

= Highlanders (rugby union) =

The Highlanders (known as the Pulse Energy Highlanders for sponsorship reasons and formerly known as the Otago Highlanders) are a New Zealand professional rugby union team based in Dunedin that compete in Super Rugby . The team represents the North Otago , Otago and Southland unions . The Highlanders take their name from the Scottish immigrants that helped found the Otago , North Otago , and Southland regions in the 1840s and 1850s . Their main ground through the 2011 Super Rugby season was Carisbrook in Dunedin , with home games occasionally being played in Invercargill and Queenstown . The Highlanders moved into Carisbrook 's replacement , Forsyth Barr Stadium at University Plaza , for the 2012 season ; the stadium opened in time for the 2011 Rugby World Cup , but after the Super Rugby season .

The team was formed in 1996 to represent the lower South Island in the newly formed Super 12 competition . They finished the inaugural season eighth , and the following season finished last after winning only three of eleven matches . However , in the 1998 , 1999 and 2000 seasons they qualified for semi @-@ finals ; hosting the 1999 competition final against fellow South Island team the Crusaders . They lost the match 24 ? 19 , and the following year were again knocked out by the Crusaders ? this time in their semi @-@ final . In the following fifteen seasons they would only finish in the top four once more , in 2002 . But in 2015 , they were crowned Super Rugby champions .

Former Highlander , Anton Oliver has played a record 127 games for the Highlanders , and thirteen other players have played over 50 games for the team . The Highlanders ' highest career points scorer is Tony Brown with 857 points , and highest career try scorer is Jeff Wilson with 35 . They are currently coached by Jamie Joseph and are co @-@ captained by Shane Christie and Ben Smith .

= = History = =

The Highlanders ' franchise was created as one of five New Zealand teams in the Super 12 . Originally named the Otago Highlanders , the Highlanders ' franchise area encompassed the lower South Island of New Zealand , and was formed from the North Otago , Otago , and Southland provincial rugby unions .

The 1996 team was captained by John Leslie and coached by Gordon Hunter . Their first Super 12 match was against the Queensland Reds at Carisbrook on 3 March 1996 , whom they defeated 57 ? 17 . After three matches the Highlanders were undefeated and leading the competition . However the following week at Loftus Versfeld Stadium in South Africa they were defeated 59 ? 29 by Northern Transvaal . They only won two more games that season , against Natal at Carisbrook and against the Canterbury Crusaders at Lancaster Park , and they finished the season eighth on the table .

1997 was the least successful season ever for the Highlanders . They finished last in the competition , and managed only three wins . They were now coached by Glenn Ross and captained by Taine Randell . Their eight defeats that season included a 75 ? 43 loss to Natal in Durban . The points scored by Natal included 50 points by Gavin Lawless ? a competition record . Following their last place in the 1997 season , Tony Gilbert was appointed as coach . Their first game under his guidance was an upset 26 ? 19 win over the Queensland Reds . The Highlanders eventually became the first New Zealand side to defeat all four South African teams in one season . After defeating the Bulls at Loftus Versfeld they needed the Queensland Reds not to defeat the Brumbies by a large margin . Queensland were defeated by the Brumbies 23 ? 16 and the Highlanders finished fourth , thus qualifying for the semi @-@ finals . In the semi @-@ final , they faced defending champions the Auckland Blues at Eden Park . The Blues were leading 20 ? 16 at halftime , and were leading 30 ? 26 before a controversial try to Adrian Cashmore pushed the Blues to a 37 ? 26 lead . Joeli Vidiri had illegally taken out Highlander Stanley off the ball .

The following season in 1999 the Highlanders improved on their 1997 season record by reaching and hosting the tournament final . They opened their season with a 19 ? 13 victory over the Auckland Blues at Carisbrook . This was followed by a victory over the Northern Bulls , the Stormers at Carisbrook , and the Cats , before their first loss of the season to the Sharks . They returned to

New Zealand to defeat the Waikato Chiefs and then the Crusaders . After defeating the Reds , the Highlanders lost to the New South Wales Waratahs at Carisbrook . The next week they defeated the Brumbies at the same venue . In their next match , despite leading the Wellington Hurricanes 14 ? 3 at half time , the Highlanders lost when Hurricanes half back Jason Spice scored in the corner to give the Hurricanes a 21 ? 19 victory . Had the Highlanders won they would have finished top of the table and hosted a semi @-@ final at Carisbrook . Instead they then had to travel to South Africa where they defeated the Stormers 33 ? 18 . The Highlanders travelled back to Dunedin for the 1999 Super 12 Final , which was against South Island rivals the Canterbury Crusaders , and was billed as " the party at Tony Brown 's house " after Highlanders first five @-@ eighth Tony Brown . The Highlanders scored first , and led 14 ? 9 at half time . However the decisive try was to Crusaders wing Afato So 'oalo , who chipped the ball then out @-@ sprinted All Blacks winger Jeff Wilson to collect the ball and score . Although the Highlanders scored a try to Isitolo Maka with three minutes remaining , the Crusaders won 24 ? 19 .

The Highlanders opened their 2000 season with a 50 ? 13 victory over the Queensland Reds at Carisbrook . They won their next three matches , against the Sharks , Hurricanes and Cats . However they then lost their following three ; against the Crusaders , Brumbies , and Blues . They played the Crusaders at Jade Stadium in their semi @-@ final , and were defeated 37 ? 15 after Marika Vunibaka scored two tries for the Crusaders in the last 20 minutes . The next season opened with a 23 ? 8 victory over the Blues . Their 39 ? 20 defeat of the Waratahs at Carisbrook on 7 April was the first defeat of New South Wales by an Otago @-@ based side since the Otago provincial team defeated New South Wales 5 ? 0 in 1901 . The Highlanders narrowly lost to the Hurricanes in Napier 35 ? 33 before defeating the Brumbies at Carisbrook on 20 April . Although the Highlanders went undefeated at home for a second consecutive season , they finished fifth with six wins that season .

Laurie Mains had returned from South Africa to coach Otago in the 2001 National Provincial Championship (NPC) , and was appointed the Highlanders coach for 2002 . Their season started with a narrow 30 ? 28 loss to the Crusaders at Jade Stadium . That year the Highlanders also achieved a win over all four South African teams . The Gordon Hunter Memorial Trophy was also introduced that season to be contested between the Highlanders and Blues . Gordon Hunter had coached both teams before dying from cancer in 2001 . The match was played at Eden Park , and the Highlanders were ahead 15 ? 3 at half time , and eventually won 20 ? 13 . Their last home match of the season was against the Reds at Carisbrook . The Highlanders ' 40 ? 26 win meant that they had gone three seasons undefeated at Carisbrook . The Highlanders finished fourth and played the Crusaders in Christchurch where they lost 34 ? 23 , although Jeff Wilson did score a try in his last match for the franchise .

The 2003 season started with a 29 ? 16 win over the Chiefs in Hamilton . They then defeated the Stormers and Bulls before losing to the Cats in Johannesburg . Their second loss occurred when the Crusaders defeated them 17 ? 16 at Carisbrook . The Highlanders had gone three seasons , 2000 , 2001 and 2002 , and 16 games unbeaten at Carisbrook before that loss . The Highlanders then defeated the Blues 22 ? 11 to retain the Gordon Hunter Memorial Trophy . In April that year it was revealed a rift had developed between coach Laurie Mains and some of the senior players in the squad . Anton Oliver was branded the ringleader by Mains , and after their final game of the season Mains resigned and was replaced by his assistant Greg Cooper .

In contrast to their previous season , in 2004 the Highlanders conceded 44 tries , twelve more than in 2003 , but scored nine more tries than in 2003 . Not only did they have a new head coach , but also thirteen new players in their squad . This all contributed to them finishing the season ninth that season . The Highlanders ' 2005 season started with a loss to the Blues at Carisbrook . Following this the side won six games consecutively , the first time the franchise had ever done so . After a draw with the Stormers and a bye , the Highlanders had gone unbeaten for eight weeks . Three weeks from the end of the round robin they were third , but after losing their remaining three matches fell to eighth for the season .

After ten years the Super 12 was expanded to include two extra teams ; the Western Force from Australia , and the Central Cheetahs from South Africa . The expanded competition was renamed

the Super 14 . The Highlanders continued under Cooper in 2006 . After losing their first match of 2006 to the Crusaders , they then won their next three . After only won two of their last six games , they finished the season ranked ninth . The 2007 ended with a similar result to 2006 . The Highlanders again finished ninth on the table , and worst of the New Zealand teams . They finished the season with five wins and eight losses from their thirteen matches .

While the fortunes of the franchise had been declining for a few years , they would bottom out with a player exodus following the 2007 Rugby World Cup . The squad 's entire All Black front row of Carl Hayman , Anton Oliver , and Clarke Dermody left for lucrative contracts in Europe , while star first @-@ five Nick Evans moved north to Auckland to play for the Blues , and hugely talented young lock James Ryan was forced to retire at age 24 due to injury problems . Joining the exodus were several other veteran starters , along with coach Greg Cooper who left the franchise to take up an assistant coaching position with the Blues . The coach for the 2008 season , Glenn Moore , was appointed 28 August 2007 .

Moore was left with a weak side of young and inexperienced players which would stumble to a franchise @-@ worst record of only 3 wins against 10 losses during the 2008 Super 14 season , and finished as the lowest @-@ placed New Zealand team on the table . Jimmy Cowan , one of the team 's few bright spots through this period , was appointed team captain for 2009 , but things would improve little over the following two seasons as the team again limped to the worst record of the New Zealand clubs . When Moore was released as coach following the 2010 season , the franchise had compiled a record of only 10 wins against 29 losses in three seasons under his leadership .

Former All Black Jamie Joseph was hired as coach for the 2011 Super Rugby season , while Jamie Mackintosh replaced Cowan as team captain . The campaign would prove to be the franchise 's most successful in several years , as they raced out to a 3 ? 0 start including a monumental away win over the Bulls in Pretoria . They remained in playoff contention for almost the entire season , sitting 8 ? 4 at one juncture , before slumping under an injury cloud at the end of the year to finish 8th on the table .

Highlanders won the 2015 Super Rugby season defeating the Hurricanes 21 ? 14 in Wellington . Phil Gifford called the win the " greatest Super Rugby comeback this century " .

= = Name and colours = =

The name Highlanders was chosen after the early Scottish settlers in the lower South Island . These Scottish settlers were the founders of Dunedin ? known as the " Edinburgh of the South " , and the city where the Highlanders are based . According to the Highlanders official website : " The name and image of the Highlander conjures up visions of fierce independence , pride in one 's roots , loyalty , strength , kinship , honesty , and hard work . "

The colours of the Highlanders formerly encompassed the provincial colours of North Otago , Otago , and Southland ; yellow , blue and maroon . Blue is also the predominant colour of the Flag of Scotland , and is used by many sports teams in that country .

On 3 June 2011 , the Highlanders introduced ? controversially ? a new predominantly lime green home kit . It was debuted in the Highlanders ' final home match of the 2011 Super Rugby season .

Despite the resounding negative feedback from fans , this kit was initially confirmed for the 2012 season . On 6 September 2011 , however , the club announced a change of heart ? they would be returning to their traditional blue strip for home matches , and using the lime green kit for away matches during the 2012 Super Rugby season .

= = Franchise area = =

The Highlanders ' franchise area consists of the region controlled by the North Otago , Otago and Southland Rugby Unions . Both Otago and Southland compete in the semi @-@ professional ITM Cup (formerly the Air New Zealand Cup) , and North Otago in the amateur Heartland Championship . However , given Otago and Southland 's lack of success in the ITM Cup , the Highlanders have often looked further afield to sign players from . This is a reflection of Otago 's

historically large influx of people from distant lands during the early settlement period , particularly from the Celtic countries of Scotland and Ireland .

= = Grounds = =

Starting with the 2012 season , the Highlanders moved into the Forsyth Barr Stadium , opened in August 2011 . It was built to replace their original home of Carisbrook , which was no longer suitable for international rugby , or as a venue for the 2011 Rugby World Cup . The Carisbrook Stadium Trust was established in 2006 to manage the planning and construction of a new stadium . The new stadium is not on the current Carisbrook site , but instead near the University of Otago and Otago Harbour . It is a roofed , all weather stadium with a rectangular configuration , and permanent seating capacity of 25 @, @ 000 that could be expanded to 30 @, @ 748 if necessary .

The Highlanders ' original home ground was the 29 @, @ 000 capacity Carisbrook in Dunedin . Carisbrook is also known as " The Brook " , or as " The House of Pain " due to its reputation as a difficult venue to visit . The stadium was also well known for Dunedin 's large student population (known as " Scarfies ") that occupied the terraces ? an uncovered concrete embankment at the eastern end of the ground .

The Highlanders usually play at least one regular season match outside of Dunedin , at either Rugby Park in Invercargill or the Queenstown Events Centre in Queenstown . Prior to 2007 the regular season match was usually played at Rugby Park , however in 2007 they played a match at the Queenstown Events Centre . The Highlanders have also played pre @-@ season matches at Centennial Park in Oamaru and at the Showgrounds in Balclutha .

On 28 March 2009 , the Highlanders played a home game at FMG Stadium in Palmerston North against the Bulls . This game attracted a crowd of 10 @, @ 000 ; one of the Highlanders ' biggest of the 2009 season .

= = Development team = =

The Highlanders have fielded a development team in competitions such as the Pacific Rugby Cup and in matches against other representative teams for several seasons . Known as the Highlanders Development XV , the squad is selected from the best emerging rugby talent in the Highlanders catchment area and is composed of Highlanders contracted players , wider training group members , under 20s , and selected club players .

= = Records and achievements = =

= = = Season standings = = =

= = = Team records = = =

The 2014 season set several new records for the team , that had stood since the 1998 and 1999 seasons . They scored their most ever points (425) , and most ever tries (42) in a season . Lima Sopoaga set a franchise record for most points in a season with 178 , becoming just the third Highlander to score 25 points in a game . The 2000 year saw perhaps their greatest victory ever with their 65 ? 23 win against the Bulls , setting several records ; most points in a match , most tries in a match with nine , and largest winning margin of 42 .

Former first five @-@ eighth Tony Brown holds the record for most career points with 857 . His 857 career points included 144 conversions , 183 penalties , and six drop @-@ goals . The most points in a single match is held by former fullback Ben Blair who scored 28 against the Sharks in 2005 . Most career tries is held by former player Jeff Wilson with 35 . Wilson and Blair also share the record for most tries in a single match with three along with Israel Dagg , Doug Howlett , Ryan

Nicholas , Jeremy Stanley , and To 'o Vaega .

= = = Honours = = =

Champions (1)

2015

Runners @-@ up (1)

1999

Playoff Appearances (6)

1998 , 1999 , 2000 , 2002 , 2014 , 2015

= = = Current squad = = =

The squad for the 2016 Super Rugby season :

= = = Current internationally capped players = = =

Ben Smith is also the vice captain of the 2016 All Blacks

= = Notable players = =

Players who have played over 50 games for the Highlanders :

Josh Blackie

John Blaikie

Tony Brown

Jimmy Cowan

Tom Donnelly

Carl Hayman

Carl Hoeff

Byron Kelleher

Chris King

Josh Kronfeld

Filipo Levi

Simon Maling

Seilala Mapusua

Kelvin Middleton

Craig Newby

Anton Oliver

Taine Randell

Romi Ropati

Alando Soakai

Ben Smith

Lima Sopoaga

Adam Thomson

Jeff Wilson

= = Coaches and management = =

In their first season the Highlanders were coached by Gordon Hunter before he joined the All Blacks selection panel . Glen Ross took over in 1997 , and was not reappointed for the 1998 season . Tony Gilbert was appointed for the 1998 season , and again coached the team in 1999 before being appointed co @-@ coach for the All Blacks . Peter Sloane was appointed Gilbert 's successor for the 2000 season , and also coached them in 2001 before moving to coach the Blues . Laurie

Mains returned to New Zealand from South Africa to replace Sloane for the 2002 season . Mains resigned following the 2003 season after a rift between him and senior players . Greg Cooper replaced Mains and coached the team from 2003 until 2007 , when he left the franchise to take up the assistant coaches position with the Blues . Glenn Moore coached the club from 2008 through until 2010 , when he was relieved of his duties after the club posted only 10 wins against 29 losses in his three years in charge . His replacement was former All Black flanker Jamie Joseph , who has been coach since the start of the 2011 season . In 2013 Tony Brown was appointed the job as attack coach after two seasons being the head coach of Otago and leading them to finals fixtures .

Head coach

Jamie Joseph

Assistant coaches

Jon Preston

Scott McLeod

Kees Meeuws

Tony Brown