

Rugby

NPC offers rising stars chance to stake claim

With the Mitre 10 Cup set to kick off next week, **Christopher Reive** highlights some of the players who could either stake their claims for higher honours – or attempt to get back in the good books of some Super Rugby and All Blacks selectors



Kinivillame Naholo Taranaki

The younger brother of All Blacks winger Waisake, Kinivillame Naholo has shown glimpses in two pre-season Ranfurly Shield defences to excite Taranaki fans. You'd be hard pressed to find someone who can match the 19-year-old winger for pace, he has plenty of strength, and can dazzle defenders with his foot-work.



Etene Nanai-Seturo Counties Manukau

In his debut season at Mitre 10 Cup level, there will be plenty of eyes on the highly-touted young fullback. The 18-year-old has shown his worth in the seven-man format, but will it translate to the 15-a-side game?



Tiaan Falcon Hawke's Bay

With Ihaia West taking up a deal in France, Falcon will take the reins as the Magpies' No 10. Having missed the majority of the Chiefs' Super Rugby campaign this season due to injury, Falcon will no doubt be eager to get some game time under his belt. He's playing in behind a strong pack this season, which includes Hurricanes stand-out loose forward Gareth Evans and Chiefs teammate Michael Allardice at lock. Falcon will have every opportunity to impress.



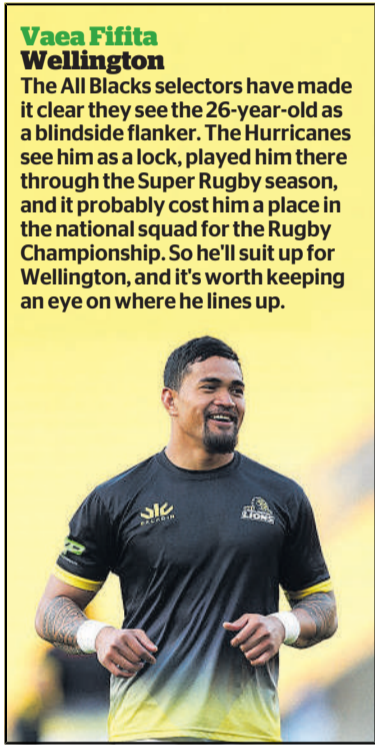
Rene Ranger Northland

He's back. The cult hero has returned to Northland following a short stint in France. He was released by La Rochelle after making just a handful of appearances for the French club. The 31-year-old played in all of Northland's matches last season, and should feature just as heavily this time around. The question here is will he be able to produce his dominant best?



Jordan Manihera Waikato

Manihera announced himself in the opening match of the 2017 season with a hat-trick against Taranaki at Yarrow Stadium. One week later, he pushed his try tally to five with a brace against Bay of Plenty. The loose forward should again be an integral cog in the Waikato engine room as they look to find their way back into the premiership.



Vaea Fifita Wellington

The All Blacks selectors have made it clear they see the 26-year-old as a blindside flanker. The Hurricanes see him as a lock, played him there through the Super Rugby season, and it probably cost him a place in the national squad for the Rugby Championship. So he'll suit up for Wellington, and it's worth keeping an eye on where he lines up.



Dylan Nel Otago

Unlikely to get a look in among the crowded Canterbury loose forwards stocks, the Durban-born Nel has travelled further south to try to forge himself a role in Otago colours. The 25-year-old is a strong ball-runner, more than capable of bagging his share of tries this season.



Stephen Perofeta Taranaki

Incumbent first five-eighth Marty McKenzie has been ruled out for the season due to a hip injury, and Perofeta is the logical choice to replace him in the No 10 jersey. After a mediocre season for the Blues, lining up for a strong Taranaki side will give him a chance to show why he's been touted as the man to end the Blues' agony.



Jackson Ormond Southland

After seven years in Taranaki's backline ranks, Jackson Ormond has gone south looking for more opportunities to get on to the paddock. His 2017 campaign was derailed by a broken fibula, he'll be looking to get back to his best with a new squad. With 57 provincial appearances to his name, Ormond brings a wealth of experience to the Stags' backline.

2018 MITRE 10 CUP

WEEK 1 THURSDAY AUGUST 16 – SUNDAY AUGUST 19		
Thursday 7.35pm	North Harbour v Northland	Albany
Friday 7.35pm	Tasman v Canterbury	Blenheim
Saturday 2.35pm	Manawatu v Waikato	Palmerston North
Saturday 5.05pm	Auckland v Counties Manukau	Auckland
Saturday 7.35pm	Bay of Plenty v Taranaki	Rotorua
Sunday 2.05pm	Wellington v Otago	Wellington
Sunday 4.35pm	Southland v Hawke's Bay	Invercargill
WEEK 2 THURSDAY AUGUST 23 – SUNDAY AUGUST 26		
Thursday 7.35pm	Counties Manukau v Bay of Plenty	Pukekohe
Friday 5.45pm	Otago v Hawke's Bay	Dunedin
Friday 7.45pm	Taranaki v Manawatu (RS)	Taranaki
Saturday 2.05pm	Canterbury v Wellington	Christchurch
Saturday 4.35pm	Waikato v North Harbour	Hamilton
Sunday 2.05pm	Tasman v Southland	Blenheim
Sunday 4.35pm	Northland v Auckland	Whangarei
WEEK 3 WEDNESDAY AUGUST 29 – SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 2		
Wednesday 7.35pm	Counties Manukau v Taranaki	Pukekohe
Thursday 7.35pm	Auckland v Waikato	Auckland
Friday 7.35pm	Wellington v Southland	Wellington
Saturday 2.35pm	Bay of Plenty v Canterbury	Tauranga
Saturday 5.05pm	Manawatu v Otago	Palmerston North
Saturday 7.35pm	North Harbour v Tasman	Albany
Sunday 2.05pm	Hawke's Bay v Counties Manukau	Napier
Sunday 4.35pm	Northland v Taranaki	Whangarei

WEEK 4 WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 5 – SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 9		
Wednesday 7.35pm	Waikato v Wellington	Hamilton
Thursday 7.35pm	Canterbury v Manawatu	Christchurch
Friday 5.45pm	Otago v Northland	Dunedin
Friday 7.45pm	Auckland v Tasman	Auckland
Saturday 2.05pm	Southland v Counties Manukau	Invercargill
Saturday 4.35pm	Hawke's Bay v Bay of Plenty	Napier
Sunday 2.05pm	Wellington v North Harbour	Wellington
Sunday 4.35pm	Taranaki v Waikato (RS)	Taranaki
WEEK 5 WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 12 – SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 16		
Wednesday 7.35pm	North Harbour v Canterbury	Albany
Thursday 7.35pm	Waikato v Hawke's Bay	Hamilton
Friday 5.45pm	Northland v Manawatu	Whangarei
Friday 7.45pm	Tasman v Taranaki	Nelson
Saturday 2.05pm	Counties Manukau v Wellington	Pukekohe
Saturday 4.35pm	Southland v Otago	Invercargill
Sunday 2.05pm	North Harbour v Bay of Plenty	Albany
Sunday 4.35pm	Canterbury v Auckland	Christchurch
WEEK 6 WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 19 – SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 23		
Wednesday 7.35pm	Manawatu v Tasman	Palmerston North
Thursday 7.35pm	Northland v Southland	Whangarei
Friday 7.35pm	Bay of Plenty v Waikato	Rotorua
Saturday 2.35pm	Hawke's Bay v North Harbour	Napier
Saturday 5.05pm	Otago v Canterbury	Dunedin
Saturday 7.35pm	Taranaki v Auckland (RS)	Taranaki
Sunday 2.05pm	Tasman v Counties Manukau	Nelson
Sunday 4.35pm	Manawatu v Wellington	Palmerston North

WEEK 7 WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 26 – SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 30		
Wednesday 7.35pm	Hawke's Bay v Northland	Napier
Thursday 7.35pm	Bay of Plenty v Manawatu	Rotorua
Friday 7.35pm	Auckland v Otago	Auckland
Saturday 2.35pm	Waikato v Southland	Hamilton
Saturday 5.05pm	Taranaki v North Harbour (RS)	Taranaki
Saturday 7.35pm	Wellington v Tasman	Wellington
Sunday 2.05pm	Canterbury v Hawke's Bay	Christchurch
Sunday 4.35pm	Counties Manukau v Northland	Pukekohe
WEEK 8 WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 3 – SUNDAY OCTOBER 7		
Wednesday 7.35pm	Otago v Bay of Plenty	Dunedin
Thursday 7.35pm	Wellington v Auckland	Wellington
Friday 7.35pm	Hawke's Bay v Manawatu	Napier
Saturday 2.35pm	Northland v Waikato	Whangarei
Saturday 5.05pm	North Harbour v Counties Manukau	Albany
Saturday 7.35pm	Canterbury v Taranaki	Christchurch
Sunday 2.05pm	Southland v Bay of Plenty	Invercargill
Sunday 4.35pm	Otago v Tasman	Dunedin
WEEK 9 WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 10 – SUNDAY OCTOBER 14		
Wednesday 7.35pm	Southland v Auckland	Invercargill
Thursday 7.35pm	Tasman v Hawke's Bay	Nelson
Friday 7.35pm	Taranaki v Wellington (RS)	Taranaki
Saturday 2.35pm	Bay of Plenty v Northland	Tauranga
Saturday 5.05pm	Waikato v Otago	Hamilton
Saturday 7.35pm	Counties Manukau v Canterbury	Pukekohe
Sunday 2.05pm	Auckland v North Harbour	Auckland
Sunday 4.35pm	Manawatu v Southland	Palmerston North



SEMIFINALS	
FRIDAY OCTOBER 19 – SATURDAY OCTOBER 20	
Friday 7.35pm	Semifinal 1
Saturday 2.35pm	Semifinal 2
Saturday 5.05pm	Semifinal 3
Saturday 7.35pm	Semifinal 4
FINALS	
FRIDAY OCTOBER 26 – SATURDAY OCTOBER 27	
Friday 7.35pm	Championship final
Saturday 4.05pm	Premiership final

