

COLLEGE SPORT



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Town ready for rare chance

RUGBY

FIVE years since a final, 20 years since a win.

Those are the statistics that will remind the St Pat's Town first XV that appearances in the rugby premierships final are not occasions to be wasted.

The school has claimed the McEvedy Shield three times in the past four years but none of the players in the senior rugby squad has experienced a premier one rugby final during their school years.

That will change when Town meet defending titleholders Scots College at Porirua Park on Sunday.

Town have regularly claimed a spot in the first four but the last time the first XV made a final was in 2010, when they went in as favourites against St Pat's Silverstream but lost 21-13.

Town has not won the Wellington competition since the 1995, when they beat Rongotai in the final.

The 2015 squad claimed a final spot with a 23-20 semifinal win over Silverstream last weekend, after being down 20-8 at halftime.

Few appreciated the win more than Town skipper Jack Nelson-Murray, who had to go through months of remedial work after surgery on his shoulder in November.

The loose forward is in his third season in the first XV but played little rugby last season, after dislocating his shoulder in a grading game. He had six weeks off but two games later dislocated it again, in the traditional against Francis Douglas - "but much worse".

It was six months before Nelson-Murray could return to rugby, though he did play some cricket in the first term.

"I haven't felt any pain [in the shoulder] since I've been back but it was more a case of getting my mind right and my confidence back," he said.

"I started wicket-keeping again during the Gillette tournament [in late March] and was a bit nervous about diving on it. But the confidence came back as I did more."

Injury threatened to disrupt Nelson-Murray's season again a fortnight ago, after he had to come off towards the end of the traditional against Silverstream. "There was a pull at the top of my Achilles."

His foot was in a moon boot "for a few days" and he missed the match against Wairarapa that weekend but did not contemplate missing the semifinal clash with Silverstream.

"It was a little bit sore but for the big games, I think you have to harden up a bit. And I didn't feel it after the game."

"Making the premier one final



St Pat's Town skipper and openside flanker Jack Nelson-Murray will have a key role in the premierships rugby final.

Photo: MIKE LEWIS

FINAL DETAILS

Porirua Park, Sunday, 2.15
Scots v St Pat's Town
Live on Sky Rugby Channel

is huge and everyone is pretty pumped up for it. It's really good for the year 13s in the squad. Quite a few of us have been playing together since the under-15s and been in the XV for three years."

Nelson-Murray has had an even longer association with the Town first five-eighth Zac Donaldson, who leads the cricket XI. "We have been playing cricket and rugby together since year 5."

"We were both keen to have a big season and Zac has worked really hard to get back after breaking his ankle."

Nelson-Murray is confident Town will test a Scots side who are unbeaten in the competition.

"We respect the way they [Scots] play their rugby but it was a close game last time [37-32 to Scots] and finals rugby is a lot different from a round robin game."

The semifinal win over Silverstream, who had beaten Town by 15 points 10 days earlier, would have been a significant confidence-builder for Town.

Town kept Silverstream scoreless in the second half, after conceding four tries in the first 35 minutes, while adding three tries themselves.

"I was getting pretty poorly and got a bit of an earful at halftime," Nelson-Murray said. "After that, we started playing the sort of rugby we wanted to play."

However, it took a try-saving

tackle from Donaldson to keep Town in front. "Zac took Losi [Filipo] out of the corner in the last minute of the game," Nelson-Murray said.

Donaldson, who did not return to rugby till last month, shifted from halfback to first five-eighth against Silverstream and will wear the No 10 jersey again on Sunday, with Luke Georgeson at halfback.

There will be a forced change in the backline with vice-captain Paul Bickle, who played at second five-eighth against Silverstream, breaking a collarbone in the semifinal. "It was gutting for Paul," Nelson-Murray said. "It's his last year and he's one of the hardest-working guys in the team."

Town coach Glenn Donaldson was impressed with the way his team came back in the semifinal.

"It was an amazing game and showed they do have that self-belief now. We were terrible in the first half and the halftime team talk was rather loud. But they were able to turn it around."

"There is an opportunity [in the final]. It's our turn to step up and the boys are fizzing about it."

"They were only five points away from Scots [in the opening round] and we are playing a lot better now. We also have some real strength on the bench and they gave us a huge boost against Silverstream."

Town will focus on retaining possession through their big pack but much will depend on whether they are able to contain the twin threats of Peter and Thomas Umaga-Jensen. "We have got to make those tackles and really sit on those two," Donaldson said.

Unbeaten but not unbeatable

SCOTS COLLEGE will have form and the law of averages on their side in the premier one rugby final.

Scots hold favouritism after maintaining their unbeaten run in the local competition with a 41-13 semifinal victory over Wellington College.

However, heading into the final with an unbeaten record has proved a heavy burden in recent years and it is at least six years since the top qualifier won a final.

But that also suggests the pattern is due to be broken.

Silverstream won the title in 2010, beating Town in the final, after qualifying fourth and losing twice to Town earlier in the season.

Silverstream were unbeaten going into the 2011 final but lost narrowly to Wellington College and the roles were reversed the following year, when Silverstream recorded an unexpected 6-3 win over College. The 2012 result came after Wellington had beaten Silverstream 29-3 and 24-11 in their two previous meetings that year.

It was more of the same in 2013, when Silverstream went down to Wellington after winning all their earlier games and defeating Wellington 25-11 in their traditional clash.

Scots, who snatched the 2014 title from Silverstream with the last play of the game, were expected to be competitive in the final but had never won a First XV match against Silverstream before.

The other pattern is that recent finals have been tight games, with three points the biggest margin over the past four years.

In any event, complacency should not be a problem for Scots this week. They have scored more than 30 points in all bar one of their eight competition games but were tested by both Town and Silverstream.

Scots beat Town 37-32 in the opening round, back in May, and were made to work by Silverstream before winning 16-12 in June.

The usual suspects starred for Scots in the semifinal, with free-running prop Alex Fidow rampant in the first half and the Umaga-Jensen twins a constant threat from any part of the field.

Thomas Umaga-Jensen limped off when subbed late in the game but is expected to be fit for Sunday.

Wellington College coach Lincoln Rawles suggested the Town pack would be a challenge for Scots but said any side could be stung by the Scots playmakers.

"Both Peter and Thomas are



Alex Fidow

'Fidow commits a lot of players to the tackle. They [Scots] use him well and it's very hard to contain a player of that size with his skills and who can move like that.'

Wellington College coach Lincoln Rawles

hard to contain when they get any room," Rawles said. "They are bigger than our loose forwards, with the pace of a back. You have to be pretty accurate with your tackling in a one-on-one situation."

"Fidow commits a lot of players to the tackle. They [Scots] use him well and it's very hard to contain a player of that size with his skills and who can move like that."

Scots coach Filo Tiatia has no doubt Town will attempt to dominate with their big pack. "Town and Silverstream are very similar. It's always about going forward and dominating the contest [up front]. It's in their DNA and it will never change."

Tiatia described his team's semifinal performance as OK. "We played with more urgency in the second half and made better decisions around protecting the ball. The boys supported each other and got the rewards but we need to keep improving."

"The final is going to be exciting for both teams and we are looking forward to it."

Silverstream coach Rob Ackerman was not making excuses for his side's loss to Town. "We made too many unforced errors. You can't make as many mistakes as we did and expect to win a semifinal," he said.

Forman's cracker year runs on

CROSS-COUNTRY

KELSEY FORMAN is in good company.

Forman is the first Wellington athlete since Kate McLroy to win the women's youth (under-18) title at the national cross-country championships.

The Wellington East student had a 13-second margin over Canterbury's Harriet Bush, with Auckland's Kat Badham third, in Christchurch on Saturday.

McLroy, who was at Marsden College, won the cross-country title in 1997 and 1998. She went on to win a world mountain running title, represented New Zealand in the steplechase at the Commonwealth Games and in triathlon at the Olympics. She was also the New Zealand sportswoman of the year in 2005.

That would be a hard act for Forman to follow but the 17-year-old has had a big year.

She ran the 4 kilometres at the Hawsell Quarry course in 14:16 to match her second national title for 2015, the first coming when she

won the U-18 2km steplechase, in record time, at the national track and field championships in March.

She also finished second in the national secondary schools cross-country championships in June and has set personal best times for the 800m, 1500m, steplechase and 3000m this year.

Her latest win was also notable for the fact that she had only just returned from competing in the 2000m steplechase at the world youth championships in Colombia. Nearly all her training in the previous month had been on the track, and in very different conditions, but she was able to adapt in Christchurch.

She also enjoyed being back on grass, her favourite surface.

"I actually felt quite good [during the race]. I hung in behind Kat, who was pushing the whole way, and kicked at the end. I decided to pick up the pace with about a kilometre to run."

Forman's next target will be the Australian cross-country championships in Melbourne at the end of the month.

The New Zealand schools team for the Australian championships comprises 11 girls and 10 boys, with James Preston (Scots) in the boys' team.

Forman finished a creditable 17th in the girls' U-18 division last year and will contest the same age group this year. "I don't know anything about the opposition but a top 10 finish would be awesome."

Preston, who will tackle the U-20 grade in Melbourne, finished ninth in the U-20 8km in Christchurch, with the title taken by former St Pat's Town star Marcus Karamanolis.

Stefan Przychodczko (Paraparamu) finished fifth in the men's U-18, while Jack Marshall (Wellington College), Joel Carman (Wainuiomata), Max Karamanolis (Town) and Callum Stewart (Scots) also finished in the top 20, in a field of 57.

Imogen Skelton (Marsden), Phoebe van Boheemen (Queen Margaret) and Michaela Walker (Kapiti) were the other Wellington runners to make the top 10 in the women's U-18.



Wellington East athlete Kelsey Forman tracks Auckland's Kat Badham before kicking off to win the youth title at the national cross-country championships.

Photo: JO MURRAY

BRIEFS

SQUASH

Family double

Scott Galloway and younger sister Charlotte kept the College Sport Wellington squash championships in the family. Scott (Hutt Valley) beat John Allan (Wellington College) 15-13, 11-8, 11-8 in the boys final and Charlotte (Hutt Valley) defeated Taylor Jamieson (Upper Hutt) 8-11, 12-10, 11-9, 4-11, 11-2 in the girls final.

UNDERWATER HOCKEY

Premier finals

Wellington Girls' and Wellington College triumphed in tight contests in the premier underwater hockey finals. Wellington Girls' beat East 1-0 and Wellington College defeated HIBS 2-1. Queen Margaret beat Hutt Valley in a playoff for third and fourth and Scots beat Hutt Valley to take third in the boys division. HIBS took the junior boys title and East the junior girls.

FOOTBALL

Finalists found

Wellington College and HIBS will contest the final of the premier youth grade on

August 19. The competition still has two rounds to run but HIBS (20 points) and Wellington College (19) have cleared out from the field. Wellington scored 15 goals against Kapiti last Saturday, while HIBS drew 3-3 with Scots. Wellington Girls' Hutt Valley, East and St Mary's will be the semifinalists in the girls premier one division.

BASKETBALL

Top four

Hutt Valley, Newlands, Onslow and Wellington College have made the top four in the Pohlen Cup and Wellington Girls', Hutt Valley, Newlands and St Mary's comprise the top four for the Sharp Cup. Hutt Valley and Wellington College were winners last weekend, along with Wellington Girls' and St Mary's.

SWIMMING

Huia Cup

Wellington College, Wellington East and Tawa took the prizes at the Huia Cup relays. East headed off Wellington Girls' in the girls competition, Wellington College beat Tawa in the boys and Tawa took the co-ed section.

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