



MAGIC 100: Paul Tupai holds aloft the Ranfurly Shield surrounded by his jubilant Bay of Plenty team mates.

PHOTOS: BRETT PHIBBS/NZ HERALD

Ranfurly Shield still matters

Who said the Ranfurly Shield was an antiquated part of rugby history and no longer relevant? Watching Bay of Plenty players and supporters react with such unbridled joy after their historic win over Auckland on August 15 proved yet again that it is the big one – the most coveted provincial sporting trophy in New Zealand.

It has the ability to stir the emotions in a manner that transcends generations and cultures.

This was best summed up by Bay of Plenty's veteran warrior Paul Tupai who fortuitously combined his 100th match with the dramatic shield win. He was the sole survivor from the playing fifteen in the 1996 challenge at Eden Park when the Bay managed to lose after leading 29-11 with eight minutes to go. This was the most heart-wrenching of all the union's long list of incredible shield misses.

Tupai admits he cried tears of sadness and frustration that afternoon and he must have won-

Peter White on Sport

dered if he would ever be able to hold the shield aloft. The road to 100 games for him has been pitted with injuries and falling out-of-favour with the selectors.

When I saw him finally get his hands on the shield and shed more tears, it was the moment for me when my emotions took over for a few seconds. A lifetime's support for a team where major successes can be counted easily on one hand does not condition you to dealing with a moment like that.

I turned to my left and a large BOP supporter was at my side. He was crying too – and laughing – it was an interesting sight. I asked him how long he had been waiting.

He said since his father's time in 1922 when the first Bay challenge against Hawkes Bay was lost due to a missed conversion in injury time.

He said the win over Auckland was the best way to win the shield – over the best team and city. As I walked away to see what the players were doing downstairs, a beautiful Samoan lady began yelling out to the Auckland players 20m below us.

"I love you guys...don't be too sad...you will be back soon." I loved it.

During the match I saw match-winner Glenn Jackson's dad Warwick going through the emotions only a parent can know. I enjoyed watching his body language as he went with Glen's achievements during the match and showed how proud he was. That was special too.

Auckland were emotional too but they were hurting.

An ignorant section of sports radio callers have recently suggested that the big unions like Auckland do not care about the shield anymore. "It should be played for by the smaller unions," they bleated in unison. Yeah

right. One look at how hard the Auckland players took the loss showed what it meant.

Yet their captain and coach reacted to the media with a positive attitude and typified what it takes to be a champion side – you win and lose with dignity.

The sporting arena is where many aspects of life are learnt – how to train and aim for excellence, learn from the emotional rollercoaster of winning and losing, contribute to a joint team effort, and to confront your fears and weaknesses.

In this modern era of professionalism with an emphasis on financial rewards and the influence of the corporate world, some old fashioned values can make the difference.

Bay of Plenty coach Vern Cotter, a hard-nut with a collection of well-crafted phrases befitting his love of French culture, summed up why his team won against much-fancied opposition.

He said they knew Auckland

had individual brilliance in their players but he backed his team to beat that sort of team.

So it came down to character, attitude, desire, and a yearning for something that you grow up in the Bay of Plenty wanting but never attaining until now – to win the Ranfurly Shield.



VICTORY: Apoua Stewart (left) and Adrian Cashmore.

Inline hockey players needed to fill brand new stadium

by Owen Hembry

South Auckland's Sabres and Storm inline hockey clubs have got a brand new stadium in Manurewa, but they need more players to ensure its future.

The number of children playing in the beginners' league is down to just 25 from 120 since the clubs moved from East Tamaki at the beginning of the year.

Team organiser Shirley Peddie says adverts, posters and word of mouth are the clubs' best hope for re-building local support.

With new members needing only to bring their skates, bicycle helmets and a mouth guard it is an affordable sport for beginners.

"It's a very family oriented sport. One kid plays, then others join in – in the end so does their Dad! It's very addictive. There needs to be a warning," she says.

Club president Scott Bason says the \$65,000 Roscommon Road rink, which will be officially opened on August 28, is the culmination of eight months of fundraising and building by volunteers.

Forced to leave their East Tamaki rink because of a finishing lease, they had to be ready to play by March for the start of the 2004 season.

Bason says the task was achieved just in time by club volunteers with the help of local

companies. The first games were played with the stadium only partially built.

"We cut it very close to the wire for finding a site on time."



INLINE HOCKEY: family sport.

A new plastic playing surface accounted for half the total budget for the new stadium.

The new surface, which has an ice-like appearance, is less stressful on players' knees and joints, provides better wheel grip, and makes the puck move faster.

Visitors are surprised when they see an inline game for the first time.

"They think it's a fantastic sport. It's fast, physical and great teamwork. They come in and say 'I never knew this existed'," Bason says.

More than 100 people are expected for the opening ceremony of the new rink but, Bason says, local politicians are not expected to attend.

"We actually spent between two and three years talking to the council and got nowhere."

New Zealand Inline Hockey Association executive officer Krystyna Beardman says support

for the sport comes from more than 3000 players at 33 clubs around New Zealand.

"The whole thing is run by volunteers. The priority for funding seems to be high level, high profile sports," Mrs Beardman says.

To help New Zealand's amateur players compete with professional overseas players the association has developed a new specialist in-line coaching course.

Andrew Peddie, Sabres and New Zealand forward player and son of proud mum Shirley, played in the 2004 Inline Hockey World Championship recently held in Germany.

"It's such a different level to what there is in New Zealand. They're just so good at passing and shooting," he says.

However, with increased competition for national places from the next generation of players the heat is definitely on. Thankfully there is no ice to melt.