



Alfred Tupu

Elected in 1997

Alfred Tupu was one of three friends who approached Ponsonby in late 1967, asking that the club accept their team as an entity that could remain together as it represented the club. Owen Donaldson said yes, that was fine, and a great addition was made to the club. For Tupu and his colleagues, Bob Tuivaiti-Va'ai and Dale Moyer, represented an all-Samoan team, the only one in Auckland at the time, which had been turned away from five other clubs before being accepted at Blake Street. That meeting and its outcome put Ponsonby at the forefront of the Pasifika connection in Auckland rugby then, and for generations to come.

Tupu was coming to the end of his playing days then, although he carried on as a player-coach for a while, but his more important role was as a leader in the Samoan community and forging links between the club and many new arrivals from the Islands during the days of the big migration. Although Pasifika players are prominent in every club in Auckland these days, Ponsonby was the first to embrace a group that has proved over time to be among the club's staunchest supporters and, for many of a certain age, Ponsonby is still 'our club', even if they have lived away from the area for years.

Tupu was unusual in those days, though, as he moved into the general club administration – many newish arrivals were somewhat shy in that regard – and eventually rose to the important position of Club Captain. He is believed to be the first Samoan to hold that post in any club in New Zealand. During his heyday the gradual merging of talent from the nation-specific teams – Ponsonby also had Tongan and Cook Island sides under its banner – became more general. By the mid-1980s, it was more or less complete.

Tupu was aware of the role he and others had played in the club's history, and proud of it. He remained a respected Elder Statesman on the side, wielding a lot of influence as one would expect of a Matai. It was done quietly but effectively and, in his own way, Alfred Tupu was a pioneer in New Zealand rugby.