

“A DRAPPIE OR TWO”

Gordon v Southern Districts – Round 4 Tooheys NEW Shute Shield

Unfortunately Dave Bezer's battle with the public announcement system continues; but a replacement was shipped to Chatswood in time to greet the visiting Rebels from the Sutherland Shire onto the ground at 3pm to compete for the Tonkin – Stapleton Cup. As previously discussed in this article, the boys from south of Tom Ugly's Bridge, refer to the encounter at Chatswood Oval simply as “Funny Hat Day”.

Souths had not recorded a victory for the season coming into round 4; but with agonisingly close results against Randwick and Norths in the last two weeks, this was certainly a game that the home team had to be concentrating on in order to stay in touch with the competition's early leaders. Diminutive New Zealand-raised fly half Kane Hancy ran out in the number 10 jumper, only days off the plane, in one of a number of late changes to the visitors' line up. Those with long memories shuddered at history repeating, as they recalled Darren Kapene lining up for the Rebels in 2004, after getting off the plane that morning, and on his own winning a game against Gordon that seemed unlikely.



The weekend's game also marked captain Mark Preston's 100th first grade fixture in a tartan jumper, since his break through debut against Penrith in 2003 after scoring 34 points on debut as a young 18 year old just out of School. Of course in April 2006 he wore the navy and white hoops of Gordon Rugby's predecessor, Roseville Rugby Club against West Harbour at Chatswood. That game was coincidentally the day that **Jeremy Mortlock played his 100th game of first grade** for the Highlanders. Since his eye-catching debut in 2003, Mark has been the central figure around which Gordon has rebuilt its team, first at fullback, then a stint at fly half before returning to 15, and this season at outside centre. He has the freakish ability to tear a team apart and create something from nothing. He has certainly been a pleasure to watch in the last 6 seasons and the milestone is a credit to him.



To go with **Preston's 100th first grade game**, was new recruit Dane Haylett-Petty, who arrives at the Club from the Western Force. The 19 year old is a winger / fullback, who has played 3 Super 14 games for the Force and has represented Australia at both U/20s and 7s. He will play for the Club when the Force does not require him or not on representative duties. DHP was listed to start his first game for the Highlanders at 14; however with in-form fly half Josh

Keil succumbing to hamstring tightness in the days before the game, the debutant moved to 15 and David Harvey moved back to the position from where he won last season's Catchpole Medal.



In other team news, Craig Thomas returned to the starting line up after a week on the side line for personal reasons. He was no doubt desperate to put up a solid showing following the man-of-the-match performance from Chris Alcock the previous week against the Rats. Paulie Tuala came into the side at blindside flanker with the injured Vili Napa'a having a week off.

Souths' Jackson "Outlaw" Mullane (on top)

The game started ominously for the men-in-tartan as some poor handling and ill-discipline saw the visitors race to a 13 nil lead within the first 15 minutes. In that time former Gladiator, Jackson "Outlaw" Mullane crossed in the Orchard Road corner, from a pin-point cut out ball from Hancy and Nathan Sievert knocked over the conversion and two more

long arm penalties.

The Rebels were playing fast aggressive footy and the home team were doing all that they could to hold on and stay in the game. However, Souths were their own worst enemy as they had two more gilt-edged opportunities in the first half to get the ball over the line. The first opportunity came when they were on Gordon's line and knocked on at the back of the ruck with an inch to the line; then again they were probably guilty of panicking with good field position in front of the Victor Trumper Stand. The job for Souths became immeasurably more difficult when almost at the same time they lost two of their better and more experienced players, skipper Tim McGann and former Brumbies and current Western Force lock David Pusey.

By half time Gordon were able to get in front 17 - 13 after David Harvey kicked a penalty and then added a try in the 23rd minute of the game, following a great defensive scrum near the Rebels' try line. Then with 5 minutes of the half remaining, the home team scored the try of the season thus far.

The Highlanders received a penalty near halfway, which was plugged into the south-western corner. The line out was secured and after 2 phases the play spread left where the visitors did remarkably well to stop what appeared to be an inevitable 5 points under the scoreboard. Thomas played half back to two consecutive rucks, before the ball was shovelled to the opposite wing, where **big Kingsley Seale** charged the ball ahead, getting on the outside of his man perilously close to the side line, before popping the ball up to Lachie Mitchell as he was being tackled. Mitchell scored the try adjacent to the posts.



After a quiet first half, Preston came to life as he scored in his land-mark game. With the visitors pushed back into their own half, good pressure from the Highlanders' scrum led to ball that went astray in the in goal. Hancy spilled the ball and could only force it for a Gordon scrum 5 metres from the line – the travelling supporters put the mistake down to jet

lag. The ball was spread right and then left before Preston dummied to stroll through to the line and the score was suddenly 23 - 13.

Four minutes later DHP scored his first try for his new Club, following a penalty that took play to 5 metres from the line in the north-eastern corner. Billy Ratu took the ball down from the ensuing line out, before Byrne delivered to Harvey, who drifted across the line, completed a run around before hitting the fullback on the chest who was not touched as he scored to the left of the posts in front of the home fans.



That was the first of a hatrick from DHP, who then scored on 48 minutes following a mistake at the back from Souths, as they allowed a towering Harvey bomb to bounce, before the ball was secured by the surge of Gordon forwards who chased the kick. From the ensuing play, Preston threw a beautiful double cut-out pass on the quarter line, which found his new team mate, who crossed

and the score and with a quarter of the game remaining was 36 - 13. The task looked insurmountable for the men from the Shire at.

DHP then turned provider as 10 minutes later he chipped and chased on the attacking quarter, before regathering and throwing what the mungos refer to as a “no looker” over his right shoulder to **Tobias Gukibau**, who accepted with glee to bullock to the line and score his first try for the Highlanders.



The winger David Alo popped up to also score his first try for the Club to make the score 48 - 13.

The scoring was rounded out for the afternoon with 5 minutes remaining on the clock as DHP scored a hatrick for the afternoon to complete a very impressive debut, save for a dropped bomb that led to Souths first try. From a points perspective, it was not as impressive as Preston’s debut 6 years earlier; but it was equally as authoritative and certainly as compelling.

With 5 minutes remaining in the game, a travelling fan with the twang of the South Island of New Zealand and the image of a fading rock star, was heard to yell out “*Come on Southern. There’s stull time*”. Idiot! Perhaps if he had consumed several cans of pre-mixed scotch and Coke, he may been excused; but short of that, there was little defence. In any event, there was to be no further scoring for the afternoon and the game finished 53 - 13, as the Highlanders dominated in the second half.

Souths kept going to the final whistle; but they struggled after half time and the loss of two big name players. However, it is to be kept in mind that round 15 at Forshaw Park is likely

to be a far stiffer contest, in which Gordon will struggle to compete if they start in the same manner that they started this fixture. With McGann and Pusey playing for the entire 80 minutes and the likes of the Waratahs' Dan Palmer and Rob Horne and the Brumbies' duo of Nic Henderson and Guy Sheperdson in the front row, the Rebels will be a very tough side to beat at home.

This week the Highlanders travel down the Pacific Highway on ANZAC Day to take on bitter local rivals Northern Suburbs. If you make it to any away game for the season, you should make it this one. North Sydney No. 1 is arguably the best ground outside Chatswood Oval in the competition and all Gordon fans need not be reminded how important this game is for both sides.

Norths were well beaten by Randwick on the weekend and are currently in eighth place on the table. However, this young side upset the highly-fancied Beasts a fortnight ago and certainly have the ability to compete with the best in the competition. In any event, the history between these two sides in the Shute Shield has demonstrated that it doesn't matter where the teams are respectively placed on the table. Upsets have occurred on a frightening regular basis. Make no mistake; the Rosso Nero (which unfortunately is not Italian for "rubbish" or "trash") will be well and truly up for this round, having only won a solitary game against Gordon in 2008 across all grades. Although, that solitary success of course was the second grade grand final.

The next home game will be the block buster against Randwick, when surely the ABC will grant the game match-of-the-day status.

Make sure that you get out to support your team as the boys are once again building to something very special this season.

See you from the Cedric Pike Stand.

Georgie McHugh