

Defeated in the Semi's - What a season!

Contributed by StockCar86, Mr BMR789 and Hawkeye
Saturday, 13 October 2007
Last Updated Monday, 15 October 2007

A good effort from the boys in pretty shocking conditions - from my perspective we were just pretty much muscled off the ball in the first 30 minutes of the game, and never recovered from being down those points. It was 30 minutes into the second half (I think, the scoreboard at the ground broke) before Auckland scored in that half which was a fantastic effort from the Bay boys.

It was great to have the team walk around the outside of the ground after the game thanking the supporters and shaking their hands -to me that really brought home the difference between NPC and higher grades of rugby where you never have that happen, especially from a losing side.

I have only seen the game live, and no tv coverage yet, but from where I was sitting it looked like Afoa hit Matt Berquist pretty high in the tackle that put him out of the game... I wonder if a citing will be made.

I was not too impressed with ARFU... no pregame entertainment, the supposed platinum premium covered seats meant I was still sitting in the rain, and 20 minutes into the second half the scoreboard and clock failed. However, the volume and intensity of the support from the HB supporters was fantastic.

Not that I usually want Auckland to win, however it would be good if they beat Wellington by 30 points in the final to show that the Magpies are just as deserving of S14 contracts as the Wellington players.

Full TimeAuckland38Hawke's Bay03

Auckland

Tries Taumoepeau, Smith, Tuitupou, Flavell, Munro

Penalties Nacewa

Conversions Nacewa 4, Munro

Hawke's Bay

Penalties Berquist

Auckland have a home final in the Air New Zealand Cup, after the Auks ended Hawke's Bay's fairy-tale run in a rain-sodden 38-3 semi-final win on Saturday.

The conditions made cohesive rugby impossible for both sides, and it was Auckland's consistency and street-wisdom that told, with the experienced pack stuffing the ball well up the jumper and Isa Nacewa dictating territory with the boot.

At least the atrocious weather conditions can be used an excuse for yet another poor turn-out by the New Zealand public to lend their support in this weekend's second semi-final.

With the Auckland skies casting down cats and dogs, it was the home side that was doing all the barking and had plenty of bite as Hawke's Bay coughed up possession and territory like a soaked hair ball.

The men in blue and white showed tremendous skills with the wet ball and hardly put a foot wrong, showing yet again why they are still undefeated in this year's competition.

As for the Magpies, they were just outclassed and outplayed in all facets of play.

Far too many line-out balls quite literally slipped away from them into the hands of the Auckland jumpers, while two of the only attacking scrums on the Aucks' tryline were flooded with errors - resulting in a turnover on both occasions.

Unlike the home team, the security of the ball was breached far too often by the visitors which resulted in a number of counter-attacks by Auckland - one leading to a try.

The first half was a forgettable one for the Magpies who were forced to play the majority of the opening 40 minutes in their own half. In fact, the amount of time spent in Auckland's 22 totalled just one minute.

This was due to not only the visitors having to battle against the wind, but also a blue and white tornado that was in no mood for dying down.

Hawke's Bay were caught in the eye of the storm straight from the kick-off as Auckland showed their intentions by weathering the conditions and taking play to the opposition.

Powerful number eight Brad Mika was held up over the Magpies' whitewash just three minutes into the match, but Auckland were awarded an early penalty that was duly converted by Nacewa.

Hawke's Bay pivot Matt Berquist had a chance to equal the scores after a high tackle by hooker Tom McCartney on scrum-half Chris Eaton, but he pulled his attempt to the left.

It took seventeen minutes for Auckland to get their first try - but was well worth the wait as the mighty pack drove from a line-out set up five metres from the Magpies' line.

With the eight forwards and three backs all stuck in the drive, prop Saimone Taumoepeau was the one that came away with a beaming smile on his big head.

Nacewa - putting in a flawless performance with the boot - kicked the touchline conversion and Auckland were 10-0 up.

The Auckland forwards were again on the move, stringing countless phases together and working well as a unit to set up their next try just five minutes after the restart.

With the eight-man band playing all the music, it was winger David Smith who arrived for the encore as he shimmied his way over for a well-constructed seven-pointer.

Young Hawke's Bay winger Zac Guildford, only 18 years of age, was to thank for Berquist's next shot at goal after the teenager was taken out late and high by Auckland skipper Sam Tuitupou.

Berquist made no mistake this time round and Hawke's Bay were finally on the board - their first and last points of the game.

Tuitupou made up for his earlier blunder by snatching a try of his own for the team after a deft chip ahead by Nacewa was greeted with a lacklustre attempt at cover by Ben Batger.

The Magpies winger was far too casual running back to recover the ball on his own tryline with the more alert Tuitupou managing to get underneath Batger and on top of the ball.

Referee Chris Pollock - who had a good day with the whistle - called upon the TMO to make the final call which was eventually awarded.

Nacewa added the extras and Auckland were sitting pretty with the scores at 24-3 at half-time.

The visitors started the second half much the same as the first with scrappy play that involved little or no communication between the players.

Players crashing into each other and balls getting kicked into team-mates' faces summed up Hawke's Bay's evening.

The Magpies' hopes were dashed even more after Berquist was forced off the field clutching his left shoulder after a thumping tackle by prop John Afoa - who was celebrating his 50th NPC/Air New Zealand match for Auckland.

The loss was evident when Auckland finally managed to cross over after having been kept under wraps by a more solid Hawke's Bay for 30 minutes of the second half.

Troy Flavell, on for Jay Williams, took a superb pass by scrum-half Taniela Moea in the tackle and crashed over in the 71st minute of the match.

Nacewa kept up his 100 per cent kicking record for the match before being replaced by Lachie Munro, who couldn't believe his luck when he found a clear passage to the tryline to wrap things up for Auckland on full-time.

The replacement pivot took the ball from a five-metre scrum on the Magpies' line, and with his backline lined up on the left - Munro took off from a static position to the right that ended with a clear run to the chalkdust.

To add further salt to their opponents' wounds, Munro slotted the conversion and Hawke's Bay's fairytale season was washed down the drain.

Auckland will now surely be favourites to hoist the Air New Zealand Cup trophy in a week's time when they host Wellington in the final