

Taranaki Dazzles for A-Grade Opening

Taranaki was graced with superb weather conditions for the opening weekend of A-grade tennis. It was clear that players were happy to be out in the sunshine, enjoying healthy competition.

In Softe Cup, South Combined took on Oakura at Okaiawa. It became a split domination battle, with Oakura's stronger men attempting to cancel out South Combined's stronger women. The telling blow from the singles was when Josh Murdoch for South Combined managed to edge out Gavin Stanley, 7-6 5-7 6-3. The South Combined women won all their matches comfortably, which meant an overall lead for South Combined of 5-3 heading into the doubles. With the doubles shared two a-piece, it was all to play for heading into the mixed doubles. Oakura needed to win all the mixed if they were going to carry the day. South Combined only dropped one of the mixed and wound up winners 10-6 overall. Both teams can walk away from this opening exchange feeling there is plenty of positives to build on for the rest of the season. South Combined know they have strong women and competitive men. Oakura will be an entirely different proposition with the addition of perhaps Jaime Simpson or one of the Lewis brothers. It has also been suggested some of Oakura's women were unavailable due to an endurance race they were attending in Wellington.

In the second Softe Cup match-up, Rotokare put its best foot forward against Pukekura. As expected, Pukekura's women proved to be too strong. All four women won their singles in straight sets with Caitlin Haylock producing the most dominant performance with a 6-3 6-0 win. The men were evenly split, with two wins a-piece. Blair Crowley dominated in the number two position, conceding just one game against Mike Erb to win 6-0 6-1. Andrew Moffat, despite warming up well, couldn't produce the kind of form that had bettered Luis Silva in the past. Silva prevailed comfortably 6-2 6-3. The most closely fought singles match was a topsy turvy affair between the number one men. Pukekura's David Barnard came out looking relaxed and swinging freely. This was perfectly suited for negating the more cagey play of the promising Rotokare junior Will Roberts. However, having taken the opening set comfortably 6-2, Barnard seemed to completely lose his confidence in his own swing. This allowed Roberts to storm back into the match and take the second set 2-6. The third set started with Barnard looking to gain his confidence, and his swing, back. Fortunately for Barnard, he recovered enough to take the deciding set 6-4. The men's doubles were split one a-piece and the Pukekura women won both of the doubles for Pukekura to take an unassailable 9-3 lead into the mixed doubles. Silva and Peters managed to pick up one win for Rotokare in the mixed and the rest went to Pukekura. This meant a final score of 12-4 to Pukekura.

In the third Softe Cup match-up, Stratford will be left wondering what could have been after going down 11-5 to Huatoki. Two men's singles slipped through Stratford's fingers with

Bruce Cleland losing 7-6 in the third set to Alistair Nairn and Grant Kite Losing 6-1 in the third set to Murray Keast. Stratford's Kristen Laurie then lost 6-3 in the third set to Chris Wilson in the women's number two match up. Adding to this was a default in the bottom doubles for Stratford when they were leading 5-4 in the opening set. The net result was a comfortable 11-5 scoreline to Huatoki. However, with just a few different bounces of the ball, the tie could have ended so differently.

In the Wilson Trophy, Rotokare hosted South Combined and claimed a win 10-6, Inglewood hosted Pukekura and ran out convincing winners 15-1 and Oakura defeated Waitara at home 13-3.

In the Sumpter Trophy, South Combined hosted Huatoki at Manaia and gave away nothing with a 16-0 drubbing. Pukekura, at home, did battle with Oakura and prevailed 10-6.

Hopefully, this weekend's favourable weather continues and more great tennis gets played all the way to Christmas.