

# PACNEWS SPORTS BULLETIN

Pacific News Agency Service - administered by the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA)

PACNEWS SPORTS

Monday 23 May 2022

© Copyright PINA 2022

## In this bulletin:

- [1. RUGBY --- Fiji and New Zealand the winners after a brilliant HSBC France Sevens](#)
- [2. PACIFIC MINI GAMES --- Pacific Mini Games organisers issue last call for volunteers](#)
- [3. RUGBY --- Crusaders rout Fiji Drua in Super statement](#)
- [4. RUGBY --- O'Connor injury scare as Reds find form against Moana Pasifika](#)
- [5. NOC --- NOC of Timor-Leste celebrates 20th anniversary of country's independence](#)
- [6. RUGBY --- Home support will boost Fiji Drua](#)
- [7. RUGBY LEAGUE --- PNG Kumuls' new head coach keen to make his mark](#)
- [8. AFL --- AFL Vanuatu keen to grow in soccer mad nation, and push for International Cup place](#)
- [9. RUGBY --- 'Drawcard team': Kepu excited as Folau among several stars returning to Tonga](#)
- [10. RUGBY LEAGUE --- Kaiviti Silktales fall agonisingly short to St Mary's in Ron Massey Cup](#)
- [11. RUGBY LEAGUE --- Dolphins retain Stan Joyce Cup with win over PNG Hunters](#)
- [12. RUGBY --- Waratahs break Dunedin hoodoo as they defeat Highlanders](#)
- [13. RUGBY --- Brumbies eye final against Tahs or Reds](#)
- [14. SOCCER --- FIFA World Cup venues to be announced on 16 June](#)

FRANCE - RUGBY: WORLD RUGBY

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

## **Fiji and New Zealand the winners after a brilliant HSBC France Sevens**

TOLOUSE, 23 MAY 2022 (WORLD RUGBY)---Fiji's men and New Zealand's women turned on the style to win the HSBC France Sevens in Toulouse on Sunday.

Ireland, led by the excellent Terry Kennedy, played some impressive rugby to reach their first ever men's Cup final, but in the final the Fijians - off the back of gold in Singapore and silver in Vancouver, Canada - were too strong.

They won the final 29-17 and Tevita Dagunu said: "Teamwork in defence and attack was what this victory was built on. We kept the ball well and stuck to our game plan.

"To all the Fijians around the globe, this win is for you."

Waisea Nacuqu was HSBC player of the final and he said: "Ireland played well, but we worked hard."

After a breathless three days, it is Argentina, who finished fifth here, who are now top of the men's overall standings with 118 points with two events to go.

Long-time leaders South Africa are second on 116 after a frustrating time in France while Australia are third on 110 and Ireland fourth on 88. After this win, Fiji are now fifth on 87 points after missing out on rounds three and four played in Spain due to the effects of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, this was the last women's tournament of the 2022 Series and the Cup final in Toulouse was a fitting finale to a brilliant six rounds of world class rugby sevens.

Reigning Olympic champions New Zealand won their first title since Sydney in 2020 when they defeated 2022 Series champions Australia 21-14 in a thrilling final.

Head coach Cory Sweeney, who claimed his first title since taking on the role said: "It is a proud moment and an emotional moment for us all.

"After Langford we worked on a few things, had some awesome training sessions and we put that into practice this week."

HSBC player of the final Sarah Hirini said: "I love this squad, I have amazing team mates and we will enjoy this moment."

It means that New Zealand, who missed part of the series due to Covid concerns, finished fifth overall on 57 points.

Australia finished top on 80 points, following a consistently top class season, while France were second on 60 points, Fiji were third also on 60 points and Ireland, also on 60, just missed out on a top three finish due to a weaker points difference.

Despite some spirited performances, including an outstanding victory over England on Saturday, Brazil finished the Series in the relegation position as the 11th core team.

### **Men's Cup final: Five star Fiji score lift title**

Fiji got off to a flying start in the men's Cup final when they scored a try after 40 seconds via Tevita Dagonu. Napolioni Bolaca converted to put Fiji 7-0 ahead.

Ireland showed great character and levelled the score at 7-7 when Terry Kennedy set-up Jordan Conroy for a try and Mark Roche converted.

Kennedy then showed excellent awareness to score his side's second try and, although it was not converted, they were up 12-7.

However, Bolaca's try, converted by Waisea Nacuqu, made it 14-12 to Fiji at half-time.

Two minutes into the second half Josua Vakurunabili scored Fiji's third try and when Elia Canakaivata added their fourth they were 24-12 up with four minutes left.

Kaminieli Rasaku's try made it a 17 point lead before a late Conroy try for Ireland finished things off 29-17.

### **Women's Cup final: Brazier try wins it for New Zealand**

New Zealand and Australia, the great rivals, met in the women's Cup final just as they had done last time out in Langford, Canada.

Demi Hayes scored an early try and Dominique du Toit converted to make it 7-0 to Australia before Risi Pouri-Lane bagged a seven pointer for New Zealand to level things up.

Faith Nathan's try, converted by du Toit, just before the break, put Australia 14-7 up.

Soon after half-time the score was level at 14-14 as Alena Saili finished well and Pouri-Lane added the conversion.

And then came Kelly Brazier's try, converted by Pouri-Lane, with two minutes to go to give New Zealand a hard fought 21-14 triumph.

### **Men's bronze medal match: Laugel the main man as France reach the podium**

A try and a conversion by Paulin Riva put France 7-0 up at half-time in the men's bronze medal match against Samoa.

The Samoans, with the passionate home crowd cheering on their opponents, battled back well though in the second period and tries from Iafeta Purcell and Vaa Apelu Maliko - and one conversion by the former - had them 12-7 up with time running out.

However, France were not done yet and a five pointer by Jordan Sepho took the game into extra-time where Jonathan Laugel bagged the winning try as it finished 17-12.

### **Women's bronze medal match: Try double from Alowesi Nakoci sees Fiji take third**

Fiji were too strong for Ireland in the women's bronze medal match.

They came out on top 26-10, Raijeli Daveua, Alowesi Nakoci (2) and Sesenieli Donu the victor's try scorers, Lavenia Cavuru (2) and Viniana Riwai adding conversions.

Vicki Elmes Kinlan and Stacey Flood scored unconverted tries for Ireland who can be proud of how they have done in 2022.

### **Men's Cup semi-finals: Kennedy leads Ireland to amazing win as Fiji also progress**

Ireland were up against it heading into their men's Cup semi-final against France with the majority of the crowd cheering for the hosts.

However, the Irish really stepped up to the plate and tries from Terry Kennedy (2), Mark Roche and Andrew Smith saw them come out on top 24-7. Roche and Billy Dardis added conversions.

France's only try in the game came from Nisie Huyard.

Tevita Dagunu, Pilipo Bukayaro and Viwa Naduvalo (2) scored the tries in the second last four tie as Fiji got the better of Samoa 28-7.

Owen Fetu score Samoa's only try.

### **Women's Cup semi-finals: Blyde and Hirini see NZ through while Australia are on fire**

Try doubles from Michaela Blyde and Sarah Hirini were enough to see New Zealand win their women's Cup last four tie against Fiji.

Risi Pouri-Lane also kicked two conversions meaning that Reapi Ulunisau and Alowesi Nakoci's converted tries came in a 24-14 defeat for Fiji.

Australia were at their very best to see off Ireland 40-7 in the second semi-final.

Maddison Levi (2) Madison Ashby, Charlotte Caslick, Dominique du Toit and Faith Nathan were their try scorers in a 40-7 triumph. Ireland's only try came from Anee-Leigh Murphy Crowe.

### **Men's fifth place: Master finisher Moneta scores two tries as Argentina grab fifth**

Argentina ended up fifth in the men's competition after they got the better of England.

In the fifth place play-off, Marcos Moneta led the way with two tries and Joaquin de la Vega also crossed - with Tobias Wade (2) and Felipe Del Mestre adding conversions - as Argentina won 21-12.

Blake Boyland and Tom Bowen were the England try scorers.

Earlier in the day, Moneta scored another double to help his side get the better of Australia 22-7 in the semi-finals.

In the other last four tie, Will Homer, Calum Randle, Tom Emery, Hayden Hyde and Frederick Roddick went over for England tries as they got the better of USA 29-14.

### **Women's fifth place: Hosts wow crowd to finish strongly**

Tries from Jade Ulutule, Yolaine Yengo and Joanna Grisez - added to by two conversions by Ulutule – helped France win the women's fifth place play-off.

They saw off Canada 19-14 in a close tie, the losers tries coming from Krissy Scurfield and Ella O'Regan.

Earlier on in their semi-final, Joanna Grisez scored an amazing four tries as France saw off Brazil 36-7.

In their own last four ties, Canada defeated USA 19-7, Keyara Wardley, Olivia De Couvreur and Bianca Farella scoring their tries in that one.

### **Men's ninth place: Pace and power sees NZ defeat Scotland**

New Zealand took their frustrations of not making the Cup knock-out phase out on Scotland in the men's ninth place play-off, winning 42-7.

Ngarohi McGarvey-Black, Caleb Tangitau (2), Dylan Collier and Akuila Rokolisoa (2) were their try scorers in the game with Scotland's only try coming through Jamie Farndale after a superb offload by Kaleem Barreto.

Earlier on in the semi-finals, Joe Webber, Regan Ware (2), Ngarohi McGarvey-Black and Caleb Tangitau (2) scored tries as New Zealand saw off Spain 36-7 while Scotland secured one of their best victories of recent times.

Jamie Farndale, Jordan Edmunds, Ross McCann and Robbie Fergusson scored tries as they go the better of South Africa 24-21.

Women's ninth place play-off: Lloyd lights things up as Scotland win

Flying winger Rhona Lloyd scored a try hat-trick in the women's ninth place play-off as Scotland's positive tournament ended with a win.

They defeated South Africa 24-10, Lisa Thomson scoring their fourth try and two conversions coming from Helen Nelson and Meryl Smith.

Zintle Mpupha and Ayanda Malinga scored South Africa's tries in the loss.

### **Men's 13th place: Japan see off Wales in the play-off**

Four converted tries made sure that Japan saw off Wales 28-14 in the men's 13th place play-off.

Timo Fiti Sufia, Taiga Ishida, Yoshihiro Noguchi and Shotaro Tsuoka were the try scorers for Japan, meaning that seven pointers from Tom Williams and Morgan Williams were not enough for Wales in a 28-14 loss.

Tyler Morgan's try double had helped lead Wales to a 27-7 win over Canada in the semi-final earlier in the day, Moeki Fukushi, Taiga Ishida (2) and Timo Fiti Sufia the try scorers for Japan in their last four 28-12 triumph over Kenya.

### **Women's 11th place play-off: Spain mount come back to defeat England**

Spain finished 11th in the women's event after they battled back from 14-12 down at half-time to defeat England in the 11th place play-off.

María García and Iera Echebarria scored tries for Spain in the first period, with one converted by Lea Ducher, but Ellie Boatman and Isla Norman-Bell tries, both converted by the latter, had England two points up after seven minutes.

The second half belonged to Spain and Ducher and Amalia Argudo scored tries and two of them were converted as they came out on top 26-14.

### **What's next?**

The men's HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series for 2022 still has two events to go.

The teams head to London for the event in the English capital at Twickenham Stadium on 28 - 29 May. There is then a break until the final round in Los Angeles on 27 - 28 August.

The women's HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series for 2022 is now finished....PACNEWS

PAC - PACIFIC MINI GAMES: INSIDE THE GAMES

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **Pacific Mini Games organisers issue last call for volunteers**

SAIPAN, 23 MAY 2022 (INSIDE THE GAMES)---Organisers of the Pacific Mini Games on the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI) have issued a final call for volunteers.

The deadline to sign up as a volunteer for the multi-sport event is Tuesday (24 May).

Anyone who is vaccinated against COVID-19 and at least 14 years of age may apply.

Volunteer coordinator Michele Joab said around 1,000 volunteers are wanted, as reported by the Saipan Tribune, but that there is no hard limit on numbers.

Organisers are targeting young people and schools in particular, with flexibility cherished.

Volunteering at the Pacific Mini Games is being marketed as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, with the event having never taken place in the CNMI before.

Competition is now less than a month away, due to run from June 17 to 25.

There are nine sports on the programme - baseball, badminton, golf, triathlon, athletics, beach volleyball, tennis, weightlifting and va'a.

The event was delayed from 2021 to 2022 because of the coronavirus pandemic and Super Typhoon Yutu causing destruction on Saipan.

Saipan is the largest island in the CNMI, which is a commonwealth of the United States...PACNEWS

NZ - RUGBY: AAP

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **Crusaders rout Fiji Drua in Super statement**

CHRISTCHURCH, 23 MAY 2023 (AAP)---The Crusaders have put their Super Rugby Pacific rivals on notice with a ruthless win over the Fijian Drua to strengthen their hold on second place.

The 61-3 win at Christchurch's Orangetheory Stadium on Friday went as forecast, their nine unanswered tries against the newcomers a handy margin boost as they fight with the Brumbies for second spot.

The sides began the penultimate round equal on points, the 9-3 Crusaders with one less victory but boasting seven valuable bonus points and victory over the Brumbies last weekend.

The Brumbies must now beat the first-placed Blues in Canberra on Sunday to keep pace, a loss all-but confirming a third-place finish.

That would set up a quarter-final against the sixth-placed team, which will be either NSW Waratahs, who are sixth on 33 points or the Queensland Reds who are seventh on 31.

"Since the Waratahs game (that they lost) and even the Blues we've dug deep, looked at ourselves, our game and started to build on the foundation of Crusaders rugby," captain Scott Barrett said.

"You never forget those sorts of games. The Force, we bounced back and had a challenge last week against the Brumbies and tonight was much tougher than the scoreline suggests."

The Drua managed to link phases together with relative comfort, but couldn't make inroads against the well-drilled host's defence.

And their turnovers were punished, the Crusaders cruising with four first-half tries including a competition-high 10th for Leicester Fainga'anuku in the second minute.

Flanker Tom Christie and Fijian-born All Blacks star Sevu Reece bagged doubles while Fergus Burke, at No.10 in place of the rested Richie Mo'unga, scored a try and kicked all but one conversion.

The Drua, based predominantly in northern NSW in their debut season, finish a campaign next weekend that's yielded two wins against the Chiefs while the Crusaders host the Reds.

"Definitely not our night, but the main thing is to learn from this against a champion side like the Crusaders," Drua captain Nemani Nagusa said.

"You miss a couple of opportunities and you pay for that. But we'll finish off against the Chiefs and come back stronger next year" ...PACNEWS

AUST - RUGBY: AAP

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **O'Connor injury scare as Reds find form against Moana Pasifika**

BRISBANE, 23 MAY 2022 (AAP)---James O'Connor's latest injury setback has soured a Queensland Reds win that snapped a four-game Super Rugby Pacific losing streak.

The Reds stuttered their way to a 34-22 victory over the last-placed Moana Pasifika at Suncorp Stadium on Friday.

A try in the 80th minute for Pasifika No.8 Henry Time-Stowers looked to have robbed the Reds of a bonus point, crucial in their tight fight with the NSW Waratahs for sixth spot.

That eventually proved to be the case, but not before what appeared to be a brilliant 80 metre team try finished by captain Tate McDermott was overturned due to a forward pass.

At one point playing with two less players after Matt Faessler and Fraser McReight were sin-binned for repeat infringements, the Reds were sweating as Pasifika moved to 22-15 with the first try after the break.

But a Jock Campbell double, well-deserved five-pointers to Harry Hoopert and Fraser McReight and a late intercept try for Harry Wilson was enough for the Reds (7-5).

O'Connor's exit with 20 minutes to play was a worry though, particularly for Wallabies coach Dave Rennie as he watched from the sidelines ahead of July's England Test series.

The No.10 had only returned from a knee injury last week and was again grimacing as he felt around that area, applying ice to his lower hamstring as he called it a night.

At best it would leave the crucial playmaker in doubt for the trip to face the Crusaders next week, with a quarter-final against either the Brumbies or the same opponents to follow a week later.

Reds' centre Josh Flook also had his bright performance ruined by a painful shoulder injury, the youngster needing the green whistle as he was taken from the field late in the contest.

Pasifika enforcer Timoci Tavatavanawai wreaked havoc with ball in hand, brushing off McDermott with a huge fend.

But McDermott didn't flinch, stopping the winger's next run in another captain's knock for the hosts....PACNEWS

FIJI - RUGBY: FIJI TIMES

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **Home support will boost Fiji Drua**

NADI, 23 MAY 2022 (FIJI TIMES)---The Fiji support this week is something Fijian Drua coach Mick Byrne and his players will be looking forward to when they take on the Chiefs in a Super Rugby Pacific clash at Churchill Park in Lautoka next week.

Following a 61-3 loss to the Crusaders on Friday night, Byrne said the support they'd received in their inaugural year in Super Rugby was massive boost to the players.

A good number of members from the Fijian community in Christchurch turned up at the Orangetheory Stadium to cheer the players on.

"We've had that in most stadiums we've gone to. There's a healthy Fijian community all around the world," Byrne said.

"We've noticed over the years with the 7s — wherever they've played they've carried a good crowd. The Fijian community has been great supporting us."

Byrne said they were expecting similar scenes of a sell-out crowd when the Drua hosted its first Super Rugby match against the Highlanders in April.

The Fijian Drua host the Chiefs in their last match of the season at 3pm on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Fijian Drua chief executive officer Brian Thorburn said tickets were selling fast, with 50 percent or more than 5000 tickets sold.

"No more than two weeks ago in Suva and again next week in Lautoka is that Fijian community is something we're gonna look forward to playing in front of.

"We're really looking forward to it. This has probably been the coldest game we've played this year and next week is gonna be the hottest we've played. So it will be a good contrast for us."...PACNEWS

TIMOR - NOC: INSIDE THE GAMES

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **NOC of Timor-Leste celebrates 20th anniversary of country's independence**

HANOI, 23 MAY 2022 (INSIDE THE GAMES)---The National Olympic Committee (NOC) of Timor-Leste has celebrated the country's 20-year anniversary of independence.

Athletes and officials competing at the ongoing Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in Vietnam's capital Hanoi gathered in the NOC headquarters at the Hyatt Regency West Hanoi Hotel, sharing a special cake, champagne and various snacks.

The celebration opened with a prayer and the national anthem, before team leaders praised athletes for the manner in which they represented Timor-Leste.

José Manuel Ramos-Horta, elected as President of Timor-Leste earlier this month, was congratulated on his victory, with the NOC declaring that it was looking forward to working with Ramos-Horta to enhance sport in the country.

Two of Timor-Leste's medallists at the SEA Games - Felisberto de Deus who placed second in the men's 5,000 metres and 10,000 metres and Santina Adelaide de Sousa Fernandes who took bronze in the women's under-49 kilograms taekwondo - earned special recognition.

Timor-Leste became the first new sovereign state of the 21st century to be recognised by the United Nations (UN) in 2002.

After a period of instability following the end of Portuguese colonial rule, Indonesian troops invaded the territory in 1975 and ruthlessly suppressed the independence movement.

It has been estimated that up to 200,000 people were killed by fighting, massacres, famine and disease during the occupation.

Timor-Leste voted for independence in 1999, and was officially recognised as an independent state by the UN three years later, on May 20, after a period of being governed by the United Nations Interim Administration for East Timor.

As an independent nation, Timor-Leste sent two athletes to the Athens 2004, Beijing 2008 and London 2012 Olympic Games, and then three to Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020.

Its nationals competed as part of the Individual Olympic Athletes team at Sydney 2000.

Timor-Leste has been represented by one athlete at the last three Winter Olympics, but has yet to win a medal at either edition.

The country has also featured at all five Asian Games since Busan 2002 without medalling, although it had won 35 medals in its first nine appearances at the SEA Games prior to the delayed Hanoi 2021....PACNEWS

PNG - RUGBY LEAGUE: ABC

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **PNG Kumuls' new head coach keen to make his mark**

PORT MORESBY, 23 MAY 2023 (ABC)---In his first interview since he was appointed as head coach of the PNG's national men's rugby league team, the Kumuls, Stanley Tepend has told Pacific Beat his intention is to build on the legacy of his predecessor Michael Marum, while putting his own stamp on the top job.

Tepend, who is currently assistant coach with the PNG Hunters, after leading Lae Snax Tigers to the Digicel Cup Premiership in Papua New Guinea last season, doesn't have time on his side, with the Kumuls set to play their first test match in over two years against Fiji next month.

He's begun the process of assembling a squad but concedes that the level of experience in the current Hunters team is not as great as in the past, and that means having to cast the selection net wider.

But in the meantime coach Tepend says the reality of what he is taking on has just about sunk in.

"Once the announcement was made, it's actually been weird in a way, has it really happened? Am I really the coach of the national side?2

"It didn't sink in until after the game the Hunters played against Townsville Blackhawks. After that win, I was just in my room thinking, geez, you know, it has really happened. And yeah, it's been unreal," Tepend said.

"But now I'm seeing that because of the late appointment, there's a lot of work to catch up on as a coach, eligibility of players and all that sort of stuff. And it's been tricky at times trying to balance with the Hunters, but the Hunters' staff have been really helpful."



Tepend was previously assistant to Michael Marum, before he opted to resign from his post and pursue a career in politics, with plans to run in PNG's election later this year.

The new coach says he intends to carry on where Marum left off, with PNG ranked fifth in the world, but he'd like to put his own mark on the top job too.

"(I'll be) just trying to carry on from the success that coach Michael had, but at the same time, there's probably an element where I'll probably change a little bit, but not too much, so we can try our best to just continue with the success that we've had."

Tepend's first assignment with the Kumuls will be the Pacific test against Fiji Bati in Sydney in June, followed by the Rugby League World Cup over in England in October.

In recent years the Hunters have formed the backbone of the PNG side, but the current team is generally much younger and with less experience than their predecessors, so the new coach is on the look out for players where ever he can find them.

"That makes it challenging trying to pick the national side, but I've got a clear indication of which (Hunters) players will be in the mix, it won't be as many as before, but it gives me an opportunity to take a look at other Queensland Cup teams with PNG players in them."

Tepend is also on the look out for players from the NRL who may be eligible to represent the Kumuls, and the Dragons' Jack de Belin, whose maternal grandmother was born in PNG has put his hand up.

"We've actually reached out to him already and he said he's really keen, so that's a really big bonus for us, and Bailey Biondi-Odo at the Bulldogs, we're just checking his eligibility."

But regardless of the team that lines up against Fiji, the new head coach says the one thing that can inspire and unite the players is the Kumuls' jersey.

2When they put that on, it doesn't matter how many NRL players we have, and my biggest challenge is not who we have or don't have, or what experience we don't have, but making sure that they understand what the jersey means to us." ...PACNEWS

VAN - AFL: ABC

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **AFL Vanuatu keen to grow in soccer mad nation, and push for International Cup place**

PORT VILA, 23 MAY 2022 (ABC)---Ambitious plans by AFL Vanuatu to spread the word about Australian Rules Football in a country where soccer is king have been stalled by the outbreak of COVID-19 that has spread across the nation.

But undeterred, a small band of Aussie Rules disciples have soldiered on, and spread their message via social media and through on-line training programmes.

And with the 2023 International Cup in Melbourne put back to 2024, the hope is by then Vanuatu might have a team ready to take part.

Nancy Patterson is AFL Vanuatu's Programme Director, and while she's the first to admit that soccer is the dominant force, she says interest in AFL is growing.

2Working as a development officer introducing football in different communities I have seen lots of people are showing interest, especially the kids. My major job is visiting the schools. So I found out that lots of kids are very interested in this game, we just need to work more and help them to know the basic skills especially," Patterson told Pacific Beat.

Working alongside Nancy Patterson, but at a distance because of the COVID-19 outbreak in Vanuatu, is Jarrod Landells, a volunteer sponsored by the Australian government who works as AFL Vanuatu's Communications, Media and Policy Liaison Officer.

"I think (AFL) as a niche sport like volleyball, table tennis, judo, rowing, they've all seen that the playing field is probably not level, but there are some really important ways that they can achieve some goals that they set themselves, whether it be an Olympic level or regional level or community based level," said Landells.

And AFL Vanuatu has had some success, but Nancy Patterson says progress is difficult without the right ground to play on.

"We have competitions going on, with six men's teams and five women's team, but the challenge we face is (not having) a footy oval that we should have, to get more people coming in and more teams to participate."

Taking cricket in the country as their inspiration, AFL Vanuatu's strategy extends well beyond getting good teams on to the field, and the hope is the game can contribute to the reduction of non-communicable disease rates in key population groups, and the reduction of domestic violence is also a target.

"We're committed to helping spread the message of reducing and hopefully eliminating gender based violence through fostering some relationships with men and women, boys and girls who are playing footy all on the same field," said Jarrod Landells.

"And the other thing is just building some really strong community leadership through sport, because there are a lot of young people in Vanuatu who aspire to bigger and better things. And a lot of their heroes and their role models are international stars of sport. And we think that we can get some really great outcomes if we do the same thing on a more localized and smaller scale level of getting those young people to see themselves as the role models of the future for their community."

The good news for AFL Vanuatu is that COVID-19 restrictions on team sports have been lifted, and so the on-field action can resume.

Long term they harbour ambitions of entering a team in the 2023 International Cup which will now be played in Melbourne in 2024.

Jarrod Landells says a year's delay will actually help Vanuatu by giving them more time to catch up with the leading Pacific nations, Fiji, Nauru and the reigning International Cup champions, Papua New Guinea.

"We had some preliminary discussions within AFL Vanuatu and our partners about either 2023 or 2026 being a soft target for reaching the International Cup and look who knows we have some very good players in the men's and women's senior teams," he said.

"Some of them have played in Australia before, so they've got some good experience with tactical knowledge and training techniques. And I'd be lying if I said that I wouldn't want to strive for the next International Cup, but it's a very competitive field and not everyone gets the chance to make it, so we'll try our best." ...PACNEWS

AUST - RUGBY: SMH

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **'Drawcard team': Kepu excited as Folau among several stars returning to Tonga**

SYDNEY, 23 MAY 2022 (SMH)---Sekope Kepu says his World Cup days are behind him but the former Wallabies prop is excited by the prospect of his friend Israel Folau playing for Tonga at next year's tournament - and possibly against Australia A this July.

Kepu confirmed the former Wallabies fullback, who was sacked by Rugby Australia in 2019 for controversial social media posts, is keen to take advantage of changes in World Rugby eligibility laws and switch to Tonga.

Where once it was very difficult for players to play Test rugby for a second country if they'd been capped, changes by World Rugby in 2021 mean Folau can represent Tonga via his parental link, and having sat out Test rugby for at least three years.

Folau last played for the Wallabies in 2018 and after a failed bid to return to the NRL, he is now playing rugby for NTT Communications Shining Arcs in Japan under former Waratahs coach Rob Penney.

Tonga coach Toutai Kefu said Folau's eligibility is due to be reviewed by World Rugby next week and he hopes to bring the 73-Test Wallaby in to play in the Pacific Nations Cup in July, in which the Test teams of Tonga, Fiji and Samoa, along with Australia A, will play a three-game tournament in Fiji.

"We have been pretty proactive. As soon as they changed the rule, we approached players straight away and notified World Rugby these are the players we are looking at," Kefu said.

"They have to rubber-stamp the paperwork it but we don't foresee any problems."

Folau told AFP last month he was "definitely interested" in playing for Tonga. "It would be a huge honour if I got the opportunity," he said.

Kefu said he was excited by the potential of a Tonga team with ex-Wallabies and All Blacks in it.

"I still keep in touch with Izzy and it sounds like he is pretty keen," Kefu said. "Obviously playing on the world stage is a big thing. I know a lot of people would be tuning in to watch him. He is doing his thing in Japan and doing really well over there.

"And if they can get a few of those of guys from around the world, Charles Piutau and Malakai Fekitoa and those boys, I am sure they will be a drawcard team. There are some big names there. It would be awesome for the game."

Kefu said: "[Folau] is only 33, 34 and by no means is he over the hill. He is playing good footy up in Japan and he'd have a year and a half to get his body conditioned to hopefully play in the World Cup next year."

Kefu is keen for Folau to also play for Tonga but the 110-Test Wallaby said he would be happier watching on from the couch.

"The way I see it is there a ton of good young Tongan props and good young Wallabies props and it is time for those guys to take the opportunities and I will enjoy being on the backburner and watching on," Kefu said...PACNEWS

AUST - RUGBY LEAGUE: NSWRL

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **Kaiviti Silktails fall agonisingly short to St Mary's in Ron Massey Cup**

SYDNEY, 23 MAY 2022 (NSWRL)---Kaiviti Silktails have fallen short in what would have been a gutsy victory with 12 men, going down 18-16 to St Mary's at St Mary's Leagues Stadium.

The pulsating match had just about everything with the physicality and muddy pitch making it reminiscent of 1980s rugby league. Both sides were aggressive from the outset and it never faltered from either team with fatigue refusing to play a factor.

Joe Vaegaau opened the scoring when he crashed over after five minutes for the home side, before a barnstorming run from Osea Natoga resulted in the winger offloading to his centre, reducing the margin to 6-4.

St Mary's extended the lead when Anthony Layoun cut out his centre for Chris Ausene-Scanlon to cross, but the Silktails stayed close in the contest, receiving a reward when Watisoni Waqanisaravi crashed over close to the line.

With Silktails halfback Mosese Qionimacawa being sent off for his part in a melee and St Mary's prop Atonio Tauillili being sent to the bin for a high tackle, both sides needed to dig deep. The Silktails then punished St Mary's when winger Viliame Tutivuli embarked on a scintillating 50-metre run down the left flank to put the Fijian's back in front for the first time in the game.

Eventually consistent goal line pressure took its toll with David Fale scoring in the corner, and Jake Rafferty-Butfield nailing the sideline conversion for the win.

St Mary's are seven from eight in 2022 but the Kaiviti Silktails will be proud of their efforts in what could go down as one of the games of the season.

The Silktails face the Sea Eagles at Mascot Oval this week with St Mary's hosting Mounties St Mary's Leagues Stadium....PACNEWS

AUST - RUGBY LEAGUE: QRL

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **Dolphins retain Stan Joyce Cup with win over PNG Hunters**

BRISBANE, 23 MAY 2022 (QRL)--The Redcliffe Dolphins will retain the Stan Joyce Cup in 2022 having defeated a fast-finishing Hunters side 30-16 in miserable conditions in Round 9 of Hostplus Cup.

The Dolphins were animated from the kick-off, capitalising on a Hunters' forward pass and ruck infringement in the opening sets to camp themselves on the Hunters' try line.

The Hunters were defending well until Dolphins hooker Sheldon Pitama spied some space around the ruck and slid over in the slippery conditions to give the Dolphins a four-point lead.

The Hunters would respond immediately, working upfield from the kick-off thanks to a relieving penalty before punching through the Dolphins' middle to set up for a right edge shift. Hunters halfback Jamie Mavoko would provide the deft grubber for Rodrick Tai on the last tackle to bring the scores to 6-4.

After a fast start, the game settled into a grind with poor ball control and ill discipline helping both teams get out of their own end and mount an attack.

It was the Dolphins who would adapt best to the wet conditions, however, with Dolphins fullback Trai Fuller impressing with a 50-metre run out of his own end before diving on a clever kick back in behind the ruck in the 18th minute to score under the posts.

New Zealand Warriors-contracted outside back Edward Kosi was next to trouble the scoreboard, crossing on either side of half-time thanks to some smooth backline movements down the Dolphins' right edge before Cody Hunter scored in the 60th minute to give the Dolphins a 20-point lead.

The Hunters showed great intent and energy to keep turning up in the horrid conditions and weren't short of scoring opportunities themselves throughout the match. A desperate Redcliffe defensive unit held firm for the most part, until two quick tries inside the final ten minutes saw PNG finish the game encouragingly.

Brandon Nima ducked out of dummy-half close to the line and found prop-forward Dilbert Isaac in support to score in the 74th minute, before a lovely pass from Wartovo Puara Jnr sent Sylvester Namu over virtually untouched beside the right post with just 30 seconds remaining.

The score will disappoint for Hunters fans but their resilience in awful conditions was compelling and they will take some confidence from the way they fought themselves back into the game.

Coach comments

Hunters coach Matt Church was disappointed given the improvements shown over the last two weeks.

"That was a disappointing result for us. Everything we've done well over the last two weeks we just seemed to forget today," Church said.

"We know we're at our best when changing the direction of our attack and using the power and footwork of our middles, but we just went away from that today.

"You saw what happened when we played to our strengths late in the game – they couldn't stay with us and we scored twice in 10 minutes.

"Credit to Redcliffe, they barely made a mistake in the second half and were good tonight, but we can be better. The conditions were awful and we were willing on both sides of the ball, but just not smart enough with how we used the footy today."

The Dolphins face Ipswich Jets in Round 10.

The Hunters will take on Tweed Seagulls....PACNEWS

NZ - RUGBY: RUGBY.COM.AU

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **Waratahs break Dunedin hoodoo as they defeat Highlanders**

DUNEDIN, 23 MAY 2022 (RUGBY.COM.AU) ---The NSW Waratahs have stunned the Highlanders, coming away with the 32-20 win in Dunedin.

Darren Coleman's men started strong, responding to a quick Highlanders try via Will Harris.

However, they were given a gift opportunity when Sam Gilbert was sent off for an ugly cleanout on Michael Hooper.

Tries to Mark Nawaqanitawase and Hooper allowed the visitors to build a commanding 19-7 lead at the break.

Whilst the Highlanders hit back through Scott Gregory, Darren Coleman's men showed the fight that has typified their revival, with Edmed booting two penalties and crossing for a try to seal the win.

It was their first victory against New Zealand opposition across the Tasman since 2015.

The victory took the Waratahs (8-5) ahead of the Queensland Reds and into sixth on the ladder.

They face a clash with the ladder-leading Blues back in Sydney on Saturday as the last round determines the top eight finals.

The Highlanders couldn't have started better with lock Josh Dickson barging across the line in the third minute after an early turnover.

NSW hit back eight minutes later when No.8 Harris showed some deft footwork to plant the ball between the sticks for a 7-7 scoreline.

The game took a turn in the 29th minute when Highlanders five-eighth Gilbert was sent off for an ugly lifting tackle in which Waratahs flanker Michael Hooper was up-ended.

The Wallabies captain was making his return to play from concussion but escaped unscathed.

The visitors immediately used their numerical advantage with a long, floating pass finding winger Mark Nawaqanitawase to score.

Then Hooper showed his pace to dart from the back of a ruck, running 20 metres to score and give his team a commanding 19-7 halftime lead.

The Waratahs lost prop Paddy Ryan to a yellow card early in the second half for a head knock as he attempted to clean out.

With Waratahs fullback Ben Donaldson spilling an Aaron Smith kick, the Highlanders pounced on the loose ball and used the extra space to put centre Scott Gregory over in the corner.

After a previous penalty strike the margin was just four points with the home side on the march.

But the Waratahs refused to wilt under pressure and five-eighth Tane Edmed kept the scoreboard ticking over with two penalties.

Playing his first game since his return from Japan, forward Ned Hanigan shrugged off the defence and then off-loaded to Edmed for the Waratahs' fourth try.

NSW attempted to chase another try after regulation time to secure a bonus point, but turned the ball over for Liam Coombes-Fabing to have the final say for the Highlanders....PACNEWS

AUST - RUGBY: AAP

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **Brumbies eye final against Tahs or Reds**

SYDNEY, 23 MAY 2023 (AAP)----The Brumbies are on a likely collision course with the NSW Waratahs or Queensland Reds in the Super Rugby Pacific finals, with their opponents to be determined in the final round.

The Canberra side sit third on the competition table heading into their last match before the top-eight final series after a heart-breaking loss to the ladder-leading Blues.

They looked headed for a famous victory at home on Saturday night until Beauden Barrett slotted a field goal after the fulltime siren for a 21-19 win.

The Crusaders are in second, five points clear of the Brumbies, while the Chiefs round out the top four, a further three points back so could still do some last-round damage.

Brumbies coach Dan McKellar was seething at the 16-5 penalty count in the Blues' favour which hamstrung his team's hopes of a win.

"A 16-5 penalty count at home - it was tough to take but what do you say ... I don't want to get myself into trouble," McKellar said.

"I'm shattered as I thought our effort and attitude deserved better

"We were 20 seconds away from a pretty special win."

Beaten 37-26 by the Crusaders the previous round, McKellar drew confidence from his team's performances against the two NZ powerhouses heading into the play-offs.

"The last two weeks, while we've lost both, we know we've got the game to beat both the Crusaders and the Blues and it looks like they will finish top two so we take something from it," he said.

The Waratahs secured a 32-20 victory over the Highlanders on Sunday - their first in Dunedin in 14 years - which meant they climbed over the Reds (35 points) into sixth, two points ahead on the ladder.

The Hurricanes are in fifth (38 points), one point ahead of the Waratahs (37 points), with fourth and fifth to clash in week one of the finals.

As it stands the Waratahs would face the Brumbies in Canberra in the quarter-finals and the Reds would face the Crusaders.

That could change if the Reds upset the Crusaders in Christchurch when they meet in the last round while the Waratahs also have a tough assignment, hosting the Blues.

The Reds could be without veteran James O'Connor who suffered a hamstring injury late in their 34-22 win over Moana Pasifika on Friday night.

The Brumbies have a final-round meeting with lowly-placed Moana Pasifika in Auckland, with the newcomers having to back up from a postponed match against the Western Force this Tuesday night.

The Chiefs must travel to Churchill Park in Lautoka to take on Fijian Drua.....PACNEWS

SWITZ - SOCCER: INSIDE THE GAMES

PACNEWS SPORT: Mon 23 May 2022

### **FIFA World Cup venues to be announced on 16 June**

ZURICH, 23 MAY 2022 (INSIDE THE GAMES)---Host cities for the 2026 FIFA World Cup in the United States, Mexico and Canada are set to be announced on June 16.

Sixteen locations in the U.S, three in Canada and three in Mexico are all vying to stage matches.

With Canada and Mexico each anticipated to have three host stadiums, and 16 planned in total, there are in effect 16 American venues battling for 10 spots on the roster.

This increases to 17 with the acknowledgement that two stadiums in the Los Angeles area, the Rose Bowl and SoFi Stadium, have been listed as possibilities should it be successful as is expected.

The Rose Bowl was the scene of the 1994 FIFA World Cup final.

SoFi Stadium is the world's most expensive stadium, venue of this year's Super Bowl and due to stage much of the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Opening Ceremony.

Orlando's Camping World Stadium joins the Rose Bowl as the only proposed US venue to have been used for the 1994 World Cup, and along with the Pasadena venue is the only one in the US not home to a National Football League (NFL) gridiron team.

Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium, Gillette Stadium near Boston, Paul Brown Stadium in Cincinnati, Dallas' AT&T Stadium - which before SoFi Stadium could claim to be the world's most expensive - NRG Stadium in Houston, Miami's Hard Rock Stadium and Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City have all been put forward as candidates.

Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara - home of the San Francisco 49ers - Seattle's Lumen Field, Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia, M&T Bank Stadium in Baltimore, Denver venue Empower Field at Mile High, Nashville's Nissan Stadium and MetLife Stadium, in New Jersey but also representing New York City in this context, complete the list of hopefuls.

M&T Bank Stadium also encompasses Washington D.C. after the bid to bring games to the US capital merged with the Baltimore-Maryland 2026 effort.

Edmonton, Toronto and Vancouver are due to stage games in Canada, at the Commonwealth Stadium, BMO Field and BC Place.

Guadalajara, Mexico City and Monterrey, at Estadio Akron, Estadio Azteca and Estadio BBVA, make up the Mexican line-up.

FIFA is billing the event on June 16 as a "major announcement" and which matches the venues are staging is also expected to be revealed.

MetLife Stadium was suggested as the venue for the final in the successful United Bid's bid book, with Atlanta and Dallas suggested for the semi-finals.

"In line with the previous stages of the FIFA World Cup 2026 selection process, any announcement will be made in the best interests of football, taking into consideration the needs of all stakeholders involved, as we aim to lay the foundations for the tournament to be delivered successfully across all three countries," Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) President Victor Montagliani said.

"We can only reiterate our appreciation to all the cities and the three member associations for their efforts and dedication to this process."

A FIFA delegation has been able to visit the stadiums vying for selection, with the process delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It had initially been planned for host venues to be finalised in early 2021.

The FIFA World Cup has never been held across three countries before.

Canada has never hosted the event before, but Mexico was the sole host in 1970 and 1986.

The Azteca was the venue for the final on both occasions....PACNEWS