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Super Rugby Aupiki: Navigating challenges for the growth of women’s rugby

Theme:
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Co-authored by NZ Herald

Originally featured on NZ Herald.

EDITORIAL

Rugby holds an almost sacred status in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Super Rugby Aupiki final stands as a beacon of progress and potential. Yet, as the Blues and Chiefs Manawa prepare for their final at Eden Park, a disheartening reality emerges: the pinnacle of women’s rugby will be vying for attention amidst a clash with other sporting spectacles.

Scheduled to kick off at 4:05 pm, the Aupiki final finds itself in direct competition with the Warriors and the start of the ANZ Premiership, diluting the spotlight it rightfully deserves. This overlap, while seemingly a logistical misstep, underscores broader challenges and opportunities facing women’s rugby in New Zealand.

Blues chief executive Andrew Hore’s rationale for the timing is understandable, citing logistical constraints and venue availability. Yet, his defense falls short in acknowledging the significance of granting the Aupiki final the undivided attention it merits. Eden Park is a fitting stage for these athletes, but the timing risks pitting their competition’s conclusion against other sporting events.

Moreover, the decision highlights a broader issue of visibility and recognition for women’s sports. Despite strides in gender equity and inclusivity, women’s rugby continues to grapple with disparities in resources, coverage, and audience engagement. By scheduling the Aupiki final alongside other major fixtures, the risk of overshadowing these athletes’ accomplishments becomes all too real.


The community’s response, exemplified by the willingness of Auckland rugby clubs to reschedule fixtures, demonstrates a grassroots commitment to supporting women’s rugby. Yet, this enthusiasm must be met with reciprocal efforts from governing bodies and broadcasters to elevate the profile of women’s sports, particularly at critical junctures like finals.


Crucially, the decision to broadcast the final on TikTok underscores a strategic pivot towards engaging younger audiences and expanding the sport’s reach. While commendable, this initiative must complement, not substitute, broader efforts to secure mainstream visibility and investment in women’s rugby.


As the Aupiki final approaches, it is imperative that stakeholders reflect on the broader implications of their decisions. Beyond logistical considerations, the timing of sporting events carries symbolic weight, shaping narratives of inclusivity, recognition, and respect - this could not be more the case than when it comes to finals.

In the pursuit of growth and fan engagement, Super Rugby Aupiki must navigate the complexities of scheduling and competition. As the tournament continues to evolve, it’s essential to prioritise the interests of players, fans, and the integrity of the sport. Only then can Super Rugby Aupiki realise its full potential as the showcase of women’s rugby talent, not only in New Zealand but on the planet.

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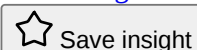


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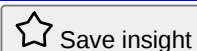


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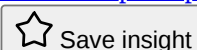


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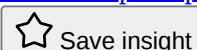


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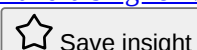


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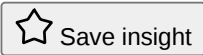
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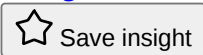


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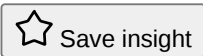


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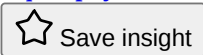
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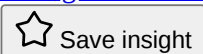


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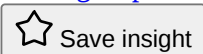
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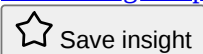
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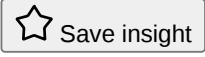
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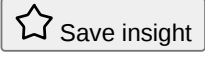
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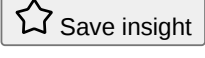
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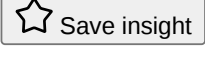
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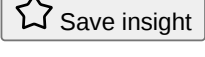
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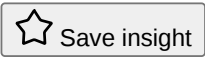
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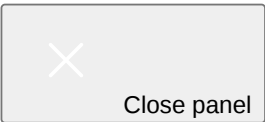
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