

Over 130 years of rugby history in New Zealand

The first recognised game of rugby played in New Zealand took place on Saturday, May 14, 1870 between a Nelson College side and the Nelson Football Club. A crowd of around 200, including “a fair sprinkling of ladies and a goodly number of the opposite sex,” gathered at the Botanics Reserve, Nelson to watch a new version of football, brought to New Zealand by Charles Monro.

Charles Monro, son of the then Speaker of the New Zealand Parliament, Sir David Monro, has been termed the “father of New Zealand rugby”. He played rugby as a student at Christ College, Finchley, England, and introduced the game to the Nelson Football Club in January 1870. He suggested a match be played against Nelson College, whose headmaster, Rev. F.C. Simmons, was himself a former student of Rugby School, England as were his two predecessor principals. This led to the historic match four months later.

Monro himself played in this first game and apart from 1871, continued to play for the Nelson Rugby Football Club and for combined Nelson Clubs until 1875. He is recorded as being a club committee member in 1870 and coach until 1873.

The first teams fielded eighteen players a side; “ten forwards (the kick off, with the fast runners to follow up), three half-backs (a few to back them up), Three three-quarters (the long kicks in the rear), and two fullbacks (goal minders)”.

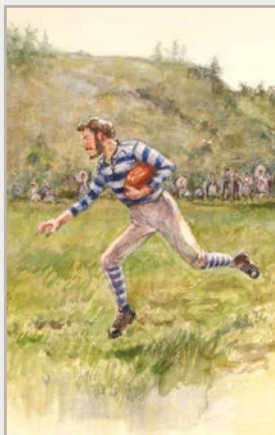
The teams for next big match were reduced to sixteen players. Sixteen ‘Old College Members of the Club’ played against a team of the same number who were not Collegians. The match was played one Saturday and then, as the rules required, matches to continue until one side had scored two goals. After several wet Saturdays abandonment was agreed upon.

The final match of the first season was played in Wellington on September 12th between a Wellington side and the Nelson Rugby Football Club. This game is regarded as the first inter-provincial rugby match in New Zealand and Nelson College players made up 12 of the starting sixteen.

Nelson College continued to make a significant contribution to New Zealand rugby providing one of the first All Blacks, George (Geo) Harper, who was in the first New Zealand Rugby team to wear the black jersey for a tour of Australia in 1893.

The proud tradition of Nelson College rugby continues today in the school where the game began back in 1870.

School and club rugby still continue to be the breeding ground for New Zealand’s elite players who become All Blacks.



Sean Garwood



Nelson artist Sean Garwood was born in England and grew up in Western Australia. From a very young age he was influenced by his father’s highly successful full-time career as an artist.

Growing up on the coast near the port town of Fremantle, Sean spent a lot of time sketching amongst Fremantle’s rich maritime heritage.

During this time his father was exhibiting his work throughout Australia and later New Zealand.

Thoughts of becoming a full-time artist like his father were put on hold, as the natural progression of a boyhood dream to become a Ship’s Master became a reality. After arriving in New Zealand at the age of 15, he became the contry’s youngest Deep Sea Master at only 21. Sean’s family has a rich maritime history, including being descendants of Admiral Eliab Harvey, who was Captain of the Temeraire, at the battle of Trafalgar. The earlier family name being Harvey-Garwood.

During his many years at sea Sean never lost the inspiration to take up a full-time painting career, which eventuated in 2006. Although he spent many enjoyable times sketching, Sean had never painted until he gave up his maritime career.

Like his father Sean is completely self-taught and works entirely freehand which has allowed him to develop his own unique style which he terms “close focus realism”.

Sean was influenced by his father’s meticulously detailed compositions. Every painting presents a challenge to re-create the beauty of the aged and textured subjects. Sean presents his art with a straight forward frankness that requires no verbal interpretation.

Although he never played rugby himself, living in New Zealand Sean could not help but be caught up in the enthusiasm for our national game. “I was intrigued by the whole history and mystique of the game that is such a big part of the New Zealand psyche.”

There are only two artists from whom Sean draws inspiration, his father and the magic of Andrew Wyeth. Sean, along with his wife Ligliana and two young daughters, currently reside on a country property in Nelson, that is “absolutely conducive to painting”.



The Old Blues that led to the All Blacks

by

Sean Garwood



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The Old Blues that led to the All Blacks

The painting immortalises the heritage of New Zealand rugby from its origins at Nelson College.

Although no archival records are kept as to the exact date of this jersey it is believed that it dates back to 1909. The jersey itself is archived at Nelson College. Made from wool by Lane Walker Rudkin of Christchurch under the 'Canterbury' brand, the label says: "No better in the Dominion" with the Canterbury logo in italics above. The striking colour of the jersey is a combination of Oxford and Cambridge blues, which are, of course, the colours of those two famous English universities. It is worth noting that the jersey is relatively small, only to confirm the view that players of this era were really quite modest in size compared to the highly developed bodies of today's professional players.

The boots, although not from the same era as the jersey, are similar in design to those worn by Don Clarke in his 1956 debut game against the Springboks.

The old leather rugby ball is from the early 1900's and more rounded than the flatter oval shape used today.

The Nelson College cap depicts the years that this particular student made the 1st XV.

In the foreground of the painting is an invitation from the Nelson College Football Club for a dance to be held at the college on 5th September 1909.

Inscribed in the desk is the name of the talented three quarter George Harper (known as 'Geo.' Harper). He began playing first class rugby in 1884 for the combined Nelson clubs while still attending Nelson College. From 1886 to 1895 he was the mainstay of Nelson provincial rugby. George Harper first came to national prominence when playing on the wing for the South Island against a touring Great Britain side. It wasn't until 1893 that he gained All Black selection.

The various elements in this painting combine to embody the spirit and history of rugby in New Zealand.

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The Old Blues that led to the All Blacks

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by **Sean Garwood**

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