

# Foxton Rebels have a cause — Rugby League

*Two years out, the Foxton Rebels rugby league team are at the top. In their first year of competition league in the Manawatu, they took out all available trophies, Senior Knockout, Senior Competition, and Senior Champion of Champions. And this year just finished, they moved up a grade to Premiers and took out all available titles there too.*

To cap it all off, they made it to the Tusk Cup, the rugby league nationals, representing Manawatu. However the fairytale came to a temporary halt (as some club supporters would say) at the hands of the Christchurch club Hornby who dished out a 56 to 10 defeat.

That's not dampened enthusiasm at all, in fact it's made the Rebels realise just how big their achievements have been on and off the field.

TU TANGATA went to Foxton to find out how a community of about three thousand people, with a significant number of Maori, can field such a challenge.

Well the first thing that hits you is the infectious enthusiasm, in both players and supporters alike. In fact it's hard to tell them apart, especially after hearing tales of what experience, or rather, lack of rugby league experience, there is.

Nui Kunaiti is acknowledged as the kaumatua, guesstimated as being in his 40's. As another player Terry Hapi puts it, "When I started playing senior rugby, he had just retired from it."

There would only be a handful with

rugby league experience, the rest were either rugby players with one or two having played soccer or hockey.

Coach Mickey Te Rangi says a lot of the players had not played any sport since leaving school, and in his words, "they're more than I expected."

That may not sound surprising but for the realisation that Mick himself has no rugby league experience either. He's been a good keen rugby man all his life, and a good coach at that. In search of someone who has some rugby league experience, chairman of the Foxton Rebels Rugby League Club, Tom Woon was found to be the man.

He'd played league for the army in Palmerston North and was instrumental in getting the club off the ground. By this stage of writing, the origins of the club are starting to get lost in clouds of myth but it appears Tom was in on the ground floor.

He'd been on the Foxton Borough Council for six years and was approached in this capacity when grounds for a rugby league club were being considered. He says the Foxton race course was one early option which

was rejected in favour of the present Victoria Park. The mayor too was an early supporter and helped the club get established.

Marshall Carrol, former club chairman, was one of the ones who put the proposition to the council about the need for league grounds. He says he was keen on starting a league team at Longburn, but Terry Hapi and Paul Luke told him to forget Longburn and start one in Foxton.

It appears at that time, there had been a fall-out with the local rugby club over some players not getting a regular run with the team, and the general lack of team spirit.

Mickey Te Rangi says he'd been a rugby coach for years and had seen ups and downs in fielding rugby teams. He says the formation of the Foxton Rebels caused a further reduction in the ranks and there was some ill feeling between the two codes. Players say this was the meaning of the name Rebels, they were challenging the established clubs. This challenge showed itself in former rugby mates saying, "your league club won't last, it's just a flash in the pan."

That was enough to spur them on but it wasn't all.

Tom Woon says, "We gave the guys a new focus."

All agree the initial idea was for a social rugby league club, where players and families could participate. It seems the idea mushroomed from there.

