

# COLLEGE SPORT



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## Ah Kuoi family making their mark

### AFL and RUGBY

YOU name it and the Ah Kuoi boys will play it.

Brothers Utu and Naitoa Ah Kuoi have played a variety of sports with the common denominator being that they usually play them well.

Rugby and AFL have become their sporting priorities but along the way one or the other, or both, have tried their hand at volleyball, basketball, water polo, handball, athletics, underwater hockey and swimming.

Both brothers are in the Wellington College first XV, have been selected for national age group teams in water polo and represented New Zealand at AFL over Anzac weekend.

Utu is a young year 13 – he does not turn 17 till this month – but was among four schoolboys selected for the New Zealand Hawks, the senior AFL team.

He also captained the New Zealand academy team which played in Sydney in March and last month was named as the New Zealand under-16 player of the year for the 2014 season.

The senior Hawks played against the AFL academy team from Australia, which pitted them against the best young talent in Australia.

“It was Utu’s debut at that level and the newcomers find the pace pretty fast,” Wellington AFL academy director Sam McKenzie said. “He was competing against the best in his age group but definitely held his own.”

Mckenzie, who also plays for the New Zealand Hawks, has coached Ah Kuoi and played with and against him.

“He is one of the hardest ball

runners in New Zealand,” McKenzie said. “He’s very quick and strong.

“He’s good at hunting the ball and he’s a tough player. You don’t want to run into him, he’s a fairly hard nut.”

Ah Kuoi also recorded the sort of results that interest Australian AFL scouts when among 35 schoolboys put through a variety of tests at the national AFL combine, in Wellington last month.

He was the fastest in the group over 20 metres, covering the distance in 2.9 seconds.

“In terms of his speed and athleticism, he’s up there,” McKenzie said. “The New Zealand [AFL] players are always up against it [compared to their Australian counterparts] in terms of knowledge but that sort of speed can give you a little bit of space.

“He now needs to play more football, to learn more, and making the New Zealand men’s side will lead to more opportunities.”

Ah Kuoi is versatile in terms of what positions he can cover in AFL but plays mostly in midfield or at halfback.

He demonstrated his versatility again for the Wellington College first XV last weekend, beginning the game against Napier Boys on the wing, as injury cover, before moving back into the loose forwards, where he usually plays.

He has been a comparatively late convert to the forwards, after playing much of his rugby at second five-eighth. “I’ve only had two years in the forwards and I’m still learning.”

He wants to continue playing both AFL and rugby and has no clear preference. “They are different sports and I would love to have the opportunity to go further in



Brothers Utu, left, and Naitoa Ah Kuoi have made an impression in a variety of sports, including AFL and Rugby.

Photo: MAARTEN HOLL/FAIRFAX NZ

either one. They have different skills but playing one helps the other.

“My size – 1.85m tall and 88kg – probably suits AFL a little bit more than rugby but I still want to give rugby a crack.

“AFL obviously isn’t a major sport in New Zealand but it’s get-

ting bigger and I will take any chance to represent my country.”

Ah Kuoi, who also won the senior javelin at the regional schools track and field championships, is likely to head to Otago University next year, with the aim of becoming a physiotherapist.

Naitoa Ah Kuoi is bigger –

1.92m tall and 94kg – than his brother and though only a year 11, the 15-year-old is already in his second season in the school first XV.

Few year 10 players make the Wellington College starting, much less earn a spot as a squad lock. “There weren’t many year 12

and 13 locks last year but he [Ah Kuoi] did exceptionally well for a year 10 to break into the squad and then become a key ball winner,” first XV coach Lincoln Rawles said. “He’s a year 11 now and the senior lock.”

Ah Kuoi has had to put his water polo career on hold, due to

**‘He’s good at hunting the ball and he’s a tough player. You don’t want to run into him, he’s a fairly hard nut.’**

Sam McKenzie  
Wellington AFL academy director about Utu Kuoi

his rugby and AFL commitments but plans to keep playing volleyball and handball while he can, largely for enjoyment.

He would look at any opportunities that arose with AFL but his dream is to play professional rugby. “I wasn’t expecting to make the first XV last year. It was quite surreal. At first I found it quite tough [at first XV level] but towards the end of the season I was feeling quite comfortable.”

He was a member of the Wellington under-16 team last year and selected for the Hurricanes under-17 training camp and is eligible for both squads again this year.

He captained the New Zealand under-16 AFL side at Anzac weekend and was named the New Zealand player of the series after two games against the Peninsula Saints, from Victoria.

“It was the best I’ve seen him play,” McKenzie said. “His play and his leadership has really developed. His work rate has started to improve and that’s a big thing for a player of his size. He was winning about 90 per cent of the hit-outs as a ruckman and that was exciting to see.”

## Brothers leading Bishop Viard revival

### RUGBY

THE Bishop Viard first XV are a true band of brothers.

The squad contains five sets of brothers and the family connections seem to be working.

Bishop Viard followed some solid pre-season form by defeating premier one team St Bernard’s 43-24 in the opening grading round last weekend.

That would normally set the winning team up for a return to premier one but it won’t be that easy for Bishop Viard.

They have a tough pool and face another big game, away against Wairarapa College, this Saturday.

However, Bishop Viard are at least given themselves a chance of returning to the top grade.

It would be a remarkable achievement, as the first XV played in premier three last year and were beaten in the semifinals by the St Pat’s second XV.

“It would be a massive bonus for us if we made premier one,” coach Sam Leota said.

“Our first goal was to make sure that we got out of premier three and our other target was to win the Beard Trophy [the competition run between the Porirua Basin schools].

“But we will believe in ourselves, whatever team is in front of us. But we will need to stick to our patterns and play to our strengths.”

Bishop Viard retained most of their players from the 2014 squad and had a good buildup to the season.

“We have got a really good bunch of kids and three or four of them have been in the team since year 11,” Leota said. “There are six year 12 players, who mostly graduated from our under-15 team last year, and a couple of year 10 boys.”

“One difference this year has been the amount of off-season training. Some of the older boys started doing conditioning training in November and we had a two



The Bishop Viard first XV squad, which includes five sets of brothers, faces a key grading game this weekend.

**We will believe in ourselves, whatever team is in front of us. But we will need to stick to our patterns and play to our strengths.**

Sam Leota  
Bishop Viard coach

Fullback McCarthy, who has attracted interest from Sydney league clubs, and speedy winger Roy Maiava, who notched three tries against St Bernard’s, have also been important cogs in the backline.

Wairarapa College won their grading pool last year, with a win over Hutt International, but were not eligible for premier one.

That is not the case this year. They beat Paraparaumu 40-5 last weekend and wins over Bishop Viard and St Bernard’s over the next couple of weekends would secure them a place in the top grade.

Wairarapa lost only two of their 20 games last year, a Co-ed Cup match against Feilding High and the premier two final against Tawa.

“This will probably be a season defining game for us [on Saturday],” coach Chris Senior said. “Premier one would bring a lot of benefits. We lost the tight five from last year and have only five years 13s but there is some good talent coming through.”

Rongotai scored 11 tries when beating Taita 65-0 last week and it would be a shock if they did not top their grading pool and HIBS, who beat Upper Hutt 27-10, will be favoured in their pool.

Tawa made an encouraging start with a 23-8 win over Aotea and might be the team to beat in pool D, which also includes Naenae, who opened with a 25-20 win over Newlands.

## Wellington sides hope for redemption

Complacency won’t be a problem as the Wellington teams prepare for the second round of the first XV festival this week.

The three Wellington sides all had their pride dented when well beaten in the opening round, in Hawke’s Bay.

St Pat’s Town never flattered when thumped 39-0 by Gisborne

Boys, Silverstream conceded three converted tries in the second half when going down 31-10 against a strong Hastings Boys side and Wellington College were defeated 30-10 by Napier Boys.

Between them, the Wellington teams managed just three tries, while conceding 13. However, the early season games can be skewed

by a variety of factors and last weekend’s results are unlikely to be a true indication of the worth of the Wellington sides.

Saturday’s games will be held at Palmerston North, with Silverstream meeting Gisborne, Town against Napier and Wellington College playing Palmerston North Boys.

and it would be one of the smallest in Wellington.”

Bishop Viard will be led by lock Dylan Patu and tighthead prop Dorian Tato is another key member of the pack.

First five-eighth Foliga Va’alepu-Austin has made a big impression and has already racked up nearly 100 points with his boot this year. A former Wellington under-16 rep, he was originally at Porirua College but played for Rotorua Boys’ High School last year.

day camp in the holidays.”

The work has paid off and Bishop Viard indicated in their buildup games that they would be competitive in the grading rounds.

They beat Aotea and Porirua College in a pre-season tournament, to claim the Denys Latham Cup, defeated Naenae, another premier one team, in the Co-ed Cup and added wins against Newlands and the Town second XV.

The win over St Bernard’s also meant that Bishop Viard now hold

the Cardinal Cup, for the first time since 2009.

The brothers in the squad are Roy and Tominiho Maiava, Paulo and Jeremih Lokeni, Antonio and Adam Tone, Jayden McCarthy and Brandon Naera and Tisi Finau and Brandon Kamoto.

In addition, youngster Nasser Tato joined older brother Dorian in the squad for the pre-season games.

“We have a pretty experienced backline but a young pack,” Leota said. “We don’t have a big pack

## Wellington Girls’ squads join forces

### NETBALL

IF YOU can’t beat them, join them.

The Wellington Girls’ College senior netball and basketball teams have more than a few players in common.

The two squads also do their weekly conditioning sessions together.

It helps reduce the workload for those who turn out for both teams, in an era when the leading school athletes have probably never had more demands on their time.

“We work in well together and it benefits both squads,” basketball coach Steve Graham said.

The Wellington Girls’ basketball team dominated the Wellington competition last year and three of their leading players – Tegan Graham, Lyric Dixon and Caitlin Grice – are also in the netball team.

The netball team will be in the limelight next Monday, in their televised clash against Wellington East in a quarter-final of the national college knockout competition. It will also serve as a curtain-raiser to the Pulse-Tactix game at Te Rauparaha Arena.

Wellington Girls’ earned a bye in the second round after a 38-26 win over the lower North Island top seeds Manukura in the opening round, while East, who have three players in the New Zealand secondary schools side, advanced by beating St Mary’s 30-18 and Newlands 29-25.

“It will be a great challenge [against East] and we are very excited about it,” Wellington Girls’ coach Emma Weenink said.

“There is a lot of talent in the East team and the challenge for us will be to pull together and use all 11 players as a group.

“We took our chances against Manukura but it was virtually a pre-season game. They had a lot of young players and will be much better later in the season.

“But we have rep players and some of the team have been



Tegan Graham plays her part in both the netball and basketball teams at Wellington Girls’ College.

Photo: KEVIN STENT/FAIRFAX NZ

playing together [in the senior team] for three years. The connection is there.”

Three of the Wellington Girls’ squad – Abby Collier, Aliyah De La Mare and Francesca Wotton – are in the Wellington centre under-17 squad and Tianna Rutene is in the under-15 team.

The team is led by goal shoot Bianca van Dyk, daughter of Irene. “Bee [van Dyk] has a very good shooting range,” Weenink said. “She has a wonderful personality, is smart and knows the game well – she has watched quite a lot of netball.”

Dixon will miss Monday’s game through injury but Junior Tall Fern Tegan Graham, who plays at goal attack, is likely to make a significant contribution. “Tegan is very competitive, has a presence on the court and is very hungry for the ball,” Weenink said.

Wellington Girls’, East and St Mary’s all play in the premier grade in the Wellington women’s competition.

“It’s great for the school teams,” Weenink said. “It’s a tough competition and they learn so much playing against clever and more experienced players.”

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