

“A DRAPPIE OR TWO”

Gordon v Randwick – Round 6 Tooheys NEW Shute Shield

The heart break of the semi final against Randwick at Rat Park in 2008 has been referred to on a number of occasions in this article. Indeed the press had been talking of revenge for the men in tartan, who were denied their chance at competition glory by a fast-finishing myrtle green machine. “Revenge”, however, was not the sentiment that emanated from Chatswood Oval, rather a desire to arrest the slow starts of the previous two weeks against Northern Suburbs and Southern Districts. There was no doubt that to give this opponent a head start was to concede the fixture.

A brilliant Saturday afternoon greeted the large crowd that turned up for Gordon’s first televised game of the season. The line for the jumping castle was so long that if a quick



thinking parent was unable to delegate the duty of supervising their child on the apparatus to a kindly passer by, they could have missed an entire half of rugby. The day was touted as being the biggest crowd at Chatswood in a decade and the people responded, voting with their attendance that club rugby at this time is far and away the best form of the game in NSW. It is also a credit to Randwick’s supporters, who always travel to support their team.

From the opening bell the Highlanders looked crisp. At the scrum it was obvious that the front row of Larmarn Ma’a, Nath Nicol and Ofa Fainga’nuku had the upper hand. After 10 minutes that advantage resulted in the first try, as Billy Ratu picked up from the base of the scrum 5 metres from the visitors’ line before offloading to Vinnie Byrne, who threw a pinpoint double cut out ball, before quick hands saw the ball go through three players before Dave Harvey delivered the last pass to **Lachie Mitchell** who flashed over in the north eastern corner. It was the start that

the team had been hoping for, as they were quick, direct and executed perfectly. Dave Harvey missed his only kick of the afternoon and the score was 5 - 0.

The score was soon 12 - 0 after a mistake by Randwick’s fullback Marshall Milroy, who appeared desperate to get something going as the Galloping Greens had no answer to Gordon’s play.

Determination and attitude - Mark Preston

After a clearing kick, Dave Dillon retrieved the ball near the side line 30 metres out, he sent the ball inside to Milroy, who weighed up his options for just a little too long and his attempted midfield bomb was charged down by Josh



Whittaker. Harvey, charging down the side line crossed to the six yard box in shades of Liverpool's Steven Gerrard, before Mark Preston collected and scored under the posts.

Gordon had two more terrific opportunities in the first half; but with men unmarked, the last pass went astray, in much the same way that chances were squandered at Scum Park the week before. However, Randwick was finding it difficult to capitalise on those mistakes and their lack of ideas was epitomised by hooker Antonio Halangahu kicking long off two short arm penalties. He may have the name; but he certainly doesn't have the boot.



The Highlanders lost Vili Napa'a during the first half to a shoulder problem and he will be out for a few weeks. However, the team lost nothing as **Paulie Tuala came on and had another barnstorming game.** Regularly he asked questions of the Wicks' defence and started a number of attacking moves. Unfortunately those attacks yielded no more points.

In the shadows of half time, it looked as though the home team would go to the break with a healthy, if not safe lead. That dramatically changes as, on the bell, referee Nathan Pearce imposed himself and made the biggest decision of the game. From half way on the eastern side of the ground Milroy broke away, after a number of missed tackles and some slick passing before flanker Dave Vizer pinned his ears back and set sail for the corner. However, Harvey came across in cover and Vizer turned the ball inside to Ratu Nasiganiyavi. Harvey stuck a hand out and the ball ricocheted into touch. The whistle blew; but not to signal half time. Instead Pearce, conjuring all of the memories of the Arab Camel Driver in television games over which he officiated (well, to be brutally honest in all games in which he officiated), ran to the spot and awarded a penalty try.

Harvs, accidental offender given 10mins and a penalty try against him. Can be found in wikipedia under 'power – and those that abuse it'

The ball did go forward off Harvey's hand; but Pearce had to have determined that it was Harvey's intention only to knock the ball forward. The vision is certainly ambiguous enough to suggest that Harvey was making the best attempt he could to intercept. In circumstances that it was deemed to be a deliberate knock forward, a penalty try should only have been awarded in circumstances that the action "prevents a try that would probably otherwise have been scored". To have made that decision the referee had to determine that Nasiganiyavi, who would have taken the ball (if he caught it) at about the 10 metre line heading for the corner with cover defence coming in the form of Preston and Mitchell, would probably have scored. Nasiganiyavi may have scored the try; and even if Harvey's actions were offensive and deliberately so, it is a far greater step to say that a try would probably have been scored. To award a try



under the posts and to send off a player to boot was a very harsh penalty. The score at the break was 12 - 7 to the Highlanders.

The hangover from Harvey's stint in the sin bin continued. After a great defensive effort for the remaining 14 players during the 13 minutes that Harvey was off the field, Gordon were awarded a penalty on their attacking quarter line virtually in front. Harvey would have thrown it over to increase the home team's lead. However, Preston was called on to do the duties and missed. With minutes remaining in the game that miss may have been crucial.



After the break, Randwick stepped up their intensity as their back three took on the line. They were rewarded when Milroy scored under the Trumper Stand after Nasiganiyavi cut through the middle field shortly after Harvey's return from the bin. However, **the Highlanders hit back within 5 minutes when Byrne crashed over from the base of a ruck.** At 19 - 12, with 20 remaining the

game was there to be taken. Within two minutes, following a dropped ball, Randwick was on Gordon's line again, before Vizer cut back into the defence, despite a 3 man over lap and scored. And only 3 minutes later Milroy came streaming through the middle of the field again to link up with Nasiganiyavi who scored out wide. The score was suddenly 25 - 19 in favour of the Galloping Greens.

A penalty goal was added by Milroy, before a spirited last fling from the Highlanders to at least secure 2 bonus points with a fourth try. Unfortunately, with a try beckoning and 3 minutes on the clock Joe Metuisela was taken down in a fantastic tackle only 2 meters from the stripe. It would have made for a very interesting last couple of minutes with Harvey's long-range drop goal prowess coming into play. However, it was not to be and the score finished 28 - 19. But for the penalty try and Preston's missed kick when Harvey was off the field, the last minute try would have been for the win. All credit to the visitors for coming back from their first-half malaise; **but such refereeing impact on the result leaves a very bitter taste in one's mouth.**



In the end it was a very disappointing result. Gordon could and probably should have secured a bonus point for scoring four tries prior to the half-time bell being tolled, and gone on to comfortably win the game. On the back of a magnificently dominant scrum it was a bit of a waste. However, the Randwick's credit, once the momentum shifted with the

penalty try at the end of the first half, they pinned the Highlander's in their own half with great defensive pressure and a testing kicking game. When Gordon attempted to kick out of trouble, the Galloping Greens back three showed why the sobriquet rests with that team as they ran at their opposition with speed and conviction.



It was a disappointing result; but far more positives than negatives should be taken from the game.

As mentioned the scrum was magnificent and demonstrated once again that it is one of the best units in the competition.

The defence was also pretty good; but for a couple of misses in midfield, which a side like Randwick, with its attacking prowess duly

capitalised upon. It should also not be forgotten that in leaving a bucket full of tries on the field in the last couple of weeks, that the backline is continuing to create those opportunities. When last-pass errors can be removed from the movement, other sides will have great difficulty keeping up with the men in tartan.

The challenge gets no easier this weekend, as the Highlanders travel to Woollahra Oval, a venue at which they have not prevailed for the considerable part of a long time. It is one of the great suburban grounds and boasts of the closest schooner to a sideline in the competition; apparently it beats St Mary's Leagues Rugby Park by 32.5 centimetres.

The Beasts are currently running second on the table, only two points in front of the Gordon, after they secured a very good win against Randwick a couple of rounds ago. They will no doubt field a very tall and powerful pack, which will provide the platform for one of the best centre combinations in the competition in Azar and Lavin. It will be a cracking contest; but a win from the Highlanders will be an emphatic statement to the rest of the competition, who are watching closely to see whether the hiccup on the weekend was in fact more.

Get out to the eastern suburbs to support the boys as they endeavour to break the hoodoo at this ground and climb back up the ladder.

The next home game is against Sydney Uni and there is surely no better time to get to Chatswood to witness the Highlanders make up for the torment that this club has inflicted on the men in tartan since the turn of the Millennium. As the team attempts to assert itself at the top of the competition this season, they need you at the ground more than ever. Make sure that you get there early to get a good spot as the best vantage points will fill very quickly, if not to make sure that your kid gets a go on the jumping castle.

See you from the Cedric Pike Stand.

Georgie McHugh