

CLUB ESTABLISHED AFTER SUB-UNION SPLIT

To those of a generation who witnessed the advent, this is quite a story and a satisfactory answer to years of frustrations, suggestions, ideas and planning to achieve a satisfactory scheme for our district to do honour to this illustrious game of Rugby that we love. To those who did and gave so much to the formation of “Western” a large debt of gratitude is owed. The planning, the materials, the cartage, the drainage, the financing, so much was given. Names we will not mention they are too numerous and anyway those who gave only little most likely did their utmost.

THE ORIGINS

Kaipara Sub-Union as it was known covered an area from Hobsonville in the South to Glorit and Silverdale in the North. East Coast Bays in the East and all that rugged West Coast line from Bethels to the Kaipara Harbour. During World War II rugby went into recess and it was in 1946 that enthusiasm was rekindled. Clubs to answer the call were Glorit, Combined Maoris, Parakai, Helensville, Kaukapakapa, Silverdale, East Coast Bays, Hobsonville Air Force, Hobsonville Civilians, Whenuapai Air Force and Kumeu. The competition was keen, fields were paddocks, donated buy some generous “Cockies” washing facilities, a cattle trough, a creek or were non-existent – playing gear a lot to be desired and transport the back of the local “Carriers” truck. Ages in some teams ranged from 16 to 46 but there were exceptions. “Ah”, the perfect bliss of playing on well-groomed Air Force grounds – hot showers, a cool beer in the mess – then home to milk the cows (by hand).

Our “Rep” team in those days was competitive with trips to Thames, South Auckland (Counties) and numerous appearances on Eden Park. And so it went, some teams strengthening, some teams weakening. In 1950 Riverhead Club came into being and eventually established claim on Riverhead War Memorial Park as headquarters.

It was about 1961 that Kaipara Sub Union began to decline. Some Clubs and quite a few players headed for Auckland and the big time, other Clubs struggled to field teams. Things went from bad to worse and eventually meetings were held, ideas exchanged and suggestions aired. Two suggestions made sense:

1. To keep a “Rep” team in top form, fed by the keen and able players from the various Clubs and field it in the Auckland Competition.
2. Divide Kaipara into areas, amalgamating Clubs in these areas and playing in the Auckland Competition.

Suggestion (2) won the day, (Western United) was to consist of an amalgamation of Kumeu, Riverhead, Hobsonville Civilians, Hobsonville Air Force, Whenuapai Air Force and Helensville. Now don't think that all this amalgamation was going to be a 'piece of cake'. Feelings on some issues ran pretty high – imagine a good loyal Riverhead supporter being asked to be “palsy” with a good loyal Kumeu supporter. A good loyal Kumeu player being asked to swap

his Black and Green jersey for a Red and White one. What to call this amalgamation of Clubs. What colours to choose? Where should headquarters be etc.

Eventually agreement was reached on Riverhead War Memorial Park as Headquarters. Colours chosen and a name established. Club funds from those Clubs that had any were pooled. Committees formed, officers elected and "Western United" was officially born. The year was 1963.

Our first President was Ross Garnham, Secretary was Clive Welch and Chairman Ben Parkinson.

Helensville eventually took the bull by the horns and formed their own Club.

Player support in Western United was good with the Senior teams playing in Division Two and making the finals for Division One in the first season.

Facilities at the "Park" were stretched to the limit and a decision was made to build a new Club Room in 1974. Many were the good citizens and businessmen that came to the "party". The optimism and at times the despair was all part of a wonderful community effort. The building was finished in 1976 and officially opened by Major General Pearce.

The Club is indebted to those who assisted by taking out debentures, life membership was granted to 70 members on the payment of \$1,000 each. While this assisted enormously with the initial financing, inflation and the loss of annual revenue made this a questionable exercise.

Today the Clubrooms with furnishing and equipment are a valuable asset and an extra section has been purchased to allow for expansion although in the meantime it provides an extra carpark area.

For many years the Club relied on RNZAF members to make up the senior team and although they gave the Club loyal service their frequent transfers and inter service commitments meant it was difficult to form a stable base for the Club.

Over the years this trend has changed and by 1982 the Senior Squad included 14 players who started as schoolboys with the Club. In addition, both netball and tennis have become affiliated to the Club, introducing new members to the Club.

Over the years "Western" has had its ups and downs in competitions but being a country club have always enjoyed their Rugby, no matter what the score was. And now we have a North Harbour Union to compete in! Can't go wrong can we?

FOOTNOTE:

In 1998 Western United changed their name to Kumeu Rugby Club to better reflect the region. By 2010 Helensville Premier were struggling with numbers and Kumeu were not fielding a Premier team. After much debate the decision was made to unite Kumeu Premiers with Helensville forming the Western Pioneers brand which debuted in 2011 and now includes a Premier Two team.

Both Kumeu and Helensville continue to field Senior grade teams and both Clubs are particularly strong with their Junior grades.