

ROUND 02 | MEN'S CENTRAL LEAGUE



SUN 7 APR, 3PM

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CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME



I would like to welcome Western Suburbs to Wakefield Park in what is our first home game of the new CL season.

Western Suburbs are a much improved squad from last season and they showed this last week in their opening round win scoring 7 goals. Our boys need to ensure they are up for it today as Wests have a few points to prove.

Both our top two sides won in their opening rounds, albeit a little ugly for our Cap Prens, but it's the 3 points that matter not how we got there. The CL side travelled up to Napier and had a good win vs a much improved Napier side.

Over Easter weekend I had the pleasure of being out in Kapiti to watch our u11, u13 and u17 play in the KCU

Easter Tournament. What a pleasure it was. Our u11 finished around mid-table, our U13 won their age group and our U17 went through unbeaten but finished second on points. Well done to the coaches, managers, parents and players who helped in the set-up and organisation of the teams and the day.

Good luck to both teams today. We look forward to welcoming you back to our Clubrooms for the aftermatch function with all players, coaches and referees.

Paul Kotrotsos

CENTRAL LEAGUE

PAUL IFILL



Good afternoon everyone. Welcome back to Wakefield Park.

Last weekend we headed up to Napier on Easter Sunday for our first Central League fixture of the season.

We travelled knowing that we had prepared well, and were aware that Napier always carry a threat and that they had recruited very well in the off season.

Early on in the game it was clear that it wasn't going to be easy, so I was very pleased to come away with a 3-0 win in what I felt was a decent performance.

There were some very good moments and I was pleased with the progress that we are making, but feel there's still

plenty of work to do to play as I would like to see us play! Today sees us welcome Alan Koch and his Western Suburbs team. Suburbs enjoyed a fantastic opening day win against our neighbours, Island Bay, winning 7-1 in a very one-sided encounter.

With the above in mind, we expect a very tough game today!

Please get behind the players as we look to get our first home win of the season!

Paul Ifill

CAPITAL PREMIER

TAYLOR HALL-JONES



Welcome back everyone as another season is upon us!

First up in Capital Premier we took on Te Kotahitanga FC at home.

The game was a cagey affair with neither team threatening too much in the first half. Te Kotahitanga were very organised and difficult to break down whilst threatening on the break themselves.

It took until the 80th minute to get the breakthrough when Oli Davies slipped in George Walker who calmly slotted it in the bottom corner to put us 1-0 up.

We were relatively comfortable until the 97th minute when Te Kotahitanga hit the crossbar with virtually the last play of the game meaning we held on for three points.

It's great to have a team from Kāpiti back in the league and we look forward to the reverse fixture.

Taylor Hall-Jones

OLYMPIC U17'S

SAMUEL MITRAKAS



The KCU tournament last weekend proved to be a promising start for our U17s.

A lot of work behind the scenes has gone into getting the team into the position they are in at the moment. The boys have had almost 8 weeks of training already, but this was to be our first set of games.

With only 3 games in a pool of 4 (Olympic, Miramar, PNU Academy and Kapiti), we came away undefeated (5 points) but finished in second behind PNU (6 points). A draw against Miramar (1-1), a draw to Kapiti (0-0) and a 1-0 win vs the winners PNU. The games were quick, 20 minute halves. Fayaadh and Kahurangi were our goalscorers.

As all preseason games go there's always positives and many things to work on. The club has done a lot of work in the youth space over the last few months to put us in a position to field an U13 and an all Olympic U17 team in the CDL league, starting 28th April.

There has been a big shift in player movement where plenty of new players have arrived at our doorstep wanting to represent the club. Thanks to Paul, Matt, Pete and Nina for all their work up to this point. It will be an exciting season ahead with a good bunch of boys.

Samuel Mitrakas



U13'S ZEUS

SIMON GEORGE



The U13 CDL team has had a comprehensive pre-season so far.

Since 2023, we have strengthened our squad both from within the club and with new players to the club.

It's been a big adjustment moving from 9 v 9 on smaller pitches to 11 v 11 on full-size pitches. The more games the better to help with this adjustment. Personally, I would much prefer they kept playing 9 v 9 and continue to develop playing in tighter spaces on smaller pitches for 1-2 more years, but it is what it is.

It was great to have the chance to compete in the KCU tournament on Easter weekend. The bulk of this group have enjoyed recent success, winning last year's KCU and Wests tournaments and 4 of our 5 girls won a tournament in Sydney in October, so we went into this tournament with high expectations. My primary focus is on how the team plays and individual development, but results are also important.

Unfortunately, one of our opponents pulled out, so we only played two group games. We beat Miramar 4-0 and Palmerston North United Academy 1-0. Next was the semi-final, beating Palmerston Nth Marist 3-1 and victory in the final again versus Miramar, this time 3-1. Well done to the players and very supportive parents!

Nice to win, but the main thing was it gave us more valuable game time, learning how to play together in such a large space.

Congratulations to the first and second teams and coaches on their continued success and a big thank you to the club officials for paving the way for us U13s to compete in the CDL/TDP league.

Simon George



THE HISTORY OF THE O'BRIEN SHIELD

Wellington Olympic will again be defending the O'Brien Shield as they face off against Western Suburbs today, having successfully kept Wests at bay in their last encounter together.

Today marks the 337th challenge for the Shield since it was first commissioned in 1992 to recognise the contribution that Bob O'Brien had made to football – as a player, coach, administrator and President of the then, Wellington Football Association.

Bob was a Life Member of Seatoun Club where, amongst his football activity and administration, had won two Chatham Cup winners' medals in 1957 and 1958, along with the Wellington Championships.

Capital Football's Matt Snaddon has been able to put together a list, not only of the Clubs that have won the coveted Shield since its inception, but impressively (and no doubt many, many hours later), composed a complete record of team players, results, goal scorers, referees, linesmen, as well as other information.

Miramar Rangers concluded a significant defensive record of 32 matches last season, with Waterside Karori taking the Shield home with them and ending Miramar's run when they beat them 4-3 in the Shield's 328th match.

Olympic picked up the Shield in its 334th match then defended it against both Stop Out and Wests, successfully.

Because of the nature of how the Shield changes hand (and divisions), some Clubs have not had the opportunity for a challenge for many, many years. Seatoun, sadly, are one of those Clubs having lost their chances to hold the Shield again since its early years.

The Club first won the newly introduced Shield in 1992 in only its 2nd match out against Seatoun only to lose it straight back to Seatoun in their next meeting in match 3.

By the time Olympic could challenge for the Shield again, it was match 14 and they fell short against holders Wanganui Athletic.

It would be another five years before the Club would come to head to head for another challenge. With an impressive lineup, the team had another opportunity to take on the defender in match 70. Having wrestled it out of Petone's possession, the Club went on to defend it twice more consecutively before Lower Hutt City ruined our party.

The Shield came back to us in match 79 with three successful defences just to give it away in the 83rd match to Karori.

In 2000 and 28 challenges later, Olympic celebrates

again after beating Western Suburbs, but two defending matches later, Lower Hutt stomped on our parade again.

There were a number of challenges through the years, but too many unsuccessful defences. Olympic finally found some stride in 2012 having removed the Shield from Petone in the 226th match and went on to successfully defend the Shield for another 10 challenges before succumbing in the 237th match to, who else, but Lower Hutt.

Olympic will be looking to repeat its successful run and surpass its 10 game consecutive wins record.

The Shield will be displayed down at the field at every home game match as required by Capital Football. This allows for both defending and challenging clubs to be able to promote the Shield and provide publicity to members and supporters, alike. Trustees for the Shield – Matt Snaddon (Capital Football), Jason Pine (Media) and Michael Chadwick (Seatoun)

WELLINGTON OLYMPIC:

Challenges:	31
Defences:	35



WESTERN SUBURBS



Mental Hospital AFC

Western Suburbs was established in 1906 as Mental Hospital AFC, initially as a recreational outlet for staff at Porirua Mental Hospital, winning the Chatham Cup in 1935, beating Christchurch's Western 2–0.

Western Suburbs (1956–1973)

In 1956 the name of the club changed to Western Suburbs, reflecting its player base from Porirua and Tawa. Led by Hungarian-born coach Imre Kiss, who had represented New Zealand for one official international in 1967, the club won the Central League First Division title in 1968 and again in 1969, qualifying for the inaugural season of the National League in 1970. That year they lost the Chatham Cup to Blockhouse Bay after a replay, but achieved success for the second time in their history the following year, beating Wellington City 3–2 in the 1971 final. Western Suburbs were relegated from the National League at the end of the 1971 season.

Porirua United

The club name was changed to Porirua United in 1973 when Porirua gained city status. Shortly after, a faction within the club broke away to form rival club Tawa AFC. Porirua United won the Central League title in 1974.

Porirua Viard United

At the end of the 1983 season Porirua United and Viard amalgamated to become Porirua Viard United. The women's team were joint National Champions in 1987, drawing the grand final with Auckland's Eden. In 1992 Porirua Viard United amalgamated with Mana United, forming Western Suburbs.

Western Suburbs (1992–present)

Over the last 10 years, the club won two Central League First Division titles, participated in the North Island League in 1999, finishing 8th. Wests also won the inaugural Capital Federation Championship in 2000.

The 2001 season was an up-and-down season under Ken Cresswell. After a poor start the team managed to get back on track finishing a respectable 3rd-place finish.

2002 brought a new coach, a new attitude and a few new faces to Wests. Ex-Wests captain, Martin Disley, took over as coach from Ken Cresswell, who had gone to Wellington United in the off-season. Wests scored 27 goals in their final 5 games of the season, conceding just 7. With just 2 games remaining, Wests took the lead from Lower Hutt and needed a win against Petone in the final game of the season to secure their 4th League title in 6 years. Following their 2002 League Title, Wests went on to dispose of Havelock in the Regional Playoff 11–0 on aggregate. The National League Promotion Playoff was a mixed bag for Wests, picking up a win, a draw and a loss against Waitakere, Glenfield and Caversham respectively.

In 2003 and 2004 the club performed well losing only 3 and 2 games in each season. However, it was not good enough to win and only second and third placings were achieved in the Capital Premier Competition. 2005 saw the return of the Central League after the dissolution of the National League in favour of the New Zealand Football Championship competition. Western Suburbs became the first team to win the renewed competition, however the team was knocked out of the Chatham Cup in the 3rd round for fielding an ineligible player.

In 2006, the centenary year of the club, the club failed to defend their Central League title, finishing runners up. However Wests managed to reach the Chatham Cup final, winning the trophy after defeating Eastern Suburbs 3–0 on penalties after a scoreless draw. Western Suburbs was officially recognised as Porirua City's Team of the Year. In 2018 Wests travelled to Auckland for the Chatham Cup final against Birkenhead United and succumbed in penalties.

The 2007 season saw Western Suburbs winning the Central Premier League title, however they failed to defend their Chatham Cup title, losing to Central United 10–9 on penalties after a scoreless draw.

Central Premier League Winners:

1996, 1998, 2005, 207, 2009, 2019





2023 SEASON RECAP



February/March

Preseason began with the annual Hilton Petone Cup where we fielded a blend of first and second team players. We were unable to retain the trophy, losing to Wellington Phoenix Reserves 3-4 in the final, with attention firmly focused on our first international foray.

On 11th March we played our first ever Oceania Football Association sanctioned match – the home leg of the Oceania Champions League national qualifier against NZ and Oceania Champions Auckland City at Martin Luckie Park. Somewhat more formal than we were used to with a set announcer script and the playing of the FIFA Living Football Anthem as the teams walked on. We fielded five debutants (although only one of these actually saw out the season), having lost club stalwart with over 150 caps, Alex Palezevic to Stop Out in the off season while Gianni Bouzoukis and Kailan Gould had headed overseas. A 37th minute goal from newbie Joel Stevens gave us the advantage and he nearly doubled it when he hit a ball from just inside the Auckland City half but it swerved at the last moment and bounced off the post. We held the lead until the 79th minute when City equalised.

A 1-1 draw represented our first ever point against City in four meetings but we were left with a feeling of what might have been. The second leg a week later at Kiwitea Street was more of the same. After 62 minutes we were 3-1 up on the day (4-2 on aggregate) after a Ben Mata penalty and a brace from Hamish Watson. The final 16 minutes however saw us concede four times with an Emiliano Tade hattrick (including two penalties) and a straight red card to Ben Mata to lose 3-5 on the day (4-6 on aggregate). City had just returned from the World Club Championships and their superior match fitness told – we won the first 70 minutes over both legs 4-1 but lost the last 20 minutes 0-5. Unfortunately,

dynamo Kailan Gould could only watch as his return from Australia was too late to register him for these OCL matches.

The Central League started on 25th March with a home match against Miramar Rangers. The 2023 draw meant that we would not see a repeat of the tense 2021 and 2022 finales where we pipped Miramar to the title both years with 1-0 wins. Miramar were in a rebuilding year and we won comfortably 3-1 which included with a goal by Joe Hopper 10 minutes into his debut and a brace of penalties from Ben Mata.

April

The month started on April Fool's Day with a rollercoaster match against Waterside Karori on the Karori grass on which we have struggled over the years. It wasn't looking promising when Scott Basalaj upended a Karori attacker and the referee pointed to the spot and brandished a red card. As Scott was going for the ball it was technically the wrong call and the referee downgraded the card to a yellow having spoken to the linesman. Scott, having given away the penalty, made amends by saving the kick! Former Karori striker Merlin Luke-Miny and Josh Rogerson put us 2-0 up before Luke Agalawatta ensured a nervous last seven minutes or so before we held on to win 2-1. An amusing sidenote to the match was that Karori had more Greeks in their starting line-up than we did! Lukas Halikias had moved over during the off-season while we had Sammy Mitrakas on the bench.

Next up was a Good Friday encounter with Wellington Phoenix Reserves at Fraser Park. The match was heading towards a 1-1 draw until Kailan Gould popped up to score the winner in stoppage time in his 50th match for Olympic. Shades of our 2021 campaign where

stoppage time winners were a regular occurrence. It was a clean sweep for the club as the seconds and thirds also beat their respective Phoenix Academy opponents.

The remaining April matches were at the newly returned Wakefield Park with wins against Whanganui (6-1), Petone (4-2) and North Wellington (7-0 with a Hamish Watson hattrick). The Petone match included our first 0-2 comeback of the season and Jack-Henry Sinclair's 50th goal for the club.

After six matches we had the maximum 18 points ahead of Wellington Phoenix Reserves on 15 points and Western Suburbs on 12 points with perennial contenders Miramar Rangers back on 9 points. We had dropped to 2nd place behind Petone on goal difference after the Karori match – the first time since the end of the 2021 season that we had not been top of the league at the end of a round.

May

The next match was on another of our least favourite grounds over the years (the 4-2 title winning match in 2016 being a notable exception) – Hutt Park. Stop Out included former Olympic players Alex Palezevic and Connor Gaul in their line-up so were up for the challenge. The ground and weather lived up to their reputation but we eked out a 2-1 lead shortly after half-time which we held going into the last quarter. Ben Mata came off the bench for his 99th cap but his first action was to mis-time a tackle and, as last man, return to the sheds after the briefest of cameos. Stop Out equalised following the resulting free kick and took the lead a few minutes later. In stoppage time we were reduced to 9 men with Joe Hopper receiving his second yellow as Stop Out held on to win 3-2.

After that setback we had two resounding wins at home against Napier City Rovers (6-3) and out at Endeavour Park against Wests (5-2). The NCR match saw a second consecutive home hattrick by Hamish Watson and the return of Gianni Bouzoukis (from Finland and then injury) as a second half substitute. Captain Ben Mata became the 34th Olympic centurion in the Wests match and celebrated in style with a brace of penalties taking him to 31 goals in those 100 matches (including 19 penalties).

Despite the Stop Out defeat, we were still top with 24 points from 9 matches followed by Wellington Phoenix

Reserves and Western Suburbs on 18 points, although WPR had a catch up match against Miramar still to play.

June

June began with a bang. We had our first run out in the Chatham Cup for the season and demolished Rupert Kemey's old club, Wainuiomata. They scored first but by the half hour mark we were 5-1 ahead with Gianni Bouzoukis, on his first start of the season, already with a hattrick. That was Gianni's 7th hattrick for Olympic giving him the club record on his own ahead of Mickey Malivuk. With two more goals in the first four minutes after half time a real rout was on but the remaining goals were shared and we only ran out 9-3 winners.

That cup goal-fest was the springboard for a once in a generation result at Davey Farrington Park the following week. Gianni had taken approximately 28 minutes to score a hattrick the previous week and needed slightly longer this time ... by about three minutes! This was our first ever hattrick against Miramar Rangers. After 31 minutes or so we were rocking and rolling at 4-0 (Hamish Watson had the other). The previous year in the National League we had been 4-0 up at half time but eased off to a 4-1 win with the Grand Final the following week. This time we pushed on and finished 7-0 winners with Hamish also completing a hattrick and Gianni adding his fourth in second half stoppage time.

This was our fifth match unbeaten at David Farrington Park (2 wins, 3 draws), most goals scored ever against Miramar (previous was 4) and highest victory margin (previous was 3). This also equalled Miramar's worst ever home defeat (0-7 versus Wellington Diamonds United in 1981).

After such a stellar start to the month, the remaining two matches were shaky affairs – we fought back in the third round of the cup to edge Central League strugglers North Wellington 3-2 and had a stoppage time equaliser in a 2-2 draw with Karori. With less than a quarter of an hour to go we were actually trailing North Wellington 1-2 but Ben Mata equalised from the spot (his second penalty of the match) before Theo Ettema scored his first ever match winner. It took another Ben Mata penalty to rescue a point against Karori with his third goal of the match (he had scored an own goal in the first half and hit home the rebound from his saved penalty in the 70th minute).

After 11 rounds our lead at the top of the table had been



cut to a single point. We had 28 points with the Phoenix Reserves on 27 points and Wests on 24 points. It was shaping up to be a three way race for the title with Miramar completely out of contention.

July

We started the month in style brushing aside Whanganui Athletic (7-0) up at Wembley Park and followed up with a comprehensive cup victory against Petone (5-0) at Memorial Park to reach the national stages of the cup for the second season running for the first time since 2005 and 2006.

Next up was the potential league defining match against WPR. At half time we were in a 0-2 hole again. We were still 0-2 down after 70 minutes and still looking for our first ever home goal against WPR having lost 0-3 in 2022. Two quick goals from Jack-Henry Sinclair and Hamish Watson brought us level before a stoppage time winner by Ben Mata (yes, from the penalty spot) gave us a stunning 3-2 win. As happened earlier in the season, the seconds and thirds also beat their Phoenix counterparts making the season tally across the leagues, Wellington Olympic 6 Wellington Phoenix 0.

The league was now ours to lose with a second trip of the month to Memorial Park up next. We were on a 35 match scoring streak, Ben Mata was on a 5 match scoring streak, we hadn't lost to Petone since 2011, hadn't even drawn with them since 2014 and hadn't failed to score against them since 2000. All these streaks ended unceremoniously in a humbling 0-4 defeat. We were already 0-2 down when Gavin Hoy was given a straight red in the 40th minute for reacting to the elbow choke by Matthew Brazier. Brazier, despite already being on a yellow, remained on the pitch and we could not repeat the heroics of the earlier league match.

The only good news was that a significantly understrength WPR side lost to North Wellington (losing the O'Brien Shield in the process) while Western Suburbs lost to Miramar. With only 4 rounds to go it was a two horse race with us on 34 points and WPR on 30 points. We would, however, be without Gianni Bouzoukis until the final match against Wests due to a holiday organised before his return to NZ.

The disappointment carried into the Chatham Cup



quarter final at home to Eastern Suburbs the following week. After 16 minutes we were once more in a 0-2 hole – a badly cleared ball was hit home from the edge of the box and a second came straight from a corner. By half time we were level once more with yet another penalty brace from Ben Mata – his fourth of the season. With normal time running out, Justin Gulley was deemed to have brought down a Suburbs attacker and he was red carded as the last man. We held out valiantly until the 119th minute when a Francis De Vries screamer made the final score Olympic 2 Suburbs 3.

August

The Chatham Cup was out of reach for another season but thanks to a 5-0 win against North Wellington at Alex Moore Park, the O'Brien Shield was back at Wakefield Park for the first time since we relinquished it to Lower Hutt City (0-3) on a stormy midweek night in July 2013. The match also had another notable event – when we were awarded a penalty early in the second half and already 3-0 up, Ben Mata handed the ball to Tam Dimairo. Tam duly slotted home his first ever goal for the club in his 56th appearance placing him 5th equal on the list of games played without a goal - just behind Ryan Edwards on 59 but well short of 1st placed Nigel Metcalf on 82.

While we were beating North Wellington, WPR dropped points in a 3-3 draw to Stop Out. The following week, 12th August, WPR lost the early kick off match against Napier (1-4) meaning that if we beat Stop Out then we would be champions with two games to spare. Stop Out, having already beaten us at Hutt Park were out to spoil the occasion and led 3-2 at half time. We dug deep and the trophy was assured well before Hamish Watson scored in stoppage time to make the final score 6-3. We were helped by the red card given to the Stop Out keeper despite Scott Basalaj's protests on his behalf. The second half wasn't as tense as the two 1-0 victories that clinched the previous two titles and the celebrations weren't as intense in the clubrooms afterwards but history was achieved with the first ever Central League three-peat.

A day later we found ourselves celebrating again with the first ever Venus Shield win by our reserve side and breaking another great record of the two top divisions



in the Capital Federation area being won by the same Club. Oliver Davies scored on his starting debut for the 1st team in a 4-1 win against Napier at Park Island – our 6th consecutive win at that ground since 2020, having gone winless there from 2014 to 2019.

September

The only thing riding on the last Central League match of the season was the O'Brien Shield. Western Suburbs had fallen off the pace due to players moving overseas and the result was never in doubt as we romped to a 4-1 lead just after the half hour mark and ended up 8-3 victors with Gavin Hoy scoring his first Olympic hattrick having just hit two against both Stop Out and NCR. Ben Mata was again generous and handed the ball to Jack Cawley who failed to hit the target from the spot. The league ended as it began with a goal to Joe Hopper.

The Central League trophy, the O'Brien Shield and the Venus Shield were all in the trophy cabinet but could we go one better than last season and add the coveted National League Trophy?

The National League campaign began up in Auckland against newcomers Manurewa. In a feisty match we prevailed 5-2 having twice been pegged back before pulling away.

Next up were Napier at Martin Luckie Park (used for National League whenever possible this season despite Wakefield Park being available). We were going for our 10th straight win against NCR dating back to August 2020. The game was over within the first half hour – by then it was already 4-0 with two goals apiece for Gianni Bouzoukis and Jack-Henry Sinclair. Deri Corfe pulled one back for the visitors just before half time but a comeback was unlikely. Gianni completed his hattrick (a record extending ninth for the club) in the 56th minute before Jack-Henry scored the milestone 100th hattrick for Olympic since 1970 in the 81st minute. Ben Mata added a seventh with a few minutes left – his 20th goal of the season – from the spot as usual to make the final score 7-1. Three matches against NCR this season had yielded an impressive combined 17-5 scoreline (6-3, 4-1, 7-1).

After two rounds there was a three-way tie at the top of the table on maximum 6 points with Olympic ahead of Christchurch United and Auckland City on goal difference.

October

A trip to Christchurch to play Cashmere Technical out at Nga Puna Wai was the next challenge. For the fifth time this season we went 0-2 down. A Joel Stevens cracker pulled a goal back but at halftime Technical had extended their lead to 3-1. By the 62nd minute we were level with a Hamish Watson brace. The game ebbed and flowed thereafter but Ben Mata will be ruing the one that got away as he failed to get his header on target with about five minutes to go with the keeper beaten. Having been a couple of goals down twice, the team showed character to stay unbeaten with the 3-3 draw but dropped a couple of points behind Auckland City in the standings but still level with Christchurch United who drew with Auckland United.

Revenge was on all minds when Eastern Suburbs came to visit in a match played at Wakefield Park due to the unavailability of Martin Luckie. Some route one action saw Gianni Bouzoukis get on the end of a bomb from Scott Basalaj to give us the lead after only 10 minutes. Unfortunately, as has been the case most of the season, the defence couldn't hold out and by half time we were facing a 1-2 deficit. It was looking bad until substitute Gavin Hoy popped up with the equaliser with under five minutes to go. The 2-2 final score was a repeat of the Chatham Cup regulation time score but it meant another two points dropped and the gap to Auckland City had widened to 4 points.

A trip to Auckland to play United at Keith Hay Park was shaping to be a crucial encounter with both sides leading the chasing pack on 8 points after 4 matches. With only two teams making the National League final we needed a result to stay in pole position for second spot (bearing in mind we still had the unenviable task of facing Auckland City at their Kiwitea Street fortress). Gavin Hoy was again on the mark but another defensive error led to a United equaliser. We regained the lead shortly after the half hour mark after another stunning free kick from Joel Stevens. Gianni Bouzoukis added a third with under 10 minutes to go and the three points were secured. With the 3-1 win we remained unbeaten but Auckland City continued to eke out wins and remain four points ahead after five matches.

After matches against Cashmere Technical, Eastern



Suburbs and Auckland City on paper the task against Petone seemed much easier but the former Olympic coaching duo of Ryan Edwards and Jamie O'Connor had led Petone to the National League for the first time and they had beaten us back in July. Both league matches this season had seen us concede the first two goals so it was reassuring for players and fans alike when Gianni Bouzoukis hit the opener after 12 minutes. That was his 99th goal for the club so he had plenty of time left to hit the magical 100th.

Despite numerous chances, it took until the 54th minute for Gavin Hoy to double the lead (scoring for the third match in a row). The missed chances came back to bite when Jack O'Connor, who had scored a hatrick in the 4-0 upset win in July, pulled a goal back after 85 minutes. It was getting tense and worse was to come with Hamish Watson getting a straight red (for those of you counting that was our sixth of the season including five straight reds). A stoppage time equaliser was ruled out for offside and we were relieved when the final whistle blew for a 2-1 win.

After six rounds we remained unbeaten and clear in 2nd place with 14 points - four points behind Auckland City and only one point ahead of Christchurch United. With both challengers having to go to Kiwitea Street in rounds 8 and 9 respectively - the round 7 clash between the sides was almost a semi-final.

November

There were a few nerves in the crowd ahead of the home match against Christchurch United. We were still unbeaten but United were playing well. On the personal front, Gianni Bouzoukis had another chance to reach the magic 100 goal milestone in front of his home fans ... and he didn't waste the opportunity. While the teams were still being announced, he had slotted home from just outside the box to give us the lead after barely 2 minutes. He became only the third Olympic player to reach 100 goals after Harry Kotsapas and Chris Christie-Yiavasis, and in record quick time – a mere 127 matches!

In the 6th minute, Isa Prins, on debut, won a penalty which Ben Mata duly slotted home for a 2-0 lead. Gavin Hoy then scored for the fourth match in a row after 24 minutes to extend the lead to 3-0 and pole position for a place in the National League final beckoned. A rash

high boot challenge by Joe Hopper in the 30th minute changed the momentum. A straight red making seven reds for the season and a second red for Joe after his yellow-red against Stop Out back in May. United capitalised on the numerical advantage and by the hour mark had dragged themselves back to a 2-3 deficit. We dug deep and a Jack Cawley header (better with his head than from the penalty spot) extended the lead to 4-2 and broke his goal scoring duck. Kailan Gould sealed the match with a late goal after coming off the bench to make the final score 5-2.

After seven rounds we had edged four points clear of United but remained four behind Auckland City with a visit to Kiwitea Street up next. A win there would secure a place in the final against already qualified Auckland City.

Auckland City had been unbeaten at Kiwitea Street since 2016 and we had never beaten them in five attempts (1 draw and 4 losses). It was a hard ask but not impossible. We were on a 15 match National League round robin unbeaten streak of our own (our only loss was to City in round one last season). The memory of the late capitulation in the OCL play-off was still fresh in everyone's mind. We were getting closer to City and this could be the time. A cagey affair was still deadlocked at 0-0 after an hour before Gianni Bouzoukis scored for the fifth match in a row. Substitute Hamish Watson bundled in a second after 74 minutes. So far so good but it was around now that the wheels came off in March. When City pulled a goal back in the 79th minute the doubts resurfaced but Gianni added a second just before full time for a 3-1 win and at last we could celebrate a win against City.

After eight rounds, City, on 21 points, were now only a point ahead of us. The final was already set - City v Olympic as it had been in 2022. We would need to beat WPR and hope City dropped points at home to Christchurch United to claim the Minor Premiership (not that the final venue depended on it given that Mt Smart Stadium in Auckland had already been given the nod). Unlikely but not impossible.

With the rare opportunity to go through a National League season unbeaten there was something to play for in the round 9 match against WPR. Scott Basalaj



sat out the match giving a debut in goal to Brooklyn Browne. WPR had a much changed side with a number of debutants but started the livelier and in a repeat of the previous match were 2-0 ahead after just over half an hour. That was the half time score but news was coming in from Auckland that Christchurch United had come from 1-2 down to defeat Auckland City 3-2. This opened the door for us to win the Minor Premiership if we could mount a comeback of our own.

Hamish Watson scored in the 47th minute to cut the deficit in half and although it was one way traffic thereafter, it took until the 70th minute for Joe Hopper to level the scores. We still needed another to top the table. Nerves were frayed as chances were missed before Gianni Bouzoukis scored for the sixth match in a row (his record is seven in a row) with under 5 minutes remaining and added a fourth from the spot on full time (Ben Mata had already been subbed off). The Gianni double earned him a share of the National League golden boot with Garbhan Coughlan for the second year running and also took him above Chris Christie-Yiavasis to second place in the all time Olympic goal scoring list with 104 goals.

In our fourth National League Championship campaign we had reached the summit – we had been 6th in 1993, 5th in 1994, 2nd in 2022 (on an unusual tiebreaker rule of who played who) and 1st in 2023. The Minor Premiership was banked, an unbeaten league season had been achieved and the unbeaten round robin streak had been extended to 17 matches but the final was still to come and we needed to win it for true glory.

26th November 2023 - mark the date. A repeat of last year's final with Auckland City the opponents once again at the same venue. The only difference was that we went into the match as slight favourites having won the league and having beaten City on their own patch. For the second year running an Olympic player had a milestone match – Tor Davenport Petersen became the 35th Olympic centurion and the third after Andre Racz in the 1994 Chatham Cup final and Scott Basalaj in the 2022 National League final to reach the milestone on the big stage. Andre and Scott had both lost so maybe it would be third time lucky for Tor. Looking at omens we had won the Chatham Cup at the second attempt (the 1994 final was lost 0-1 to Waitakere City before the 2-1 2009 triumph against Three Kings United) so could it be

the same for the National League final?

In 2022 City were too clinical for us and won 3-2 leaving us to rue missed opportunities. In 2023 the reverse was the case. Even the most ardent Olympic fans were left shaking their head that the score was still 0-0 at half time given City's chances (including rattling the crossbar) and the belief was growing that this might be our year. In the 58th minute we added to that belief when a cross by Joel Stevens was poked home by Kailan Gould. The blue and white clad fans at Mt Smart went wild! Just over half an hour to hold out. City hit the woodwork once again as we rode our luck. Hamish Watson had a chance to clinch it but muffed his lines. Nerves were frayed in the stands as the clock counted down. Then in the last minute of stoppage time City won a free kick and everyone including their keeper went up for it. The tension was unbearable but the ball was booted clear and on the break, Jack-Henry Sinclair side-footed the ball towards the empty net from distance. The ball trickled into the net and the final whistle blew. We had won 2-0.

Wellington Olympic were champions of New Zealand for the first time. The players rushed over to the supporters to celebrate. It had been backs to the wall but it capped a great season in what was the last match for coaches Rupert Kemeys and Scoota Roche.

Venus Shield, O'Brien Shield, Central League three-peat and now the National League – what a season!





SQUAD LISTS

Scott Basalaj (GK)	1	Quillan Roberts (GK)
Gabriele Matanisiga	2	Jamie Waldash-Chan
Adam Supyk	3	Tom Scott
Dylan Wood	4	Cameron Brown
Justin Gulley	5	Alifeleti Peini
Tor Davenport Petersen	6	Harry Fautley
Jesse Randall	7	Owen Moyo
Edward Wilkinson	8	Bruce Izumi
Hamish Watson	9	Reilly Marlow-Jones
Oliver Colloty	10	
Kailan Gould	11	Ollie Arrowsmith
Chris Kotrotsos (RGK)	12	Flynn Cave
William Vincent	13	Josh Brown
Jack-Henry Sinclair	14	Albie Francis-Alles
Ben Mata (C)	15	Charlie Ostrem
Devon Thurston	16	Lucas Finnegan
Luke Tongue	17	Cameron McKenzie
Samuel Mitrakas	18	Connor Wilson
Tamupiwa Dimairo	19	
Isa Prins	20	
Lukas Halikias	21	Finn Diamond
Gavin Hoy	22	Lucas Meeks
Jonty Roubos	23	
Joel Coustrain	24	
Oliver Davies	25	
Kaelin Nguyen	26	
Josh Rudland	27	
George Walker	28	
Alex Britton (RGK)	41	
Matthew King (RGK)	42	
	COACH	Alan Koch
Paul Ifill	ASSISTANT	Tyler Logan
Ekow Quainoo	ASSISTANT	
Taylor Hall-Jones	GK COACH	
Alex Britton	S&C COACH	
	PHYSIO	Jack Fayle
Brogan Treanor	MANAGER	Brian McInnes
Matt Kolic	GEAR MANAGER	
Dave Graham	LOGISTICS	

REFEREE
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Heloise Welsh

2ND ASSISTANT
Jordan Williams