

Fabulous Frano! No better words describe North Harbour's first five eight, the quick hard working thoroughly competent star of the ANZAC Day clash with Counties at Pukekohe .

Frano Botica showed that he has everything – reliable hands, pace an eye for a break, imagination and a willingness to run with the ball, cover tirelessly, back up on attack and make the tackles.

All he lacked was a good boot, but that was only in running play because he elected all day to pass the ball. From penalties and conversions he demonstrated an equally reliable boot to pile on 10 points.

Twice North Harbour came from behind but Counties were in front again 29-22 at the final whistle. The North Harbour President's XV had ample stars.

Neil Bower took a lot of the lineout ball with soaring leaps that had a classical stamp to offset the size and strength of Paul Tuoro and Ron Williams was as energetic and bustling a prop as any forward on the field.

Matt Nicholls fired out fine passes from behind the forwards and out on the wing Wayne Hill had pass and ability to excite the crowd.

Eventually, Wayne Shelford produced the driving form which made him a key forward in Auckland's second phase play last year – a strength which may become equally valuable to North Harbour when the playing patterns settle down.

But who wouldn't welcome the old master of attack and deception, Bruce Robertson, if he decided to come out of retirement, a guest along with North Shore's Brad Johnstone in North Harbour's first half team.

The magical movement of man and ball which made Robertson the world's top centre set alight the North Harbour back line.

It was the same quality he used to bring to Counties and All Black rugby and it was fair that he should score North Harbour's first try, after young Botica had scored the historic first points with a penalty.

Two more veterans in Gary Cunningham and Mike Mills also scored tries in the second half. But as among the forwards, some backs will have hot competition for their North Harbour places in the 12 May trials.

Yet coach, Peter Thorburn kept his word, put on men who's play he knew and produced positive, attractive rugby that has ample promise and bright prospects – and every sign of a clean sweep in this years' third division National Championship