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Plaque to be Erected to 'The All Black from Castleisland'



All-Black Timothy O'Connor's great grandnephew, Peter O'Connor (left) pictured with local historian and Castleisland RFC and Munster official, Maurice Walsh in Castleisland on Sunday during Mr.O'Connor's visit.

My thanks to Maurice Walsh for sending the following piece and pictures of his discovery of Tim O'Connor – Castleisland's All Black. That there's going to be a plaque unveiling at Castleisland RFC headquarters at The Cragreens will surely give rise to a celebration / festival week or weekend of the impressive history of rugby in the area. And maybe a cup to mark the occasion?

Castleisland's great sporting tradition has been further enhanced with the discovery that one of only a handful of Irish born All Blacks was a native of Castleisland. He was born in Kilcushin in 1860 the son of Daniel O'Connor and Mary 'Behane' from Lixnaw. The family emigrated to New Zealand in the late 1870's and settled in Ponsonby.

Research & Report by Maurice Walsh

No doubt, because of their knowledge of the game of Caid in Ireland and its similarity to rugby the young O'Connors were attracted to the local game and it seems that Timothy excelled at the game.

The following description of Timothy and his career are from the All Blacks history:

Tim O'Connor was a large, heavy Irishman who was a member of the first New Zealand team ever selected in 1884. He had been prominent in Auckland rugby for some years before the team was chosen and was virtually an automatic selection, even though nomination rather than any trial form chose the team.



Tim 'Behane' O'Connor.

The All Black from Castleisland to be commemorated by a plaque at Castleisland RFC.

Rejoicing in the good Irish name of Timothy Beehane O'Connor and born at Kilcushin Castleisland in the Emerald Isle, his date of birth is given as 1 January 1860, although for many years this was uncertain. What is certain is that by the time he was in his early 20s, there were few better rugby players anywhere in Auckland.

Notable Firsts

O'Connor had a number of notable firsts in his career. He was a member of the Auckland Combined Clubs side that met New South Wales in 1882, the first match ever played in this country by a touring team, and since Auckland won 7-0 it represented the first win by a New Zealand side over a touring team. He was also part of the Auckland side that later administered an 18-4 defeat to the tourists, scoring a try.

In 1883, he was a member of the first Auckland Union representative team and scored the province's first try against Canterbury, thus gaining Auckland's first point (tries were only worth one point in those days).

Invaluable Tourist

A year later he was a member of the first New Zealand side ever fielded, against the Combined XV in Wellington before heading off to Australia. On tour he was kept busy, playing six of the eight matches. His bulk (at 14st, or 89kg, he and James Allen were the heaviest forwards in the side) and pace, surprising for such a big man, made him an invaluable tourist. He later led Auckland to victory over the 1888 British team, the first local skipper to enjoy success against these formidable tourists, having taken over the captaincy from the injured Bob Whiteside. In the days before the Auckland union was formed, O'Connor represented the province's Combined Clubs side in 1881 and 1882 from North Shore. By 1883 he was playing for the old Auckland club, where he was a stalwart until the end of the decade. However, Auckland folded in 1891 through lack of numbers, prompting the introduction of the District Scheme, and O'Connor played out his last few seasons in Ponsonby colours.

Noted Field Athlete

He made the last of his 19 Auckland appearances in 1892, giving him a record few early players could match. Six of his appearances had been against touring teams; Auckland had won three and drawn one of these games.

O'Connor served for a few years on the Ponsonby committee before turning his attention to the now defunct City club (which had basically taken over the Auckland club's area) and served as auditor to that body for many years. O'Connor's strength made him a noted field athlete in his day, as he won the 1893 Australasian shot put title and three at national level (1891, 1892 and 1897), adding another Australasian title in the hammer throw in 1893. A publican at Auckland's Victoria and Waverley Hotels who used his name to advertise his hotel in some of the early rugby publications "T B O'Connor – Proprietor – Captain Auckland Team that defeated England 1888; member first New Zealand team to tour Australia 1884". Tim O'Connor died at Auckland on 5 February 1936.

Suitable Plaque

Castleisland R F C members are in the process of organising the erection of a suitable plaque to commemorate Timothy O'Connor in the near future. The exact date is yet undecided, as a great grand nephew Peter O'Connor, who visited Castleisland last weekend, expressed a hope that Timothy's grand daughter Patricia from New Zealand might like to attend. What is certain is that All Black Doug Howlett, who also played with Auckland, has agreed to come and unveil the plaque.