an age limit on player eligibility for 1916, and ran a 'senior' competition restricted to players under 20 years (changed to under 21 mid-season), and a junior competition for players under 16. The League was less restrictive, playing junior, third- and fourth-grade competitions but with no age restriction for juniors. This meant that for those over 21 who wanted to play some form of rugby, the only option was the league game. At its annual general meeting, the Canterbury League had decided to run the junior grade competition with no age restriction on players, but only following a spirited debate. Patriotic sentiment ran high and one delegate proposed that no player over eighteen should be allowed to play football during the coming season, saying that 'the sooner they [the League] put the whole force of men at the disposal of the Defence Department the better'. He declared that he could not take office if men were playing who should be at the front. Another delegate even went as far as proposing that 'only players under eight or over eighty, should be allowed to play football'. The secretary brought the meeting back to reality

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<sup>78</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 May 1917, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 May 1917, p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 May 1917, p. 8.

by pointing out that fifteen members of the Linwood club had been turned down by the military on account of flat feet and maintained that 'nobody had a right to prevent men who had been turned down by the Defence authorities from playing football'. President, Dr Thacker, MP, said that

attention should be confined to juniors, and to those men who could not be spared economically to go to the front. If such men could not go, they should be able to play football, but should be made to wear their exemption badges when on the field, in order to show the people that they were not "shirkers"<sup>81</sup>

The age restrictive proposals were defeated and the executive's more liberal policy was adopted by a large majority. During the season the League's patriotism was brought into question over its policy of not enforcing an age restriction on junior-grade players when the Sydenham league club asked the City Council for the use of a ground at Sydenham Park. The Rugby Union leased two grounds but was only using one due to one of its clubs being unable to raise a team. A councillor was concerned that men of military age were playing junior league and asked the club secretary what age limits were enforced.

We are only playing juniors  
Men or boys? What age?  
There is no restriction on age.  
What is your club composed of, boys or men?  
Chiefly boys that play in the matches.<sup>82</sup>

The secretary then informed the Council that the club had forty members at the front. Both codes reverted to unrestricted open-age senior competitions in 1917 and 1918.

In both Auckland and Christchurch league and union officials tried to demonstrate their patriotism by encouraging all eligible players to enlist, but whilst the union authorities preferred to ban all players of military age, their league counterparts took a more tolerant approach. Many men of military age

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<sup>81</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 10 April 1916, p. 2. All quotes in paragraph are from this source.

<sup>82</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 20 June 1916, p. 3.

had good reasons for not being in the army, some were rejected for medical reasons, others were exempt as workers in essential industries. League authorities recognised these facts and did not impose any outright bans on playing league. These contrasting responses resulted in league gaining players at the expense of union, running more attractive competitions and attracting more spectators, and in turn forcing union authorities to resume open-age competitions to counter the increasing popularity of league.

It can be seen from the above that Union authorities took a much more pragmatic approach to wartime activities than did their counterparts in Australia and Britain. Whilst authorities in these countries halted all club rugby for the duration of the war and expected and encouraged all players to enlist, things were different in New Zealand, where club competitions were maintained throughout the war years. In Auckland and Christchurch where the threat from league was most felt, both codes ran senior competitions in 1915, but in 1916 union took a more patriotic stand and only allowed those under 20 (Auckland) or those under 21 (Christchurch) to play. This stand was quickly abandoned for the 1917 season when it became clear that many players were being lost to league, and senior competitions were resumed for the rest of the war. Smaller centres managed to keep senior competitions going, despite fewer club teams, by bringing high school teams into the competition.

### **Patriotism**

Patriotic activities by sports administrators were widespread in the early war years but more particularly in Auckland where even the two rugby codes put aside their differences to raise money for patriotic causes. At the beginning of the 1915 season both codes suspended their competitions for two weeks to raise money for the war effort. The Rugby Union staged a match between an Auckland team and one from the Trentham Military Camp and on a beautifully fine day 6,000 spectators attended the match, which

raised £250 for the Hospital Ship and Wounded Soldiers Relief Fund.<sup>83</sup> The Rugby League postponed all its fixtures so that its players could attend.<sup>84</sup> The following Saturday it was the turn of the Rugby League, which staged a 7-a-side competition which, despite the 'threatening weather', attracted almost 4,000 spectators and raised over £200. That week the Rugby Union postponed all except its schoolboy matches. The £200 raised for Patriotic Funds comprised £158 gate takings, £42 from sale of a cup, which was then presented to the Auckland League,<sup>85</sup> and £4/2/6 from the sale of jerseys. 'An anonymous donor had given [the] two jerseys from a set of red, yellow and black ones worn by the New Zealand in the first international played in New Zealand against Britain in July 1910.'<sup>86</sup> The League also donated about £300 of its season's gate takings to the Hospital Ship and Wounded Soldiers Fund, a considerable sum as there was only a limited number of occasions on which it could charge for admission.<sup>87</sup>

Five benefit matches were played late in the 1917 season. The Newton and City clubs played each other to raise funds for returning servicemen from their two clubs, then two composite teams chosen from all the clubs played each other to raise funds for a memorial for W. Mackrell, a representative player who had been killed in the war, and the third match was to 'provide comforts for four members of [the Ponsonby and City] clubs who have returned from the war disabled for life'.<sup>88</sup> The fourth match was part of a joint effort with the Football (soccer) Association, to raise funds for the Returned Soldiers Association, and saw first the final of soccer's Falcon Cup played, then Ponsonby, the League champions, played a combined team from the

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<sup>83</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 June 1915, p. 8.

<sup>84</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 June 1915, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 June 1915, p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 June 1915, p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 28 July 1915, p. 4.

<sup>88</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 September 1917, p. 8.

other clubs. The matches attracted the largest attendance of the season, helped no doubt by the gesture of the Rugby Union in cancelling all its matches, and at least £200 was raised.<sup>89</sup>

The season finally ended on Saturday 13 October when the Rugby League and the Hockey Association jointly organised a Festival of Sport at the Domain to raise funds for the Red Cross. Three games were played on different grounds; at 1.45 pm a junior league game, a senior ladies' hockey game and a senior men's hockey game, then at 3 pm the 'star attraction', the Auckland League representative team played a New Zealand Military representative team.<sup>90</sup> Military authorities it seemed were, unlike the situation in Britain, prepared to allow league to be played by army teams.

The Wellington League suffered a major setback through its support of patriotic activities in 1915. Following the opening rounds of its competition, games were cancelled during most of June as patriotic activities took centre stage. Sporting fixtures in all codes were cancelled for the first two Saturdays in June to accommodate a 'Monster Patriotic Carnival'.<sup>91</sup> Club fixtures were to have resumed on the third Saturday, but league fixtures were cancelled due to a lack of players, who, presumably, had found other pursuits to occupy their Saturdays. All sporting fixtures were again called off on the last Saturday in June for the crowning of the Carnival Queen. These major disruptions throughout much of the month badly affected most sports, but league in particular, a new sport and lacking depth of support, lost many players and was unable to complete its senior competition.

The smaller Lower Waikato League contributed to the war effort by playing two benefit matches during 1915, one 'in aid of the Belgians' and the other for the Hospital Ship Fund. A third benefit match was part of a joint effort by Huntly soccer and league clubs. The soccer club played the

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<sup>89</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 September 1917, p. 2, 17 September 1917, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 October 1917, p. 3.

<sup>91</sup> *Evening Post*, 3 June 1915.

'Geordies' and the league club had its senior team play its juniors. The admission was one shilling and the proceeds were given to Mrs. Baker, whose husband had been killed in France.<sup>92</sup> At the end of the 1915 season, the Hawkes Bay League cancelled its matches when the 'Thirty Thousand Club' staged a carnival at its ground, McLean Park, and donated the proceeds from the final match of the season, a Charity Cup match, to the 'Sand Bag and Equipment Fund'. The gate money from the final of the newly formed West Coast League's inaugural competition was donated to the 'Wounded Soldiers Fund', and, when the Auckland representative team played in Thames at the end of the season, the local League, for the first time, charged admission to the game and donated its takings to the 'Patriotic Funds'.

Another expression of patriotism by league officials was the pride shown in the sacrifices made by players. The reports presented to the annual general meetings of various league clubs in 1917 made sad reading, recording the heavy losses sustained. Ponsonby had had to cancel several matches owing to the enlistment of 87 players in the armed forces.<sup>93</sup> One hundred and twenty five City players had been on active service, of whom 10 had been killed, 25 wounded and four awarded the military medal.<sup>94</sup> Onehunga had been forced to withdraw its team from the senior competition, its Roll of Honour numbered 107, with 14 killed in action and 20 wounded, whilst Corporal Baker had been awarded the military medal and bar.<sup>95</sup> Newton was represented principally by junior members as most older players were on active service. The Roll of Honour numbered 64 and many had been killed.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> *Huntly Press*, 16 July 1915.

<sup>93</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 27 March 1918, p. 9.

<sup>94</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 28 March 1918, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 2 April 1918, p. 8.

<sup>96</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 April 1918, p. 7.

### **The War and League's Growing Popularity in Auckland**

The war affected spectator support for the two rugby codes differently. Throughout the 1915 championship series, league in Auckland consistently attracted bigger crowds than union. There was a large attendance at all its opening matches, whilst little public interest was shown in a 7-a-side tournament which opened the union season.<sup>97</sup> The following week there was a very large attendance at Victoria Park for the league but 'not a large' attendance at Eden Park for the opening round of the union senior competition.<sup>98</sup> On the third week, despite strong winds and heavy rain, there was again a very large attendance of spectators at Victoria Park for the league but only a small attendance at Eden Park for the union.<sup>99</sup> The fourth week saw strong winds and occasional showers but still the league attracted many spectators,<sup>100</sup> whilst the attendance at the union was 'not large'.<sup>101</sup> The league championship final was played at the end of July when, on a fine day and 'despite the strong counter attraction of the Pakuranga Hunt Club meeting', about 4,000 spectators paid admission to see Grafton win the championship by 10 points to 5 over City.<sup>102</sup>

League matches in Auckland continued to attract big crowds during the 1916 season with those matches played at Victoria Park attracting over 4,000 spectators each week, on average, throughout the season. In addition, suburban matches were well attended, especially at Devonport and Otahuhu.<sup>103</sup> In contrast the Rugby Union struggled to attract spectators. Even on a fine day and with no competition from league, as on the King's Birthday

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<sup>97</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 12 May 1915, p.10.

<sup>98</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 17 May 1915, p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 24 May 1915, p. 3.

<sup>100</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 2 June 1915, p. 3.

<sup>101</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 31 May 1915, p. 3.

<sup>102</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 2 Aug 1915, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 30 April 1917, p. 8.

weekend, when the League postponed all matches as many players were employed at the Auckland Racing Club meeting,<sup>104</sup> union could not attract many supporters to Eden Park, where attendance was reported as 'not large'.<sup>105</sup> When league competitions resumed the following Saturday, there were over 2,000 spectators at Victoria Park and a large attendance at Devonport, but the Rugby Union could only attract about 500 spectators to its matches at Eden Park.<sup>106</sup> On Saturday 15 July the League, with permission to charge admission at Victoria Park, decided to donate all receipts to the Childrens' Hospital Ward Equipment Fund and a crowd of 4,000 turned out, but there was very little interest in the union at Eden Park.<sup>107</sup>

Prior to the playing of the Roope Rooster<sup>108</sup> knockout competition, the League received a nasty surprise when it was informed that the Council had resolved to sell all the fences surrounding Victoria Park.<sup>109</sup> This was a serious blow, as it would now be unable to charge admission to this popular competition. Played over a four-week period starting at the end of July, it again proved popular. Crowds of over 3,000 were attracted to each of the early rounds and almost 5,000 spectators turned out for the final, whilst union matches failed to attract many supporters. Admission was now free, but the League was able to charge 1/- for admission to the grandstand and this money was donated to charity. City won the Roope Rooster, beating Ponsonby by a score of 11 points to 5.<sup>110</sup>

The superior brand of rugby offered by the Rugby League was

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<sup>104</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 June 1916, p. 4.

<sup>105</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 5 June 1916, p. 8.

<sup>106</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 12 June 1916, p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 July 1916, p. 8.

<sup>108</sup> A competition introduced at the end of the championship rounds to extend the season, shortened by the decision not to play representative football during the war.

<sup>109</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 27 July 1916, p. 10.

<sup>110</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 1916, p. 3.

apparently taking many spectators from union. That these new supporters were predominantly working class is shown on the only two occasions in 1916 that union games outdrew league in support. On both occasions the Rugby Union staged games that would appeal especially to middle-class supporters. On Saturday 24 June it put on a special programme at Eden Park with a schoolboys match, Kings College vs Grammar School, and University vs Grammar School Old Boys as the senior attraction. Despite showery weather, over 3,000 turned out to watch. At Victoria Park, on the other hand, the two leading league clubs were drawn to play the bottom two. Unfavourable weather, together with the likelihood of two easy victories, did not tempt the public and there were barely 1,000 spectators to witness the occurrence of a couple of upset results. Bottom-placed Newton beat top-placed Grafton by 8 points to 3 and second-to-bottom team Ponsonby beat second-placed City by 15 points to 8. Only third-placed North Shore was true to form, easily beating Otahuhu by 30 points to 0 at Otahuhu.<sup>111</sup> Attendances were back to usual the following week with about 1,000 at Eden Park for the union and about 3,000 at Victoria Park for the league.<sup>112</sup>

On Saturday 15 July league once again failed to compete with union when another match with middle-class appeal was played, this time between Kings College and Grammar School, to raise funds for the Starving Belgian Children Appeal.<sup>113</sup> The efforts put into promoting this match by schoolmasters ensued that there were about 6,000 spectators, or more likely 6,000 tickets were sold. How many middle-class parents braved the inclement weather and actually turned up is open to conjecture:

Acting under the direction of college and school masters, the boys worked strenuously, and as a consequence the bad weather did not

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<sup>111</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 June 1916, p. 8.

<sup>112</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 July 1916, p. 4.

<sup>113</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 17 July 1916, p. 8.

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**Football.**

**SPECTACULAR  
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**RUGBY V. LEAGUE.**

**THIS DAY (SATURDAY), CERTAIN.**

**DOMAIN CRICKET GROUND.**

**THE MUCH-DISCUSSSED EVENT,  
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Coached by PERCY WILLIAMS (ex-N.Z. Rep.), and Published by Authority of the Players:-

(McHugh, Auck. rep.; Ghent, Auck. rep.; Barclay, Auck. rep.; Olson, Auck. rep.; Murphy, Goldfields rep.; Courtney, emergency rep.; Harris, Auck. rep.; King, Auck. rep.; Simpson, Auck. rep.; Daly, Nicholson. Burns, Churches, Casey, Corner.

NOTE—Twelve of the above are from the recognised Railway Team, Rugby Union Champions.

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 R. A. SPINLEY, Secretary.**

**PUBLIC NOTICE.**



As the only Officer authorised by the bona-fide members of the Railway Football Club to speak and act on their behalf, I beg to intimate to the Rugby enthusiasts of Auckland that as there are only fifteen (15) bona-fide members in the Club, and of that number thirteen (13) have been practicing with a view to playing against Ponsonby to-day in the Domain, I can confidently state that there is no possibility of a team from the original Railway Football Club (Championship Winners) playing on any other ground. It is possible that the team may be strengthened by the inclusion of three well-known Auckland Rugby Representatives, so there is every reason to be confident that a great game will result.

The Club has seceded from the jurisdiction of the Auckland Rugby Union, and the bona-fide members of the reorganised Club will in future not be playing the grand old game that made New Zealand famous.

C. McDEVITT,  
 Hon. Secretary.

**RUGBY FOOTBALL.**



**THIS DAY:  
 AT EDEN PARK.**

**THE RUGBY GAME,  
 WHICH MADE NEW ZEALAND FAMOUS.  
 UNION'S ANNUAL EFFORT FOR CHARITY.**

**RAILWAY (PRESENT CHAMPIONS)  
 V.  
 UNIVERSITY (RUNNERS-UP).**

Curtain-Raiser, 3 p.m.  
**PONSONBY V. GRAMMAR OLD BOYS.**  
 Third Grade Final.

Admission, 6d.; Stand, 6d.; No Free List.  
 P. McELWAIN, Hon. Sec.

**IN REFERENCE TO THE ABOVE, THE AUCKLAND RUGBY UNION wish to state that the following players of the Railway Team, Winners of the Championship, who have been interviewed, have given authority to definitely announce that they have no intention to secede from the Rugby Code:—J. D. Stewart (Capt.), H. Barclay (Vice-Capt.), J. Corner, W. Lane, E. Herling, G. Birnie, C. Dacre, J. Rasmussen, E. Burns.**

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materially affect the gate takings as it might have done had the sale of tickets not been so vigorously pushed prior to the day.<sup>114</sup>

Without any special effort, league attracted over 2,000 spectators to Victoria Park despite the bad weather.

League continued to be the popular choice of spectators in 1917, with not only championship and Roope Rooster matches attracting large crowds but also a series of charity matches played at the end of the season. Two matches which elicited huge public interest involved players from the Railway club, which switched codes from union to league at the end of the season. The Railway club, which had burst onto the union scene as a newly formed club at the start of the season, and went on to win the club championship, was a social club which happened to bring together a group of talented players.

The matches, which illustrated both the popularity of league, and the animosity of the union establishment towards the game, were presaged by three advertisements that appeared in the *New Zealand Herald* on Wednesday 26 June. One, headed **Spectacular Football**, announced a **Unique Event**, a union versus league match at the Domain Cricket Ground between the Railway team (Rugby Union champions) and the Ponsonby team (Northern Union champions), the match to be played under league rules on Saturday 29 September.<sup>115</sup> The next advertisement, headed **The Rugby Game, which made New Zealand Famous**, announced a Charity Cup contest at Eden Park, to be played under union rules, 'New Zealand's National Game', on Saturday 29 September, between Railway, the present champions, and University, holders of the Charity Cup.<sup>116</sup> The third advertisement announced that

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<sup>114</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 19 July 1916, p. 12.

<sup>115</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 September 1917, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 September 1917, p. 5.

At a meeting of the players attached to the Railway Football Club, held last evening, the following resolutions were unanimously carried:-

That the Railway Club secede from the jurisdiction of the Auckland Rugby Union.

That this meeting of players confirms the action of the secretary in applying to the Auckland Rugby League for affiliation.

Con McDevitt (secretary)<sup>117</sup>

The Auckland sporting public must have been mystified by these events. An article in the Saturday's *Herald* reported that

Unusual interest attaches to the football matches here today, as the members of the Railway team will be called upon to declare under which code they will play. The two matches are announced, in which, it is claimed, Railway players are to take part - one under the Rugby Union and the other under the League.<sup>118</sup>

It then named nine players, including the captain and vice-captain, who 'are stated to have definitely announced that they have no intention to secede from the Rugby code. On the other hand', it continued, 'the Rugby League officials announce that 12 of the Railway team will take part in a match against Ponsonby...'<sup>119</sup> and went on to name those players. One can but wonder at the amount of pressure that these players were under leading up to the matches, as union officials strove to prevent their defection and league officials to retain their allegiance.

Four advertisements, one above the other, appeared in the *Herald* on Saturday.<sup>120</sup> [see page 293] One advertised the League match and gave the names of 15 players 'published by the authority of the players' and noted that '12 were from the recognised Railway team'. The second advertisement was a public notice signed by C. McDevitt, honorary secretary, as 'the only Officer authorised by the bona-fide members of the Railway Football Club to act on

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<sup>117</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 September 1917, p. 5.

<sup>118</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 29 September 1917, p. 9.

<sup>119</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 29 September 1917, p. 9.

<sup>120</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 29 September 1917, p. 12.

their behalf' informing rugby enthusiasts that there were only 15 bona-fide members of the club, of whom 13 had been practising to play in the match against Ponsonby. He went on to 'confidently state that there is no possibility of a team from the original Railway Football Club (Championship Winners) playing on any other ground'. He hinted that his club might be strengthened by the inclusion of three well-known Auckland union representatives, thus making him confident that a great game would take place. The notice ended by announcing that the Club had seceded from the Auckland Rugby Union and that members of the reorganised Club would not in future 'be playing the grand old game that made New Zealand famous'. The third advertisement, inserted by the Auckland Rugby Union, was for the Union's Annual Effort for Charity, a match between Railway, the present champions, and University, the runners-up, to be played at Eden Park. The fourth advertisement was a notice signed by P. McElwain, the honorary secretary, stating on behalf of the Auckland Rugby Union that nine players of the Railway Team had been interviewed and had given him 'authority to definitely announce that they have no intention to secede from the Rugby Code'. The players would appear to have been under pressure to do this and it remained to be seen which code they finally chose.

The two matches were played in unfavourable weather conditions which 'interfered considerably' with the attendance at Eden Park, where University secured victory over 'Railway' by the narrow margin of 15 points to 13 in the union game. The rugby union columnist in Wednesday's *Herald* wrote 'considering that the Railway team had not played together before, the exhibition of football was good',<sup>121</sup> thus implying that few 'bona-fide' Railway players took part. At Victoria Park a 'considerable amount of interest was evinced in the football match... under League rules'<sup>122</sup> and a large number of supporters of both codes were attracted. Railway secured a comfortable

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<sup>121</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 October 1917, p. 10.

<sup>122</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 October 1917, p. 6.

victory over Ponsonby by 12 points to 3. The great interest in the clash of codes at Victoria Park was not surprising 'this possibly being the first game played under such circumstances'<sup>123</sup> and it appears that despite the efforts of the Rugby Union, most of the Railway players stood by their decision to switch codes. Of the 15 named to play under League rules, only three were also named amongst the nine players said to have decided not to secede from the Rugby Union. If, as McDevitt claimed, there were only 15 bona-fide Railway players and 13 of them were practising to play in the League game, then these three players may well have been the only Railway players to take part in the match at Eden Park, the rest being outsiders brought in to make up a team. Certainly no more was heard of the Railway rugby union club.

The Railway league club, on the other hand, played its second match the following Saturday, and lost to the City club at Victoria Park by a score of 6 points to 18. This was to be its last match. As a social club with only 15 members, it needed more recruits to survive as a senior team and even if only a few of its players stayed with union, its situation would be doubtful. At its annual general meeting the following year it was proposed that it amalgamate with the Grafton club.<sup>124</sup> At Grafton's annual general meeting, its president, J. Edean, stated that the club had been weakened by the departure of members for the front and he suggested that the club amalgamate with the Railway club. This suggestion was unanimously adopted, and C. McDevitt, secretary of the Railway club, was then elected secretary of the combined club.<sup>125</sup>

The 1918 season saw an 'explosion' in support for league games. Games at Victoria Park were very popular with crowds of 4, 5 and 6,000, while a crowd of 7,000 was at the Domain on Saturday 13 July for a 'special' match between Newton and Ponsonby.

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<sup>123</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 October 1917, p. 10.

<sup>124</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 April 1918, p. 8.

<sup>125</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 17 April 1918, p. 9.

Why the league attracted large crowds whilst the union did not is not known. It may be that union's middle-class supporters considered it unpatriotic to watch sport whilst the league's working-class supporters did not. It is also possible that spectators were attracted by a superior brand of rugby, or saw sport as a welcome release from the troubles of war.

By the last year of the war support for league had grown to such an extent that the Auckland Union felt forced to take desperate measures to counter its increasing popularity. It decided at the start of the 1918 season to unilaterally introduce rule changes aimed at making the union game more attractive, even though this would bring it into conflict with the New Zealand Rugby Union.<sup>126</sup> A committee of leading officials and referees, established in 1917 to consider how to stem the losses to league, had recommended changes to the rules designed to speed it up and make it more interesting to both players and spectators. The proposed modifications created considerable controversy within the Auckland Union and some members of the committee threatened to resign, whilst the New Zealand Union considered expelling Auckland if it persisted in implementing them. Undeterred, the Auckland Union voted to adopt the modifications in their entirety for all cup matches.<sup>127</sup> As the expulsion of the Auckland Union would have likely led to a complete league takeover in the city, the New Zealand Union turned a blind eye to the transgressions.

The Auckland Union caused further strife later in the season when its representative team travelled to Wellington. With the agreement of both the Wellington Union and the players, and in defiance of a veto placed by the New Zealand Union on the use of the modified rules in representative

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<sup>126</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 8 April 1918. The amendments were 1) elimination of the wing forward. 2) the absolute free kick. 3) modification of rule relating to kicking into touch. 4) strict enforcement of the rule penalising lying on the ball.

<sup>127</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 8 April 1918, p. 7, and Paul Neazor, *Ponsonby Rugby Club: Passion and Pride*, Auckland: Celebrity Books, 1999, p. 74.

matches, the game was played under the modified rules.<sup>128</sup> The New Zealand Union was not prepared to tolerate the rules being used outside of Auckland and at a meeting following the match it maintained that

The alterations [to the rules] really meant the thin edge of the wedge. The game should be either Rugby or League, not a mixture of both. Rugby rules were quite good enough, and the game should be played under them'.<sup>129</sup>

A directive was given that all inter-union games should only be played under Rugby Football Union rules. At the next meeting, it was claimed that the New Zealand Union 'did not know officially' that the Wellington game had been played under the modified rules and in discussion it was argued that 'there was no justification for departing from the game that had stood the test of time' and that 'there would be very little difference from the league game if the amendments to the rules were adopted'. The meeting then agreed that 'this committee reaffirm its determination to uphold the constitution as set down in the rule book, for which purpose, it was elected at the last annual meeting'.<sup>130</sup>

The Auckland Union was unrepentant, stating emphatically that 'the modifications improve the game to a marked extent and in this the union is supported by both metropolitan and country players and supporters of the game throughout the province'. To those who argued that the modifications should be submitted for approval to the English Rugby Union, the Auckland Union replied that 'the modifications are merely a liberal and sensible interpretation of the rules of Rugby and in no way depart from the spirit of the laws laid down for the government of the game'.<sup>131</sup> The Auckland Union then proposed that the New Zealand Union hold a special meeting to consider suggested alterations and additions to its rules. The Auckland Union wanted

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<sup>128</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 September 1918, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 1918, p. 3.

<sup>130</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 12 September 1918, p. 7.

<sup>131</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 September 1918, p. 3.

to invest the New Zealand Union with greater powers than it then possessed. 'The time had arrived for the New Zealand Union to become the final court of appeal in football matters in the Dominion'.<sup>132</sup> In advocating such a move, the Auckland Union had 'no desire to break with the English Union or depart from the strictly amateur game'.<sup>133</sup> What the Auckland Union was proposing was that the New Zealand Union 'make the necessary alterations in the wording' of its constitution so as 'to invest the New Zealand Union with the authority at present vested with The English Union'.<sup>134</sup> The Auckland Union circulated its proposals to the various Rugby Unions in the Dominion and New South Wales. These acts of rebellion show how seriously it took the threat from rugby league in its province.

### **Representative Football**

At the beginning of the 1915 season the Auckland League argued that it would be unpatriotic to play representative football in wartime. It opposed the proposal of the New Zealand League to send a team to Australia and rejected a number of challenges for the Northern Union Cup.<sup>135</sup> This decision was disastrous for other North Island provinces. Leagues such as Wanganui, Hawkes Bay and Taranaki, with much smaller populations, were unable to sustain club competitions, but were keen to keep the game alive by playing representative football. Auckland's decision was a major reason for their going into recess.

The Auckland League, however, whilst refusing to play other provincial teams, made exceptions in the case of its own district leagues, playing the newly re-formed Thames League and the Waikato League. The Thames

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<sup>132</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 September 1918, p. 3.

<sup>133</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 13 September 1918, p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 October 1918, p. 8.

<sup>135</sup> The Roope Rooster knock-out competition was probably organised to fill the gap thus left at the end of the club championship.

League sought affiliation with the Auckland League,<sup>136</sup> and asked for a match against Auckland. The Auckland League decided to play a home-and-away series against it and also to play Waikato at Hamilton.<sup>137</sup> The match against Thames, played at Victoria Park, attracted over 4,000 spectators, demonstrating that representative football was still able to attract large crowds. For the return match, the Northern Steamship Company ran an excursion to Thames and about 350 supporters travelled with the Auckland team.

The Wellington League was ambivalent about the playing of representative matches during war-time. At the start of the 1915 season it argued that league should continue to be played at club level 'as it keeps young men fit but is not attractive enough to deter them from enlisting', but at representative level 'a young man who thinks he has a chance of making a representative team might be tempted to defer enlistment until after the representative season ends',<sup>138</sup> so representative football should not be played. This seems to have been the prevailing view of the executive; the proposed representative trip to Hawkes Bay early in the season was called off as it was 'not altogether a time for tours anyway',<sup>139</sup> and no other representative games were played during the season.

The Wanganui League was unable to secure a ground for its club competitions in 1915 and had had to abandon its junior competition the previous year as player enlistments took their toll. Whilst lacking sufficient players for a club competition, there was a core of experienced players who could have kept the game alive by playing representative matches. The decisions, on patriotic grounds, of the Auckland and Wellington Leagues not

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<sup>136</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 22 July 1915, p. 4.

<sup>137</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 5 Aug 1915, p. 5.

<sup>138</sup> *Evening Post*, 8 May 1915, p. 12.

<sup>139</sup> *Evening Post*, 29 May 1915, p. 14.

to play representative matches meant this was no longer an option and the League ceased to function.

The Taranaki League found itself in a similar situation in 1915. It decided that, as so many players were in the army, it would not be possible to conduct a club competition, but that the game could be kept going by playing representative fixtures. To this end it was decided to send a team to play Manawatu, Wellington, Canterbury and Hawke's Bay during June. This representative tour never eventuated, so league ceased to be played in Taranaki.

The Hawkes Bay League was another that was hard hit by player enlistments, which caused three clubs to withdraw from competitions in 1915, leaving just three senior clubs still active. The League, though, was expecting visits from a number of representative teams to make the season a success. But the decisions of the big city leagues not to play representative games meant that the expected visits never eventuated. This loss of representative fixtures, together with the heavy player enlistments, and the decision to call off all junior league, forced the League to suspend operations at the end of the season.

Helped by the willingness of the Auckland League to send teams to its district leagues, the Lower Waikato, Thames and Goldfields Leagues did manage to play some representative matches in 1915. Following the end of the senior championship, the Lower Waikato League held a representative trial match, following which the Auckland senior and junior representatives travelled to Huntly for matches<sup>140</sup> There was a fairly good attendance considering the bad weather. A break of six weeks followed before the season finally ended with an Auckland Maori representative team losing to Lower Waikato before a moderate crowd.<sup>141</sup> No representative football was played in the 1916 season and player shortages caused the club competition to be

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<sup>140</sup> *Huntly Press*, 17 September 1915.

<sup>141</sup> *Huntly Press*, 15 October, 1915.

cut short. To provide football for the remaining players, two games were played by a 'representative' team against the Auckland club City Rovers. On 26 August at Ngaruawahia, the City team beat Lower Waikato by 13 points to 9 and two weeks later the Lower Waikato representatives were in Auckland where they again lost, this time by 19 points to 8.

The newly reformed Thames League was able to enliven its season with help of Auckland, which played a home-and-away series with the Thames representative team. The team travelled to Auckland on Saturday 28 August where, before a crowd of 4,500, they 'gave a highly interesting and decidedly meritorious display'<sup>142</sup> before losing to the more experienced Aucklanders by 27 points to 16. The Thames League also benefited from the generosity of the Auckland League, which gave it 50 percent of the gate.

The following Saturday the Auckland representative team travelled to Thames for a return match whilst the Thames Old Boys' team, also from Auckland, came to play the City Rovers team. The League proposed, for the first time, to make a charge, donating its share of the one shilling admission to Patriotic Funds.<sup>143</sup> The games roused considerable interest in Thames and

without going into the merits and demerits of the League and Rugby games, it [could] truly be said that Saturday's exposition was an eye-opener to many and the enthusiasm which prevailed throughout the match showed that the spectators were keenly interested in the play. The game was fast, open, cleanly contested, and there was an entire absence of rough play or "the boot",<sup>144</sup>

There were a good number of spectators present and Thames emerged the victors by 25 points to 13.<sup>145</sup> The Thames Old Boys' club, Thames players now resident in Auckland, had an easy victory by 21 points to 0. Another representative game was played on 25 September against the Goldfields

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<sup>142</sup> *Thames Star*, 30 August 1915, p. 4.

<sup>143</sup> *Thames Star*, 3 September 1915, p. 1.

<sup>144</sup> *Thames Star*, 6 September 1915, p. 4.

<sup>145</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 6 September 1915, p. 8.

team. An excursion train was run from Waihi and the match ended with some doubt as to whether Goldfields had won or the game had ended in a tie.<sup>146</sup> The final game of the season was the return match against Goldfields on Saturday 9 October. There was no doubt this time that Goldfields won the game, the final score being Thames 8 Goldfields 13. These representative games undoubtedly made for a more interesting season, but even so the League was unable to build on this and no more league was played in Thames.

Following the 1915 season, and with league now only being played in Auckland and Christchurch, representative football virtually ceased. No representative games were played by Auckland in 1916, but four clubs organised an end-of-season excursion to Thames 'for the purpose of treating the Thames public to an exhibition of league football'.<sup>147</sup> A large number of supporters and players accompanied by a band left for Thames by steamer on Friday evening<sup>148</sup> and the following day Thames Old Boys beat Richmond by 11 points to 5 in a senior match, whilst in the curtain-raiser played between two fifth-grade teams, City beat Grafton by 3 points to 0.<sup>149</sup>

Only one representative match was played by Auckland in 1917, but it was of significant interest. It was played at the end of the season as part of a Red Cross fund raising day. The Auckland representative team played a New Zealand Military representative team,<sup>150</sup> admission was 1/-, and an 'unusually large number of spectators witnessed a particularly interesting exhibition of the game' which ended in a victory for Auckland by 23 points to 20.<sup>151</sup> This was possibly the only representative league game played by an

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<sup>146</sup> *Thames Star*, 27 September 1915, p. 4.

<sup>147</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 September 1916, p. 8.

<sup>148</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 2 September 1916, p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 September 1916, p. 8.

<sup>150</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 October 1917, p. 3.

<sup>151</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 15 October 1917, p. 3.

army team, and it shows a much more tolerant attitude to the game on the part of the military than that taken by their English counterparts. As previously noted, the English authorities would not countenance any league being played in the armed forces, whilst taking full advantage of league players to strengthen services union teams.<sup>152</sup> Another example of the army authorities' relaxed attitude to league comes from Christchurch, also in 1917, when the Twenty-seventh Reinforcements league team, from the Trentham army camp, were in Christchurch to play the Sydenham senior team, the ultimate winners of the senior championship. While in Auckland the League executive offered to provide a ground for a match between the 28th Reinforcements and Returned Soldiers 'provided the match be under league rules'.<sup>153</sup> This match does not appear to have been played, but on 16 June the 28th Reinforcements played a Maori team from Narrow Neck Reinforcement Camp at Eden Park. As Eden Park was the Rugby Union's ground, it is likely that the game was under union rules, but again the incident shows that the military were prepared to allow league to be played.

But overseas things were different: Fiona J. Hall cites incidents mentioned in letters home from soldiers, one saying that a union game between the Auckland and Canterbury Battalions had had to be abandoned because of 'some trouble regarding League players', and another that a union match was abandoned because the Auckland Battalion 'insisted on including a League player, and as Major Jordan, our captain, insisted otherwise the game fell through'.<sup>154</sup>

With the end of the war in sight, the Auckland League decided to resume playing representative football at the end of the 1918 season, and

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<sup>152</sup>Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain, A Social and Cultural History*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, pp. 15-17.

<sup>153</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 14 June 1917, p.7.

<sup>154</sup>Fiona J. Hall, "'The Greater Game'" Sport and Society in Christchurch during the First World War 1914-1918', Canterbury University MA Thesis, 1989, pp. 28-29.

staged a trial match to enable a team to be selected for its first wartime interprovincial match. This match, against Canterbury, was played on the Domain on Saturday 14 September, when over 10,000 spectators, starved of representative football, watched Auckland demolish Canterbury by 45 points to 9. Two weeks previously Ponsonby had travelled to Christchurch to play its champion club Sydenham for the Thacker Shield.

The Canterbury League had sent a representative team to the West Coast to introduce the game there in 1915, but no more representative football was played until after the war. A representative trial game, in which Sydenham, the senior champions, beat a Probables team, presaged the return of interprovincial football in 1918, and a second trial was played the following week. Then, on Saturday 31 August, the Ponsonby club, winners of the Auckland senior competition, came down from Auckland to challenge Sydenham, Canterbury champions, for the Thacker Shield, the first such challenge since the war began. The Canterbury League secured the sole use of Sydenham Park, a pay ground, and heavily promoted the match. They arranged for ample seating and 'those desirous to do so [could] reserve chairs along the touchline'.<sup>155</sup> The Council arranged for a continuous tramcar service to the ground. In perfect weather, a large crowd saw the visitors beat Sydenham by 11 points to 0. The third-grade final was played as a curtain-raiser, with Woolston beating Linwood by 5 points to 3. The next Saturday a third, and final, representative trial was played, with the selected representatives beating Addington by 27 points to 10. The season ended the following Saturday in Auckland, when the Canterbury team were in Auckland for a representative match.

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<sup>155</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 27 August 1918, p. 4.

**Conclusion**

Rugby league emerged from the war years in a considerably weakened condition. The enlistment of large numbers of players, together with its exclusion from schools, made the continuation of club football impossible in all except large cities, and of these it was only in Auckland and Christchurch that club football continued, Wellington being forced into recess. The decisions of the city Leagues not to play representative football put paid to any hopes, harboured by some of the Leagues from smaller towns, of keeping the game alive by fielding a representative team. Yet where league was played, in Auckland and Christchurch, it increased in both player numbers and popularity.

In Auckland particularly, league matches attracted significantly more spectators than did union, and there its growth posed a serious threat to the union game, forcing authorities to unilaterally introduce modified rules to counter this threat. Though both codes were keen to demonstrate their patriotism, league's more accommodating policies of allowing men of military age to play attracted players from union, whilst union's restrictive policies led to loss of players, fewer teams and poor quality competitions. All these factors contributed to the big increase in spectator numbers at league games.



# 6

1919-1920

POST-WAR RECOVERY

League emerged from the war with the game being played in just two centres, Auckland and Christchurch. It was re-started in several provinces and districts but was unable to regain its pre-war level of support. Four leagues, Wellington, Hawkes Bay, Lower Waikato and West Coast, resumed operations in 1919 and a further three, Hamilton, Rotorua, and King Country, in 1920. Also in 1920, a new league was started in Inangahua. However, nine leagues, Thames, Goldfields, Gisborne, Taranaki, Wanganui, Manawatu, Nelson, Golden Bay, and Marlborough, did not restart, and districts where league had once been strong were lost.[see table 12] The New Zealand League was concerned that the game be restarted in as many centres as possible, and therefore it quickly organised international tours by Australia, in 1919, and Britain 1920. The tourists played a series of test matches against New Zealand which generated considerable interest and attracted large crowds. But the New Zealand League also made sure that games were played in all centres, large and small, where league was being restarted, or was likely to be restarted, in order to re-ignite interest in league. League faced hostility from union supporters in a number of centres, particularly over fair access to grounds, unfounded allegations of professionalism, banning of league players, and denial of access to schools, all issues that league had had to contend with in the pre-war years.

### **Auckland**

After holding the game together through four difficult wartime seasons, in which it had nevertheless made significant gains over union, the Auckland Rugby League found it hard to adjust to the post-war situation. At the start of the 1919 season it confidently expected that league would boom in the



coming year.<sup>1</sup> However, clubs proved overly optimistic as to the numbers of players returning to the game from the war. Initially 50 teams were entered in six competition grades, up significantly from the 35 teams that started the previous season, but by half-way through the season 14 teams had been forced to withdraw due to a lack of players. Union clubs were more realistic, with 37 teams entered in five grades, up only slightly from the 29 that started the previous season, but only two teams were forced to withdraw, although a number of games were won by default. Soccer teams remained stable, up just two teams from 30 to 32. Hockey recorded an explosion in player numbers; from only 23 teams entries almost quadrupled and the season started with 81 teams entered in nine grades.<sup>2</sup> (see table 10)

The 1920 season proved even more successful for league in Auckland, starting with 49 teams from 13 clubs in six grades. The Rugby Union had slightly fewer teams, but two more clubs, with 40 teams in six grades. Soccer, for the first time, had the greatest number of teams, 56, but this was boosted by 18 teams entered in the various grades by the YMCA. Hockey numbers plummeted from 81 teams to 30.

A feature of the 1919 season for league, and possibly a reaction to the violence of war, were of instances of ill-discipline by both players and spectators, in at least one instance players walked off the field after disputes with the referee and one match had to be abandoned after the crowd, unhappy with a referee's decision, invaded the pitch. On the bright side, league continued to grow in popularity, with record crowd numbers at both club and representative games. Gate receipts over the season totalled £2141/16/6, leaving the League with a profit of £977/13/2, an increase of £320 over the previous year and enabling £880 to be set aside in a fund to purchase a playing ground.<sup>3</sup> A new club was formed by ex-pupils of the Marist

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<sup>1</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 May 1919, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> I have no explanation for this boom in popularity.

<sup>3</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 6 April 1920, p. 7.

Brothers' schools, which entered a team in the senior competition, and, with the return of the North Shore seniors, a seven-team competition was started. Unfortunately by mid-season the Grafton club was unable to raise a senior team, so the competition reverted to a six-team format.

The Roope Rooster knock-out competition was still a popular attraction at the end of the season but a first round game was spoiled when, with Ponsonby ahead of Newton by 10 points to eight, 'an unruly crowd invaded the playing field and made a demonstration against the referee. Attempts to clear the ground proved futile and the game was declared off'.<sup>4</sup> The re-match, played on Monday 4 August, before a crowd of 8,000 spectators at the Domain, was won by Newton 13 points to 10.<sup>5</sup>

Several new clubs were formed for the 1920 season, whilst North Shore amalgamated with recently formed Sunnyside, as there appeared insufficient support for two clubs at Devonport.<sup>6</sup> The new club was called Devonport United.<sup>7</sup>

The end of the 1920 season saw plans, put on hold during the war, for the acquisition of a ground of its own by the Auckland League finally concluded. The Hospital Board accepted its offer to lease the Board's property in Stanley Street for 21 years with the right of renewal. The League secured an area of about 6 acres, room for two football grounds, and was to spend £2-3,000 on improvements and erecting a grandstand. This work would probably not be completed for 1921 but the ground would be available for 1922. It was unanimously decided that the ground be named Carlaw Athletic

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<sup>4</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 24 July 1919, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 August 1919.

<sup>6</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 29 March 1920, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> There was disagreement on the name of the new club; some urged that the North Shore Albions name be retained, as it was the first Northern Union club to be formed in New Zealand, but some from Sunnyside opposed this and it was eventually decided to call the new club Devonport United. *New Zealand Herald*, 5 April 1920, p. 6.

Park.<sup>8</sup> Natural slopes on two sides gave room for a large number of spectators and there was also a fine site for a commodious grandstand.<sup>9</sup>

### **Canterbury**

As in Auckland, the wartime growth of league in Christchurch continued into the post-war years. Dr. Thacker, President of the Canterbury Rugby League, was optimistic when he reported to the annual general meeting at the start of the 1919 season. He expected that test matches against Australia would be played in both Christchurch and Dunedin, 'so as to educate the people in the south' and predicted that 'within two years we will have the whole of the South Island playing Rugby League'.<sup>10</sup> The Chairman, A. E. Hooper, hoped to introduce league into Christchurch schools, saying they should 'seize the opportunity they had at the present time of getting the game established in one of the public schools. In a year or two they would get more to come in'.<sup>11</sup> These optimistic visions were not to be realised, but league in Christchurch continued to grow over the next two seasons.

The return of many of players from the war strengthened the clubs in 1919 and a record 27 teams took part in league; one more than the previous year, playing in five competitions; senior, junior, third-grade, fourth-grade and, for the first time, a fifth-grade. Union retained its numbers, with 36 teams in five grades, soccer increased its teams from 15 to 19, in four grades, but hockey's numbers fell from 25 teams to 19 due to a loss of lower-grade teams. The number of teams increased in all codes in 1920, but though the increases in league, 27 to 29, in hockey, 19 to 23, and in soccer, 19 to 21, were only modest, union experienced an amazing growth, with the number

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<sup>8</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 23 September 1920, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 October 1920, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 31 March 1919, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 31 March 1919, p. 6.

of teams almost doubling from 36 to 68, mainly due to the huge increase in the number of lower-grade teams. (see table 11)

The 1919 season saw the return of representative football, both inter-provincial and international, with a home-and-away series against the Wellington senior and junior representative teams, and the hosting of a test match against the Australian tourists, though no test match was played in Dunedin. The season was dogged by bad weather, causing all matches to be called off on two weekends. Horseracing caused further disruption, with two championship rounds being postponed due to its competition. When games were scheduled in competition with the Grand National race meeting, the majority of players did not turn up, a situation common to all codes. These delays meant the season only ended in early October. Following its success the previous season, a seven-a-side tournament was staged, which attracted so many entries that it had again to be played over two Saturdays. The Addington club toured to the West Coast to encourage the newly re-formed league there.

### **Wellington**

League was restarted in 1919 at a meeting of the Wellington Rugby League held on Thursday 15 May and attended by delegates from four clubs: Athletic, Newton, Petone and Suburbs. The Chairman, C. Murphy, pointed out

that the reason of the adjournment of the League game until after the war was due to the bann [sic] put on players over the age of 21 using municipal grounds, as well as to the number of League players who had voluntarily enlisted...

Mr Murphy urged the necessity of united action on the part of the delegates in order to push the game along, and he advised that special attention should be paid to the juniors. The question of grounds was a vital one, only one ground being at present available at Petone, but it was hoped that the new Wellington City Council would be able to provide one in Wellington.<sup>12</sup>

But the intransigent attitude taken by a faction of the Council to the use of

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<sup>12</sup> *Evening Post*, 16 May 1919, p. 3.

its grounds by league was to present a major problem.

The League was active in recruiting new players for 1919 and the game was apparently appealing to well-known and representative union players, with a number expected to make their initial appearance early in the season. Harry Tancred, a Wellington union representative from the previous season described as the best forward in Wellington rugby, had switched from the Petone union club to the Petone league club.<sup>13</sup> George Bradley, one of the best backs in New Zealand, had been a union representative for South Canterbury and Wellington before switching to league. W. Wilson, a winger, was another ex-union representative just returned from active service, whilst J. Parker was a fast forward capable of playing in any position.<sup>14</sup>

As in the pre-war years, league was strongly supported in the Hutt valley but struggled in Wellington itself. The senior competition started with three city teams plus Petone, but the Newtown club experienced difficulties recruiting players and was replaced by a Petone 'B' team so that a four-team competition remained. Support for junior football in the city was also weak, with two city teams struggling to raise teams whilst Petone had many young players.<sup>15</sup> The city team Suburbs dropped out mid-season, leaving just Athletic and Petone to finish the season. Despite player shortages, games played at Petone attracted many spectators, probably mainly from the Hutt valley.

After the ground problems and the struggle to recruit players in 1919, the Wellington League had a successful 1920 season, with more players, an expanded junior competition and sufficient grounds. The League also opened a gymnasium, which proved popular with players.<sup>16</sup> With more players, both senior and junior competitions were stronger. Newtown were back and joined

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<sup>13</sup> *Evening Post*, 17 May 1919, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Evening Post*, 24 May 1919, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Evening Post*, 26 June 1919.

<sup>16</sup> *Evening Post*, 11 May 1920, p. 8.

Athletic, Suburbs and Petone to make a four-team senior competition, whilst Suburbs were also back in the junior competition, joining Athletic, Petone, and three new clubs, Central, Rovers and Petone North to make a six-team junior competition. Also during the year a league team from the Watersiders Athletic Club played several friendly games.

After the three-year break due to the war, the re-launch of league in Wellington was beset by difficulties during 1919, but these were overcome in 1920, with sufficient grounds secured, more players taking part, and encouraging numbers of spectators.

### **Lower Waikato**

The Lower Waikato was the only other district, outside of the cities of Auckland and Christchurch, in which league was being played in 1916, but even there it was forced to go into recess for two years. During this interregnum, union supporters seized opportunity to restart their game. On 18 April 1918 a rugby union club was formed at Huntly. A correspondent in the *Huntly Press* maintained that whilst league might be superior to union when well played, in country districts, where players never had a chance to get to a high pitch of perfection, it was a deadly failure. Union, on the other hand, could be made interesting by mediocre players. His article ended with an appeal 'to give Rugby another chance'.<sup>17</sup>

During June games were played under the jurisdiction of a newly formed Rugby Association by teams from four clubs, Huntly, Ngaruawahia, Horotiu and Ohiniwai. It is odd that the body organising the games called itself a Rugby Association rather than a Rugby Union. It is possible that the Association was a rebel body, outside the jurisdiction of the New Zealand Rugby Union, as reports of the games played on Saturday 1 June and Saturday 8 June suggest that they were played under modified rules.

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<sup>17</sup> *Huntly Press*, 19 April 1918.

The games at both places were fast and interesting and quite justified the Association in turning from the Northern Union game. There is no doubt that the *new* Rugby game, played intelligently, will bring back the sympathy which in old times was accorded to the game of football and which has been conspicuously absent during the past few years. At each place there was a good crowd of spectators and it was evident that they were well satisfied with the change.<sup>18</sup> Under the *new rules* there is no inducement, or indeed, opportunity for the close play which was indulged in the olden days when the sides were evenly matched, but rather every encouragement is given to fast, open play, and this was the order of the day throughout. The game was thus made most interesting for the spectators and on all hands the opinion was expressed that football had taken a new lease of life in the Waikato.<sup>19</sup> (*italics mine*)

The reports could well have been of league rather than union and it seems likely the Rugby Association was using the modified rules being played in Auckland. Despite the optimism of the correspondent, no more games were reported.

The situation changed during 1919 when the two codes clashed head-to-head. The Lower Waikato Rugby League was reformed, with the Huntly, Ngaruawahia and Taupiri clubs returning to league and a new club being formed at Horotiu. The League asked the Auckland League to supply referees for the matches to be played at Horotiu and Taupiri and it agreed to do so.<sup>20</sup> The four clubs took part in a successful championship series which should have ended on Saturday 9 August when Huntly journeyed to Taupiri, with many supporters, to defend the Draffin Cup.<sup>21</sup> Huntly trailed Taupiri until a last minute try gave them victory by 11 points to 10. Huntly were entitled to hold the Cup for the rest of the season but sportingly accepted Taupiri's challenge to a rematch to give 'the local people a chance of seeing a good exhibition of football' So on Saturday 23 August, despite bad weather, a large

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<sup>18</sup> *Huntly Press*, 7 June 1918.

<sup>19</sup> *Huntly Press*, 14 June 1918.

<sup>20</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 5 June 1919, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Huntly Press*, 15 August 1919.

crowd watched Huntly secure another victory retaining the Cup and their unbeaten record.<sup>22</sup>

Union's revival was short lived, as it was unable to compete once the Lower Waikato Rugby League had been re-formed in June 1919. Prior to this the Huntly Football Club annual general meeting on Tuesday 6 May was informed that the Ngaruawahia Club had decided to play union in the coming season. It was proposed that the Huntly club play Northern Union but an amendment was carried that 'the Rugby game be played'.<sup>23</sup> The club only managed two games before a lack of players forced it to withdraw from the union competition. Once the Huntly league club had been re-formed, most of the union club's players went back to league and union died out in Huntly. The Ngaruawahia club had a change of heart once the Lower Waikato League was re-established and took no part in the union competition, returning instead to league, as did the Horotiu club.

Five clubs that did play union during the 1919 season, Takapu, Ohiewai, Rangariri, Waeranga and Kia Ora, were all from small settlements located around Lake Waikare, further downstream from the traditional rugby area, centred around Huntly and Ngaruawahia. This was reflected in their forming the Waikare Rugby Union.<sup>24</sup> The 1919 season saw union once again abandoning the Lower Waikato to league, which reclaimed its clubs and players, and re-emerged stronger than ever.

Another club, Orini, joined the four existing clubs in the Lower Waikato League in 1920 and each club fielded junior as well as senior teams. Due to the strong spectator support in the previous season, the League requested clubs to 'erect a wire 10 feet from the touchline on each side of the ground' and 'all lovers of clean sport'<sup>25</sup> were asked to assist in keeping onlookers off

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<sup>22</sup> *Huntly Press*, 5 September 1919.

<sup>23</sup> *Huntly Press*, 9 May 1919.

<sup>24</sup> *Huntly Press*, 26 July 1919.

<sup>25</sup> *Huntly Press*, 30 April 1920.

the field. Following the completion of the club championships, the Huntly club successfully defended the Draffin Cup against both Taupiri and Ngaruawahia. The latter challenge took place before one of the season's largest crowds.

Of the Leagues formed in New Zealand during this period, the Lower Waikato Rugby League is unique in that all three senior union clubs in the district voted to play under Northern Union rules in the 1911 and 1912 seasons. Subsequent to this union football ceased to be played in the Lower Waikato and at the start of the 1912 season the Waikato Rugby Union was declared defunct. League had been the only football played in the Lower Waikato until it ceased operations during the later years of the war. Union enthusiasts' attempts to revive the game in the 1918 season, whilst league was still in recess, had only a short-lived success as once league restarted in the 1919 season union quickly died out again.

Another feature of football in this district is the ease with which clubs and players switched from playing union to league, back to union, and finally to league again, all within a nine-year period. Clubs in the district happily ignored the policy of the New Zealand Rugby Union to ban for life any footballer who played league.

### **Hamilton**

Winter sports were well catered for in 1920 in Hamilton. Union had four-team senior and six-team junior competitions, plus third- and fourth-grade competitions, so it had re-emerged from the war in a healthy state. There were also three hockey and two soccer clubs. In this situation it would not be an easy task to restart league. But the New Zealand Rugby League was keen to see the game restarted and had scheduled the English touring team to play in Hamilton, hoping of generating sufficient interest to see league reintroduced. The match was played on Wednesday 28 July, and a committee set was up to make arrangements both for the game, and for a public meeting to be held after the match 'to promote the interests of the

League game in Hamilton'.<sup>26</sup>

D. W. McLean, President of the New Zealand Rugby Football League, and J. Wilson, manager of the English team, both spoke at the meeting. McLean said that the game was now being played in Auckland, Hawkes Bay, Wellington, Westland and Canterbury and although difficulties with grounds had hampered them a bit, they would be overcome just as they had been surmounted in Auckland. He went on to say that '[t]he statement that the game was a professional one was an absolute bogey'.<sup>27</sup>

The enthusiasm generated by the England match and the meeting following it led to a second meeting, on Monday 2 August at the Bath Rooms, to form a Hamilton league club. Over 50 supporters heard the convener, J. Downey, say that it was also intended to form a South Auckland Rugby League Centre to 'go down to Mercer, south to Taumarunui, and taking in the Goldfields area and Rotorua also'. The Centre would have two delegates on the New Zealand Council and would aim to give every consideration to the players and 'not hoard up the money when they had it'.<sup>28</sup> Auckland was willing to give the Centre every assistance. Mayor J. R. Fow was elected patron, W. H. Stevens president and J. Downey secretary/treasurer. The long list of vice-presidents included many prominent names. Several substantial donations were announced and 20 players were signed. F. Innes was to present a shield, to be known as the Innes Memorial Shield, in memory of the late Chas Innes who was an official closely associated with the game's previous existence in Hamilton. The Shield would be for annual competition amongst the senior clubs. Practices started immediately under the guidance of coach 'Opie' Asher,<sup>29</sup> who was coming to live in Hamilton.

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<sup>26</sup> *Waikato Times*, 24 July 1920, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Waikato Times*, 31 July 1920.

<sup>28</sup> *Waikato Times*, 3 August 1920, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Asher had organised the 1908 and 1909 Maori tours to Australia and was a well-known Auckland representative player.

The revival of league was well received in Hamilton and, with the securing of Seddon Park for games, it attracted big crowds. It was reported that supporters were prepared to spend £5,000 to £7,000 on improvements, including a grandstand, if a suitable ground could be found.<sup>30</sup> The Hamilton supporters also had ambitions to unite the leagues from the various parts of South Auckland in direct affiliation with the New Zealand League.<sup>31</sup>

### **Cambridge**

With the help of clubs from Hamilton and Auckland league was introduced to Cambridge in 1920. A large advertisement on the front page of the Tuesday 21 September issue of the local newspaper announced

FOOTBALL SPECIAL - LEAGUE FOOTBALL - THE SPECTACULAR GAME.

A Cambridge team was to play a King Country touring team on Victoria Square the next day. Spectators were invited to 'come and see the pick of Cambridge playing the league game'.<sup>32</sup>

The first<sup>33</sup> league football match which has been played in Cambridge took place yesterday afternoon on the Victoria Square grounds. The day was wet and the ground in a particularly sloppy condition, and this was a decided drawback to the exposition of a fast game...

It was the first attempt of many of the Cambridge players at League, and the referee besides controlling the game, practically acted as a "coach". The attendance of the public was decidedly meagre.<sup>34</sup>

Despite their inexperience, the Cambridge players emerged winners by one point.

Following the match, a well-attended meeting was held in the YMCA rooms to consider forming a local league. It was addressed by two officials from the Hamilton league club who promised support and financial backing.

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<sup>30</sup> *Waikato Times*, 24 September 1920.

<sup>31</sup> *Waikato Times*, 7 October 1920.

<sup>32</sup> *Waikato Independent*, 21 September 1920.

<sup>33</sup> Actually the second, the first was played in 1914.

<sup>34</sup> *Waikato Independent*, 23 September 1920.

It was then decided to form a league club and play more matches.<sup>35</sup> In fact two matches were played, both at Victoria Square and both attracting large crowds. Cambridge lost to Hamilton and also to the Maritime club from Auckland on the following week, when an admission charge of 1/- did not deter spectators, as the match 'proved to be a popular event, a fair gate being taken'.<sup>36</sup> League had been successfully launched in Cambridge and had managed to attract considerable spectator interest. Its prospects for the next season seemed good.

### **King Country / Rotorua**

After the war, league was re-started in two other districts in Auckland province but unfortunately little is known of these initiatives as contemporary newspapers have not survived from either Taumarunui or Rotorua.

The second attempt to start the game in the King Country was made at a meeting held in Taumarunui on Monday 19 April 1920 at which the King Country District Rugby League was formed.<sup>37</sup> It was later reported that there were four senior and five junior teams playing and that 'league football is booming in the district'.<sup>38</sup> One of the clubs, Manunui, was playing in Napier in September and there are also reports of a Waikato Maori representative team playing the Huaroa club at Taumarunui, also in September.

It is not known if a Te Kuiti team played league in 1920 but the union game was not strong there and it was the general opinion in union circles that the town could support only two teams. To this end the United club disbanded and its players joined either the Te Kuiti or Nehenehenui clubs.<sup>39</sup> The Hetet family, who had been the driving force in league before the war,

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<sup>35</sup> *Waikato Times*, 24 September 1920.

<sup>36</sup> *Waikato Independent*, 12 October 1920.

<sup>37</sup> *King Country Chronicle*, 22 April 1920.

<sup>38</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 28 August 1920, p. 10.

<sup>39</sup> *King Country Chronicle*, 30 March, 1920.

were now back with union with J.T. Hetet patron, and W. Hetet president of the Nehenehenui club whilst T. Searancke, another prominent figure in pre-war league, was secretary. In these circumstances it seems unlikely that league was revived in Te Kuiti.

The game in Rotorua was restarted after the war following a visit by the English touring team in 1920. The League was officially re-established at a meeting held at the Victoria Institute on August 25 1920 when the Auckland League were asked for some jerseys and rule books. At the meeting F. Munro handed in the sum of £3/12/-, which he had held since the original league disbanded in 1914.<sup>40</sup>

### **Central Provinces and the South**

The situation in the central provinces was very different from that in Auckland Province. Only two of the nine pre-war leagues were re-started. Unsuccessful efforts were made to re-introduce the game in Wanganui, where enthusiasts applied to host a game against the 1919 Australian tourists. The New Zealand Rugby League was unable to grant the request but offered to assist in re-forming the Wanganui league.<sup>41</sup> Also in 1919 an attempt was made to restart the game in Dannevirke and a league team was reported to be visiting Napier.<sup>42</sup> Of the other pre-war league centres, Gisborne, Hawkes Bay, Taranaki, Nelson, and Marlborough, only in Hawkes Bay was league successfully re-launched.

### **Hawkes Bay**

Following a three-year interregnum during the war, the Hawkes Bay Rugby League was restarted in 1919, at a general meeting held on Thursday

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<sup>40</sup> D. M. Stafford, *The New Century in Rotorua: A History of Events from 1900*, Rotorua: Ray Richards Publisher, 1988, p. 156.

<sup>41</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 September 1919, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 14 August 1919, p. 2.

8 May.<sup>43</sup> Hawkes Bay had been the strongest League, other than the big city leagues, in both the number of clubs, number of players, and number of grades of competitions in the prewar years, so its chances of becoming reestablished were good. Prewar players and supporters took an active part in re-forming five of the prewar clubs; Ahuriri, City, Clive and Petane fielded both senior and junior teams, while Westshore fielded two junior teams. It was felt that the game would prosper as the town now had 'the universal Saturday half-holiday'.<sup>44</sup> The referees' association was also re-formed and appealed to retired players to join the association so that old referees could retire,<sup>45</sup> whilst the League distributed leaflets outlining the rules of the game to the general public and all the Napier schools.<sup>46</sup> Junior players were reported to be anxious for the lower-grade competitions to restart as they felt that the League, by abandoning these competitions during the war, had forced them to play 'some other game'.<sup>47</sup>

There was a good attendance at the opening games and a collection was taken to which 'every spectator seemed to contribute'.<sup>48</sup> The League conducted successful three-round senior and two-round junior competitions and matches played at Nelson Park attracted large crowds. Petone and Ahuriri were much the stronger of the senior teams but the junior competition was more evenly matched.

In a further attempt to spread the game, the League had Maritime, an Auckland team, play the City club in the township of Taradale. Maritime also played the Ahuriri club at McLean Park and won both matches by large scores, demonstrating the gap in playing standards between newly started

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<sup>43</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 8 May 1919, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 5 June 1919, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 5 June 1919, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 25 June 1919, p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 12 June 1919, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 12 June 1919, p. 3.

clubs and clubs active throughout the war. The Auckland junior representatives also visited Hawkes Bay and secured a comfortable victory over a Napier senior selection.

The league game maintained its popularity with spectators in 1920. A good number turned out for the first game when local club City beat Petone from Wellington and large crowds were reported throughout the season for both senior and junior matches. 'Spectators rolled up in their hundreds for a junior game at Taradale',<sup>49</sup> and a collection yielded close to £5. Nearly 1,000 spectators watched a junior game between Westshore and Taradale at Nelson Park. 'It says much for the drawing powers of the game when such a concourse can come together for a junior match'.<sup>50</sup>

The club championship season opened on Saturday 24 April with five senior, six junior and five-third grade teams in competitions and ended four months later on Saturday 28 August. From 26 June a four-team schools competition was also played.

The 1920 season had been a full and successful one for the Hawkes Bay League, although its tongue-in-cheek challenge to the Hawkes Bay Rugby Union for senior and junior representative games to be played, with the proceeds to charity, was rejected by the Union, citing NZRU rules prohibiting such matches.<sup>51</sup> There were hopes of an even better 1921 season, with Kia Ora, another pre-war club, reported to be re-forming.<sup>52</sup> A 'well known firm' was also forming a club for the next season,<sup>53</sup> and hopes were high of finally getting a team started in Hastings, if the League could secure a ground there.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1920, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 5 July 1920, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 17 August 1920, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 14 August 1920, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 28 August 1920, p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 28 August 1920, p. 10.

### **The West Coast**

Westland was, aside from Canterbury, the only South Island province in which league was played after the war. Geographic isolation and a small population posed problems for the re-formed League, but it successfully re-introduced the game in the 1919 and 1920 seasons, and also oversaw its introduction to the Inangahua district. Due to its isolation it was not able to rely on representative games to attract support and looked to visits from the Australian and English tourists to promote the game. The New Zealand League was willing to help by allocating matches against Australia in 1919 and England in 1920. The English visit was very successful but the Australians reneged on their commitment.

After a three-year break, the West Coast League opened the 1919 season with a friendly match played at Blackball on Saturday 10 May 'to make the players conversant with the rules of the new game',<sup>55</sup> suggesting that most players were new to league. The New Zealand League offered assistance, and indicated it was trying to have the New South Wales team play on the Coast later in the season.

Christchurch club sides visited the Coast in both seasons. The Addington club gave a big boost to the new League in 1919. Its match against the Runanga club was played on Saturday 19 July in atrocious weather. Despite the conditions, the match was watched a large crowd. The second match, played at Blackball on the following Wednesday, also took place in the rain on a wet and sodden ground.<sup>56</sup> The local sides won both games.

Linwood was the Christchurch club to visit the Coast in 1920, but it was not a good advertisement for league, being heavily outscored in each of its games against the three local senior teams. It was criticised for not taking the trip seriously and sending an inferior team.

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<sup>55</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 13 May 1919, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 22 July 1919.

The senior competition in both the 1919 and 1920 seasons comprised teams from Kohinoor, Greymouth, and from Runanga and Blackball, both mining towns. Each club also fielded a junior team to join the Brunner club in the junior competition and a new club, Rivals, was formed in 1920 to make a five-team junior competition. Players for the newly formed clubs turned out in motley attire at the start of the 1919 season and it was not until July that reporters commented on teams 'appearing in proper attire, looking very smart in the new jerseys'. Teams wearing colours was 'a help to both players and referee and aided materially towards a better game'.<sup>57</sup> A new club, Rimu, was formed at Hokitika in 1919 and the Kohinoor club travelled down to play a friendly match to help its launch,<sup>58</sup> but it did not survive to take part in the 1920 competitions.

Two league players from the Kohinoor Club, J. Brown and T. O'Callaghan, both from the Kohinoor club, were selected to join the New Zealand league team to tour Australia in 1919 but it was anticipated that both would find it difficult to obtain leave from their employers. Only Brown was able to join the tour.

### **Inangahua**

A major breakthrough occurred in 1920 with the start of league in the Inangahua district. Following a request to the West Coast League for a match to be played at Reefton to introduce the game,<sup>59</sup> the League decided to play an 'A' versus 'B' match on the next Saturday. Moves must have been already well advanced, as over 50 people were at a meeting held on Tuesday 3 August in the Reefton Drill Hall, called by the newly-formed 'League Football Centre', at which arrangements were made for the match. A representative from the West Coast League stated that the League was prepared to assist

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<sup>57</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 7 July 1919, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 2 September, p. 7, 8 September, p. 8, 1919.

<sup>59</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 4 August 1920.

in every possible manner. Also present were four representatives from various clubs, probably union, who stated that 'they did not quite understand the League game, but if to them it was an improvement on Rugby they would play League'.<sup>60</sup> Several players then expressed a willingness to try the game by playing a match against the newly-formed Argus club.<sup>61</sup> There was a large attendance at the exhibition match and 'some solid inter-district games in the future [were] anticipated'.<sup>62</sup>

The following Saturday, the Argus club were in Runanga, beating the home team by 14 points to 7 in a match in aid of the Broken Hill Miners' Fund,<sup>63</sup> while the Runanga junior team were at Blackwater, where they played another newly formed Inangahua club, Waiuta.<sup>64</sup> By this time another club, Mawheraiti, had been formed and the Inangahua League was arranging a championship round between the four clubs Reefton, Argus, Waiuta, and Mawhereiti.<sup>65</sup> A further meeting of the Inangahua League resolved to give country players the utmost assistance, and reported that with the support it was receiving 'everything promises and points to a most successful season'.<sup>66</sup>

### **Representative Rugby League**

The post-war years saw the return of representative football, at both provincial and international level. The New Zealand League sent a representative team to Australia early in the 1919 season; later in the year the Australians toured New Zealand; and, in 1920 an English team toured

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<sup>60</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 5 August 1920.

<sup>61</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 4 August 1920.

<sup>62</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 9 August 1920.

<sup>63</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 16 August 1920.

<sup>64</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 19 August 1920.

<sup>65</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 16 August 1920.

<sup>66</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 24 August 1920.

New Zealand. These tours were important in the revival of league in New Zealand. With league only surviving in Auckland and Canterbury at the end of the war, the New Zealand League faced a huge task to try to restore the game to its pre-war strength. It used the tours to strengthen its support in Auckland and Canterbury, to help the newly re-formed leagues, and to provide the impetus for other leagues to re-form. The tours also demonstrated to the New Zealand public that not only had league survived the war, but that it was capable of organising and promoting international tours, thus boosting its claim to be one of New Zealand's national sports. The League allocated test matches to all the large cities and ensured that even the smallest league had a match against a touring team. Far fewer provincial representative matches were played in this post-war period, and the tours by Australia and Britain took centre stage in showcasing league as a national sport.

Prior to its departure for Australia in June 1919, the New Zealand team played the Auckland representatives at the Domain, where over 8,000 spectators, starved of representative football during the war, paid £295/13/- to see the national side secure a narrow victory over the Aucklanders by 25 points to 19.<sup>67</sup> In Australia the New Zealanders met state teams from New South Wales, where the game was much stronger than before the war, and Queensland, where the game was rapidly growing. Although losing all six matches, the New Zealanders were always competitive and lost three games by less than a converted try. New Zealand won all four of its games against district leagues. Australian fans flocked to the matches in record numbers, 46,000 were at the opening match of the tour in Sydney, producing a record gate of £3,012, and there were 39,000 spectators at the second.<sup>68</sup> The New

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<sup>67</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 May 1919, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> John Coffey and Bernie Wood, *The Kiwis: 100 Years of International Rugby League*, Auckland: Hodder Moe, 2007, p. 59.

Zealand League's share of the gates must have been welcome.

The Australian tour to New Zealand later in the season also drew big crowds, particularly in Auckland. Over three successive weekends in September, the Australians attracted crowds of 24,000 and 15,000 to test matches at the Domain whilst another 20,000 crowded the Domain to watch the Australians beat Auckland. On the same day as the Auckland match, less than 500 spectators watched the under-20 union representatives beat the secondary schools representatives at Eden Park.<sup>69</sup> Even a trial played on Saturday 23 August to select the Auckland team to play New South Wales attracted a crowd of between 6,000 and 7,000 to Victoria Park.<sup>70</sup>

Earlier in the tour, the League secured Wellington's Basin Reserve in Wellington for the first test against Australia on Saturday 23 August, and large newspaper advertisements invited the public 'come and see Harold Horder's lightning runs and Ifwerson, the Brilliant New Zealander. Clean, fast and open football'.<sup>71</sup> About 8,000 spectators turned out for what would 'long be remembered as one of the finest exhibitions of football yet seen in Wellington. Weather conditions were very good, and the ground being used for the first time this season, was in excellent order'.<sup>72</sup> Three Wellington players: A. Morris, G. Bradley and J. Scott were in the New Zealand side which lost to the Australians by 21 points to 44.

The following week in Christchurch, the first international rugby league match to be played in Canterbury took place. It was played at Sydenham Park, where a crowd of over 7,000 saw New Zealand beat Australia by 26 points to 10. Over 54,000 people watched the four tests, demonstrating the desire for such matches and vindicating the decision to stage tests in Wellington and Christchurch as well as Auckland.

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<sup>69</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 22 September 1919, p. 9.

<sup>70</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 25 August 1919, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> *Wellington Evening Post*, 22 August 1919, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Wellington Evening Post*, 25 August 1919, p. 11.

The Leagues in the four smaller league-playing centres were also given games against the tourists. The only representative game played during 1919 by the Lower Waikato representatives was against the touring Australian team. It was played at Hamilton, even though league had not yet re-started there, to take advantage of the pay ground, Steele Park. The Australians' visit aroused considerable interest, and, on Thursday 18 September, over 2,000 spectators saw a Waikato team lose by 58 points to 5.

The visit of the Australian tourists was also the highlight of 1919 for the Hawkes Bay League. After arriving by steamer, the visitors were given a civic reception by Mayor J. Vigor Brown. The match against the Hawkes Bay representatives was played on Saturday 27 September, in perfect weather conditions, and generated huge interest. 'The attendance [between 5 and 6 thousand] was considered by many to be a record, but it is safe to say that it is the biggest football crowd seen in Hawkes Bay for many years.'<sup>73</sup> Hawkes Bay proved no match for the Australians, losing by 67 points to 4. Prior to this game, the Hawkes Bay League persuaded the visitors to extend their stay and play an exhibition match in Hastings, in an attempt to get the game started there. Despite the short notice, the match, against a Hawkes Bay selection, was played the following Wednesday at 'the Ridge', home of Hastings rugby union. Over 1,500 spectators turned out, in ideal weather conditions, where Australia again completely outplayed the locals, winning by 73 points to 7.<sup>74</sup>

The final match of the Australian tour was played on Saturday 4 October at Newtown Park in Wellington. On a fine day, the completely outclassed Wellington representative team lost by 91 points to 5 before a large crowd.

The West Coast, the only other district playing league in 1919, was also allocated a game against the Australians. The Australians were to play

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<sup>73</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 27 September 1919, p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 2 October 1919, p. 2.

in Greymouth on Wednesday 27 August.<sup>75</sup> Only two days prior to the match the Australian team's manager wired that the visit could not be arranged, but relented following a telegram from Wingham, the League secretary, on condition that Wingham and Moyle, secretary of the Canterbury League, provided a financial guarantee. Wingham not only provided the guarantee but also undertook to hire cars to take the Australians from Christchurch to Greymouth.<sup>76</sup> However, the Australians raised further objections and Tuesday's paper announced the match had been postponed.<sup>77</sup> After further negotiations the West Coast League thought 'at last definite arrangement that practically precludes a hitch has been made for the playing of the eagerly awaited...match'.<sup>78</sup> The match was re-advertised for the following Monday and Greymouth merchants were urged to give their employees two hours off to see it, but at the last minute the Australians went back on their word and the match never took place.

During 1920 a British team toured New Zealand, generating great interest and attracting huge crowds. They played three tests against New Zealand as well as eight games against representative teams from provincial centres. The tour opened in Napier on Saturday 3 July against a North Island representative team and over 5,000 people, 'including a surprisingly large number of ladies',<sup>79</sup> packed McLean Park. The game was hardly a contest, with the North Islanders losing by 45 points to 5. Five Hawkes Bay players, P. Burrows, P. Exeter, E. Herrin, C. McCarthy (captain) and H. Pring, were included in the North Island team. Four players, Burrows, Findley, N. McCarthy and Merrell, were also in the Rest of New Zealand versus Auckland match played in Auckland on 19 June. Auckland easily beat the Rest by 54

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<sup>75</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 21 August 1919, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 25 August 1919, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 26 August 1919, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 28 August 1919, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 5 August 1920, p. 2.

points to 0.

The British were in Auckland on 24 July, where they suffered the only loss of the tour. Auckland prepared for the game by holding representative trials which attracted good crowds. On Saturday 19 June the first trial match was to have been played, but a continuous downpour partially submerged the ground, forcing officials to postpone the game. Notwithstanding the weather, a fair number of spectators had gathered and their admission money was refunded.<sup>80</sup> The game was replayed on the following Wednesday when, despite steady rain, there was again a large attendance of spectators<sup>81</sup> as there was at a second trial match played on Wednesday 14 July.<sup>82</sup> At the Domain, on Saturday 24 July, the Britishers lost to Auckland, in their only defeat of the tour, by 24 points to 16.

Beautiful weather prevailed and a crowd of over 30,000 watched Auckland defeat England in the opening match of the tour. The result was a surprise for most people as the visitors' backs were expected to be superior to the locals. An injury to Rodgers the English half back in the first few minutes reduced the visitors to 12 men as no substitutes were allowed. Credit was given to the local forwards for a fine display.<sup>83</sup>

The following Saturday, 31 July, another crowd of over 30,000 spectators packed the Domain to see England win the first test match against New Zealand by 31 points to 7.

In the week between these matches, the British played Rotorua and South Auckland. In Rotorua 1,500 spectators at Marine Parade witnessed an easy victory to the British by 58 points to 15.<sup>84</sup> The game was played on Tuesday 27 July, even though the League was not re-formed until the end of August, though some league is likely to have been being played prior to the

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<sup>80</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 June 1920, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 24 June 1920, p. 7.

<sup>82</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 15 July 1920, p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 July 1920, p. 6.

<sup>84</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 28 July 1920, p. 11.

match.

The South Auckland match against the British, on Wednesday 28 July, was a major event for the small town of Hamilton. The Mayor gave the visitors a civic welcome, many businesses closed for the afternoon, trains to all country stations were delayed until after the match, and the visitors were given a motor tour of the district. On the Monday before the match an advertisement appeared in the local paper, signed by the Mayor J. R. Fow, inviting Hamilton businesses to close their premises from 2 p.m. for the visit of the 'English' Football team.<sup>85</sup> The day before the match a large advertisement appeared in the paper<sup>86</sup> for 'The Great Football Event...South Auckland v. England'. Underneath was a smaller advertisement for a 'meeting of all interested in League Football' to be held in the Theatre Royal Tea Rooms after the game. Then followed advertisements from Hamilton grocers, the Hamilton District Law Society and Hamilton Hardware Merchants, all announcing that their businesses would be closed for the match.

The match certainly lived up to expectations. It was reported under the headlines

**FAST FOOTBALL AND BIG CROWD - VISITOR'S BRILLIANT DISPLAY.**

Bright, sunny weather, with the absence of any material wind, and the record crowd that had ever assembled to watch a football game in South Auckland's chief centre, were the features, as the visiting thirteen of English League footballers lined on to the ground to oppose South Auckland at Steele Park.... The English players got a great reception as they appeared from the densely packed throng round the number one enclosure. The preceding appearance of the home team, strangers, too, to quite the greater number of the onlookers, was also the signal for special applause. They were a likely looking combination physically, drawn from Lower Waikato and King Country clubs, in which areas the League code of football is fostered. A full week of special preparation.... had wrought marked improvement of the home thirteen.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Waikato Times*, 26 July 1920, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> *Waikato Times*, 27 July 1920, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> *Waikato Times*, 28 July 1920, p. 5.

To everyone's surprise South Auckland took an early lead with a converted try and maintained it until well into the first half. The British then pulled ahead to be up by 18 points to 8 at the interval. The second half was all Britain, who went on to win by 49 points to 10. The match had certainly succeeded in generating interest in league, not just in Hamilton but also in the surrounding districts

[The] crowd was easily the record one for Steele Park. Estimated at the vicinity of 7,000. The main enclosure of the Park was deeply lined, Patrons being represented from the town, from all parts of the Waikato, from King Country districts and from other parts. ...the manner in which the committee locally responsible for the management of the game under the League code had affairs in train earned the deserved appreciation of one and all.<sup>88</sup>

In the week between the first and second tests the British were in Taumarunui, centre of the King Country Rugby League, and a most unlikely place for an international team to visit, being a small isolated railway town in the middle of the North Island. The tourists were again given a civic reception and then

'taken by special train to the heart of the forest, Pungapunga, and given a demonstration of tree felling and logging. Returning to Manunui they were taken over the mills and butter box factory'.<sup>89</sup>

The match was played on Tuesday 3 August before between 3 and 4 thousand spectators, a huge crowd for such a small town, and one which justified the decision of the New Zealand League to award the fixture to King Country. The locals were much lighter and were outclassed in both forward and back play. The final score was England 47, King Country 3.

The British next undertook a three-match tour of the South Island. Their first game, on Saturday 7 August, was in Christchurch where the second test match was played. For this match the Rugby Union was persuaded to allow league to be played Lancaster Park, but the weather spoilt what should

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<sup>88</sup> *Waikato Times*, 29 July 1920, p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 4 August 1920, p. 5.

have been great day for league. Heavy rain fell throughout, resulting in a crowd of only 5,000. The report in the *Christchurch Press* was favourable to the league game

From a spectacular point of view, the game was naturally disappointing, but, under the circumstances, it was far more open and fast than one anticipated, and it must be said that, under similar conditions, a Rugby Union game would have been much less interesting. There were not the stereotyped tactics of the Union game, and in their passing the English backs used their brains, often cutting out two or three men, and sending a long pass out from a scrum to the wing.<sup>90</sup>

The weather improved over the weekend and conditions were good as the Canterbury representative team played the British on Monday 9 August, again on Lancaster Park, but only 1,500 turned up to watch. Maybe this was because the match was played on a workday or maybe Canterbury was thought to be no match for the tourists. If the latter then

League followers were surprised by the game struggle it [the Canterbury representative team] put up in the match against the English League team at Lancaster Park on Monday. Indeed, the local team made a much better showing than did the New Zealand team in the test match on Saturday, this being particularly the case in the verve and resourcefulness of the backs, and in the tackling, which was of a high standard throughout. The team showed remarkably good combinations, moreover, and all sections worked together with commendable cohesion.<sup>91</sup>

The Cantabrians eventually lost by 29 to 14 after being within four points of the English at one stage. This shows how much the standard of play in Christchurch league had improved over the war years.

A 20-year-old wing, Owen Rowe, who was renowned for his effectiveness in the wet, scored three of Canterbury's four tries. That is a record which has never been equalled against international opposition - nor has any Canterbury Rugby Union player been able to emulate Rowe's feat on Lancaster Park.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, p. 44.

<sup>91</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 11 August 1920, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> Coffey, *Canterbury XIII*, p. 44.

Then it was over the Alps to the West Coast, where the visit of the British was eagerly awaited following the failure of the Australians to fulfil their fixture the previous year. The British played the West Coast on Wednesday 11 August and the excitement engendered was intense. A huge crowd was at the station to see the team arrive from Christchurch and accompany them, led by the Citizen's Band, to a civic reception at the Albion Hotel. On arrival at the hotel the team filed out onto the balcony to the cheers of the crowd and several speeches had to be made before the players could go back in for their evening meal.<sup>93</sup> Large, front-page notices in the local newspaper advertised the match and admission was 2 shillings, double the usual price for a representative game. The local schools were asked to close on the day of the match<sup>94</sup> and over 2,000 spectators were at Victoria Park to watch England overwhelm the locals by 55 points to 13.<sup>95</sup>

The third and final test match was played at Wellington on Saturday 14 August, at the Basin Reserve, where cold wet weather did not deter the nearly 4,000 spectators enjoying the match. This year there were no Wellington players in the New Zealand team, but four; J. Scott, M. Pollock, Puketapu and Salisbury were named as reserves. England won by the narrowest of margins, 11 points to 10, and the match was a great promotion of league in Wellington.

A first class display of the Northern Union game known locally as League was reckoned to be out of the question under such circumstances [the bad weather], but contrary to expectations, the exhibition was of high order... the New Zealanders displayed great form, and as a result the contest was one of the most exciting and keenly fought seen in Wellington for sometime, the trend of play being such as to keep the interest of spectators at a high tension until the final whistle. Altogether, the game was an exceptional one under existing circumstances. On returning to the pavilion the visitors

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<sup>93</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 11 August 1920.

<sup>94</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 4 August 1920.

<sup>95</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 12 August 1920.

were loudly cheered.<sup>96</sup>

The two tours generated great interest and large crowds watched the matches. The decision of the New Zealand League to have the tourists play in every district where league was played both raised the profile of the game and contributed to the reestablishment of league as a national game.

Relatively few inter-provincial games were played in the post-war period due, in part, to league not being revived in the central provinces. In the North Island, league was only restarted in two provinces, Wellington and Hawkes Bay, whilst in the South Island only on the West Coast was the game restarted. This left the provinces lacking opposition and having to travel long distances to meet what opposition there was. Another reason for the few interprovincial games was the overwhelming superiority of Auckland. The newly restarted leagues were not competitive with it and one-sided games were not an attractive proposition.

Auckland's only inter-provincial match of the 1919 season was against the newly re-formed Hawkes Bay League and was to have been played on Saturday 2 August at the Domain, but bad weather forced it to be abandoned. The match was replayed the following weekend at Eden Park, where, under ideal weather conditions, a crowd of about 9,000 spectators saw Auckland beat Hawkes Bay by 33 points to 13.<sup>97</sup> An Auckland junior representative team travelled to Hawkes Bay at the end of August to play a representative team and the Napier City club, whilst several club teams were planning to play matches at Huntly and Thames.

The senior and junior representative teams of the Canterbury and the newly re-formed Wellington League played each other in 1919 but the Wellington games had to be postponed on two occasions due to the ground being unplayable. The matches finally took place at Newtown Park on 13

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<sup>96</sup> *Evening Post*, 16 August 1920, p. 4.

<sup>97</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 August 1919, p. 9.

September when over 700 spectators saw the senior teams draw 23 all and the juniors have an easy 20 points to 6 win. For the return fixtures on the following Saturday, a large crowd at Sydenham Park watched the Canterbury teams win both matches. The final match of the season was on Saturday 4 October, when the Australian touring team played Wellington. The League was expecting a good crowd at Newtown Park despite competition from a union representative match against Wanganui at Athletic Park. The Wellington side proved no match for the Australians, who won easily by 91 points to 5 on a fine day.<sup>98</sup> Wellington representative football was dogged by ill-fortune in the 1919 season. The first two games, against Auckland and Hawkes Bay, were both called off due to 'curtailed railway services',<sup>99</sup> then bad weather and unplayable grounds caused several postponements, so that only three senior and two junior games were played.

The only representative game played by the West Coast in 1919, following the failure of the Australian tourists to play on the Coast, was due to the West Coast officials persuaded the Canterbury League to send a representative team at the end of the season. The match was set to start early so that country people could get their trains but League officials' efforts to promote the match were undermined as

with a consistency that is enough to damp the ardour of the most enthusiastic of football followers, the weather ... was as bad as the West Coast could produce. Looking back on the matches played by visiting teams during the season just ended it is remarkable how many wet days occurred and yesterday was in keeping with the past. In spite of the rain some 300 spectators assembled on Victoria Park. A wet ground and greasy ball prevented a good display of football.<sup>100</sup>

Canterbury won by 5 points to 3.

Auckland played no inter-provincial matches during 1920 but

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<sup>98</sup> 6,000 spectators at Athletic Park watched Wellington beat Wanganui by 30 points to 3 in a Ranfurly Shield challenge, but no crowd figures for the league match have been found.

<sup>99</sup> *Evening Post*, 25 July 1919, p. 4.

<sup>100</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 20, 23 October 1919.

Wellington, Hawkes Bay, Canterbury and the West Coast did. Canterbury's first match of the season was played on Saturday 29 May at English Park, the home of Canterbury soccer. So bad was the weather that all union matches for the day were either not played or called off half-way through. The league game went ahead nonetheless, even though it entailed a big financial loss. Canterbury easily beat West Coast by 24 points to 3 and also won the return fixture at Greymouth.<sup>101</sup> The Canterbury representatives were in Wellington on 31 July to play the locals and four weeks later a large crowd was at English Park, where, in perfect weather, Canterbury overwhelmed Wellington by 43 points to 10. At the end of the season the junior representatives beat the West Coast juniors by 22 points to 15 at Kaiapoi.

There were no setbacks to Wellington's 1920 representative season and the first matches were played in Napier on Saturday 29 May when both senior and junior teams played Hawkes Bay teams. The seniors played the return match at the Basin Reserve on Saturday 3 July, when, despite the wet and muddy conditions, a crowd of 1,300 spectators saw Wellington win by 12 points to 8. On the same day there was only a small crowd at Athletic Park for union club matches.<sup>102</sup> A much bigger crowd of 4,500 spectators was present a month later when the Canterbury league representatives beat Wellington by 25 points to 8 in excellent conditions. This figure surpassed the crowd at the test match played two weeks later under, admittedly, much worst conditions, but the figures showed that representative rugby league could attract strong spectator support in Wellington.

Hawkes Bay League played only two interprovincial matches during 1920, beating Wellington by 26 points to 18, before a large crowd at McLean Park on Saturday 29 May, then losing by a narrow margin in the return fixture. The Wellington Juniors beat the Hawkes Bay Juniors in the curtainraiser, by 11 points to 8

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<sup>101</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 2 June 1920, p. 3.

<sup>102</sup> *Evening Post*, 5 July 1920, p. 11.

Although Auckland did not play any inter-provincial games in 1920, teams from its district leagues played a number of what might be termed 'quasi-representative' games against Auckland club sides and each other. On Saturday 18 September the Hamilton League's senior and junior representative teams were in Auckland; the seniors played Marist Old Boys seniors, losing by 14 points to 21, whilst the Juniors played City Juniors. Also in Auckland that day was the Huntly junior team, who played Maritime Juniors.<sup>103</sup> At the end the season the Devonport club entertained the newly restarted King Country senior and junior representative teams. The games were played in 'extremely adverse conditions, nearly half the ground being underwater',<sup>104</sup> King Country nevertheless won both games, the seniors by 13 points to 8 and the juniors by 3 points to 0.

More games were played by the Lower Waikato representative team in 1920, whilst six players from the district were in a South Auckland team that played the British in Hamilton. The matches attracted large numbers of spectators; 2,000 were at Ngaruawahia for the first match, won by the senior team from the Auckland Maritime club, and 1,500 at Huntly saw King Country beaten by 15 points to 7. The final representative matches of the season were against the newly formed Hamilton senior and junior representative teams.

As the only league club in the town, the Hamilton club played a series of 'representative' games against teams from other centres during 1920. The week following its formation two full teams turned out for a practice game, with the first competitive game being played the following week at Seddon Park. The locals had 'a leavening of players well acquainted with the game, and their ranks will be strengthened by the inclusion of former Auckland players who are now located [in Hamilton]'.<sup>105</sup> The game, played against Ponsonby before a large and enthusiastic crowd, produced a surprise result,

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<sup>103</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 September 1920, p. 9.

<sup>104</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 27 August 1920.

<sup>105</sup> *Waikato Times*, 3 August 1920, p. 6.

the final score being Hamilton 30 Ponsonby 28. 'Judging by the interest shown, League football has secured a good hold in the town, and promises to draw big crowds before the season is over'.<sup>106</sup>

The league club had secured Seddon Park for the rest of the season and won their second game there the following week, beating another Auckland club, Newton, before a good attendance of spectators. A representative trial match was then held before Hamilton met their first defeat, on Wednesday 1 September, losing by only 2 points to the King Country before a very good attendance for a mid-week game. A couple of days later, in their first away fixture, Hamilton 'A' and 'B' teams both lost to Lower Waikato at Ngaruawahia. The next Saturday a team from the Waimarino district calling themselves Tongariro, 'a strapping lot of fellows ... reputed to have a good knowledge of the League code',<sup>107</sup> lost, nevertheless, by 24 points to 6 to the Hamilton senior team, the Juniors suffering a narrow defeat, 11 points to 7, in the curtainraiser. This is the only reference to league in the Waimarino that has been found.

Before the season ended, the Hamilton juniors travelled to Auckland to play the City club's fourth grade team and two Auckland clubs, Maritime and Marist, came to Hamilton for a benefit match for the Comfort Fund of the Waikato hospital. This was another major event for the Hamilton club; the Municipal Band was in attendance at Seddon Park, special trains were arranged 'so that the needs of the large number of country people who will be certain to attend will be suitably met', and seating was reserved 'for the first call of the ladies'.<sup>108</sup> Despite adverse weather, there was a good attendance. A very successful season for Hamilton league finally ended with the representative team visiting Taumarunui to play the King Country.

The King Country Rugby League must have attracted some good

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<sup>106</sup> *Waikato Times*, 16 August 1920.

<sup>107</sup> *Waikato Times*, 8 September 1920.

<sup>108</sup> *Waikato Times*, 27 September 1920, p. 7.

footballers to its ranks when re-formed in 1920, as it fielded a strong representative team, managing to beat the Devonport seniors at Devonport, and Hamilton at Hamilton, as well as contributing half the players to the South Auckland side which played the British tourists at Hamilton. The team lost its return match with Devonport at Taumarunui by 15 points to 0, and was beaten by Cambridge at Cambridge. The season ended when a visiting Waikato Maori team beat local club Hauaroa by 14 points to 0.<sup>109</sup>

The Cambridge Rugby League was only formed at the end of the 1920 season, yet it managed to play representative teams from the King Country and Hamilton, as well as the Maritime club from Auckland. The new league had got off to a good start and created local interest in the game.

### **The War Between the Codes Goes On**

The main areas of contention in the post-war years were, again, obtaining grounds for league, allegations of league being a professional game, the selective reinstatement to union of league players, and the exclusion of league from schools. Ground problems were most intense in Wellington, but Hawkes Bay and Canterbury also experienced problems. In Auckland on the other hand, where, outside of schools, league was as strong as, if not stronger than, union, the two codes managed to amiably co-exist. The Auckland Union opted to combat the growing popularity of league by adopting rule changes to make their game more attractive to play and watch, hoping thereby to attract support back from league.

In June 1919 the League responded to a request from the Auckland Football Association (soccer) for help in raising funds to send a team to Christchurch, by allowing a soccer game to be played as a curtain-raiser to a senior competition match at the Domain,<sup>110</sup> and in July League and Union officials agreed to play matches under both codes at the Domain as part of

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<sup>109</sup> *Huntly Press*, 1 October 1920.

<sup>110</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 12 June 1919, p. 9.

a Peace Celebration weekend. The matches were between teams made up of returned soldiers and representative players from both codes.<sup>111</sup>

The 1920 season opened on Saturday 1 May with another display of inter-code cooperation when a triple header was staged at the Domain to raise funds to send the New Zealand team to the Antwerp Olympic Games. An Auckland selection played a team from HMS *Renown* at soccer, College Rifles played Grafton at union whilst Ponsonby played Marist Old Boys at league.<sup>112</sup> The codes went their separate ways the next week when at Eden Park about 1,800 people watched University play College Rifles where 'the fine exposition of football provided was worthy of much better patronage'.<sup>113</sup> At the Domain between 5 and 6,000 spectators watched the league match between City and Ponsonby. Gate receipts of well over £200 were donated to the Waterside Workers' Band fund.<sup>114</sup>

Attendances at league games were at a high level throughout the season with 9,000 at the Domain on 12 June, 5,000 at the Domain and 3 to 4,000 at Victoria Park on 3 July, then 7,000 at the Domain on 17 July and 14 August, and 6,000 for the final championship round on Saturday 21 August and on 28 August for the opening round of the Roope Rooster. Crowds of 10,000 saw Ponsonby successfully defend the Thacker Shield by defeating Federal, the Canterbury League champions, by 29 points to 19 on Saturday 4 September and Newton win the final of the Roope Rooster knockout competition to end the season by defeating Maritime by 12 points to 8 on Saturday 18 September at Victoria Park. The Auckland Rugby Union was particularly helpful in 1920 over the playing of a league representative match. The match, against the newly re-formed Hawkes Bay League, was to have been played on Saturday 2 August at the Domain, but bad weather forced it

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<sup>111</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 July 1919, p. 9.

<sup>112</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 29 April 1920, p. 10.

<sup>113</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 May 1920, p. 6.

<sup>114</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 May 1920, p. 6.

to be abandoned. The match was replayed the following weekend at Eden Park, the Rugby Union's ground. The Domain was unavailable as the Rugby Union had booked it for its middle-class showcase game of the season: King's College versus Grammar School. The League approached the Union for help in finding a ground. Whilst the Union would not relinquish its booking of the Domain, 'satisfactory arrangements had been made with the Rugby Union for the use of Eden Park for the representative game on Saturday'.<sup>115</sup> A motion of thanks to the Union management committee was passed unanimously by the League.

In Christchurch, the growth of league during the war appeared to evoke increased opposition and, in the post-war period, there was none of the inter-code cooperation shown by the Rugby Union in Auckland. The Canterbury League felt that it was being discriminated against in the allocation of grounds at the start of the 1920 season, when its application for playing fields at Lancaster Park was rejected by the City Council, which regretted no ground was available there for club matches, but invited the League to forward details of interprovincial fixtures and the Britain vs New Zealand match. The League authorities felt that the Board of Control of Lancaster Park was not acting fairly as the Park was the property of all citizens. The Council eventually allowed the League to use Lancaster Park for its match against the British and for the test match, but not for inter-provincial games or club matches.<sup>116</sup> The soccer authorities were more cooperative, allowing the League to use its pay ground, English Park.

Restarting in 1919, following its recess during the war, the Hawkes Bay League attracted large numbers of spectators to its games in 1919, despite being only allocated an inferior ground. The Napier Council allotted McLean Park, a pay ground, to the Rugby Union and Nelson Park, a non-pay ground, which was in a rough state, and with no changing facilities, to the League.

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<sup>115</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 7 August 1919, p. 10.

<sup>116</sup> *Christchurch Star*, 29 March 1920, p. 8.

Nevertheless there was a good attendance at the opening games and a collection was taken to which 'every spectator seemed to contribute'.<sup>117</sup> League authorities felt further discriminated against in the allocation and maintenance of grounds in 1920. One Saturday they were denied the use of Nelson Park due to the Prince of Wales' visit, then the Council neglected to prepare the grounds for the next Saturday's matches so that only one ground was available and that 'only after officials, players, and supporters had to put the goal posts up'.<sup>118</sup> On another Saturday the main ground was marked out many yards too short, so a junior match had to be played on it and the senior match transferred to the number two ground, where 'the rough state was not conducive to good football'.<sup>119</sup> The League drew back from accusing the Council of deliberate obstruction but resolved to fight openly for its rights.<sup>120</sup> Later in the season the League complained of the lack of changing facilities at Nelson Park with 'everyone compelled to change his clothes in the open',<sup>121</sup> including the hockey girls. Relations with the Council deteriorated further when it decided to erect a wire fence between the two grounds at McLean Park, the union ground, but did nothing to help with spectator control at Nelson Park, where there were more than double the number of spectators. Then the Council shifted the Town Board office, which presumably provided changing facilities, to McLean Park when there was a greater need for it at Nelson Park. 'It seems that the Rugby Union have got a good friend at court. There are three grounds on McLean Park and six on Nelson Park, two of which are often used by the ladies for hockey, yet in spite of this, footballers have continually to dress in the open.'<sup>122</sup> As in Christchurch, it appeared that

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<sup>117</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 12 June 1919, p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 22 May 1920, p. 10.

<sup>119</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 22 May 1920, p. 10.

<sup>120</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 22 May 1920, p. 10.

<sup>121</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 10 July 1920, p. 10.

<sup>122</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 7 August 1920, p. 10.

there was antagonism to league on the part of some city councillors and possibly staff.

Whilst both Christchurch and Hawkes Bay leagues encountered difficulties with civic authorities over grounds, the situation faced by the Wellington League was much worse. When the game was restarted in 1919, the problems due to the lack of grounds were raised by "Kick-on", the weekly league columnist in the *Evening Post*:

The League is at present somewhat hampered in the matter of grounds, and at the present time only one at Petone is secured, but there are several at Hutt Park which can be acquired if necessary. An application is already in with the City Council for a ground on one of the city reserves. It is very essential in the interests of the game that a ground should be obtained in the city. Newtown Park was previously available and would prove of value this season.<sup>123</sup>

But the Wellington city councillors thought otherwise,

regretting its inability to grant a ground this year, owing to the fact that the ground had already been allocated. The council, however, would offer no objection if a ground could be secured from one of the other bodies at present using the City Reserves.<sup>124</sup>

Fortunately for the League, the Wellington Football Association kindly agreed to hand over one of its grounds at Newtown Park,<sup>125</sup> which eased the difficulties the League had had in running its club competitions in the early part of the season. With the League having the use of only one ground, and that in Petone twelve kilometres from Wellington City, the two city teams had had to travel to the Hutt every week where a double header was played. Things became worse with the start of the junior competition, and the League was driven to play just one senior and one junior game each week. The first game to be played on a city ground took place on Saturday 31 May at an obscure ground at Lyall Bay, but the situation eased when a ground at Newtown Park became available enabling full rounds of both the senior and

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<sup>123</sup> *Evening Post*, 17 May 1919, p. 13.

<sup>124</sup> *Evening Post*, 6 June 1919, p. 8.

<sup>125</sup> *Evening Post*, 6 June 1919, p. 8.

junior competitions to be played.

The antagonism to league by some City Councillors resurfaced when the League's application to use the Basin Reserve for representative matches was discussed. The Reserves Committee received a deputation from the League, which pointed out that it was not a professional body and that 'under its regulations the payment to players was prohibited except in cases where it was necessary to assist members of a touring team to meet expenses'.<sup>126</sup> The Reserves Committee accepted this and recommended that the League and the Football Association [soccer] each be granted the use of the Basin Reserve for three days with the right to charge admission.

However, a faction of the City Council, led by Councillor Luckie, overturned the Reserves Committee's recommendation and denied the League the use of council grounds.<sup>127</sup> That Councillor Luckie had been associated with 'other sporting bodies' [probably rugby union] could have influenced his stand that councillors should 'not encourage professionalism' by allowing the used of council grounds by 'gladiators' for 'professionalism'.<sup>128</sup> A hard-hitting reply from W. S. Brice, secretary of the Wellington Rugby League, informed Councillor Luckie of the rules relating to payment of league players, which clearly forbade any payment other than at a rate of not more than 10 shillings per day when away from home for representative duties. As to the charge of league players being 'gladiators' because 'the League game is played under rules which require a man to be in the pink of condition, or else he cannot play', Brice pointed out that any game 'is only as fast as the players care to make it' and reminded the Councillor of the controversy presently occupying the rugby community 'concerning some of the League rules, which the Rugby people want to adopt, and only for one object, viz, to make the game faster, and consequently more entertaining to the public'.

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<sup>126</sup> *Evening Post*, 14 July 1919, p. 7.

<sup>127</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 July 1919, p. 5.

<sup>128</sup> *Evening Post*, 5 July 1919, p. 12.

Brice concluded by suggesting that Councillor Luckie might have been misinformed and hoped he would 'do the right thing and make amends to the players of the League code, and not deprive them of playing against, or the Wellington public the opportunity of witnessing, the New South Wales team in action in Wellington'.<sup>129</sup>

A special meeting of the Management Committee of the New Zealand Rugby League was called over the issue and it was decided to ask the Wellington Council to reconsider its decision. (see Appendix Eleven) The League strongly refuted the charge of professionalism, saying 'the officers and delegates are now prepared to state without fear of contradiction that since the inception of the game in New Zealand professionalism has never been tolerated.'<sup>130</sup> It then compared league with cricket, saying it felt sure 'no corporation would refuse playing grounds for representative cricket, and yet it is well known that gentlemen receiving a salary for playing are allowed to take part in representative matches.'<sup>131</sup> It cited its contributions to patriotic causes in the war, and pointed out that it was supported by 'gentlemen holding good positions, a Minister of the Crown, members of Parliament, justices of the peace, municipal and Government officers, etc., [who] would not for a moment associate themselves with a sport in which any taint of professionalism could be found.'<sup>132</sup> That the New Zealand League was firmly positioning itself as opposed to professionalism, and citing support from establishment figures to strengthen its claim, indicated that the code had established a firm foothold in New Zealand.

The Wellington League sent a deputation to the Reserves Committee, which, after hearing the League's arguments, recommended to the Council that the use of the Basin Reserve on three dates, with permission to charge

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<sup>129</sup> *Evening Post*, 5 July 1919, p. 12.

<sup>130</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 July 1919, p. 5.

<sup>131</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 July 1919, p. 5.

<sup>132</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 1 July 1919, p. 5.

for admission, be granted. Councillor Luckie continued to voice his opposition to the League's application and was supported by several other councillors. Their arguments were that 'if the League was encouraged the other games, providing sport for thousands every Saturday, were liable to be cut out' and that 'the council had no right to ask ratepayers to provide grounds through which other people could make money'.<sup>133</sup> Councillor Luckie went further, stating that the New Zealand League was a direct representative of an English professional body and was 'the thin end of the wedge of professionalism'. He claimed that

he had it on the highest authority that the Auckland League recently offered a Rugby player £50 to "go over", [and] the main object of the League was to promote tours. The players could then afford to throw up their jobs during the winter months and go on tour.<sup>134</sup>

Councillors supporting the League maintained that its opponents were old union players and jealous of league, and that 'council had no right to discriminate between any games'.<sup>135</sup> The Council eventually adopted the Reserves Committee's recommendation by 10 votes to 6.

At a subsequent Council meeting, the League presented 'overwhelming evidence (to the fair minded person)...which proved conclusively that the Rugby League does not in any way encourage or allow professionalism', and as Councillor Luckie could produce no evidence to prove his statement that 'he knew of a player who had been offered some amount to play League', the League called on him to either produce evidence or retract his statement at the next council meeting.<sup>136</sup> There is no evidence that he either produced evidence or retracted his statement. However, the problem of lack of grounds had hampered the development of the game and the executive were urged, by the *Post's* league columnist, to 'be early off the mark next season in their

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<sup>133</sup> *Evening Post*, 12 July 1919, p. 9.

<sup>134</sup> *Evening Post*, 12 July 1919, p. 9.

<sup>135</sup> *Evening Post*, 12 July 1919, p. 9.

<sup>136</sup> *Evening Post*, 26 July 1919, p. 12.

hunt for playing areas<sup>137</sup> as the League was expecting to have many more teams.

Ground problems were largely overcome in time for the 1920 season and the League secured grounds at Petone and Hutt Park in the Hutt and at Emerson Street and Newtown Park in the city, although the League complained that 'the Emerson Street Ground was still without a dressing shed, the small toolshed providing accommodation for only half-a-dozen men'.<sup>138</sup> The League offered to supply the labour to erect a dressing shed, but the Council declined as it would have had to supply the materials.<sup>139</sup>

Following the war, and unlike its English counterpart,<sup>140</sup> the New Zealand Rugby Union granted an amnesty to all who had played league before and during the war, but this did not apply to post-war league players. This led to a continuation of the pre-war situation whereby clubs and provincial unions ignored, when it suited their purpose, the policy of the New Zealand Union of banning anyone who had played league since the war. The Wellington Rugby Union, feeling threatened by the resurgence of league and the loss to it of good players, ignored the New Zealand Union's policy and turned a blind eye to league players returning to union. Although the League was recruiting 'class' players from union, it was also losing players back to union. In early June the Petone club informed the League that 'an official of the club had failed to turn up for a game for which he was selected but instead played in a junior rugby union match in Petone'. It was resolved tell the Petone Rugby Union Club that they were playing a man who had been playing league.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *Evening Post*, 13 September 1919, p. 12.

<sup>138</sup> *Evening Post*, 9 June 1920, p. 2.

<sup>139</sup> *Evening Post*, 20 July 1920, p. 18.

<sup>140</sup> The English Rugby Union reinstated its ban on all league players as soon as the war ended. Collins, 'English Rugby Union and the First World War', p. 815.

<sup>141</sup> *Evening Post* 6 June 1919, p. 8.

At the end of the month the losing team in a union match complained that the referee had been an ex-league player and the Wellington Rugby Union ordered that the game be replayed, and it was reported that several league players were openly playing union - one in the senior competition - with the clubs' knowledge.<sup>142</sup> Finally, in August, at a League management committee meeting,

Considerable discussion took place regarding the attitude of the [Wellington] Rugby Union in reporting to the New Zealand Union Messrs Tancred, Scott, Morris and Pollock, who turned from the Rugby ranks to the League, and members of the committee thought it was very unfair that these players were singled out when other players who had played League and returned to Rugby were not reported.<sup>143</sup>

A motion that all league players playing union should be reported to the New Zealand Rugby Union was lost.

A similar situation prevailed in the Hawkes Bay, where the Rugby Union continued its pre-war policy of taking back league players in defiance of the New Zealand Union. A player in a union match was warned by the referee that if he re-offended he would be sent off. The response was 'Oh you can send me off and I will go and play the League game',<sup>144</sup> for which remark he was promptly dismissed. The player in question had played league throughout the previous season. The incident prompted the comment that 'the Hawkes Bay Rugby Union would play every League player in Napier today, and not have the least qualms of conscience over it'<sup>145</sup> if it could. On another Saturday a major race meeting prompted the League to cancel all matches, knowing the attraction of such events for rugby players. The Rugby Union did not cancel its fixtures, but many of its players were at the races anyway. To make up the numbers, clubs recruited league players, so that

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<sup>142</sup> *Evening Post* 28 June 1919, p. 12.

<sup>143</sup> *Evening Post* 14 August 1919, p. 8.

<sup>144</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 8 May 1920, p. 10.

<sup>145</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 8 May 1920, p. 10.

'more than one team playing Rugby last Saturday was indebted to League players for coming to their assistance and enabling them to place a full team in the field'.<sup>146</sup>

The establishment of a league club at Taradale also upset the Hawkes Bay Rugby Union. At the end of March the League called a meeting at which a Taradale club was formed and 24 financial members enrolled. Tom Cottrell, a New Zealand representative, and Alf Tucker, an old Clive player, had promised to play and 'everything points to the League game getting a good hold in that locality'.<sup>147</sup> The new club hoped to field both senior and junior teams.

This stung the Rugby Union into action after years of neglect, and a week later it held a meeting to form a union club in Taradale. There were accusations of underhand behaviour on the part of the League in calling a meeting and not inviting representatives from the Rugby Union, implying that had they attended they may have influenced the meeting against forming a league club. Much of the meeting was taken up in attacking the league game, and those playing it were reminded that by doing so they would be banned for life from playing union. League supporters present 'wanted to know why the Rugby representatives, having left Taradale alone for the last ten years, wished to bother now'.<sup>148</sup> An interesting position was taken by one speaker who had been appointed an official at the previous meeting but who stated that he 'did not intend to take any part until the conclusion of the present meeting', but was 'prepared to assist either game, but if two clubs were to be formed he would have nothing to do with either, as it meant the failure of both'.<sup>149</sup> The meeting closed without any union club being formed.

Two other incidents illustrate the fear held by union supporters of the

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<sup>146</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 26 June 1920, p. 10.

<sup>147</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 8 April 1920, p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1920, p. 2.

<sup>149</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1920, p. 2

threat posed by the league game. In Greymouth, where league had been restarted following the war, an exchange of letters appeared in the *Greymouth Evening Star*. The first letter was from a 'Rugby' of Blaketown, who accused the paper of trying to mislead the public by reporting a game as 'one of the best games ever seen in Blackball'. He maintained the teams were made up of a few senior and a few junior players with the rest being 'resurrected' players or 'total strangers to football'.<sup>150</sup> The next day brought two replies, from J. Thomas, secretary of the Kohinoor club, and from W. Smith. It was pointed out that as 'Rugby' had not been at the match, he was in no position to comment on it and the presence of juniors in the teams was defended by comparing the match with the union match played on the same day

on the [Victoria] Park, when the good old National game could only produce eighteen players, and some of them played in their civilian clothes, and the fact remains the majority of the others were only juniors.<sup>151</sup>

It would seem that in an isolated and sparsely province, both rugby codes were struggling to find players.

A new dispute then arose in response to the claim that most of the players at Blackball were total strangers to football. Smith wrote that far from being a total stranger to football, one of the players, Jones, was, in fact, a Buller, West Coast and New Zealand representative, but 'Rugby' claimed no one by that name appeared in the records.<sup>152</sup> The response to this was the suggestion that 'Rugby' knew who Jones 'really was'.<sup>153</sup> It would seem that 'Jones' was playing league under an alias to avoid trouble from the union authorities.

The determination of union authorities to keep league out of schools,

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<sup>150</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 19 May 1919, p. 5.

<sup>151</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 20 May 1919, p. 4.

<sup>152</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 21 May 1919, p. 2.

<sup>153</sup> *Greymouth Evening Star*, 22 May 1919, p. 2.

and the fear that if schoolboys were allowed to play league the union game would be seriously undermined, is shown in an incident in Hawkes Bay. Hawkes Bay seems to have been the only province in which league was played by school teams, this instance and the prewar Technical School team. The local Rugby Union accused the League of approaching the headmasters of Napier schools, offering them footballs and coaching if they took up league. The Union was upset because the NZRU had refused it a grant to provide footballs to local primary schools. The Union was afraid that 'if Rugby was not encouraged in the schools, there would be a hard struggle to obtain players for senior grades in later years' but that 'if the ABC of Rugby was inculcated in primary schools there would be no danger of the boys joining the League in later years'.<sup>154</sup> The League claimed that it was the headmasters who approached the League. It insisted that if schools wanted to play league it would give them a helping hand.<sup>155</sup> Eventually four schools, Taradale, Clive, Port Ahuriri and Westshore took up the game and the 'helping hand' included the donation of footballs plus a grant of £5 for travelling expenses.<sup>156</sup> The New Zealand League was also eager to see league played in the schools and made a grant of £30 to promote the game in the public schools.<sup>157</sup>

The fear of the competition from league is best demonstrated in Auckland, where league was proving more popular than union amongst both players and spectators. At the start of the 1919 season the Auckland Rugby Union was still having to deal with the question of the amended rules it had

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<sup>154</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 29 March 1920, p. 2.

<sup>155</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 30 March 1920, p. 2.

<sup>156</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 22 June 1920, p. 3.

<sup>157</sup> *Napier Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 1920, p. 10.

unilaterally adopted the previous season.<sup>158</sup> In April, at its annual general meeting, the executive

expressed regret that notwithstanding the universal approval of them by the players, the public and the press, the committee had hitherto been unable to enlist sufficient support from other Rugby Unions in the Dominion to have them embodied in the rules of the game.<sup>159</sup>

At a special meeting of the New Zealand Union in January to discuss the adoption of the amended rules, the executive postponed any decision until its annual general meeting in May. By then it had mustered sufficient support to have the rules rejected. The Auckland Union, nonetheless, decided to continue using the amended rules. The decision was contentious and only made on the casting vote of the chairman.<sup>160</sup> Pressure was brought on the Union to fall into line and it reversed its decision and decided to play the rules 'as allowed by the New Zealand Union'.<sup>161</sup>

The growing popularity of league was still worrying the Auckland Rugby Union prior to the start of the 1920 season. It felt that some changes should be made 'to arouse public interest in the game' and one suggestion was that 'representative matches should be played about June [midway through the club championship rounds] thus avoiding the monotony of continuous club games',<sup>162</sup> and it was decided to raise this with the Canterbury and New Zealand Unions.

Later in the season the Auckland Union arranged another conference of rugby unions from throughout the country to discuss proposed

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<sup>158</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 8 April 1918, p. 7.

1. elimination of wing forward.
2. absolute free kick.
3. modification of rule relating to kicking into touch.
4. strict enforcement of the rule penalising the lying on the ball.

<sup>159</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 April 1919, p. 7.

<sup>160</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 12 June 1919, p. 9.

<sup>161</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 3 July 1919, p. 7.

<sup>162</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 16 April 1920, p.9.

amendments to the rules agreed on at the meeting of New Zealand, Queensland and New South Wales Unions in Sydney the previous year. The English Rugby Union had only agreed to 'a few minor amendments which did not meet the requirements as far as the game in New Zealand was concerned'.<sup>163</sup> The English Union was to be asked to permit all the amendments to be adopted in New Zealand and Australia. The large crowds at the British League tourists' matches in Auckland and the small numbers of spectators at the All Blacks' matches in Sydney were quoted as 'examples to show the need for making the game more attractive'.<sup>164</sup>

The conference took place in Wellington on Friday 3 September and five resolutions were carried. They expressed approval of the modified rules as in the best interests of the game, called for their introduction in their entirety for the 1921 season, recommended that the New Zealand Rugby Union be advised of these decisions, recommended that the English Rugby Union be informed of the intention to play the amended rules but expressly assuring it of New Zealand's loyalty and adherence to its laws relating to professionalism, and finally that the New South Wales and South African Unions be assured that should they not be prepared to come into line with New Zealand over the amended rules then New Zealand would revert to rules approved by them when playing international fixtures.<sup>165</sup>

The loss of support to league was a major concern to the Auckland Rugby Union and was the reason for its taking drastic measures to make union football more appealing to both players and spectators, even to the extent of defying the New Zealand Union and playing the amended rules in its local competitions, promoting conferences to have the rules more widely adopted and being prepared, if necessary, to go ahead and adopt the rules without the approval of the English Union. Despite their efforts, league in the

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<sup>163</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 25 August 1920, p. 9.

<sup>164</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 25 August 1920, p. 9.

<sup>165</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 9 September 1920, p. 7.

post-war years in Auckland had become the most popular code with both players and spectators.

### **Conclusion**

From there being just two functioning leagues at the war's end, by 1920 league was being played in ten centres, two being new to the game. This recovery was sufficient for the New Zealand League to be able to claim the status of a national sport, unlike its counterparts in England and Australia, where league continued to be a regional sport, albeit a very popular one. Nevertheless it had suffered significant losses, particularly in the central provinces, where league was no longer played in Gisborne, Manawatu, Taranaki, Wanganui, Nelson, Marlborough and Golden Bay. Having been only recently introduced to many centres, league had not had time before the outbreak of war to establish any depth of support, so that not only could it not survive the war, but, lacking any surviving infrastructure, reintroducing the game after the war meant starting again from scratch, something that many regions were unable to do.

The game, though, had grown in strength in both Auckland and Christchurch, where it had been played throughout the war, and in Auckland it had become more popular than union, prompting the Auckland Rugby Union to defy the New Zealand Union and play under modified rules in order to compete. The tours by Australian and British teams, organised by the New Zealand League, did much to increase the profile of league, and attracted large crowds. The League's policy of having tour teams play matches in every centre where league was played did much to help the smaller leagues become re-established. There was still considerable opposition to league from within the establishment, accusations of professionalism, attempts to deny leagues access to publicly owned sports grounds, and denying schoolboys the opportunity to play league.



# 7

## CONCLUSION

Geography and demography, the Great War, and the hostility of the Rugby Union, all had their effects on the introduction of rugby league to New Zealand. New Zealand was a small country with many small towns but few large ones, and these were in many cases separated from each other by long distances and mountains. Consequentially inter-town club games were often impracticable unless rail or shipping links existed, whilst most towns lacked the population to support more than a few sports clubs anyway. Moreover, league has been shown to appeal to working-class males, particularly those employed in larger industries such as freezing works, railway workshops and the docks, which were situated in the larger centres, making it easier to raise teams in these places.

New Zealand's response to these difficulties was for most codes to conduct local club competitions in each town whilst the better players became part of provincial, or district, representative teams which played a series of matches at the end of the club competitions. Rugby league followed this pattern, with representative games playing an important part in its development. The importance of size can be seen here; the smaller the town, the greater the competition for players, and league was entering an already overcrowded market.

Although league's introduction, its adoption in towns and cities throughout the country, and its ultimate failure to survive in many centres, can be shown to follow the three stage pattern identified by Bales,<sup>1</sup> the working of Bale's process in the New Zealand context was interrupted by the Great War, which had a detrimental effect on the introduction of league. In most parts of the country the fledgling provincial leagues had not had time to build the depth of support needed to survive the war years. Therefore it

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<sup>1</sup> Bale, pp. 46-7.

can be argued that the Great War was a contributing factor to league remaining only a minor sport in most of New Zealand. It retained, however, a major position in some larger centres such as Auckland and Christchurch.

League started in a small way in 1908 as a player-driven enterprise, with groups of rugby union players in half-a-dozen towns and cities throughout New Zealand, taking the initiative in forming teams and playing a series of interprovincial matches. Unlike the start of the game in England and Australia, there were no large-scale defections of union clubs or players, no national body was established nor were any clubs. It was not until 1910 that the New Zealand Rugby League was formed to administer the game, and only in Auckland and Invercargill had attempts to form clubs been successful. It was with Auckland's southern tour at the end of 1910 that league entered the 'band wagon' stage, with leagues being formed, and clubs and club competitions being started, in many parts of the country. The Great War put an end to most of these initiatives and, outside of Auckland, where league had been established long enough to have put down some roots, and Christchurch, the game ceased to be played.

The wartime collapse of most leagues illustrates the lack of depth in the game. Having been introduced only a few years before the war, there had been insufficient time for roots to be put down and for a core of supporters to be built up to carry the game through and relaunch it in the post war period. In Auckland, where both a League and clubs had been formed in 1909, there was sufficient depth of support to enable the game to be played throughout the war, and, with this support, the game actually grew in strength, increased its player and supporter numbers, and challenged union for supremacy. By the end of the war, Auckland had reached the third stage in the introduction of the league to New Zealand, and entered the post-war period as a major regional sport. In Christchurch, even though league was only started in 1912, it was past the first stage and just into the second by the outbreak of war. It was therefore able to continue its growth throughout

the war years, and was well established entering the post-war period. Outside of these two centres, league had ceased to be played during the war years and it was never to fully recover from this setback.

It is little wonder that establishing clubs was much more difficult than in either England or Australia, where there were large towns and cities in close proximity, and club competitions had been important from the start. In New Zealand, to a large measure, representative football was as important as club football to most leagues, whilst in England and Australia, other than international matches in Australia, it was of little account. In the early years it was representative football that kept league alive in most centres and most leagues were established following the playing of representative games to generate interest. Once established, leagues used the chance of representing their province, or country, and testing themselves in a faster and more skilful game, to attract union representative players to their game, but failed to retain the many 'casual' players who only took part in one or two games. Some players would also be aware of the chance of openly earning money from their football skills by playing for English or Australian clubs.

The hostility to league on the part of rugby union authorities created a different type of problem to that of geography, demography and war. The introduction of the game raised the fear that it could displace union as New Zealand's major winter sport, and union officials reacted by placing many obstacles in the way of league's establishment. Threats of life bans for playing the game would have discouraged some from trying league, whilst the successful campaign to denigrate league as being a professional sport, in an era when professional sport was viewed with opprobrium, would have discouraged others. Attempts by Rugby Union officials to deny league the use of municipally owned sports grounds were successful to various degrees in a number of towns. Moreover, the Rugby Union, with the help of union supporting schoolteachers, ensured that, with very few exceptions, league was not played in schools.

Class played a big part in the bifurcation of rugby in both England and Australia and from its start league was regarded as *the* working-class rugby in the regions of these countries in which it was played. Rugby started in England as a game played by the middle classes, with workingmen only taking up the game in the late nineteenth century. Many of its middle-class supporters were not sorry to shed their working-class players following the 'great split' of 1895, and they were numerous enough, even in the northern heartland of league, to maintain their own exclusively middle-class clubs. In Australia the split took place in the large city of Sydney, where, despite losing their working-class players, the middle class were also numerous enough to maintain an exclusive middle-class competition based on college, university and 'old boys' clubs. This split was not going to happen in New Zealand with its small population and small and isolated towns. The middle class was too small and scattered for rugby to survive as an exclusively middle-class game; it needed working-class players, and it was prepared to fight to keep them. This accounts for the much greater hostility to league in New Zealand.

It was a widely held opinion at this time that league was a faster, more skilful game than union, was less prone to violence, and was a more entertaining game to watch. Many within the union game wanted to see its rules modified to make it more attractive both to play and to watch, but opposition from the New Zealand Rugby Union officials managed to stifle any such moves. Instead, they adopted a number of policies aimed at destroying league, whilst keeping union unchanged. Union officials were overwhelmingly middle-class and were supported in their efforts by sympathisers from the middle-class establishment. Some town councillors were sympathetic to their efforts to deny the use of council-owned sports grounds to league and obstructed league's efforts to obtain fair access, the press supported the union claims that league was a professional sport by repeatedly reporting such unfounded allegations, whilst most school teachers, with a union background and union sympathies, were largely successful in keeping the

league game out of schools whilst promoting and encouraging the union game.

Unlike in England, where the discrimination against rugby league was rigorously maintained, and all league players were banned from union for life, the attitude of union authorities to league was both ambivalent and inconsistent. On the one hand the New Zealand Rugby Union claimed to uphold the English Union's policies on professionalism and the banning of league players, whilst on the other, provincial unions, anxious not to lose players, took a more pragmatic view and tended to take back league players, as this both strengthened union and weakened league. Union clubs would include league players in their teams, assuming that, as other clubs were doing the same, nothing would come of it. The threat of being banned was real enough though, and numbers of league players, particularly national and provincial representative players, were banned, but many others who had played league, particularly at club level only, were quietly taken back to union.

The possibility of being banned may have deterred some from playing league, but the large numbers of 'casual' league players show that the perception that one could 'give league a try' and then go back to union was widespread. Wherever league was played, team sheets show that in any season many men played in only one or two games, whilst a smaller number played in most matches and these were the ones likely to be back the next season. But the enthusiasts needed the casual players to bolster team strengths, and, with many returning to union, a new group of casual players had to be recruited each season to keep the league game going.

As most rugby players in New Zealand stayed with union, league never became *the* working-class game that it did in parts of Australia (Sydney and Brisbane) and, together with soccer, in northern England. It was, nevertheless, *a* working-class sport as it was largely shunned by middle-class players, and only played by workingmen. League, in fact, was probably the

first *working-class* sport in New Zealand because, as well as being played only by workers, many of its administrators were also workingmen, and those who were middle-class came mainly from the lower middle-class, such as publicans and shopkeepers. League did, though, receive some support from Labour and Liberal MPs and town councillors. This was at a time when sports administration was considered the domain of the middle-class establishment, and workers were not expected to have a part in it.

In the pre-war years there were tours by Australia every year, which proved very popular with spectators and attracted large crowds, whilst a short British tour in 1910 and a longer one in 1914 were even more popular. These tours raised the profile of the game, made a substantial contribution to its finances, and provided an inducement to better union players to take up league by giving them the prospect of representing their country. But all representative games were popular, and inter-provincial and inter-district games played a big part in introducing and popularising the game throughout the country.

In the post-war years far fewer representative games were played, as many leagues had not been re-formed, thus making travel a major consideration, whilst Auckland, being much stronger than any other league, chose not to play representative games, concentrating on its domestic competitions instead. This made the two tours, by Australia in 1919, and Britain in 1920, of great importance in regenerating interest in league. Games drew huge crowds, and the New Zealand League's policy of having the tourists play in all league centres gave the newly re-formed leagues a great boost.

During the war league did not survive in most centres due to many of its players enlisting in the army. It also lost another player source as possible recruits from union also enlisted and were lost to league, whilst its exclusion from schools denied it the annual influx of union-playing school leavers, who did much to keep union going in many towns. On the other hand, in the two

cities where league continued to be played, it benefited from the decision of union officials not to allow anyone of military age to play union. The league authorities took a more tolerant approach, and, whilst encouraging their players to enlist, did not stop anyone from playing league, thus attracting many union players to the game. Also, with junior grades established, school leavers who wanted to play league could be catered for and were able to work their way up through the grades and graduate to play for senior teams.

After the war, league was restarted in a number of districts, to the extent that by 1920 it could once more claim to be a national game, but, outside of Auckland and Christchurch, it no longer posed a threat to union and became, like soccer and hockey, a minor sport with its own constituency. Having said this, the fact that enthusiasts were able to start from scratch and establish the game in many parts of the country, challenged the view that rugby union was the game played and supported by most New Zealanders. In fact the numbers of union, league, soccer, and hockey teams in the metropolitan cities show that union was the game of choice of less than half the men who played winter team sports, and even in towns, union was far from being in a dominant position, with league, soccer and hockey all having their own constituencies.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX ONE

[an interview with Mr. Reardon by an *Evening Post* reporter]

The movement in Wellington is in the direction of playing the Northern League game, which it is felt in some quarters, is the better game. During a recent trip of mine to New Plymouth and later to Napier, I was asked by the officials of both places to interest myself in the movement. On my return to Wellington I got in touch with the officials here, and found they had been treating for suitable grounds. This question of grounds has been a difficult from our point of view, but we think we have overcome this difficulty sufficiently to warrant us in opening up the game here.

The Auckland League has guaranteed the costs of the grounds for this season, and as a result we are now closing on certain offers that have been made. We have now reached the stage which justifies us in inviting applications from players to offer their services to the league. I have been asked to allow my name to go forth as a guarantee of good faith, assuring those who communicate that the communications will be treated in absolute confidence, until such time as we are in a position to declare the formation of clubs. The idea we have in mind just now is that for this season the League Committee will form the clubs so as to distribute the players equitably. At the beginning of next season players will have the option of choosing their own club.

It must be understood that this is not a money making scheme. For the present, players will have abandoned all idea of remuneration. They will have to play for the love of it for just now.

There is certainly some slight inducement for senior players even now. A trip to Australia is in sight, and a team for England will also be selected in the near future. These are the inducements offering at the present.

[*Evening Post*, 10 May 1912, p. 8.]

APPENDIX TWO

[the rugby columnist of the *Evening Post* reporting the Wellington New South Wales match]

At last Wellington has seen an exhibition of the Northern Union game and it has left many footballers thinking hard. Let it be said honestly and at the start that the majority of those who saw Saturday's match between the New South Wales thirteen and the Wellington representatives appeared pleased with the game. Nor could any unbiased spectator fail to admit that it was fast, clean, and open, three qualifications all more or less the outcome of alterations and modifications in the old Rugby rules. The game was fast for several reasons, and five of these may be set out as follows :- (1) The reduction from 30 to 26 men; (2) the absence of line-outs; (3) the revised scrum; (4) the passing work of the forwards; and (5) the elimination of the kick direct out of touch.

It goes without saying that the doing away with four men on the field tends to greater freedom and pace. Taking the second of these essential differences, no one can fail to admit that the line-out is not missed. With regard to the scrum... those who saw the packs working on Saturday will admit that nothing fairer could be wanted, and certainly nothing faster. The passing work of the forwards once more brings up the deficiencies of New Zealand football in late years. How often is a good forward passing rush seen nowadays? As a corollary to the excellent passing came the quick side-stepping and mercurial dodging of the visitors. As to the doing away with the direct kick-out of touch, this again tends to make the game faster, and it is useful if only for that purpose.

Nevertheless, one of these fine days the Rugby Union will have to take some steps to come into line with the League amendments to the rules. Sooner or later it must be realised that if there is anything in the League game that makes for improvement in play, and added interest from a spectator's point of view, it is only folly to ignore it. The amendments are eminently sane, and there is not the least use being blindly conservative about the matter. And the moral the writer has attempted to point from all this is that surely the best way for the Rugby Union to combat the professional game is to offer the public a game which is equally attractive.

[*Evening Post*, 31 August 1912, p. 14.]

APPENDIX THREE

[the rugby union columnist of the *Christchurch Star* writing of the Canterbury-Wellington league match]

As far as the day went it can be said at once that the League game possesses some distinct advantages over the Rugby Union code. The chief improvement is the entire deletion of the dull, forward slogging and tussling so prominent in the Rugby game as played here. Today, despite the fact that neither team was at all brilliant, but in fact raw and even crude in their play, there was hardly a dull, unexciting period during the match while at times the play was very fast and exciting. The changes come with startling suddenness, and individual play stands out vividly. The absence of line-out work and the forward slog inseparable from the Union code are conspicuous by their absence, and this tends to improve the game immensely from a spectator's point of view. It would be interesting to know the opinion of the majority of the spectators with regard to the new game, but in fairness to the League it must be said that, although to-day's match provided an excellent afternoon's amusement the teams did not do justice to it by any means. Played by two teams of brilliant and scientific players there would be a smashing exhibition of exhilarating football. Canterbury were unlucky to lose to-day, for they were the better team on the day's play, and Wellington were decidedly fortunate in snatching the match out of the fire at the last moment.

[*Christchurch Star*, 7 September 1912, p. 7.]

APPENDIX FOUR

[report presented to the 1913 annual general meeting of the Wellington Rugby League]

The annual report, which was read and adopted, stated that the executive, in presenting the report, did so with the satisfaction of knowing that the efforts in starting and managing the league in Wellington were appreciated by the affiliated clubs. The game was not started until late in the season, and consequently great difficulty was found in securing grounds. The league, however, was fortunate enough to secure two - one at Duppa street and one at Petone. These two grounds were enough to accommodate the four teams playing.

The finances were in a good condition considering the limited source of revenue. The coming season would be one in which great care would have to be exercised by both the management and players alike. Care from the management so that the league be put on a firmer footing, and grounds procured, and equal attention given to the lower grades. The encouragement of the juniors was most important, and the young players should be well looked after and given the opportunity to play the game under good conditions.

The grounds available this year [1913] are situated as follow[s]: Three at the Hutt (including two splendid grounds on the Recreation Reserve, to which a charge can be made), one at Petone, one at Duppa street, and at least two of the city reserves not yet allotted.

The Chairman said he hoped the League would receive fair treatment when the allocation was being made; the Executive also requested that the use of the Basin Reserve would be granted for a representative match, with permission to charge for admission. Some difficulty was anticipated from other bodies in this connection, but he contended that it was no part of the business of the Reserve Committee to enquire into what he might term the `morality` of the game; the council should not be concerned whether the game played was professional or not. They only dealt with the body asking for a ground. He believed that, the disposition of the City council was to deal out even-handed justice as far as the League was concerned.

[*Evening Post*, 3 April 1913, p. 4.]

APPENDIX FIVE

[editorial in the *Christchurch Star*, as rugby league makes its appearance]

## THE FOOTBALL CRISIS

While the matter discussed by the committee of the Canterbury rugby Union last night is of little interest to the public compared with, say, the necessity for getting rid of the political Jonahs who have brought Canterbury such dreadful weather ever since they took office, it is of the utmost importance to the great and growing body of footballers. Hitherto the Rugby Union has been in the comfortable position of controlling the best grounds, but a game between a League team from New South Wales and a Canterbury team will be played here probably at the end of August: and it is recognised that some, if not many, of the leading Rugby players will be attracted to the newer game. Wherever the Northern Union game has obtained a footing it has infallibly drawn the support and enthusiasm of the public. The reason may be, as the chairman of the Canterbury Rugby Union suggests, that the League clubs capture the idols [sic] of the public, or it may be that the Northern Union code really does make for open, spectacular play. But whatever the causes may be, the fact has to be faced that the followers of the winter game desert Union Rugby wherever League Rugby makes its appearance.

A great deal of nonsense is talked about professionalism in this connection, and in New Zealand a special plea has been made for the retention of the older game on the ground that it is unadulterated amateurism. But it is by no means necessary that the men who play the League game should be professionals. Under the code adopted in this part of the world the League competitions are played under amateur conditions. The men are not paid for playing or even, as some of the critics appear to think, for "loss of time." When a League team goes on tour, it is true the men are compensated for loss of wages, but the payments are certainly not on a scale that would induce any young fellow to give up a steady job for the sake of the game. Professionalism comes into play when clubs commence to bid against one another for the services of specially skilled men, and the extent to which an evil of that sort is allowed depends entirely on the firmness and watchfulness of the authorities controlling the sport.

The Canterbury Union's committee took the proper course last night in deciding to invite the clubs to discuss the position. There is room for only one Rugby code in Christchurch, and if the majority of the players show a disposition to take up the newer code, the Union would be wise to accept the inevitable and to undertake the control of the game. Of course such a step would mean that many followers of the older game would drop out of the sport altogether, for they would not care to identify themselves with a code that permitted anything in the shape of professionalism. The probability is that the clubs will decide to remain loyal to the old code, and that the League game will be established in spite of the opposition of the Union. It will then remain to be seen whether Union Rugby, which undoubtedly has a strong hold on the affections of the Canterbury people, will be strong enough to resist the attacks of its rival.

It is a pity that so much should be made of the bugbear of professionalism, which does not cause violent breaches in the cricket world, but the fact of the matter is that New Zealand is trying to carry on the traditions that are imported from the Old Country and that are in many respects illogical. Still, if the Northern Union code is really an improvement on the Rugby code, there should be nothing to stop New Zealand adopting the rules on the basis of strict amateurism, and, after all, it is the playing and not the paying that should count.

[*Christchurch Star*, 25 July 1912, p. 2.]

APPENDIX SIX

[letter from the Nelson Rugby Union to Department of Education, 1911]

Sir,

I am directed to call your attention to the fact that the Stoke Industrial boys are about to affiliate to the Northern Union football organisation (a professional body), and ask if such a step has the sanction of your department? Apparently the manager of the institution has not recognised the danger of such a proceeding. It should not be necessary to point out the danger of corruption in sport by introducing the professional element, and I do not think your Department will consider it judicious that this spirit of indulging in sport for individual monetary gain should be inculcated in the boys. However, the strong protest I wish to place before you is that a great injustice would be done the boys by allowing their affiliation to a professional football organisation, as after once participating in this game they are debarred from all the privileges of amateur football and the boys on leaving the institution would experience a great hardship. My Union in the past has made a donation from the N.Z.R.U. grant towards the institution, and as we hold a school championship the boys are provided with competition, if they desire to enter for such. I would point out that no school, private or public-college or university-has embraced this professional game, recognising in it a grave danger to youth by encouraging a professional spirit in sport. This is not only the case throughout the Dominion but throughout the whole Empire. In regard to the manager, I think it is only want of knowledge on the subject that has led him to permit this circumstance to arise.

[*Nelson Evening Mail*, 17 May 1911, p. 2.]

APPENDIX SEVEN  
Meeting of the rugby union.  
Decision on the professional question.

[the following is from the report appearing in the London *Times* 20 September 1895. I am grateful to Tony Collins for supplying me with a copy of this report.]

The annual meeting of the Rugby Union was held last night [19 September 1895] at the Cannon-street Hotel, when the new draft of the rules as to professionalism came up for adoption, and the policy of the Union as regards the new northern body was declared. Mr. W. Cail brought before the meeting the new rules relative to professionalism. He explained the clauses of the new draft which had been promised by the committee at the special meeting last December. These new rules are of great stringency, and, while they contain all the points of the old code, they contain various new principles. Upon these Mr. Code touched *seriatim*. [in regular order: one after the other] They are to a great extent contained in rule 2, as follows :-

Acts of professionalism are:-

1. By an individual:-

A- Asking, receiving or replying [relying?] on promise, direct or implied, to receive any money consideration whatever, actual or prospective; any employment or advancement; any establishment in business; or any compensation whatever for:- (a) playing football, or rendering any service to a football organisation; (b) training, or loss of time connected therewith; (c) time lost in playing football or in travelling in connection with football; (d) expenses in excess of the amount actually disbursed on account of reasonable hotel or travelling expenses.

B- Transferring his services from one club to another in opposition to Rule 6.

C- Playing for a club while receiving, or after having received from such club, any consideration whatever for acting as secretary, treasurer, or in any other office, or for doing or having done any work or labour about the club's ground or in connection with the club's affairs.

D- Remaining on tour at his clubs expense longer than is reasonable.

E- Giving or receiving any money testimonial, or giving or receiving any other testimonial, except under the authority of this union. F- Receiving any medal or other prize for any competition except under the authority of this union.

G- Playing on any ground where gate money is taken- (a) during the close season; (b) in any match or contest where it is previously agreed that less than 15 players on each side shall take part.

H- Knowingly playing with or against any expelled or suspended player or club.

I- Refusing to give evidence or otherwise assist in carrying out these rules when requested by this union to do so.

J- Being registered as or declared a professional, or suspended by any national union or by the Football Association.

K- Playing within eight days of any accident for which he has claimed or received insurance compensation, if insured, under these rules.

L- Playing in any benefit match, connected directly or indirectly with football.

M- Knowingly playing or acting as a referee or touch judge on the ground of an expelled or suspended club.

[continued]

2. By a club or other organisation -

A- paying or promising payment, or giving, offering, or promising any inducement as to employment, advancement, or establishment in business, or any compensation whatever to any player for- (a) playing for that club; (b) training, or for travelling expenses to or from any training resort, or for loss of time in connection with training; (c) loss of time while playing or travelling in connection with football; (d) hotel or travelling expenses in excess of the sum actually and reasonably disbursed.

B- Receiving as a member a member of another club in opposition to Rule 6.

C- Receiving or continuing as a member any one it may pay or have paid for either regular or occasional services.

D- Paying, for any of its teams, players, officials, or members on tour longer than a reasonable time; or paying for more than a reasonable number.

E- Giving from its funds, subscribing, or playing a match for any testimonial.

F- giving any medal or other prize for any competition except under the authority of this union.

G- taking gate money at any ground- (a) during the close season; (b) at any match or contest where it is previously that less than 15 players on each side shall take part.

H- Knowingly play or allowing its players to play with or against any expelled or suspended player or club.

I- Refusing to produce its books or documents, or to allow its officials or members to give evidence or to assist in carrying out these rules when requested by the union to do so.

J- Knowingly playing or admitting as a member, without the consent of the union, any member of an expelled or suspended club, or any expelled or suspended player, or any person registered as or declared a professional or suspended by the National Union or by the Football Association.

K- Knowingly allowing a player to play in its matches within seven days of an accident for which he has received or claimed insurance compensation, if insured under these rules.

L- Playing or allowing its ground to be used for any benefit match connected directly or indirectly with football.

M- Knowingly allowing its members or teams to play on the ground of an expelled or suspended club.

N- Refusing to pay, within one month, any costs or expenses ordered by this union for inquiries held under these rules.

Mr Cail drew attention to subsection F of rule 2 which had been drawn in order to demonstrate the authority of the union in regards to leagues. As to subsection L of rule 2 it was not meant to deprive a rich club of the right of giving a donation to one of its smaller brethren. There were various saving clauses, and the union would not deal with cases in any arbitrary spirit. After a few questions the rules were adopted with only one dissident.

[continued]

Mr. Rowland Hill explained the policy the committee had taken up in regard to the Northern Union. He stated that his committee, after carefully considering the crisis that had arisen, had decided that:-

1. The members of the Northern Union clubs are under our rules declared to be professionals.
2. This ruling shall not include those members of clubs which belong to the Northern Union who by November 1 next resign their membership of their club, or, in case of amalgamated clubs, resign their connection with the Rugby section thereof, and at once report such resignation to their respective county committees.
3. (a) No Rugby Union club or player may play on the ground of a professional Rugby club; (b) no professional Rugby club may play on the ground of a Rugby Union club.
4. (a) No Rugby Union club may employ as referee or touch judge any member of a professional Rugby club; (b) no member of a Rugby Union club may act as referee or touch judge in any game in which a professional player takes part.

APPENDIX EIGHT

[letter in the *Marlborough Express* from the President of the Marlborough Rugby Union]

## Football's Future

The predominant interest and the real utility of our national sport, football, in all its phases must be my apology for trenching somewhat on your space to face some vague remarks of "Spectator" in Friday's issue and to demarcate my attitude towards "professionalism" among our Rugby enthusiasts. Firstly, let me say that I depreciate the opinions of the small section of long-faced individuals who decry the sport in any form, and wish to see the lives of our workers a drab vista of grey, unbroken by any patches of bright color. However, healthy sport continues to take its rightful place as second only to the serious business of living, and the one branch of it, Rugby, is menaced by the dark cloud of the League game is no fault of our amateurs properly so called, but is entirely due to the hidebound and conservative attitude of those controlling the game in England. Really, if it were not so serious it would be amusing to note how the main question is side stepped.

The New Zealand Union, in mistaken loyalty to the effete English Union, pretend that their object is to nip professionalism in the bud, when actually professionalism is only a side issue. Mark this point, that the New Zealand Union will disqualify for life a man who plays League football even if he does not accept a penny. Why? Simply because they do not so much fear the bogey of professionalism as the influence of a more skillful and more attractive game. Anyone who knows anything about football knows that the "close forward" "bullocking" and "tight" features of our amateur game are eliminated under League rules. Rugby football as now played by amateurs in New Zealand is a game that has reached its present comparative excellence by a natural evolution. Can it not still be improved? Surely it can. But-and that "but" is the crux of the position-the authorities in New Zealand will not sanction changes in the rules making the game more skillful and less brutal, swifter and less tedious, more spectacular to see, and more intelligent to watch, merely because the English authorities are too conservative to better the game by borrowing ideas from their professional brethren. It doesn't seem quite nice, "don't you know."

The League game has beaten the amateur game in Great Britain because the authorities will not budge an inch from their first line of defense. They preferred to die where they stood; and die they did; and thus by their obstinacy and priggishness amateur Rugby was banished to the schools and Universities and a few isolated clubs. Believe me, history will repeat itself here, and professionalism will soon be rampant in New Zealand unless the authorities divorce themselves from England and adopt more enlightened and evolved rules. Let them stick to their present attitude and they will bring about the very result they profess to seek to avoid. What creates professionalism in any branch of sport? Is it not increasing population in the cities, where thousands demand a skillful exhibition of any sport as a mental relaxation after work in offices or shops or stores? Do you tell me that, under any rules, we have in Blenheim a large enough population to support professional football for one season? Why then do we worry? merely because, let me reiterate, the authorities are not afraid of professionalism, but of the League game itself.

The edict is you must not play under League rules- not that you should not accept money for playing. Six men may be disqualified for kicking about a football in practice under League rules. Is that attitude fostering true sport? Why not disqualify a man for playing Association? It's nearly all professional in the Old

[continued]

Country. Let me tell the public that unless the authorities abandon the whole untenable position and come down of their perch amateur Rugby will be as dead in New Zealand in four or five years as Julius Caesar. I don't wish to hear that lifeless argument that to attract large crowds to witness a trial of skill at any sport is evidence of the decadence of the race. That is- well, "rot." The vast majority of onlookers are either men whose age, or means of living, prevent them from straining their bodies in such strenuous exertion, but who nevertheless brighten their lives, accentuate their pride of race, and bring back old memories in watching young men showing those qualities of endurance, pluck, even temper, and skill, which made history in past days, are the heritage of the Britan wherever he is today, and the bright hope of the future.

To summarise, therefore, let us kill professionalism in football by adopting some of their rules and so encourage our schoolboys to play the better game. Let us be honest about it; we are out to beat professionalism, not the League game as a game. Let us play the ball, not the man.

J.F.Bennett

P.S.-This is not written as President of the Marlborough Rugby Union.

[*Marlborough Express*, 3 September 1912, p.6.]

APPENDIX NINE

[football notes by "Spectator" in the *Marlborough Express*]

## THE RUGBY GAME IN PERIL

At least, that is what they say. A bombshell fell in the local Rugby camp early this week, when rumors were rife regarding the impending change from Rugby to Northern Union football, and, needless to say, quite a stir was caused. From what information can be gleaned it appears that matters have not yet reached concrete form, although it is reported that the League will have a large following, especially of the cream of local players. As to what truth there is in any of these rumors is as yet a matter of conjecture. However, further developments are to take place very shortly, and it has been mentioned that in about a fortnight a Wellington League team will be visiting Blenheim, and it is also within the realms of possibility that the New South Wales touring team, with the addition of two Wellington players, will give an exhibition of the game at a very early date.

This state of affairs is no doubt due in a large measure to dissatisfaction engendered during the past two seasons, particularly this one, with the manner in which the local Rugby Union have controlled the Rugby game locally. Their lethargic interest in football has been roundly condemned, especially in the direction of fostering the game among schoolboys, some of whom must in the near future be members of the provincial representative team. A few seasons ago the Union, with the cooperation of several interested gentlemen, ran successful school competitions, and much interest was aroused. But of late, content to manage the competition themselves, the Union's efforts have failed dismally. It is no wonder that the lads are going over to "soccer."

During Mr. J.J. Corry's term of office as president in 1909 the Union was a live body; very much so, and quite contentious in fact. Notwithstanding the frequency of friction it was a progressive Union, and during that season representatives from Auckland (on a Thursday), Wellington (on a Wednesday), Nelson, West Coast, and Buller visited Blenheim. But this season, when the Nelson Union suggests playing the annual match on a Wednesday, the proposal is turned down, merely because of the fact that it was thought that the match would not be a financial success. In the interests of football, is it not? Whereas three years ago five "rep." matches were played here, only one is the case now.

[*Marlborough Express*, 30 August 1912, p. 2.]

APPENDIX TEN

[a letter sent to the Wellington Council by the Management committee of the New Zealand Rugby League asking it to reconsider its decision to deny the league the use of Basin Reserve.]

In the press report of Saturday it appears that an application of the Wellington Rugby League for the use of the Basin Reserve had been refused on the casting vote of the Mayor, and the reason was "professionalism." The New Zealand Rugby League, fearing that a section of the councillors were not conversant with the rules governing the Northern Union game in New Zealand, or had been influenced by opponents of the code, it would not be out of place to enlighten you on the subject. Admitting that the League is affiliated with what is termed in England a professional body, but the New Zealand League is allowed to make rules controlling the game in the Dominion without any reference to, or approval of, the English body. The officers and delegates are now prepared to state without fear of contradiction that since the inception of the game in New Zealand professionalism has never been tolerated. Further if it came to the knowledge of the League that any player had received payment other than provided for in the rules (a copy of which is enclosed), such player and the club of which he is a member would be disqualified.

We feel sure no corporation would refuse playing grounds for representative cricket, and yet it is well known that gentlemen receiving a salary for playing are allowed to take part in representative matches. As a protest against being classed as professionals, I may point out that during the past three years [ie during the War] the Auckland League, of which His Worship the Mayor is patron, and the Hon. A. M. Myers, Acting-Finance Minister, is president, donated to charity and patriotic purposes the whole of its net receipts, amounting to £1461, proving conclusively that the name of "professional" is a misnomer when connected with the management of the game in New Zealand. Gentlemen holding good positions, a Minister of the Crown, members of Parliament, justices of the peace, municipal and Government officers, etc., would not for a moment associate themselves with a sport in which any taint of professionalism could be found.

It is not my desire to dictate to your council, but I would respectfully request that in the spirit of fair play and equal privileges to all sport, your council will reconsider its decision in reference to the Wellington League's application.

[*New Zealand Herald*, 1 July 1919, p. 5.]

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