

Harbour Heroics Secure Spot in Semi Final

Weekend Herald – 9 October 1999 by Chris Rattue

North Harbour stormed into the NPC semi-finals with a stirring second half display to beat Canterbury, 19-11 at Albany last night.

North Harbour muddled their way through a first half dominated by errors from both sides.

From the outset, the Canterbury forwards appeared to hold all the game in their grasp, winning the scrum, lineout, ruck and maul battles.

But North Harbour secured their first semi-final place in four seasons through Frano Botica's goal kicking and a late Ron Cribb try.

Canterbury finished without a bonus point and must rely on struggling champions Otago beating Wellington away at Athletic Park tomorrow to return for another semi-final appearance.

Canterbury will dip out even if Wellington only gain a bonus point in defeat.

It now seems likely that it could be an all North Island play-off series, testament to the effect All Black call ups have had on the South Island powerhouses.

Harbour's win seemed an unlikely result when Harbour trailed 3-11 at halftime, with their forwards struggling and their flamboyant backs shut out.

Canterbury coach, Robbie Deans pulled a late selection switch, moving Ben Blair from wing to full-back in place of Leon MacDonald who moved to second five eighths.

It was all Canterbury in the first spell although their fifth minute try to Todd Blackadder included a huge forward pass from Angus Gardiner to the Canterbury captain.

Botica opened the second half with two penalties bringing his tally to 17 successful goals in a row.

But then he failed with a penalty hitting the post which would have got his side in front.

Canterbury then lost MacDonald a key figure in the game with a serious knee injury.

The tide of the match was turning strongly in North Harbour's favour and they hit the front after a brilliant run in the traffic from flanker Blair Urlich.

Wing Eric Rush carried it on, Walter Little made a dab and Cribb ran off his shoulder to score by the posts in the 67th minute, with Botica converting and then kicking another penalty.

North Harbour: 19 (Ron Cribb try, Fran Botica 4 pen, con)

Canterbury: 11 (Todd Blackadder try, Ben Blair 2 pen)

Half Time: 3-11 (Canterbury)

* In New Plymouth last night, Taranaki beat Southland 34-18