

“A DRAPPIE OR TWO”

Gordon v Northern Suburbs – Round 16 Tooheys NEW Shute Shield

"We hate Gordon". So stridently stated Northern Suburbs' half back and skipper Steve Evans in the *North Shore Times* in the lead up to the second local derby round of the season. "I think that it is bred into us". Well Steve, the red and black half of the North Shore does not have a mortgage on this sentiment; but it is certainly an interesting decision to put it into print. Not three days before the article went to print, Norths' stalwart Mark Cashman, speaking on the Club Rugby.com podcast for the week as to local derbies. He recalled a season that Norths put on a "hate keg", which the entire club was compulsorily required to attend, in preparation for a trip to Chatswood the following Saturday. He recounted that after Gordon learnt of this event they responded by beating the red and blacks in all five grades and four colts games. The message appeared to be simple: embrace your loathing of your closest rival, even know that you know, that they know, that you that they know; but for God's sake, don't advertise it and provide that opposition with any greater reason to triumph.



Before the first XV's ran onto the field at 3.00pm, the **cult figure Greg Wade brought up his century in tartan** in Magoos. The fiery winger rose to prominence in the heady days of the end of the 2007 season, when Gordon charged to the Tooheys New



Plate and one-off Trevor Allan Cup. A pierced tongue, a short temper and a stunning turn of speed, Greg has certainly demanded attention whenever he has represented the Club. He crossed twice in the game; but ultimately Gordon came up short 32 - 36. The man was obviously disappointed, although he seemed more intent at the end of the game to make sure that he had mates with him on the pub crawl. **We love you Wadey!**

The teams observed a minute's silence to mark the passing of Norths' senior vice president, Dave Debney, seven days earlier, before the cudgels were taken up. After the whistle blew, the scoring started early with a penalty to Dave Harvey after Jarrod Murphy caught Dane Haylet-Petty 45 metres out in front. There is no doubt that the lady from Granville who gets stuck into just about everyone would have been going nuts, as Harvey took what seemed like an age to put boot to ball, including the ball falling off the kicking tee.



Immediately following the first three points, Norths took the attack to Gordon strongly and got themselves into an extremely good position to attack, when Harvey was forced to take the ball into touch 10 meters from his own line. But the visitors did not get a chance to drive home the opportunity. The scrum never took place as a scuffle broke out – the catalyst seemingly being Harvey handing the ball back to the visitors – and the Highlanders were awarded a relieving penalty.

In the 17th minute Gordon exposed for the first of a number of occasions the North Suburbs' left-hand defence, when Vinnie Byrne switched the play to Ratu on the halfway line, who released Ed Gower. From the ensuing next phase **Terry Preston (above) sniped across the line** in the fashion that he used to when he wore a 9 on his back, where he picked up **Harvey who grubbed expertly** for Haylett-Petty to force the ball in front of the cricket nets. Three minutes later, Gordon exposed the same weakness in Norths' defence, after Norths failed to control a line out 40 metres out, and the ever-impressive Marty Plokstys secured the ball and set the backline alight once more, before Haylett-Petty completed a brace and the score was 15 - 0 as Harvey kicked the conversion.



Within 5 minutes Norths scored in the Trumper stand corner, before they conceded another major off the kick off, as Billy Ratu collected the ball and yet again the Highlanders raced down the western touch line. Harvey switched the play by kicking to the opposite wing. Kiel was first to the loose ball and he passed to **Marty Plokstys, who showed a**



great turn of pace from the 25 metre line, before he palmed off the impressive Andrew Smith and scored one of the most popular and well-deserved tries of the season.



Within sight of the end of the half, the Pirates were attacking on Gordon's quarter line; but again the visitors were unable to sustain the pressure as the ball was spilled. Instead of kicking for the relief of the side line, the Highlanders spread the ball right through Mark Preston, who put Harvey away down the western touchline. The irrepressible fullback made 50 metres before being caught,

where he recycled the ball and a **rampaging Chris Alcock, playing in a one-two punch with Craig Thomas** on the side of the scrum, scored again in the south western corner. Norths' number 8 was sin binned after the try was scored



on a touch judge's report for stomping on a Gordon player in the ruck prior to the try.

At the break the men in tartan were up 25 - 5. However, with the memory of how they themselves had come back in the second half against Warringah a fortnight earlier (albeit that I have now watched the game 11 times and I still don't really know what happened in that game), the Highlanders gathered at their huddle for refreshments with significant work to do to secure the game.

The second half started with Gordon wanting to be first on the board. And it looked good for the custodians of Chatswood Oval, as the Highlanders swept towards the northern



tryline. However, it was Norths who scored first as they turned the momentum around and scored following a dubious scrum penalty, where referee Gardner appeared to be trying to even up a very uneven contest in the scrum, as it became obvious that the Pirates' front row were no match for Fainga'anuku, Whittaker and Plokstys, who was in the middle of yet another "best on ground" performance. At 25 - 12 the Gordon supporters were apprehensive; but they needn't have been too concerned, as from the next kick off Alcock stormed

through to restore the lead. This score was followed in the next 5 minutes by two further tries to Ratu, following a fantastic run down the eastern touchline, after **Seale recovered and again released Alcock, who linked with Thomas before Ofa ultimately turned inside to Ratu.** Then, with Norths playing catch up football, a cut out ball thrown 40 metres from their own line by Norths **was plucked from the air by Kiel, who completed the journey** and the score was suddenly 44 - 12.



Norths hit back with a third try to replacement and Gordon Cricket Club lower grade batsman, Cam Crawford to stem the torrent of points being hoisted on the left hand side of the scoreboard. However, Gordon swept in further tries to Mark Preston, Harvey and Kiel to take the score to 63 - 19 as the Pirates looked ever more desperate and Michaels Schmidt and Spalding reminded Evans and his team mates of the skipper's ill-chosen words that were quoted in the local rag.

Alex Gluth came on to replace Whittaker with 15 minutes left in the game, in what may have been his last outing for the Club, depending upon whether he can convince the Immigration Department to let him back into the country. Gluth expects to be back in the country at finals time; but if this was to have been his last game for the Club, it was fantastic to see him seagulling down the wing in his swansong. A finer exponent of the

seagull has not played in a tartan jumper. Unfortunately, Gluth couldn't get across the line; but he did some tough stuff, including a few forays into the middle of the field, which was instrumental in linking with the men outside to make significant ground and he gave the final pass to McDougall with five minutes remaining, to allow the outside centre to continued his prolific try-scoring form, as he touched down for his thirteenth for the season.



Alex Gluth in possibly his last game for the Highlanders

The score finished 68 -19, which included Harvey only kicking on 5 conversions from 11, albeit most from the sideline. It was a welcome return to form for the Highlanders after two close and disappointing results. However, it is fair to say that Norths, whilst they kept putting in all day were probably not at full strength. With the coming month in front of Gordon, the men in tartan know that they will have to step up to another level to hold their position in the competition.

This weekend the Highlanders travel to Coogee to face Randwick and attempt to get some revenge for the encounter between the two sides earlier in the year, in the game that will forever be remembered for referee Nathan Charles's heavy-handed decision to award a penalty try and sin bin Dave Harvey, which swung the momentum of the game. The last time that the two teams met at the ground overlooked by the "Mark Ella Stand", the Highlanders triumphed 42 - 7 on a glorious afternoon of attacking rugby.

This season, the Wicks have climbed to third on the competition ladder on the back of some tough early season play and the return of its vast Super 14 contingent. However, with the mid-season Brumbies' tour to France to take place over the coming month, the Wicks lose an incredible seven players, being Stephen Hoiles, Henry Vanderklas, Francis Fainifo, Shaun Foley and half backs Patrick Phibbs and Josh Valentine. Further, Marshall Milroy, who proved so devastating with Nasingavani and Dillon at Chatswood in round 6, which combination was

probably ultimately the difference between the two sides, has returned to Queensland and it is unknown when he may return. **On the flip side the Highlanders lose inspirational skipper Gower**, as he justifiably takes his place in the squad after returning strongly after recovering from a fall from his bike in the pre season in which he broke his arm. It has always puzzled me as with calves his size, I'm surprise that the Horse can rotate the pedals without snapping the bike in half.



Jared Barry comes into the starting line up to replace Gower, **with Nifo Nifo returning**



from starting in his debut for Manu Samoa against Papua New Guinea in a qualifier in Port Moresby last weekend. Despite Samoa scoring 73 points against the Pukpuks, the Mag-nifo-scent One did not get his name on the score sheet. Following the game Nifo said winning his first blue jumper fulfilled a promise that he made to his late grandfather.

Gordon will have no better opportunity to beat the Galloping Greens than at this time. However, the replacements for the players missing are of no ordinary calibre and at Coogee they are always difficult to beat, notwithstanding that magnificent day in June last year. With there still being a few unresolved issues in defence, the Highlanders will have to be at the top of their game to wrest the points from the home team and leap frog them back into third spot on the ladder.

It goes without saying that this will be a belter, it is always one of the highlights of the year. Make sure that you are there to support your team, as they enter what golfers may describe as the

"Amen Corner" month of the season, with Gordon facing off against all of the other top six teams in the competition. It promises to be an intriguing month.

The next home game is against Eastern Suburbs, who after accounting for the Highlanders in round 7 at Woollahara, have had a patchy season. Last season the games were split with each side having comprehensive victories on their home patch. Hopefully the trend continues.

See you from the Cerdic Pike Stand.

Georgie McHugh