



1897

After a truly dreadful season in 1896 Ponsonby recovered in fine style and, with a string of eight straight wins, ran away with the 1897 championship. Once again there was an emphasis on a youth policy but it was noticeable that the return to winning form coincided with the return of four veterans – Albert Braund, Ollie Riley and Vic Langsford, who had all ‘retired’ at the end of the previous season, and Graham, who had been suspended for not turning up against City. That Parnell match was the one time secretary Charles Stichbury failed to file his team sheets, which suggests the club was trying to keep the return of four such notable players under wraps. Later on Braund kept appearing in matches despite never being named in the starting team, but after a couple of weeks his appearance on the field was no surprise and the opposition had prepared for him.

Reading between the lines suggests Dave Gallaher must have been considered for the 1897 All Black team that went to Australia, as he was by now recognised as one of Auckland’s best forwards, but the call didn’t come. Ponsonby was glad, as it meant he was available for the whole season while a side like Parnell suffered from having players called to higher things and injuries; when they played the return against Ponsonby no fewer than five of the Maroons’ leading players were unavailable.

Naturally the question arose whether the real Ponsonby was the 1896 version or that of 1897. The leap from a 2-8 record to 8-1 had few parallels in Auckland rugby to that time. It was a time where no team dominated an even competition and in the six years from 1895 to 1900 six different clubs headed the ladder. As it turned out, 1897 was something of a flash in the pan, and the side fell back into the lower reaches of the table in 1898 and stayed there for a few seasons yet.

But the championship meant a great deal to the people of the district, who were reported to be ‘talking about football again’ and the gossip pages were hinting that the young ladies of Ponsonby were casting a keener eye over the football team than had been the case for a few years. And happiness, to the people of Ponsonby, was feeling so good about the team that when Auckland was decked out in red, white and blue bunting to celebrate Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee, Ponsonby Road was decorated in blue and black.

10 April Season preview

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970410.2.13>

29 April Draw for the season

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970429.2.57>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970429.2.14>

30 April

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970430.2.20.3>

Ponsonby and Grafton staged practice matches for both the firsts and seconds.

1 May

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970501.2.9>

'Harrier' proved a lot sharper than any of the other critics when he forecast that the new-look Ponsonby team would be considerably improved by the infusion of new blood. Also noted was the trouble affecting Suburbs, which had been coming almost from Day One.

7/8 May Fixtures, teams and notes

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970507.2.27>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970508.2.10>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970508.2.59>

8 May Ponsonby 0 Grafton 5

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970510.2.15>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970510.2.55>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970515.2.8>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970515.2.52.2>

Although the main attraction was City v Newton, two of the three teams who shared the 1896 title, this match was worth noting by anyone who wanted a pointer on how the teams may do in the future. The match was willing and Ponsonby, despite the loss, looked a lot sharper than had been the case for some time.

13 May ARFU business

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970513.2.61>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970513.2.56>

Although no names were mentioned, several of those spoken to by the committee for rough play were engaged in the Ponsonby v Grafton game; the papers suggest blame was evenly spread. Also noted was the appointment of Jack Arneil as Auckland selector.

14 May Fixtures, teams and notes

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970514.2.63>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970514.2.16>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970515.2.56>

The Herald (15/5) noted the retired Albert Braund was seen on the sidelines the previous week. Within hours of those words appearing, he was back on the other side of the touchline, where he remained for another five years.

It was noted that the teams for the North v South match – the first one ever staged – would wear the colours of Otago (South) and Taranaki (North), with players to provide their own jerseys. A bit tough on good Canterbury or Auckland men!

15 May Ponsonby 10 Parnell 7

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970517.2.57>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970517.2.19.1>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970522.2.9>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970522.2.56.8>

Graham, R Masefield tries Braund goal from a mark

The result was a major shock, to fans, pundits and punters alike. No doubt some chortling was heard down Ponsonby Road that evening.

20 May ARFU meeting

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970520.2.59>

21 May Fixtures, teams and notes

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970521.2.26>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970522.2.58>

22 May Ponsonby 20 North Shore 11

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970524.2.57>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970524.2.19>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970529.2.8>

Renwick, Carder, Lendrum, R Masefield tries Renwick 2 conversions Renwick dropped goal

24 May Betting case in Sydney

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970524.2.7>

Given what was going on in New Zealand, and especially around rugby – see the stories circulating from the Parnell match a week earlier – this case was of significant interest. Nothing happened for another 11 years, but the warning shots had been fired.

28 May Fixtures, teams and notes

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970528.2.58>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970528.2.30>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970529.2.55>

The points table referred to in the Herald (29/5) showed how tight this competition was, which meant the fans were pouring in through the turnstiles each week.

29 May Ponsonby 3 City 0

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970531.2.13.1>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970531.2.59>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970605.2.13>

R Masefield try

3 June ARFU meeting

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970603.2.67>

4 June Fixtures, teams and notes

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970604.2.25>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970515.2.52.1>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970605.2.64>

Sharkey, in the team sheet, is none other than our old mate Albert Braund under another one of his pseudonyms. Perhaps the name was appropriate.

5 June Ponsonby 9 Newton 0

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970607.2.21>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970607.2.60>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970612.2.9>

Renwick (2), Braithwaite tries

Newton could only muster ten men, so the match was a light-hearted affair and was called off when one of the players suffered injury.

11 June Fixtures, teams and notes

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970611.2.20>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970612.2.5>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970612.2.53.14.1>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970612.2.47>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970612.2.53.14.2>

What They Said (Observer) was on the money.

12 June Ponsonby 13 Grafton 0

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970614.2.46>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970614.2.13>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970619.2.12>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970619.2.20.2>

Braithwaite, Lendrum, Rule tries R Masefield dropped goal

18 June Fixtures, teams and notes

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970618.2.22>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970619.2.20.1>

19 June No club rugby as Auckland played Northern Wairoa

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970619.2.60>

21 June

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970621.2.20>

Blue and black decorated the Ponsonby district to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee. In most other places it was red, white and blue.

24 June ARFU meeting

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970624.2.41>

25 June Fixtures, teams and notes

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970625.2.13>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970626.2.52>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970626.2.55.9.1>

26 June Ponsonby 6 Parnell 4

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970628.2.26.1>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970628.2.58>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970703.2.9>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970703.2.60.8.2>

Langsford, R Masefield tries

The match drew a crowd of 4000, the biggest of the season, and they got their money's worth; Reg Masefield's try with time up would have earned him the freedom of the district for at least a week! That try virtually decided the Auckland championship for the year.

2 July Fixtures, teams and notes

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970702.2.30>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970703.2.59>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970703.2.60.8.1>

3 July Ponsonby 15 North Shore 5

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970705.2.10.1>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970705.2.61>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970710.2.9>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970710.2.56.11>
Graham, Braund, R Masefield tries Smith (2), Braithwaite conversions

8 July ARFU meeting

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970708.2.59>

9 July Fixtures, teams and notes

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970709.2.22>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970710.2.63>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970710.2.31>

It only took another 121 years for a Ponsonby player to get a knighthood. Messrs Masefield and Braund remained untitled.

10 July Ponsonby 6 City 0

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970712.2.17>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970712.2.55>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970717.2.9>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970717.2.49.11.2>

Smith, Gallaher tries

The game was in the balance throughout, as it was scoreless at halftime and only 3-0 as the clock wound down. Dave Gallaher's try in the last few moments set off jubilant scenes on the sideline, as the win secured the championship.

16 July

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970716.2.12>

Ponsonby still had unfinished business in the Junior Cup to attend to.

17 July No club rugby as Auckland played Thames

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970724.2.8>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970717.2.57>
<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970724.2.52.8>

31 July

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970731.2.9>

Ponsonby II's fine record 1895-97. It's remarkable that, with a points differential of 38-9, Ponsonby could win seven and draw three of ten matches in 1897. Clearly points were very hard to come by during the season.

7 August

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/TO18970807.2.9>

The last item mentioned was to trouble rugby for a decade and more

11 September

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970911.2.46>

15 September

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970915.2.50>

22 September

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970922.2.45>

24 September Teams for the Tukapa v Ponsonby match

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970924.2.27>

25 September Ponsonby 5 Tukapa 12

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH18970927.2.34>

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS18970927.2.18>

A match between the Auckland and Taranaki champions was becoming a regular feature of the rugby calendar

Carder try Wilson conversion