

SKY Television – Rugby Almanac 2002 for 2001 Season

In the past North Harbour has provided a team of stars. This year it was a star team and for the second time, North Harbour finished second at the end of the NPC round Robin. The big improvement this year came in the form of defence – in just five round robin matches did an opponent score more than one try – and discipline – in just four round robin matches was more than one penalty goal kicked against them. North Harbour did not record any big scores as they had managed many times in the past and nor were there lots of tries – in fact many scored were length of the field efforts, again a tribute to the discipline that forbade the million dollar pass. The two year record of success at North Harbour Stadium fell at the NPC Semi-Final.

At fullback the return of a matured Glen Osborne brought solidity with still enough flair to keep spectators anticipating. Karl Te Nana was rather subdued on the wing, tending to wait rather than creating opportunities. Highlanders Super 12 star Aisea Tuilevu had his NPC season cut short with an injury just minutes into the first game. Newcomers on the wing Rodd Penney and Anthony Tuitavake gave promise of things to come. At centre, leading try scorer Rico Gear had his best season to date and must have gone close to All Black selection. Former Harbour player and more recent Canterbury All Black Mark Mayerhofer returned home but failed to reach his previous high standards. Rua Tipoki provided some anxious moments.

First five eight provided a job sharing opportunity for the young Willie Walker and the veteran Frano Botica with both appearing in all games and both kicking with a high level of skill. At halfback Mark Robinson captained the team with increasing maturity and the consistently high standard of his general play earned him an All Black recall.

It was expected that with the absence of their All Blacks Ron Cribb and Troy Flavell the forwards might find the going tough. But the loose forwards, particularly Blair Urlich at number eight and Craig Newby on the flank, raised their games several notches and Matua Parkinson was a fast to the loose ball as ever and seemingly attracted only a fraction of the penalties that came his way in previous years. The return of Liam Barry after five seasons in Japan certainly added value although his game time was limited.

Last year's likely lad at lock Matt Lord was another to grow in stature this year. Overseas players like Mark Giacheri and Van Humphries were adequate in the middle row.

The most exciting aspect of North Harbour in 2001 was the development of Tony Woodcock at prop. In a remarkable achievement for one so young, he started in all but one game and in just three did he play less than 80 minutes. Former Bay of Plenty and current Tong international Tevita Taumoepeau provided solidity on the other side of the front row. In his limited showing, John Buchanan looked likely to be around for a few years.

Slade McFarland and Ace Tiatia started the season as the two most likely hookers but as the season progressed it appeared that they could shortly be overtaken by New Zealand Colt Joe Ward.

Higher Honours went to:

New Zealand: Ron Cribb, Troy Flavell, Mark Robinson

New Zealand Maori: Matua Parkinson, Slade McFarland, Troy Flavell

New Zealand Colts: Joe Ward, Tony Woodcock

NORTH HARBOUR TEAM RECORD, 2001

Played 12, Won 8, Lost 3, Draw 1

Points for: 280, Points Against: 214

Date	Opponent	Location	Result	Tries	Con	PG	Referee
27 June	Hawke's Bay	Napier	28-28	Simeon (2), Adams, Camburn	Walker (3) Evans		G Reisima (Wairapa Bush)
10 August	Otago	Dunedin	12-15			Walker (2) Botica (2)	GJ Wise (Hawkes Bay)
18 August	Waikato	Albany	25-6	Walker, Parkinson, Gear	Walker Botica	Botica (2)	PD O'Brien (Southland)
25 August	Counties- Manukau	Pukekohe	15-14	Newby, Parkinson	Botica	Walker	GK Wahlstrom (Auckland)
1 September	Auckland	Albany	16-5	Tipoki	Walker	Walker (2) Botica (2)	PG Honiss (Waikato)
7 September	Canterbury	Albany	20-9	Te-Nana		Walker (3) Botica (2)	LE Bray (Wellington)
15 September	Bay of Plenty	Tauranga	31-7	Evans (2) Tuitavake, Gear, Robinson	Botica (3)		PG Honiss (Waikato)
22 September	Taranaki	Albany	26-12	Te Nana, Urlich	Walker (2)	Walker (4)	KH Rowe (Canterbury)
6 October	Northland	Albany	34-20	Gear, Robinson, Donaly, Penalty Try	Botica (3) Walker	Walker Botica	PD O'Brien (Southland)
12 October	Wellington	Wellington	31-35	Robinson (2), Barry, Gear	Walker (3) Botica	Walker	CJ Hawke (South Canterbury)
20 October	Southland	Invercargill	26-32	Gear (3), Penney (2)	Botica (2)	Walker	GJ Wise (Hawkes Bay)
27 October	Otago (semi- final)	Albany	10-37	Gear	Walker	Walker	PD O'Brien (Southland)

