

Elated North Harbour confident of '85 start

By LINDSAY KNIGHT

The Chairman of the North Harbour Rugby Society, Jim Stuart, is confident a new North Shore-based union will be ready to go in time for the 1985 season.

Elated after last night's Auckland Rugby Union annual meeting decision which took the new union on an important first step towards reality. Mr Stuart acknowledged there were some problems still to be overcome. "But we hope we'll have all the bugs ironed out in time for the 1985 season," he said. The society would be incorporating itself as a union today and would be seeking affiliation to the New Zealand Rugby Union immediately. One important priority would be a meeting of the 10 clubs which would form the new union as soon as possible. On the vexed issue of boundaries, which is causing most concern to a club like Waitemata, Mr Stuart said he sure common-sense will prevail. "We have offered a 'honeymoon' period for those players in clubs on the other side of the harbour who may live within our proposed boundary," he said. "We have been careful to display the best possible good will to all clubs in Auckland so far, and there is no reason why that should not continue." He emphasised the necessary homework had been done on all problems the new union was likely to face in finance, sponsorship, referees and secondary schoolboy competition.

Mr Stuart recognised that many eminent rugby people argued that New Zealand rugby as a whole would benefit by fewer unions rather than more. But the problems of Auckland with its vastly greater population, were in a different category than those of South Canterbury and Mid-Canterbury. "We believe this will be good for Auckland rugby as a whole," he said. "The sole basis for going ahead is that Auckland has got too big to cater for its population explosion." One other problem for the union is its lack at present of a ground with proper facilities. But Takapuna club chairman Chris Kennings who moved last night that Auckland delegates support the new union, said this could have any number of remedies. The club, working with the blessing of the Takapuna City Council, was investigating plans to upgrade the Onewa Domain with a good possibility that a grandstand might soon be built there. But a future headquarters for the new union might be sited in the Albany Basin and the Kumeu Showgrounds had already been offered for use. To gain full recognition at the New Zealand union's annual meeting next month North Harbour would also have to gain the backing of the other neighbouring unions, particularly North Auckland and Counties. North Auckland chairman Vic Hinton confirmed his union would obviously discuss the new union soon. "So far we haven't even discussed it, even on a casual basis," he said today. "What our attitude is likely to be I therefore can't say, but from a personal viewpoint I can't think of too many reasons why we wouldn't support it." There were, however, ramifications for all New Zealand unions and it was something that would have to be considered carefully.

DON: ARU can still oppose Shore more

The new rugby union on the North Shore is far from an accomplished fact, according to the retired chairman of the Auckland union, Ron Don. Mr. Don said today the vote of delegates at last night's annual meeting of the ARU had been only a recommendation. It was still possible, he believed that whenever the proposal was referred back to it the management committee would not necessarily have to support it. "What happens now is the North Harbour people will have to submit their proposals to the New Zealand union which would then refer it back to Auckland and North Auckland as the two bounding unions," he said. "They have now got an awful lot of things to do. They have really got to get cracking, and in my personal opinion will have to provide much fuller information than they did last night, particularly in regard to finance." For Mr Don, last night's meeting from a personal viewpoint was a bitter-sweet affair. He was made a life member of the union after stepping down from the chairman post he has held since 1969. But this was clouded by delegates voting to support the forming of the new union in 1985, something which Mr Don forthrightly opposed. "The effect of the new union will be to strangle the Auckland union," he said. "By bringing its boundary into the suburbs the Auckland Union just can't expand." Pointing out that six inner-city clubs – City, Parnell, Grafton, Newton, Technical Old Boys and Pt Chevalier – had gone out of existence, Mr Don said Auckland now had no growth areas. "This was something Malcolm Dick (Te Atatu's delegate) and Ivan Sapich (Waitemata) pointed out, but it wasn't really taken any notice of." – LINDSAY KNIGHT