



Our 33rd Championship (18th Gallaher Shield)

1985

Ponsonby wasn't in the winner's circle in 1984 – it was, in fact, a year when a lot of good sides missed out – and in 1985 the Seniors got away to a slowish start. This was despite a growing list of first-class players, many of whom were nearing their peak, and a settled side that had been together for long enough to understand each other well.

About halfway through the season everything began to click into place. The Alan McEvoy Trophy was not collected but Ponies hit the ground running in the Gallaher Shield section and stormed to victory, piling up a sequence of wins along the way although it needed an unlikely hero, Mike Turner, to kick the goal that decided the semi-final shootout after the scores finished level.

The strength of the team wasn't in its four regular Auckland A players, even though all four had test careers; University dominated the top side's roster with ten players chosen, even if most were not regulars. The eleven players who represented Auckland B were the strength of Ponsonby, and most are well remembered today as club stalwarts over a prolonged period.

Those whose memories go back to that time will remember the following: Petaia Nee Nee, Bernie Smith, Levi Vao, Herati Matapo, Grant McCurrach, Jack Kirifi, Mark Brooke-Cowden, Rob Cheval, Peter Fatialofa, Turner and John Mills. That was the list of Ponies who played for Auckland B. You could build the core of a very good side around that lot, rest assured. Two All Blacks, a Samoa star, two New Zealand Maori reps and a number of club centurions are in the mix. They were formidable then, and remain so in the memory.

Ponsonby had something else they had long wished for, too – a dead-eye Dick goal-kicker. Brett Craies only played four seasons with the club but scored 1039 points, to set new records all over the place. He played a limited amount of first-class footy but at club level was as good as a ten-point start every week. His boot, in an era when Auckland club rugby was full of high-scoring kickers, was often a vital factor.

The way Ponsonby charged to the Gallaher Shield, and the depth in the lower grades, served as a warning to the rest that this was not going to be a one-season wonder.