

# PRE-RUGBY WORLD CUP TESTS



MANU SAMOA vs FLYING FIJIANS: 29<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2023  
MANU SAMOA vs 'IKALE TAHI TONGA: 05<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2023  
at  
APIA PARK INTERNATIONAL STADIUM

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SAMOA



LAKAPI SAMOA



WORLD RUGBY





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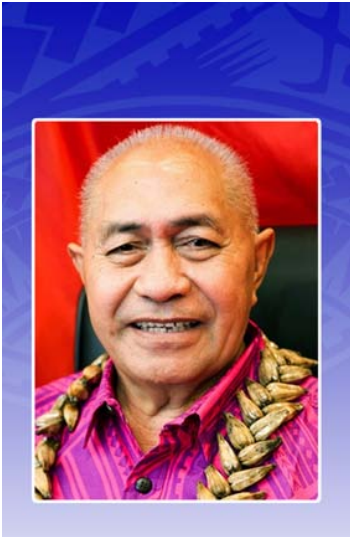
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On behalf of the Prime Minister and the Government of Samoa, I extend a very warm welcome to the Management and Players of the Fijian and Tongan National Rugby teams to Samoa. We welcome you with all the grace, beauty, humility and pride of a people who desperately want to beat you at Apia Park.

Hosting international teams is a rarity in the professional era so our fans relish every opportunity. It's a fantastic opportunity to watch the very best players from our three Pacific Nations as you prepare for the Rugby's biggest global Event, the World Cup in France.

Rugby is the game that bonds us together like no other because of the strong history and connections between our three nations. We are proud of all our Pacific players that have contributed heavily to the game across the world and have laid the foundation and pathways for our local island based players to follow a professional rugby career. You as players are ambassadors for each of our Island Nations through your achievements on the world stage.

For eighty minutes today, our rivalry as proud island Nations will showcase what is best about Pacific Rugby, the flair, the physicality, the passion and determination to beat the odds. The rest, we will be happy to leave to the three teams when they meet on the field.

To our National Team – your journey to the Rugby World Cup gets under way today and your country is proud of you. We are indeed very proud of those of you who have forged successful rugby careers overseas. We are particularly proud of the island-based boys, who have ensured competitive tension for spots in the team.

I wish you all the teams well on your journey to Europe. For our visitors I hope you make the most of your short time here, and enjoy some of all the great things our country has to offer you.

Soifua

**AFIOGA SEUULA IOANE TUĀ'AU**  
**Minister of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC)**

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It is with great pleasure to welcome the Fijians and the Tongan Teams and Management to Samoa and also to our own Manu Samoa Team.

2023 is the most important year in the international rugby cycle with the upcoming World Rugby's premier event, the Rugby World Cup. These two international fixtures are very much anticipated in view of the importance to our three Nations' preparations and finalizing selection squad to France.

The Game of Rugby has given our Pacific Nations international recognition and our contribution on the world stage is second to none. Samoan, Tongan and Fijian players continue to be sought after around the world for our sheer physicality, power and natural Pacific flare which adds excitement to any Team playing the Game.

Come Saturday, there will be no inch given and it will be business as usual between our three proud rugby nations. The very things that will make us fierce rivals on the field are the very things that also make us friends and endear us to the World.

To our Manu Samoa Team, our whole Country is behind you, I trust that the hunger and the will to succeed for the blue jersey is there and hope that you will instill the pride in the Manu Samoa in front of all the fans this weekend and at Rugby World Cup.

Lastly, I wish to congratulate and thank the Government and World Rugby for their support in assisting Lakapi Samoa hosts these fixtures and what promises to be an incredibly exciting two weeks of test matches ahead. A special thank you to all the family of sponsors who have contributed financially and in kind to Lakapi Samoa to assist hosts our visitors.

Soifua ma ia manuia.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tuilaepa Sailele L. Malielegaoi'.

**HON. TUILAEPA SAILELE. L. MALIELEGAOI**  
**Chairman, Lakapi Samoa**



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M.J. BALE





It is with immense pride and excitement that I extend a warm welcome to all of you to the beautiful shores of Samoa for the Pre-Rugby World Cup 2023 International Tests.

As the President of Lakapi Samoa, we are honored to host these prestigious matches against our esteemed rivals Fiji and Tonga.

Rugby holds a special place in the hearts of our three nations and it is an integral part of our cultural fabric. This sporting heritage is something we cherish and celebrate with every game. As we come together to witness the clash of titans, we anticipate thrilling encounters that will showcase the immense talent and tenacity of our players.

Hosting Fiji and Tonga here on our home turf is not only an opportunity to demonstrate our love for the sport but also a chance to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and camaraderie among our Pacific neighbors. These matches will undoubtedly be a testament to the rich rugby traditions that unite our nations.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to World Rugby and all the stakeholders involved for granting us the privilege of hosting these remarkable events. We are committed to ensuring a memorable and safe experience for all participants, spectators, and officials.

To our visiting teams from Fiji and Tonga, we extend a warm, mālō lelei and bula vinaka. Your presence on our island is a testament to the enduring spirit of sportsmanship and friendly competition that define rugby. May our battles on the field be fierce yet played with the utmost respect and fairness.

To all our supporters and fans, your unwavering passion and dedication inspire our players and enrich the atmosphere of these matches. Together, let us create an unforgettable rugby spectacle that will be etched in our memories for years to come.

On behalf of Lakapi Samoa and the entire rugby community of Samoa, I welcome you to the Pre-Rugby World Cup 2023 International Tests. Let us unite in the spirit of rugby and celebrate the beauty of the game we all love.

I would also like to end in wishing Vaovasamanaia Seilala Mapusua and our Manu Samoa the very best as they prepare for the World Cup.

O outou mama na. O le'a nofo tapuai Samoa i la outou faatamasoaliiiga.

Fa'afetai tele lava.

Sincerely,

**NAMULAUULU PAPALII SAMI LEOTA**

# MANU SAMOA 2023



Alamanda  
Motuga



Brian  
Alainuuese



Luteru  
Tolai



Martini  
Talapusi



Melani  
Matavao



Michael  
Curry



Duncan  
Paia'aua



Ereatarā Sotiaka  
Enari



Paul  
Alo-Emile



Ray  
Niua



Samuel  
Slade



So'otala  
Fa'aso'o



Genesis  
Mamea-Lemalu



Jordan  
Lay



Miracle  
Fai'ilagi



Neria  
Foma'i



Stacey  
Ili



Taleni  
Seu



Alai D'Angelo  
Leuila



Chris  
Vui



Fritz  
Lee



Jack  
Lam



Sa Jordan  
Taufua



Ed  
Fidow



Tim  
Nanai-Williams



Tietie  
Tuimauga



Tumua  
Manu



Charlie  
Faumuina



Jonathan  
Taumateine



Sama  
Malolo



Theo  
McFarland



Danny  
Toala



Michael  
Alaalatoa



Nigel  
Ah Wong



Christian  
Leali'ifano



Steven  
Luatua



Titi  
Lamositele



Ulupano Junior  
Seuteni



Seilala  
Lam



Vaovasamanaia  
Seilala Mapusua



Mase Mahonori  
Schwalger



Toaigaotumua  
Tom Coventry



Fa'alogo Tana  
Umaga



Andrew  
Goodman



Lemalu Tusi  
Pisi



Orion  
Keil



Tuala Benjamin  
Silva



Aitutagata Spraken  
Dave Edgar



Allistair  
Beeton



Kyle  
Foster



Magele Dr  
Shaun Mauiliu



Brian  
Colclough



Mike  
Lovell



Physiotherapist



Kris  
Setu



Niuafolau  
Faautu Talapusi



Su'a Hessed  
Ieremia





# “IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME”

**Manu Samoa head coach says get team  
environment right to win on the field**

*by Tuifa'asisina Peter Rees*

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In the film ‘Field of Dreams’, Kevin Costner’s character hears voices which prompt him to build a baseball diamond on his land for no apparent reason, until the ghosts of former baseball greats start emerging from the crops, gathering for a game which attracts thousands of fans.

Now into the fourth year of his tenure as Manu Samoa’s head coach, Vaovasamanaia Seilala Mapusua is building his own ‘Field of Dreams’. The focus is rebuilding the team’s culture from within, in the hope that it will not only translate into positive results on the field, but also attract more Samoan rugby stars overseas to answer the call and play for Manu Samoa.

And it’s hard to argue against the results so far; seven wins and one loss from 2020-2022, including Samoa’s first Pacific Nations Cup title since 2014 which was achieved in Lautoka last year in that famous come-from-behind 23-20 win over Fiji. Further good news came for Lakapi Samoa HQ with Samoa’s World Rugby ranking rising from 15 to 12, leapfrogging Fiji and Tonga in the process.

The 43-year-old Samoan-born coach hailing from Gataivai, has also capitalised on the relaxing of World Rugby’s eligibility laws to convince eligible rugby stars overseas to make themselves available. There were some players who couldn’t answer the call due to club commitments, especially in Japan and New Zealand, but the 2023 squad he has selected is easily the strongest on paper in years. Seeing the likes of former All Blacks Steven Luatua, Lima Sopoaga and Charlie Faumuina rubbing shoulders with locally produced talents is enough to give any die-hard fan optimism to believe with the Rugby World Cup in France looming.

“There’s definitely a correlation,” Vaovasamanaia remarks when asked if those internal changes have made a difference in the team’s performance. “The last World Cup cycle has been about building closer connections between the players, management and stakeholders, and we’ve spent a lot of time in the community while in camp.” Not long after assembling in Apia in July, the 40-strong squad travelled to the big island of Savaii where they were billeted out to families in the villages and spent quality time mixing with local fans and partaking in cultural activities to bring players closer to their roots and heritage.

The disruptions of COVID meant Vaovasamanaia couldn’t develop more younger players during this World Cup cycle, especially with a whole year of rugby effectively wiped out in 2020. But he is satisfied that the current team culture he is building will provide a foundation to attract and develop more young players in the future.

## **REBUILDING TEAM CULTURE**

As a former player, veteran of two Rugby World Cups in 2007 and 2011, and long-serving stalwart of the famous blue jersey, Vaovasamanaia knows how important building trust is, which is why he’s worked hard to bring the team together in a show of unity, to build a positive environment “where everyone is on the same page”.

“The main emphasis in camp is instilling into our players important team values based on fa’a Samoa and the Samoan culture, especially those players who were not brought up with these values, and so they become the best versions of themselves,” explains Vaovasamanaia. “We do everything together, even the management, which starts with morning prayers and ends with evening lotu every day.”

Vaovasamanaia came into the job at a time when Manu Samoa had underperformed at the previous two World Cups. He was motivated to apply for the job so he could make a difference and help restore Manu Samoa back to its former glory. Vaovasamanaia played 26 tests for Manu Samoa during the 2000s and early 2010s and was part of the famous team that upset the Wallabies in 2011. The former Highlanders and London Irish midfielder retired in 2016 after a stint in Japan.

But it was not an easy start to his coaching reign being appointed during the middle of a pandemic in August 2020, which meant he was working remotely for most of his first year in the job. There were no international fixtures for Manu Samoa in 2020 which allowed him to prepare for the first challenge which was World Cup qualification in 2021.

“The main goal during this World Cup cycle was qualifying for the next World Cup and to achieve that quickly to give us more time to prepare and get our overseas players committed,” said Vaovasamanaia. That goal was achieved in 2021 with two convincing wins over Tonga’s Ikahe Tahi which qualified Samoa on a 79-28 aggregate.

The following year, Manu Samoa went through undefeated in the Pacific Nations Cup to claim their first title in eight years. On the end of year tour, Manu Samoa claimed wins over Georgia and Romania with the year’s only loss coming against Italy.

### **BUILDUP TO RWC 2023**

The challenge is now to build on last year’s momentum in World Cup year. Manu Samoa travels to Japan for a dress rehearsal to their looming Pool D encounter in France on 22 July, before returning home to play Fiji (29 July) and Tonga (5 August) in Apia Park during July/August. The team will then be reduced to 33 for the World Cup before departing for Europe where they will play a warmup game against world number one, Ireland on 26 August, and possibly a game against the Barbarians, before their first World Cup game against Chile in Bordeaux on 16 September.

Vaovasamanaia is aware of the potential of the current squad and believes it is strong enough to challenge for one of the two quarterfinal spots on offer in Pool D. Based on their recent results, Argentina, Japan and even England are not guaranteed to advance and the Pool could be one of the most competitive once the World Cup kicks off. But Vaovasamanaia says he is not looking past the pool’s lowest ranked side, Chile.

“We can’t relax, all games will be tough,” he says. “Our baseline goal for this World Cup is gaining automatic qualification for the next World Cup so we need to perform well.”

Manu Samoa has not made the quarterfinal rounds since 1995 during the country’s golden era. But Vaovasamanaia is confident he has a team capable of reaching the knockout rounds.

“There will be rotation for the games before the World Cup to establish our best combinations,” says Vaovasamanaia. Manu Samoa will have one of the oldest squads at the World Cup, but Vaovasamanaia is banking on that experience and versatility. “We have built more depth in the squad during this World Cup cycle and although there are less backs than forwards selected, we have the versatility with some players able to cover multiple positions.”

According to Vaovasamanaia, rugby’s rule changes will not impact Manu Samoa’s direct style, but he emphasised that possession, discipline, winning collisions, and ball retention will be the key areas. “We are really focused on efficiencies in the contact area. Rugby is a game of stress giving it and handling it well. We need to control that part of our game,” he explains.

Like his playing his days when he left everything on the field, Vaovasamanaia has left nothing to chance to give Manu Samoa its best chance of reaching its potential. Now all that remains is to get the results on the field.

### **RESULTS DURING VAOVASAMANAIA’S TENURE 2020-2023**

2020	No games due to COVID	n/a
10 July 2021	Manu Samoa 42-13 Tonga	W
17 July 2021	Manu Samoa 37-15 Tonga	W
02 July 2022	Manu Samoa 31-26 Australia A	W
09 July 2022	Manu Samoa 34-18 Tonga	W
16 July 2022	Manu Samoa 23-20 Fiji	W
06 Nov 2022	Manu Samoa 17-49 Italy	L
13 Nov 2022	Manu Samoa 20-19 Georgia	W
20 Nov 2022	Manu Samoa 22-0 Romania	W
22 July 2023	Manu Samoa 24-22 Japan	W

**WINS 8 LOSSES 1 DRAW 0**

# SAMOA'S MIRACLE MAN

by Tuifa'asisina Peter Rees

## PROFILE:

Full Name: **Miracle Fai'ilagi**  
Villages: **Vailele, Uafato,  
Leusoalii and Asau**  
Nickname: **Mira**  
School: **Leififi College**  
Clubs: **Vailele 2020  
Laulii Lions 2022**



When Moana Pasifika hosted the Queensland Reds at Apia Park in June, the biggest cheers from the local fans was for one of their own, Miracle Fai'ilagi, who scored two excellent tries. While overseas Super Rugby fans were starting to take notice of the big and athletic loose forward, locals already knew of his quality from his exploits with local clubs Vailele and Laulii Lions. It was those qualities that first caught the eye of Moana Pasifika coach Aaron Mauger and assistant coach Leota Filo Tiatia when they attended a World Rugby combine in Suva last year, set up to identify locally based island players who had the potential to play at a higher level. They didn't hesitate to offer Miracle his first professional contract. He was the first Super Rugby contracted player from the islands signed by Moana Pasifika for the 2023 season.

Miracle repaid the faith shown by Moana Pasifika by scoring five tries enroute to taking out the franchise's rookie of the year honours in his debut season, where he announced himself to the world as a loose-forward with not only the physical attributes to play loose forward and lock, but also the mix of power, skill and x-factor. His excellent form in this year's Super Rugby Pacific competition shows how Moana Pasifika is contributing to rugby in the

islands and opening up pathways for local island players to be exposed to higher level competitions and professional environments.

He attributes his success to his mother Vaiau'au and late father Va'atausili. As the eldest of two sons, Mira as he affectionately known, grew up in the village of Vailele and attended Leififi College.

Reflecting on his journey, Miracle told the Samoa Observer: "My journey with Moana has been amazing. God has been so good to me with all the blessings of opportunities. This team has a unique culture similar to home having lotu every day, a great environment."

Standing 6'5" (1.96m) and weighing 106kg, Miracle has the raw physical attributes and ability to potentially become a world class loose forward. Manu Samoa has produced many over the years; from the legendary La'auli Michael Jones, to Sila Vaifale, Pat Lam and Apollo Perelini during Samoa's 'golden era' of the 1990s, and more recently Semo Sititi and Maurie Faasavalu in the 2000s. All had common attributes, big, strong, fast, skilful, explosive, and tremendous ball carriers.

Can Miracle live up to these expectations? That is yet to be seen. But the 23-year-old has already shown the perseverance and mental focus to succeed at the highest level, and those qualities are what will take him a long way in his career, according to Aaron Mauger, who stepped down as head coach at the end of the 2023 season.

“He’s a natural leader who exudes humility and respect,” said Mauger. “Miracle is a great example of what we’re trying to achieve at Moana Pasifika by taking Pasifika people and culture to the world stage. He was playing for his village and local province just a few months ago and now he’s starring on the Super Rugby Pacific stage.”

Mauger also believes his time in the Samoa Sevens set up has helped. “He has represented Samoa in sevens so has a solid fitness foundation and is a hard worker. For Miracle to come here, represent his family, his villages and his proud nation of Samoa, it’s 100% what we’re about,” said Mauger.



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Manu Samoa Head Coach..... Vaovasamanaia Seilala Mapusua

Manu Samoa Assistant Coach..... Mase Mahonri Schwalger

Manu Samoa Team Manager..... Su'a Hessed Ieremia

Manu Samoa 7s Head Coach..... Muliagatele Brian Lima

Manu Samoa 7s Assistant Coach..... Tausa Faamaoni Lalomilo

Manu Samoa 7s Team Manager..... Tuala Pat Leota

Manu Samoa 7s Performance Analyst..... Hari Junior Narayan

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Lead Performance Analyst Manu Samoa..... Alistair Beeton

Performance Analyst Manu Samoa..... Brian Colclough

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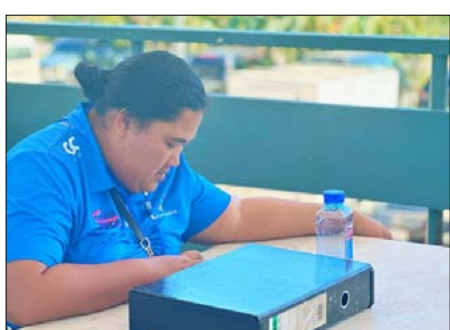
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Assistant Coach Junior Manu Samoa..... Vaimasenuu Chris Faaofu



# ISLAND RIVALRY REKINDLED AS INTERNATIONAL RUGBY RETURNS TO APIA PARK

*By Tuifa'asisina Peter Rees*

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Form and rankings usually got out the window when the Pacific's top ranked island nations Fiji, Samoa and Tonga do battle. Any one of those teams can topple each other on any given day and that is part of the intrigue and mystique behind these traditional rivalries that date back to 1924, when Western Samoa played its first official international against Fiji in Apia, and many hundreds of years before that, outside of rugby.

The Pacific Tri Nations established in 1982 helped to set up a regular test schedule between Samoa, Fiji and Tonga, and the set up of the Pacific Islands Rugby Alliance in 2002 formalised that cooperation. In 2006, the Pacific Tri Nations was replaced by the Pacific Five Nations, which was renamed the Pacific Nations Cup - the current format used.

That rivalry continues today as international rugby returns to Apia Park with local fans in for a treat as the Flying Fijians seek a return to winning ways, while Manu Samoa will look to kick off their Rugby World Cup preparations in style in front of their home fans. The 'Flying Fijians' have really come on as an international rugby nation in recent years improving their set piece, playing more structured rugby, and possessing one of the most lethal backlines in world rugby. The impact of having so many of their stars in Europe's top clubs and competitions, plus the recent successes of Fijian Drua in Super Rugby Pacific has created more depth and talent to their playing ranks.

However, the Fijians will be determined to get back to winning ways after only managing just one win in 2022 over Tonga. Fiji is coming off losses to Ireland 17-35 and Scotland 12-28 during last year's Autumn Nations Series, going down in two friendly games against the All Blacks, 13-60 in Hamilton and 23-57 in Dunedin, and losses to Australia A and Manu Samoa in the 2022 Pacific Nations Cup. They are back to near full strength in World Cup year, however, and will be much more formidable opponents.

Today's test match against Manu Samoa in Apia Park is significant as the Fijians will be keen to avenge their defeat to Manu Samoa in last year's Pacific Nations Cup thriller where Manu Samoa prevailed with a narrow 23-20 victory at Churchill Park in Lautoka. Fiji had started last year's Pacific Nations Cup campaign in style thump-

ing a star-studded Tonga 36-0 in Suva. But they weren't able to back up the result against Australia A, losing 32-18 in Lautoka and against Manu Samoa in the tournament finale.

For Manu Samoa, beating Fiji in 2022 gave them their first Pacific Nations Cup title since 2014. Fiji had won the PNC four times in a row from 2015-2018 before Japan claimed the title in 2019. The result was particularly impressive having come back from a 3-17 halftime deficit to run in two second half tries to claim a famous late victory.

Overall, Manu Samoa and the Flying Fijians have clashed 54 times since 1924 with Fiji enjoying a higher win ratio with 30 wins (55%) while Samoa has won 21 times (39%), with 3 draws between the sides.

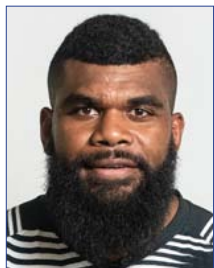
## **HEAD-TO-HEAD - SAMOA vs FIJI:**

- \* Samoa and Fiji have played 54 times
- \* Fiji has won 30 times while Samoa has won 21 times
- \* Both sides have drawn 3 times
- \* Fiji's biggest winning margin is 60 which they achieved in 1996
- \* Samoa's biggest winning margin is 26 which was achieved in 2005
- \* Samoa played its official international game against Fiji in 1924 in Apia
- \* Fiji and Samoa have only met once at the World Cup in 2011 when Samoa won 27-7 at Eden Park, Auckland in front of a record crowd.

## **RECENT RESULTS:**

2022	Samoa 23-20 Fiji
2019	Fiji 10-3 Samoa
2018	Fiji 24-22 Samoa
2017	Fiji 38-16 Samoa
2017	Fiji 26-16 Samoa
2015	Samoa 30-30 Fiji
2014	Samoa 18-13 Fiji
2012	Samoa 29-26 Fiji
2011	Samoa 27-7 Fiji
2011	Fiji 36-18 Samoa
2010	Samoa 31-9 Fiji

# FLYING FIJIANS 2023



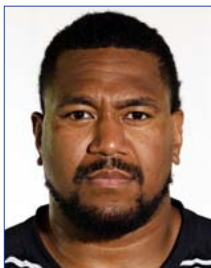
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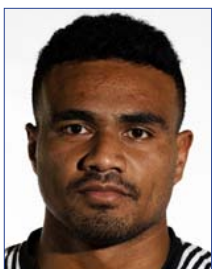
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Masi



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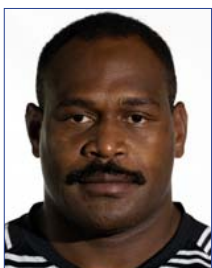
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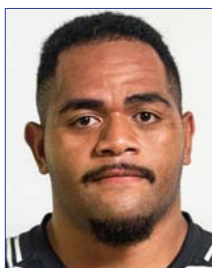
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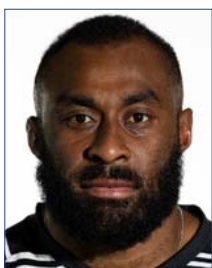
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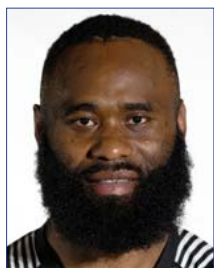
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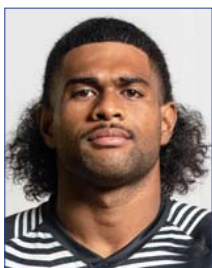
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Radradra



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Tamanivalu



Simione  
Kuruvoli



Sireli  
Maqala



Te Ahiwaru  
Cirikidaveta



Temo  
Mayanavanua



Teti  
Tela



Tevita  
Ikanivere



Viliame  
Mata



Vilimoni  
Botitu



Vilive  
Miramira



Vinaya  
Habosi



Zuriel  
Togatama



**STAR KIST VISIT**



**MAPUIFAGALELE VISIT**

# 'BIG GUNS' BOLSTER SAMOA'S WORLD CUP HOPES

By Tuifa'asisina Peter Rees



Head coach Vaovasamanaia Seilala Mapusua has assembled one of the most powerful squads in years as Manu Samoa heads into its ninth Rugby World Cup in France. The team will warm up for the tournament with the Pacific Nations Cup before they depart for Europe.

Lakapi Samoa has given the most of changes to rugby's eligibility laws and recruiting several high-profile players to bolster Samoa's World Cup hopes and aspirations to reach the knock-out stages for the first time since 1995. The addition of former All Blacks such as Lima Sopoaga, Jeffrey Toomaga-Allen, Charlie Faumuina, Steven Luatua and former Wallabies pivot Christian Lealiifano will add experience to a team already brimming with talent. The likes of Fritz Lee and Jordan Taufua who were once on the fringe of All Blacks selection, and former USA prop Titi Lamositele, who played for the Eagles in the last World Cup, adds even more quality and selection options for Mapusua.

Samoa are drawn in Pool D where they will face Chile, Argentina, Japan and 2003 World Cup winners England. On paper, Samoa has a team capable of grabbing the second quarterfinal qualifying spot from Pool D. How the team gels over the coming weeks starting with the Pacific Nations Cup with

two home games against Fiji and Tonga will be crucial before departing for France, where they are set to play in a tough pre-World Cup warm up game against the current world number one ranked team, Ireland.

The 40-man squad is heavily forward focused with only 15 backs chosen. Such is the versatility of the squad, and the depth Samoa now has, especially in the inside backs.

## **PLAYERS TO WATCH:**

**Lima Sopoaga (Papa Sataua, Sa'anapu):** Ever since he left New Zealand rugby, many Samoan rugby fans have waited to see if Lima Sopoaga would make himself available for Manu Samoa. This anticipation intensified when World Rugby paved the way with changes to the eligibility laws. While he played mostly at first 5/8 for the Highlanders and All Blacks during his time in New Zealand, Sopoaga has often featured at fullback for Wasps and Lyon and could turn out in the same role for Manu Samoa, sharing the role with incumbent, Danny Toala who wore the #15 jersey last year.

**Ulupano Junior Seuteni (Samusu, Malie):** The versatile La Rochelle backline star has been in impressive form in Europe and with the depth now in

the inside backs, this will allow the talented Seuteni to focus on cementing a spot in the centres, where he prefers to be. This will be his second World Cup after previously featuring in the #10 jersey for Samoa and his ball skills and superb running game could add another dimension for Samoa out wide.

**Christian Lealiifano (Magiagi, Letogo):** For many years, the pivot role has been a weakness for Manu Samoa. Suddenly, head coach Vaovasamanaia Seilala Mapusua is blessed with the talents of former All Black Lima Sopoaga and now, former Wallabies playmaker Christian Lealiifano. D'Angelo Leuila, UJ Seuteni and Duncan Paia'aua are also capable of filling in the 10 jersey if needed. However, the veteran Lealiifano seems certain to win that role with his recent good form for Moana Pasifika. His calm game management, kicking skills, and experience is exactly what Manu Samoa needs in World Cup year.

**Steven Luatua (Saleimoa, Malie):** Former All Black Steven Luatua adds more than just experience to the team. He gives coach Seilala Mapusua another leader in the forwards, another world class lineout option, and his versatility at being able to slot in at blindside flanker and lock. The rangy 6'5" (1.96m) former Blues forward has been a mainstay for Bristol in the English Premiership under coach Pat Lam and is set to make his long-awaited debut after pulling out from Manu Samoa selection through injury last year.

**Michael Alaalatoa (Fasito'o-uta, Matatufu):** The son of Manu Samoa legend Vili Alaalatoa captained Manu Samoa last year and his good form for Irish team Leinster puts him as a frontrunner to lead the team again. But the Australia-raised tighthead prop faces stiff competition this year with the front row

bolstered by former All Blacks Charlie Faumuina, Jeffrey Toomaga-Allen and former USA Eagles prop, Titi Lamositele.

**RWC 2023 SCHEDULE FOR MANU SAMOA:**  
vs Chile in Bordeaux on 16 September  
vs Argentina in Saint Etienne on 22 September  
vs Japan in Toulouse on 28 September  
vs England in Lille on 7 October

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

\* Manu Samoa qualified as the 13th team for Rugby World Cup France 2023 after winning a double-header against Tonga (42-13, 37-15) during World Cup qualifications in 2021.

\* This will be Manu Samoa's ninth World Cup. Samoa has competed in every World Cup since 1991 after not receiving an invitation to the inaugural tournament in 1987.

\* Manu Samoa is drawn in Pool D for RWC 2023 with Chile, Argentina, RWC 2015 hosts Japan and RWC 2003 winners England.

\* Manu Samoa are two-time World Cup quarterfinalists in RWC 1995 and RWC 1991.

\* Samoa made its World Cup debut on 6 October, 1991 vs Wales at Cardiff Arms Park. Samoa won 16-13.

\* Most RWC appearances: Brian Lima, 18. Lima was the first player in world rugby to play in five World Cups.

\* Most RWC tries: Brian Lima, 10



# SAMOA'S FIRST FEMALE REFEREE WANTS MORE TO FOLLOW HER FOOTSTEPS

*By: Taimalieutu Fuatino Muliagatele Ah Wai*

Samoa's first ever female international rugby referee Avi'i Fa'alupega has been creating history in the game for the past few years, setting the benchmark high for aspiring young Samoan women referees.

She begun her journey in 2008 as a teacher, but her first match as an official came in 2016 when she was appointed to her first international as a referee for an Oceania Sevens tournament. She also officiated the historic Rugby World Cup qualification game between Tonga and Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby in February 2020.

Rugby runs in her blood; her father was a World Rugby match official, and her brother Mussolini played for the Manu Samoa Sevens team. "Support of my family is important," she says, saying it was the reason why she got into refereeing. She believes support from family will help more young women step forward to take up the challenge and break down barriers.

On being recognized by SASNOC as the female high-end contributor to Sports in Samoa ahead of the 2023 Samoa Games, Avi'i reflected on her journey. "I was born and raised in the small village of Faletagaloa in Safune, Savaii. My humble journey is the key to my success," she says. "Everything that I've encountered in life have impacted the decisions that I've made and the sacrifices that I've been through to become the person I am today. Being grateful is one aspect of life that is very special to me, because it keeps me going and working hard to the things I've wanted to achieve in life and more importantly to service. As a woman competing against men in the refereeing career, the key is to run the extra mile and enjoy it."

Avi'i has officiated plenty of women's and men's games and now the next challenge is to being appointed an official for the women's sevens world series which is her goal.



# FORMER PLAYERS WALK DIFFERENT PATHS TO TOP COACHING JOBS

By *Tuifa'asisina Peter Rees*

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Today's Pacific Nations Cup fixture pits two former international rugby stars against each other as the head coach of their respective teams. Manu Samoa head coach Vaovasamanaia Seilala Mapusua was a stalwart of Manu Samoa's midfield during the 2000s and early 2010s, while Ikale Tahi coach Toutai Kefu was a World Cup winner with Australia's Wallabies in 1999 scoring a hat trick against Romania and establishing himself as one of the world's top No.8's of that era. Vaovasamanaia can claim bragging rights after beating Tonga 34-18 in last year's Pacific Nations Cup in Lautoka. But Kefu has tasted victory before over Samoa leading Tonga to the Oceania 2 spot for RWC 2019 past Samoa. He brings formidable team to Apia for the Pacific Nations Cup.

## *Vaovasamanaia Seilala Mapusua*

Samoa-born Vaovasamanaia played 26 tests for Manu Samoa and was part of the famous team that upset the Wallabies in 2011. He played in two World Cups in 2007 and 2011. The former Highlanders and London Irish midfielder retired in 2016 after a stint in Japan.

Since Vaovasamanaia's arrival as head coach in 2020, he has had to negotiate the logistical challenges of COVID. But he has overseen a vast improvement in Manu Samoa's international results and world ranking winning the Pacific Nations Cup last year and the team's world ranking rising from 15 to 12, leapfrogging Fiji and Tonga in the process. Taking on the head coach role is a job close to Vaovasamanaia's heart as a former player who bled blue every time he took the field for Manu Samoa across his career. Although he was relatively new to coaching at this level, he chose to take on the challenge when he saw the national team underperforming. His goal was to reverse the string of poor results and lift the team to achieve their potential with a long-term goal of reaching the knockout rounds of the Rugby World Cup 2023 in his sights. "Seeing the results not go our way it's been really tough and sometimes frustrating, and I suppose that was part of the reason why I thought if I want to influence this team that means a lot to me, then this was the best way to do it," he said in an interview with Coconet.

As a former player, Vaovasamanaia has played a key role in helping Lakapi Samoa to attract many of the overseas-based Samoan stars to make themselves available for Samoa. He has also surrounded himself with a formidable coaching team with expertise and experience in key ar-

reas, while embedding a strong culture within the team to ensure the players respect the values and foundations the team is built upon.

## *Toutai Kefu*

Kefu, 49, has been in the top job for Tonga since 2016. The former Wallabies international took a different path to the national team than Vaovasamanaia. The former Queensland Reds and Kubota Spears back-rower appeared 60 times for Australia from 1997-2003, the highlight being part of the great Wallabies teams which clinched the World Cup in 1999 and series win over the touring British & Irish Lions in 2001.

After missing selection for the 2003 World Cup, he signed with Kubota and spent the remainder of his career in Japan before hanging up his boots in 2010.

Kefu started his coaching career in 2010 as head coach of the Sunshine Coast Stingrays in the Queensland Premier League. The following year he took up an assistant coaching role with the Tonga Rugby Union and made an immediate impact helping the Ikale Tahi to wins over Fiji and Samoa in the Pacific Nations Cup and two wins at the Rugby World Cup 2011 over Japan 31-18 and one of the biggest upsets in World Cup history, a famous 19-14 win over finalists France.

Kefu became the interim head coach of Ikale Tahi in 2012 following the resignation of Isitolo Maka. But Mana Otai was installed as the permanent coach. Kefu then took up a position as coach of his former club Kubota Spears earning them promotion to the Japan Top League in the 2013-2014 season.

In 2016, Kefu replaced Mana Otai as head coach of the Ikale Tahi after Tonga failed to automatically qualify for the World Cup in 2019. He has held on to the top job ever since and has assembled arguably Tonga's strongest ever squad on paper for their 2023 campaign. "This is obviously a different class of side compared to teams we have had in the past, and what it enables us to do, it provides us with some massive X-Factor," Kefu said in an interview with the Sydney Morning Herald.



# MATCH SCHEDULE

POOL

**A**

**FRANCE v NEW ZEALAND**  
Fri, 8 Sept - 21:00  
Saint-Denis - Stade de France

**ITALY v NAMIBIA**  
Sat, 9 Sept - 13:00  
Saint-Etienne - Stade Geoffroy-Guichard

**FRANCE v URUGUAY**  
Thu, 14 Sept - 21:00  
Lille - Stade Pierre-Mauroy

**NEW ZEALAND v NAMIBIA**  
Fri, 15 Sept - 21:00  
Toulouse - Stadium de Toulouse

**ITALY v URUGUAY**  
Wed, 20 Sept - 17:45  
Nice - Stade de Nice

**FRANCE v NAMIBIA**  
Thu, 21 Sept - 21:00  
Marseille - Stade de Marseille

**URUGUAY v NAMIBIA**  
Wed, 27 Sept - 17:45  
Lyon - OL Stadium

**NEW ZEALAND v ITALY**  
Fri, 29 Sept - 21:00  
Lyon - OL Stadium

**NEW ZEALAND v URUGUAY**  
Thu, 5 Oct - 21:00  
Lyon - OL Stadium

**FRANCE v ITALY**  
Fri, 6 Oct - 21:00  
Lyon - OL Stadium

**NEW ZEALAND**  
**FRANCE**  
**ITALY**  
**URUGUAY**  
**NAMIBIA**

**QUARTER-FINAL 4**  
Sun, 15 Oct - 21:00  
Saint-Denis - Stade de France

**WINNER POOL A**

**V**

**RUNNER-UP POOL B**

**SEMI-FINAL 1**  
Fri, 20 Oct - 21:00  
Saint-Denis - Stade de France

**WINNER QF 1**

**V**

**WINNER QF 2**

**FINAL**  
Sat, 28 Oct - 21:00  
Saint-Denis - Stade de France



**WINNER SF 1**

**V**

**WINNER SF 2**

**BRONZE FINAL**  
Fri, 27 Oct - 21:00  
Saint-Denis - Stade de France

**RUNNER-UP SF 1**

**V**

**RUNNER-UP SF 2**

POOL

**B**

**IRELAND v ROMANIA**  
Sat, 9 Sept - 15:30  
Bordeaux - Stade de Bordeaux

**SOUTH AFRICA v SCOTLAND**  
Sun, 10 Sept - 17:45  
Marseille - Stade de Marseille

**IRELAND v TONGA**  
Sat, 16 Sept - 21:00  
Nantes - Stade de la Beaujoire

**SOUTH AFRICA v ROMANIA**  
Sun, 17 Sept - 15:00  
Bordeaux - Stade de Bordeaux

**SOUTH AFRICA v IRELAND**  
Sat, 23 Sept - 21:00  
Saint-Denis - Stade de France

**SCOTLAND v TONGA**  
Sun, 24 Sept - 17:45  
Nice - Stade de Nice

**SCOTLAND v ROMANIA**  
Sat, 30 Sept - 21:00  
Lille - Stade Pierre-Mauroy

**SOUTH AFRICA v TONGA**  
Sun, 1 Oct - 21:00  
Marseille - Stade de Marseille

**IRELAND v SCOTLAND**  
Sat, 7 Oct - 21:00  
Saint-Denis - Stade de France

**TONGA v ROMANIA**  
Sun, 8 Oct - 17:45  
Lille - Stade Pierre-Mauroy

**SOUTH AFRICA**  
**IRELAND**  
**SCOTLAND**  
**TONGA**  
**ROMANIA**

POOL

**C**

**AUSTRALIA v GEORGIA**  
Sat, 9 Sept - 18:00  
Saint-Denis - Stade de France

**WALES v FIJI**  
Sun, 10 Sept - 21:00  
Bordeaux - Stade de Bordeaux

**WALES v PORTUGAL**  
Sat, 16 Sept - 17:45  
Nice - Stade de Nice

**AUSTRALIA v FIJI**  
Sun, 17 Sept - 17:45  
Saint-Etienne - Stade Geoffroy-Guichard

**GEORGIA v PORTUGAL**  
Sat, 23 Sept - 14:00  
Toulouse - Stadium de Toulouse

**WALES**  
**AUSTRALIA**  
**FIJI**  
**GEORGIA**  
**PORTUGAL**

**WALES v AUSTRALIA**  
Sun, 24 Sept - 21:00  
Lyon - OL Stadium

**FIJI v GEORGIA**  
Sat, 30 Sept - 17:45  
Bordeaux - Stade de Bordeaux

**AUSTRALIA v PORTUGAL**  
Sun, 1 Oct - 17:45  
Saint-Etienne - Stade Geoffroy-Guichard

**WALES v GEORGIA**  
Sat, 7 Oct - 15:00  
Nantes - Stade de la Beaujoire

**FIJI v PORTUGAL**  
Sun, 8 Oct - 21:00  
Toulouse - Stadium de Toulouse

POOL

**D**

**ENGLAND v ARGENTINA**  
Sat, 9 Sept - 21:00  
Marseille - Stade de Marseille

**JAPAN v CHILE**  
Sun, 10 Sept - 13:00  
Toulouse - Stadium de Toulouse

**SAMOA v CHILE**  
Sat, 16 Sept - 15:00  
Bordeaux - Stade de Bordeaux

**ENGLAND v JAPAN**  
Sun, 17 Sept - 21:00  
Nice - Stade de Nice

**ARGENTINA v SAMOA**  
Fri, 22 Sept - 17:45  
Saint-Etienne - Stade Geoffroy-Guichard

**ENGLAND**  
**JAPAN**  
**ARGENTINA**  
**SAMOA**  
**CHILE**

**ENGLAND v CHILE**  
Sat, 23 Sept - 21:00  
Lille - Stade Pierre-Mauroy

**JAPAN v SAMOA**  
Thu, 28 Sept - 21:00  
Toulouse - Stadium de Toulouse

**ARGENTINA v CHILE**  
Sat, 30 Sept - 15:00  
Nantes - Stade de la Beaujoire

**ENGLAND v SAMOA**  
Sat, 7 Oct - 17:45  
Lille - Stade Pierre-Mauroy

**JAPAN v ARGENTINA**  
Sun, 8 Oct - 13:00  
Nantes - Stade de la Beaujoire

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**#RWC2023**





# CHAMPIONING THE HOPES OF LOCAL PLAYERS

by Taimalieutu Fuatino Muliagatele -Ah Wai

## PROFILE:

Full Name **Melani Arasi Matavao**  
Age **27**  
Villages: **Fasitoo uta, Laulii. Saaga Siumu, Afega, Vaimoso**  
Clubs: **Marist (2022 -2023), Vaiala (2017 – 2019), Aana Chiefs (2016 -2017), Otago NPC (2018)**

## Representative Honours:

**Samoa U20 (2015), Samoa A (2016), Manu Samoa (2017-2023), Manuma Samoa (2020), Manu Samoa Sevens (2019-2023)**

Melani Matavao is one of the success stories of local rugby, and he is hoping his example will inspire more local rugby players to aspire to reach the heights that he has achieved in his career, from playing first XV rugby for Nuuausala College and St Joseph's College, to making his name on the domestic scene for Vaiala, A'ana Chiefs and Marist. It was his talents as a playmaking halfback with an impressive running game that saw him selected to represent Samoa U20 in 2015, then Samoa A in 2016, before making his debut for Manu Samoa against Scotland in 2017.

He got his first taste of overseas rugby when he signed with Otago for New Zealand's NPC competition in 2018, under World Rugby's Pacific Combine scheme.

In 2018, he scored two crucial tries against Germany to help Manu Samoa qualify for the 2019 Rugby World Cup.

Matavao made his debut for the Manu Samoa Sevens team in 2019 and played in the 2019-2020 World Sevens Series following the Rugby 15s World Cup.

He also played in the 2022 Rugby Sevens World Cup in Cape Town, South Africa and Commonwealth Games.

Born to Ieru and Akenese Matavao as the second eldest of six children, and hailing from the villages of Fasitoo uta, Laulii. Saaga Siumu, Afega, Vaimoso, Melani is married to Tafaeafe Faalala Jess Schuster and they share a two year-old son.

Melani wants to see more locals playing at the highest levels for Manu Samoa and Manu Samoa Sevens and believes there's enough talent on island to achieve this. "There is a lot of talented young players out there and we need to bring out that talent," he says.

He has some words of advice for aspiring players. "Believe in yourself and set high goals," he says. "I made it to National University, but I decided to take Rugby as my Career Path as one of my passions." Family and humility are also important for him. "Coming from a humble family, be honest with yourself with a humble heart. Finau and keep striving."

# IKALE TAHI BRING OUT STARS TO TOPPLE MANU SAMOA

*By Tuifa'asisina Peter Rees*

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When Manu Samoa hosts the Ikaile Tahī from Tonga at Apia Park for their Pacific Nations Cup fixture on 5 August, there is plenty of motivation for both sides. Manu Samoa will be looking to cement their combinations with players coming from all ends of the globe and will not want to drop this game with momentum crucial with the World Cup just around the corner. Tonga on the other hand will be motivated by their recent record against Samoa which they will look to rectify to boost their World Cup hopes and appease their legion of loyal fans spread all over the world.

Head-to-head, Samoa boasts a superior 56% win ratio with 38 wins from 68 games and four draws, while Tonga has won 26 times with a 38% win ratio. Tonga's biggest winning margin is 23 while Samoa's biggest winning margin is 49. Based on recent results, Manu Samoa heads into this Pacific Nations Cup fixture as favourites having won the last four games between the two proud island nations. Samoa has also not lost to Tonga since 2018. Samoa also sits higher on the current world rankings at 12 ahead of Tonga (15th).

However, form and world rankings usually got out the window when the Pacific Island rivals clash. Tonga and Samoa are both capable of winning on any given day and the history and the traditional rivalry they both share just adds to the intensity whenever the two proud nations meet. There is guaranteed to be huge hits on defence and sore bodies after the game!

Tonga is a much-improved side on paper this year. The 2023 squad is stacked with talent with the likes of former Wallabies stars Israel Folau and Adam Coleman, plus former All Blacks, Charles Piutau, Augustine Pulu, Vaea Fifita and Malakai Fekitoa answering the call. This gives Ikaile Tahī coach Toutai Kefu plenty of options and a healthy selection headache.

Tonga is in arguably in the toughest pool at this year's Rugby World Cup with Ireland, South Africa, Scotland and Romania.

Manu Samoa on the other hand has assembled one of the most powerful squads in years as Manu head into their ninth Rugby World Cup in France. Samoa has made the most of changes to rugby's eligibility laws and recruited a number of high-profile players to bolster Samoa's World Cup hopes and aspirations to reach the knock-out stages

for the first time since 1995. The addition of former All Blacks such as Lima Sopoaga, Jeffrey Toomaga-Allen, Charlie Faumuina, Steven Luatua and former Wallabies pivot Christian Lealiifano will add experience to a team already brimming with talent. Former Super Rugby stars Fritz Lee and Jordan Taufua and former USA prop Titi Lamositele, who played for the Eagles in the last World Cup, adds even more quality and selection options for coach Vaovasamanaia Seilala Mapusua. Samoa is drawn in Pool D with Chile, Japan, Argentina and England for Rugby World Cup 2023.

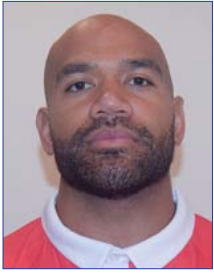
## **HEAD-TO-HEAD - SAMOA vs TONGA:**

- \* Manu Samoa and Ikaile Tahī Tonga have played 68 games
- \* Samoa has a superior win ratio of 56% with 38 wins
- \* Tonga has won 26 times with a 38% win ratio, with 4 draws
- \* Tonga's biggest winning margin is 23
- \* Samoa's biggest winning margin is 49
- \* Samoa winger and former captain, David Lemi is the top try scorer in all games between the two nations with 7 tries in 12 appearances against Tonga. He is followed by Alesana Tuilagi with 5 tries.
- \* Cooper Vuna, Elisi Vunipola, Sila Va'enuku and Tau-naholo Taufahema are Tonga's top try scorers with 2 tries each

## **RECENT RESULTS:**

2022 - Samoa 34-18 Tonga  
2021 - Samoa 42-13 Tonga  
2021 - Samoa 37-15 Tonga  
2019 - Samoa 25-17 Tonga  
2018 - Tonga 28-18 Samoa  
2017 - Tonga 30-26 Samoa  
2017 - Samoa 30-10 Tonga  
2014 - Samoa 18-18 Tonga  
2012 - Samoa 20-18 Tonga  
2011 - Tonga 29-19 Samoa  
2010 - Samoa 24-23 Tonga

# 'IKALE TAHI TONGA 2023



Afusipa  
Taumoepeau



Augustine  
Pulu



Ben  
Tameifuna



Feao  
Fotuaika



Fine  
Inisi



Halaleva  
Fifita



Isileli  
Folau



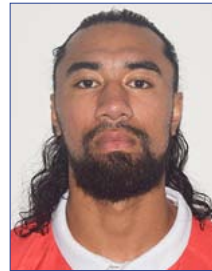
Kyren  
Taumoeafolau



Malakai  
Fekitoa



Manu  
Paea



Otumaka  
Mausia



Paula  
Ngauamo



Pita  
Ahki



Salesi  
Piutau



Samiuela  
Lousi



Samiuela  
Moli



Sione  
Vailanu



Sitiveni  
Mafi



Siva  
Maile



Solomon  
Funaki



Solomon  
Kata



Sonatane  
Takulua



Sosefo  
Sakalia



Tanginoa  
Halaifonua



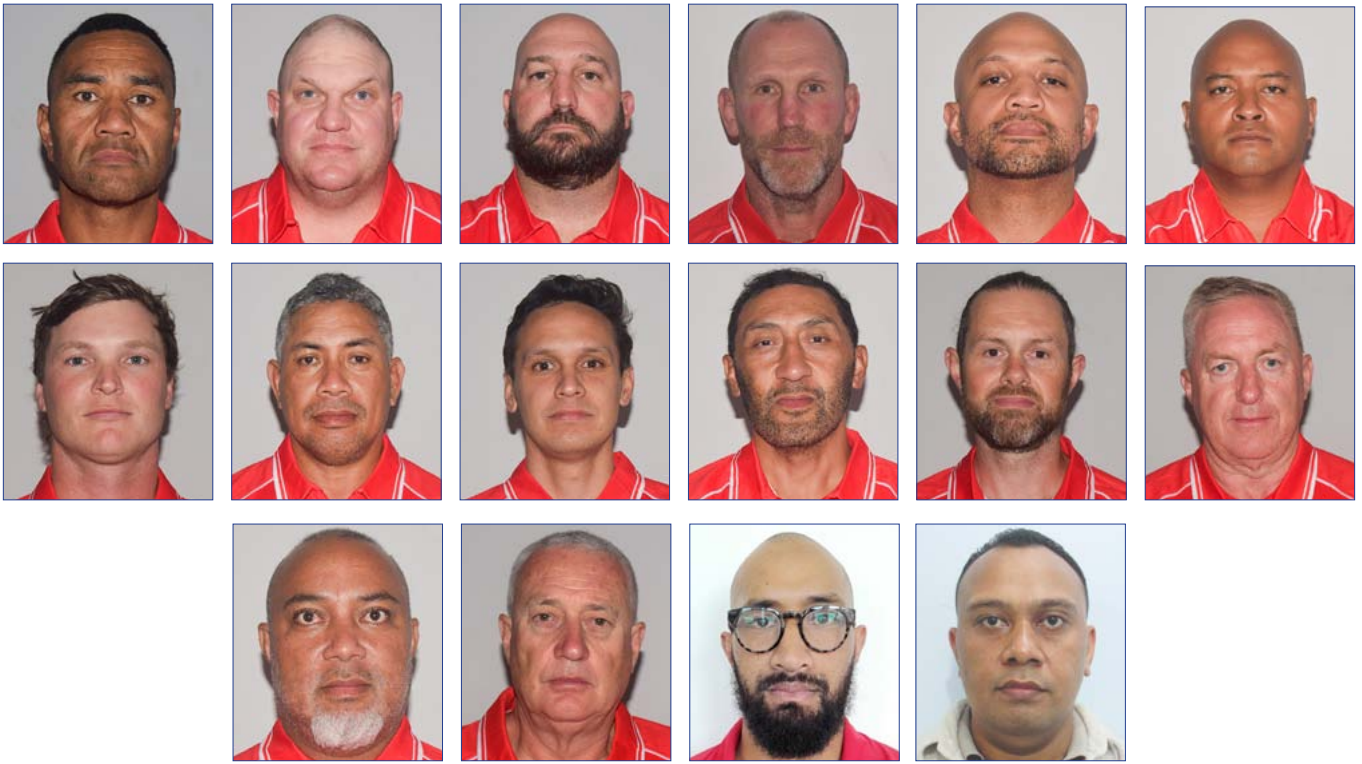
Tau  
Koloamatangi



Vaea  
Fifita



William  
Havili



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## ABOUT US:

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# PRIVILEGED PRESSURE: CASSIE SIATAGA'S HISTORIC KICK FOR SAMOA

by Thomas Airey

## PROFILE:

Full Name **Cassie Muaimalae Tanu Siataga**  
Villages: **Tanugamanono, Magiagi**  
Clubs: **Linwood RFC, Christchurch**

*“Keep your head down and go through the ball.”*

The Queensland rain is now bucketing down as hard as it has all game.

Passionate Fijian fans in the crowd are yelling at the top of their lungs.

It's sensory overload, a real-life Hollywood moment as Manusina first five eighths Cassie Siataga lines up the penalty kick that would clinch Samoa's first ever Oceania Rugby Women's Championship title with time up on the clock.

But all she can focus on are those words she so often heard from her kicking coach at Tasman last year, former Māori All Black halfback Billy Guyton, who tragically died just last month.

“That's all I was hearing when I was setting up the tee, when I was looking at the posts, thinking of all the little things he said to me, and he believed in me, so I couldn't doubt myself,” Siataga said.

“It was having the team in my ear, you've gotta do it, you can do it. They call it privileged pressure. It's a lot of pressure but we're privileged enough to be in that position to do it.”

Manusina head coach Mata'afa Ramsey Tomokino was backing his star pivot all the way home too.

“Cassie Siataga, she'd be like Grant Fox to me... every time Grant Fox stood up for a kick you knew he was going to nail it, and Dan Carter's probably the same,” he said.

“But even then I was thinking the rain, in my head thinking she could slip, she could slice it because it actually started to really bucket down. But Cassie man, she was on.”

Siataga scored all 19 of Samoa's points in the finale and was the competitions's top scorer overall.

It was a step up from the 28-year-old's already impressive debut Manusina campaign in 2022 which saw her named the team's MVP.

Tomokino said Samoa were very fortunate to have Siataga on board having been passed over for selection by the Black Ferns earlier in her career.

Born and raised in Christchurch with roots in Tanugamanono and Magiagi, Siataga was a key figure in the Canterbury teams that won all four Farah Palmer Cups from 2017 to 2020.

“We'd obviously made approaches to her earlier on, years back as well and she was kind a holding out,” Tomokino said. “The minute that Sui [Manusina captain Masuisuimatama'ali'i Tauaua-Pauaraisa, a clubmate at Linwood and close friend of Siataga's] had said Cassie wants to play now, I was like ‘nah you're kidding!’”



Every young woman in New Zealand rugby grows up dreaming of the Black Ferns, and Siataga was no different. “It’s something you strive for week in, week out. It was always there in the graft for me and I never really got that crack,” she said. “It’s almost a blessing in disguise now.”

While she never made the Black Ferns, Siataga fully understands what it means to play for New Zealand. A prodigious shortstop in softball, she made the White Sox as a teenager and represented them many times, even playing for Midland College in Texas on a scholarship before returning home to rugby.

But all that international experience couldn’t hold a candle to the feeling of representing Samoa.

I’ve never cried for the national anthem, but the first time in the blue jersey, the Samoan national anthem

came on and the tears just came out of nowhere,” Siataga said.

“Now that I have actually put my hand up, I regret all those times I did say no and all those times I could have been playing international tests but was just chasing something else.”

Despite those lingering regrets, Siataga came aboard just in time to help Manusina qualify for tier two of the inaugural WXV competition to be held in South Africa later this year.

“The only way we’re going to keep going up the world rankings, and any of our Pacific Island teams, is to get more tests and get more exposure, especially to those top level teams that we’re going to be playing,” she said.



# THEO MCFARLAND'S RISE FROM BASKETBALL STAR TO MANU SAMOA



Theo McFarland's rise from Samoa basketball star to being one of the best rugby union forwards playing in the English Premiership and for Manu Samoa is a remarkable journey. Not only is it an inspiring story for young rugby players and an example of what is possible for local athletes, it also demonstrates the wealth of talent available locally in Samoa.

McFarland is the second youngest of six children to Steve and Sarai McFarland, hailing from the villages of Moamoa, Aleisa, Salelologa and Vaigaga. The 27-year-old's height, 6'6" (1.98m) and athleticism, developed in basketball, means he is equally comfortable playing either lock or flanker. From dunking basketball balls to the oval ball game, McFarland was blessed with natural talent from a young age, where he played both sports.

"I started playing rugby in high school for Pesega College (CCWS) from 2011-2013," he explains. He was also making a name for himself in basketball during his teenage years, going on to captain the Samoa national basketball team.

He also continued playing rugby for his village, SSAB Moamoa Roosters Club, and soon his talent for Samoa's national game began to get him noticed. He was selected for Samoa's National A team, Manuma Samoa from 2019-2020. Then he earned a contract with American semi-pro team Dallas Jackals from 2020-2021 before making his Manu Samoa

debut in 2021. He was in training with the Samoa Sevens team when English Premiership glamour club Saracens approached McFarland and offered him a contract which he signed in August 2021. He was nothing short of a revelation in his first season of professional rugby making 26 appearances, winning try of the season award, and winning many fans with his athletic ability.

"It is always a privilege to be an ambassador representing my country," says McFarland. "I'm fighting for a spot in the Manu Samoa squad for the World Cup this September. We've got an awesome group of experienced players and coaches and we're very excited about doing well this year."

Success comes with sacrifices, but McFarland urged locals to work hard and make the most of opportunities to chase their dreams. "One of the challenges of being a professional rugby player is the time away from family," he explains. "I guess everything comes at a cost. To be successful, sacrifices have to be made. Having been born and raised in Samoa, I encourage the locals to keep chasing their dreams - whichever sport it may be. It can be hard at times, especially trying to make it from a very small island. But opportunities will always present themselves if you work hard. Remember, dreams without work are just an illusion."

*by Taimalieutu Fuatino Muliagatele -Ah Wai*

# TEAMS ACHIEVEMENT



## MANUMA SAMOA, A PATHWAY TO HIGHER HONOURS FOR LOCALS

*by Taimalieutu Fuatino Muliagatele -Ah Wai*

### HEAD COACH

Name - **Leiatualesa Saumani Afaese Hanipale**  
Villages - **Manono, Satupaitea, Asau, Sailele**

The importance of Samoa's National A team, Manuma Samoa cannot be underestimated. Originally founded as Kagifa Samoa in 2019 for the Global Competition, the team now plays a special role in Lakapi Samoa's development strategy as the team which provides a pathway for local players to secure opportunities to play overseas and represent Manu Samoa. The players involved are on the fringe of higher honours, and Manuma is the platform for these players to showcase their talents. Manuma has been a stepping-stone for many Samoan players. For those players who get the call up to the World Rugby Combines, the lucky few will get the chance to secure contracts which can be lifechanging for these players' careers and their families.

This year, Lakapi Samoa hosted the World Rugby Pacific Challenge in Apia and Manuma Samoa finished runner up to the winners, Fiji Warriors, defeating Junior Japan 44-33 and Tonga A, 69-7. Manuma were competitive against Fiji Warriors taking the lead just after halftime, but the Fijians finished strongly taking out the game 50-25. Current Manu Samoa 15s and sevens international Melani Mataavao and Junior Seuteni Alivaa were the standouts for the Manuma Samoa.

Manuma Samoa is led by Leiatualesa Saumani Afaese Hanipale, who hails from the villages of Manono, Satupaitea, Asau, Sailele and has been head coach since 2022. Leiatualesa remarked there are a lot of challenges coaching the team, especially not having regular competition to allow the players time to develop.

"For the team to be successful, the players need time and more opportunities to develop. The talent is there but it would be good to get more games," says Leiatualesa. "With the results from the Pacific Rugby Challenge Cup this year, there is much more improvement needed compared to other previous competitions. But we thank the support from Lakapi Samoa for all the tremendous preparations. And a big acknowledgement to all teams from Tonga, Japan and Fiji for the great effort, plus support from the community. Malo lava!"





# SAMOA EYES OLYMPIC BERTH AT OCEANIA 7S

*By Tuifa'asisina Peter Rees*

## HEAD COACH FOR MANU SAMOA SEVENS

Name - **Muliagatele Briam Lima**

Manu Samoa Sevens put up a valiant effort in the final leg of the HSBC World Rugby Sevens Series in London to claim the bronze medal in a brilliant win over the All Blacks Sevens. But it wasn't enough to claim an automatic spot for next year's Olympics in Paris as Australia grabbed the last spot by finishing fifth overall (135 points) on the points table.

However, Samoa gets another chance to qualify for the Olympics if they win the Oceania Sevens later this year. With Australia, Fiji and series winner New Zealand already qualified, it makes Samoa's job easier. But head coach Muliagatele Brian Lima won't be taking anything for granted given how competitive the series has become in recent years and Samoa's past difficulties in qualifying – think back to Rio 2016 and the lesson by Spain.

Samoa finished the 2022-2023 World Series in sixth place with 134 points, the highlight coming in South

Africa with a win in the Cape Town 7s. There were also good results in Hong Kong and Singapore as Muliagatele's young squad showed loads of potential.

The other highlight came when star player, Va'a Apelu Maliko, was crowned the World Rugby Seven Series top try scorer for 2022-2023 with 50 tries (252 points, included 1 conversion) from 62 games, averaging 4.01 point per game across the season. He was also named the DHL Impact Player of the Series for the most consistency and delivered the greatest impact against four key criteria – carries, offloads, line-breaks, and tackles. Maliko made 41 breaks, 122 tackles, 55 offloads and 214 carries throughout the 11 events. Maliko was also named in the Series Dream Team and is a front runner for the World Rugby Sevens Player of the Year award.





# JUNIOR MANU SAMOA (UNDER 20)

*by Taimalieutu Fuatino Muliagatele -Ah Wai*

## HEAD COACH

Full Name - **Galumaleana Rudolf Moors**

Villages - **Vaitele, Lepea**

Samoa's Under 20 rugby representatives, the Junior Manu Samoa have their sights on the World Rugby Trophy 2023 in Kenya which kick off this month from 15-30 July. They qualified for Kenya after dispatching Tonga U20 in their Oceania qualifying series in 2022.

The goal for our young rugby stars is to win the second tier competition and qualify for the top tier World Rugby U20 Championship for 2024.

Head Coach, Galumalemana Rudolph Moors says that getting there will not be easy and believes the World Rugby Trophy 2023 will be very competitive, but the team will do their best for Samoa.

According to Galumalemana, they are working on their goals and tactics to qualify for World Rugby U20 Championship 2024. Most of the 28 players selected are locally based, apart from a few players from overseas. Two of the players Aleipata College student, Malakesi Masefau, 18, and Paul Stanley played for the Manu Samoa Sevens in the World Rugby Sevens Series this year. Masefau scored two tries in Samoa's bronze medal victory over the All Blacks Sevens team in the London Sevens tournament. Stanley debuted for Samoa 7s in 2022 and carried his village team Vaimoso at the Marist Pago Sevens. William Hunt was also in the extended Manu Samoa Sevens squad. Two players come from the Moana Pasifika U20s team based in New Zealand, Bitner Tafili and Wally Tau.

All the best to our Junior Manu Samoa team and to the coach and management in Kenya.





# OCEANIA QUEENS MANUSINA PREPARE FOR WWXV IN SOUTH AFRICA

Instagram and Twitter: @manusina\_swr

## HEAD COACH

Name - **Mataafa Ramsey Tominiko**

Samoa's national women's rugby team, Manusina are the Oceania women's champions this year after winning the Oceania Championship in a campaign that saw them unbeaten in three test matches. A pulsating and tense final saw Manusina clinch victory over Pacific rivals Fijiana, 19-18, with the last play of the game, a penalty kick by first five, Cassie Siataga.

Manusina trailed 3-8 at the half but kept themselves in the game by remaining patient and accumulating points offered as Fiji's discipline cost them. At the sound of the final whistle the Samoans were jubilant as they toppled the reigning Oceania and Super W Champions.

A visibly joyous coach Mataafa Ramsey Tomokino said "I'm hugely proud of what the players have

achieved. They executed the game plan and left everything out on the field."

By winning the Oceania Championship, Manusina have been elevated to the new World Women's XV competition Tier Two in South Africa this October. Other countries who have qualified for the WWXV include host South Africa, Japan, and Scotland with two further teams to be added.

"This is a real turning point for Manusina and a landmark to say Manusina is back," says Tomokino. The Manusina have wasted no time with players returning to their home bases and playing in their local competitions. A place in the squad for October will be hotly contested with interest received from the around the global Samoan diaspora.



# SCHOOL COMPETITIONS

## 15's & 10's COMPETITION 2023 CHAMPIONS

### GIRLS DIVISIONS:

1. Under 14 (contact) – **Itu o Tane College**
2. Under 14 (tag) – **Wesley College**
3. Under 16 – **Lepa Lotofaga College**
4. Under 18 – **Palauli Sisifo College**

### BOYS DIVISIONS:

1. Under 14 – **Leulumoega Fou College**
2. Under 16 – **Leifiifi College**
3. Under 18 – **Church College Pesega**

## BSP 7's COMPETITION 2023 CHAMPIONS

### GIRLS DIVISIONS:

1. Under 14 – **Itu o Tane College**
2. Under 16 – **Aana #2 College**
3. Under 18
  - Gold Medalist - **Palauli Sisifo College**
  - Silver Medalist – **Itu o tane College**
  - Bronze Medalist – **Safata College**

### BOYS DIVISIONS:

1. Under 14 – **Itu Asau College**
2. Under 16 – **Palalaua College**
3. Under 18
  - Gold Medalist - **Nuuausala College**
  - Silver Medalist – **Leulumoega Fou College**
  - Bronze Medalist – **Aleipata College**



U16 - AANA #2 COLLEGE



U16 - PALALAU COLLEGE



U18 - PALAULI I SISIFO COLLEGE



U18 - NU'UAUSALA COLLEGE



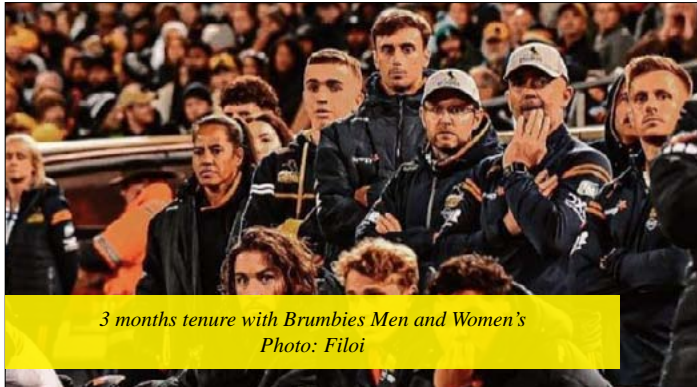
CHURCH COLLEGE PESEGA



U18 - ALEIPATA COLLEGE

# FILOI FATIMA ENELIKO: A PIONEER IN RUGBY COACHING AND A CHAMPION FOR WOMEN'S RUGBY

By: *Seumanu Douglas Ngau Chun*



*3 months tenure with Brumbies Men and Women's*  
*Photo: Filoi*



*Manusina Management and Captain after winning the Oceania Women's Championship 2023*  
*Photo: Oceania Rugby*

From the picturesque villages of Sinamoga and Vaimoso in Samoa to the global rugby stage, Filoi Fatima Eneliko's journey has been one of triumph, breaking barriers, and trailblazing accomplishments. With an illustrious career as a former Manusina and Manusina 7s player, Filoi's transition to coaching has seen her become a driving force in the sport, leaving an indelible mark on the world of rugby.

Hailing from Samoa, Filoi's passion for rugby ignited at a young age. Her exceptional skills and unwavering dedication led her to represent Samoa in both the Manusina and Manusina 7s teams, becoming a revered figure in Samoan rugby circles.

Following a successful playing career, Filoi channeled her passion and expertise into coaching, and her impact was immediate. Currently serving as the Academy Manager for Lakapi Samoa, Filoi plays a pivotal role in nurturing the next generation of rugby talents in her homeland. Her unwavering commitment to the development of young players has earned her widespread admiration within the rugby community.

Filoi's dedication to coaching excellence has been recognized with the prestigious Coach Level 3 Accreditation, solidifying her status as a top-tier coach. Her coaching prowess extends beyond national borders, as she has been honored with the role of a World Rugby Educator, sharing her vast knowledge and experience with coaches worldwide.

In Australia, Filoi continues to make waves as the Assistant Coach for the Brumbies Women's team in the esteemed Super W competition. Her strategic acumen and coaching acuity have been vital in guiding the team to new heights on the rugby field. As a female coach in a male-dominated sport, she continues to be a trailblazer and role model for aspiring female coaches.

Adding to her extensive list of accomplishments, Filoi currently serves as the Technical Advisor for the Manusina national team. Her expertise and guidance have contributed significantly to the team's growth and performance. Her contributions to the Manusina team are not new, as she had previously assisted them as an Assistant Coach during the 2013 Women's Rugby World Cup Qualifier in Spain and RWC2014 in Paris, France leaving an indelible mark on the team's journey.

Filoi's trailblazing journey extends further, as she became the first woman to coach at the Lakapi Championship level. Leading the Upolu team, she proved that gender should never limit opportunities for coaching excellence.

In another groundbreaking achievement, Filoi became the first female coach for St Joseph's College First XV, defying conventions and stereotypes. Her coaching acumen shone brightly as she led the team to a championship title, proving that talent knows no gender boundaries.

Beyond her contributions to elite rugby, Filoi's passion for the sport extends to the grassroots level. She founded the No Idea Club, a team that competes in both Touch Rugby and Rugby, promoting inclusivity and providing a platform for players of all levels to enjoy and excel in the sport.

Filoi Fatima Eneliko's impact on rugby is profound, transcending borders and generations. As a pioneering coach and a fervent advocate for women's rugby, her legacy in the sport is secure. Her journey from the villages of Sinamoga and Vaimoso to the global stage stands as an inspiration for aspiring players and coaches alike, reaffirming the notion that passion, dedication, and determination can conquer any obstacle in the pursuit of excellence.



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