

College Sport

in association with the Massey University Journalism School

Wellington College build for 'special' year

LIAM HYSLOP

Wellington College's first XV will take a patient approach to the season as they look to blood a host of new players.

The defending WelTec Premiership champions have just 10 players returning from last season and went through their pre-season with losses to Francis Douglas Memorial College (32-22), Feilding High School (38-29) and Hastings Boys' High School (50-10).

But they rallied well on Saturday to open the Transitz Coachlines First XV Festival with a 19-13 win over Gisborne Boys' High School.

Co-coach Greg Sharland said getting the win was a big confidence boost for a relatively young side.

"At this stage when you've had a couple of tough games, particularly against Hastings Boys', who are a largely returned team, but to have a win against Gisborne Boys' was nice.

"It's not a game we win very often, they're a tough team to beat at any time. It was certainly a confidence boost for our guys to hold on and we perhaps should have put a few more points on them."

The start to the season has been hampered by half the returning players being out through injury, but as they slowly filtered back in their level of play should continue to increase, Sharland said.

Even the Hastings loss had a sil-



Wellington College player Josh Morgan Ranui tries to evade a Hastings Boys' High School tackler during their pre-season clash last month.

PHOTOS: DAVID BROWNLIE



Wellington College showed good defensive resilience to win the second half against highly rated Hastings Boys' High School.

ver lining. Down 45-3 at halftime they won the second half against a team many have tipped to not only win the Hurricanes regional title again, but go one better than last year and win the national title.

The priority early in the season has been to instil the right culture in the team, Sharland said.

"With this particular group it will be a slow start because there are so many new faces. A lot of it

around this stage of the season is building the culture and understanding what it is to play for this team and what it is to be a Wellington College boy.

"And, of course, it is a very

special year being our 150th, so there's a little bit more on it and they'll be keen to represent their school well in the 150th year."

Wellington's next assignment will be a traditional away to

Napier Boys' High School, before playing the curtain raiser to the Hurricanes-Cheetahs game on May 20 at Westpac Stadium, which will also be broadcast on Sky Sport.

Sharland was predicting a wide open WelTec Premiership when it kicks off on May 27. He expected as many as six teams to be in the hunt for the title.

"I don't think there is any team at this stage putting their hand up and saying they're going to dominate. If one of the teams has a good year they could go on and win it."

St Pat's Town started the festival with a 22-18 loss to Palmerston North Boys' High School, while Wairarapa College also felt the wrath of Hastings in a 46-7 loss and Rongotai College went down to Napier Boys' 22-8.

The remaining 16 first XV's in the Wellington region have entered a knockout-style grading system to get into the WelTec Premiership, which has been expanded from eight to 10 teams this season.

Both Scots College and St Pat's Silverstream have to go through grading games this year due to where they finished last season.

Scots were defaulted to in round one on Saturday by Wainuiomata High School, while Stream beat Kapiti College 53-21.

Other results saw St Bernard's College beat Tawa College 33-20, Bishop Viard were too strong for Paraparaumu College in a 70-20 win, Porirua College outgunned Mana College 32-20, HIBS beat Onslow College 80-12, Hutt Valley High School edged Aotea College 24-22 and Naenae College ran out 31-14 winners against Taita College to claim the Avalon Cup.

College Sport Wellington
Where sports stars unfold

Major Sponsors: