

MEDIA RELEASE

Local Heroes: Five Kiwis commended for Touch community impact

Bunnings and Touch NZ acknowledge five unsung heroes making a difference



Bunnings Home Ground Hero, Vatau Sagaga and Bunnings Home Ground Heroes Ambassador, Peter Walters (L-R)

As our season of summer sport wraps up, Bunnings and Touch NZ are celebrating the individuals who make the game possible for others in their local Touch communities.

Home Ground Heroes, an initiative now in its fourth year, recognises community legends who go above and beyond the call of duty in support of the game.

This year's winners include Rolph Watson (Counties Manukau), Murray Ivory (Waikato), Vatau Sagaga (Wellington), Hoani Smith (Wellington) and Jason Watene (Canterbury) who will each receive \$5,000 to support the mahi they do in their Touch community.

Touch NZ Chief Executive, Joe Sprangers, said, "We are delighted to see another five heroes recognised and to support their mahi through Bunnings Home Ground Heroes. These volunteers give so much to their communities. Their dedication and enthusiasm enables others to enjoy the game and helps to grow the sport in communities across Aotearoa," concluded Sprangers.

Bunnings Home Ground Heroes Ambassador, Peter Walters, ONZM, said, "This is a very special initiative because it acknowledges and supports the people in our community who often go unrecognised and deserve to be celebrated. I'm very proud to be involved and to be able to thank our latest group of Home Ground Heroes."

Bunnings New Zealand General Manager, Melissa Haines said, "Congratulations to our five outstanding Home Ground Heroes - we were blown away by your contribution to your local community. We also want to thank all the individuals who were nominated by their Touch community who are making a lasting impact on the game and supporting others to play Touch."



MEDIA RELEASE

The five Bunnings Home Ground Heroes for 2025 include:

Rolph Watson – Counties Manukau

Since first playing the game, Rolph has dedicated his time to giving back to the sport he loves. He started out as a player and then moved on to become a coach, referee, administrator, supporter and mentor at Pukekohe Touch. His contribution has helped to grow his Touch module in the Counties region.

Murray Ivory - Waikato

Known as Waikato's Touch patriarch, Murray has performed various roles for his local Touch module, stepping in to help when required, including coach, referee, field marker and sideline supporter. During his tenure, Murray has shaped four generations of players, working tirelessly to ensure local tamariki have access to play the sport he loves. He has developed the largest school Touch module in the region and has helped to produce national representatives in various rugby codes.

Vatau Sagaga - Wellington

A humble but mighty advocate for Wainuiomata Touch, Vatau lives the values of his club, championing accessibility and affordability of sport in his community. He has created opportunities for local tamariki to enjoy Touch without limitation, which has resulted in huge growth in participation and a thriving Touch module in the region.

Hoani Smith - Wellington

Hoani, aka "The Touch Man", is dedicated to developing youth Touch players in Naenae. He's committed to ensuring that kids playing Touch in his community can get access to games and tournaments and spends countless hours and effort fundraising to make this possible. He's created a safe and caring environment for kids to learn the game and have fun, fostering respect, effort and teamwork.

Jason Watene – Canterbury

A local legend and role model, Jason has been influential in growing Touch in his rural community of Methven. He holds many roles from coaching, painting the fields, pumping up balls and organising kits for referees. He dedicates his time to the sport so that others can enjoy it and benefit from it. His passion for Touch, paired with his knowledge and enthusiasm have all been instrumental in creating a thriving Touch module in the region.

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 -

For media enquiries please contact:

Joe Sprangers – Touch New Zealand	+64 27 282 8691 joe@touchnz.co.nz
Alice Eade – Bunnings NZ	+64 21 245 8620 Aeade@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.

