

Senior Club Rugby Round-Up and Finals Preview – 14 July

The 2018 North Harbour senior club rugby Premier and Under 21 semi-finals were played out on Saturday 14 July and the big dance is this coming Saturday 21 July at QBE Stadium for the Championship finals with the Plate finals at club venues. Northcote and East Coast Bays have teams in both Premier grade finals and Bays remarkably also is represented in the Under 21 final along with Marist who is getting to the Under 21 final for the second time, but it will be an East Coast Bays dominated finals day at QBE Stadium with the Green and Black faithful expected in their droves.

In the Premier One grade, semi-final 1 produced an exciting finish with defending champion Northcote and fast finishing contender North Shore all tied up 14 all at full-time and extra time was whistled for Northcote's 1st 5 Jack Bergin to kick a penalty for golden point to head for the finals at the Stadium. Massey hosted a clinical East Coast Bays in semi-final 2 hungry for a long awaited spot in the finals. Bays maintained the lead throughout the match and won 18-3 the hard way, out west. Northcote has had recent appearance in the finals but for Bays there has been a drought extending back to 2010 and then back to the early years of the Union. For the train-spotters, East Coast Bays have won the Premier 1 championship in 1985, 1986 and 1991 and Northcote won it in 1989, 1990, 2010 and were 2017 champions. Northcote and East Coast Bays have been head to head only once in the Premier 1 championship in 1989 and Northcote came out on top 16-6. Northcote have come second in 2009 and 1995 and East Coast Bays runner-up in 1987, 1988, 1989, 1993 and 1994 – total appearances in the Premier 1 final are : Northcote six times and East Coast Bays eight.

In the Plate semi-finals Takapuna at home turned the tables on Marist and edged the Doolans 10-7. Kumeu thumped Silverdale at Riverhead running away in the second half to win 41-15 to secure a spot in the Premier 1 Plate final at Onewa against Takapuna for the silverware, having stowed the Country Cup away for the summer. Mahurangi won the Bowl Final by default over Glenfield.

In the Premier Two grade top dog East Coast Bays just held out Massey 11-5 in Mairangi Bay and Northcote won a high-scoring encounter against the strong North Shore side in Devonport just coming out on top 34-29. The Premier 2 final will see second seed Northcote defend their 2017 title against the dominant East Coast Bays boys on QBE Stadium Oval 21 July. For the record, Northcote have won the Premier 2 championship in 2007, 2015 and in 2017 and East Coast Bays have a rich but not recent history winning in 1985, 1988, 1990-1993 and 2001. In the Plate semi's Kumeu were too good for Silverdale at Riverhead winning 22-12 and Marist sunk a depleted Navy crew at the Vatican romping away to a 65-10 win to see Kumeu host Marist for the Plate final. Glenfield won the Bowl Final by default over Takapuna at Onewa however a seven aside fixture was played for some rugby to finish the season.

The Under 21's Championship semi-finals were tight affairs with Marist edging Massey at home 12-5 and 2017 champion East Coast Bays holding out the big Northcote team 10-7. Marist will be top seed and will make only their second tilt at the U21 Championship Final (2000 Champion) on QBE stadium against East Coast Bays as curtain-raiser to the Premier 1 Final. East Coast Bays has won the U21 trophy previously in 1988, 1989 1992 and were 2017 champions. In the Plate semi-finals Takapuna won by default over Kumeu and Silverdale secured a Plate Final spot by defeating North Shore 22-12 up on the Coast, and will travel away to Onewa for the final.

East Coast Bays is in three senior club finals on Saturday of which all involved at the house of Green and Black should be very proud, it is an outstanding achievement. No club has achieved more than two wins in Premier 1, Premier 2 or Under 21 in the history of the Union and that is on 20 occasions. Northcote got the triple crown last year but with the third win being their Under 85Kg team. The Premier 1 records show who the losing finalist is but that doesn't extend to the Premier 2 and Under 21 records unfortunately, so it cannot be established if a club has previously emulated East Coast Bay's 2018 achievement of three finalists in the top three grades.

The Under 85 grade continued their second round games on 14 July with three round-robin fixtures remaining, and with semi's and finals on 11 and 18 August respectively. Silverdale remains top of the table with a 21-16 win over Northcote away at Harvey's place but Takapuna is on the same competition points but in second place (lost to Dale

in the round) with a 25-7 win over Kumeu at Riverhead. Massey continued their charge up the table with a convincing 41-13 win over East Coast Bays at Moire Park. North Shore travelled to the 'Ville and put away the locals 25-7 and jump Kumeu into 4th place. Mahurangi had the bye. The top four remains very close and 5th place team Kumeu could push back into contention so it remains an enthralling competition.

East Coast Bays Women are in the top four of the Wider Auckland Womens Premier grade but went down to Ponsonby 22-17 and Glenfield women who are in the bottom four had a good 37-17 win over Eden. One round-robin fixture remains on 21 July in the second round of games. Semi-finals will be held 28 July with Finals on 4 August.

The Presidents grade continued to rumble on 14 July with those well-played draws and well-contested after-match speeches. The Pressies stand-down from play on 21 July for Premier and Under 21 finals day and school holiday duties with the next crop of rugby players. Kumeu host Presidents finals day at Riverhead on 18 August.

Photos by John Rau and Simon Harmer









