

MEDIA RELEASE

Behind the sidelines: Five Home Ground Heroes honoured for their impact on Touch



2026 Bunnings Home Ground Hero, Connor Thresh and nominator, Mark Robinson (L-R)

Bunnings and Touch NZ acknowledge the individuals making a real impact in 2026

While the focus in summer sport often falls to the action on the field, across Aotearoa it's the people on the sidelines who make the game possible, and as the 2025-26 Touch season comes to an end, Bunnings and Touch New Zealand are celebrating five extraordinary volunteers' whose behind-the-scenes dedication keeps Touch thriving nationwide.

For the past five years, Bunnings Home Ground Heroes has celebrated individuals who consistently go above and beyond to support their local Touch communities. Whether organising teams, mentoring players, setting up fields, or quietly making sure everyone has a place to play, these unsung heroes showcase true dedication and passion for the sport.

This year's Bunnings Home Ground Heroes being recognised for their impact in their Touch communities include Takoha Ropati (Te Tai Tokerau), Connor Thresh (Auckland), Riki Enosa (Waikato), Ike Tapine (Wellington) and Emma Puna (Otago).

Each recipient will receive \$5,000 to support the needs of their Touch community, helping ensure the game continues to be accessible, welcoming and community-led.

Touch New Zealand Chief Executive, Joe Sprangers, said the initiative continues to highlight the backbone of the sport.

MEDIA RELEASE

“These volunteers are the heartbeat of Touch in Aotearoa. They give their time, energy and leadership week in and week out so others can enjoy the game. Bunnings Home Ground Heroes allows us to acknowledge that contribution and support the impact they continue to make in their communities,” said Sprangers.

Bunnings New Zealand General Manager Melissa Haines said the nominations once again showed the power of community sport.

“Our Home Ground Heroes represent what community sport is built on, generosity, commitment and connection. Over the past five years, the hundreds of nominations we’ve received speak to the quiet but powerful difference these volunteers make. Congratulations to this year’s five winners who continue to go above and beyond for their communities.”

The five Bunnings Home Ground Heroes for 2026 include:

Takoha Ropati – Te Tai Tokerau

Transforming Touch in Te Tai Tokerau, Takoha revitalised Ngāti Hine Touch from a single team in 2020 into a thriving multi-grade pathway for all ages. His leadership strengthens cultural identity, inspires other iwi to grow their programmes, and creates opportunities for rangatahi. Through clinics, wānanga, and wellbeing initiatives, he fosters healthier, more connected communities, leaving a lasting impact across the Māori Touch landscape.

Connor Thresh – Auckland

As the driving force behind the Gurus Touch Club, Connor volunteers alongside a full-time job to provide opportunities for players of all backgrounds. Through training, mentoring, and social connection, he supports their development and helps the club grow to serve hundreds of players. His commitment to building an inclusive, welcoming environment ensures everyone can take part, develop skills, and feel part of the Auckland touch community.

Riki Enosa – Waikato

One of the most committed figures in Touch across Aotearoa, Riki has excelled as a player, leader, and mentor while staying connected to grassroots development. Through coaching, mentoring, and creating pathways for rangatahi, he supports growth, skill development, and inclusivity. His efforts strengthen teams and communities, inspiring players to reach their potential and fostering a culture of excellence and connection across New Zealand Touch.

Ike Tapine – Wellington

Dedicating countless hours as a player, coach, manager, and supporter, Ike has made a lasting contribution to Touch in Aotearoa. He coaches juniors, manages representative teams, and supports Youth and Masters' programmes, helping the game grow at all levels. His commitment nurtures skill, teamwork, and community connection, continuing to shape and strengthen the Wellington Touch community for players of all ages.

Emma Puna – Otago

Supporting Otago Touch for many years, Emma has dedicated extensive time as a manager, committee leader, and organiser. She has improved resources, introduced innovative field solutions, and travelled widely to support players and trials. Known for going the extra mile to nurture teams and volunteers, Emma fosters inclusion, opportunity, and growth, leaving a lasting impact across South Otago Touch and ensuring the sport continues to thrive locally.

To find out more about Bunnings Home Ground Heroes, visit: [Touch New Zealand - Bunnings Home Ground Heroes \(touchnz.co.nz\)](https://touchnz.co.nz)

- ENDS -



MEDIA RELEASE

For media enquiries please contact:

Joe Sprangers – Touch New Zealand	+64 27 282 8691 joe@touchnz.co.nz
Nicki Covich – Bunnings NZ	+64 21 135 2780 nicki.covich@bunnings.co.nz

Notes to the editor:

Since 2018, Bunnings Warehouse has been the principal partner of Touch New Zealand. Bunnings is the naming rights sponsor for all national tournaments. Making a positive difference in the Touch community is just a small way Bunnings can lend a hand to the communities in which we operate.

About Bunnings NZ

Bunnings is a leading retailer of home and lifestyle products for consumer and commercial customers in Australia and New Zealand. We are a major supplier to project builders, commercial tradespeople and the housing industry. Our store network in New Zealand is made up of 51 locations, comprising Bunnings Warehouses, smaller format stores and trade centres. This physical network is supported by a growing e-commerce ecosystem and supply chain network. Bunnings employs more than 5,000 team members across the country.

