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Super Rugby Aupiki: Blues co-captain Ruahei Demant pleads for greater funding in women’s rugby

Theme:
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Co-authored by Kris Shannon, NZ Herald

Ruahei Demant celebrated a maiden [Super Rugby Aupiki](#) title by issuing a plea for more funding and advocating for a merger with Australia.

The [Blues](#) co-captain led her side to a comeback win over the Chiefs Manawa at [Eden Park](#) on Saturday, rallying from an 18-5 deficit with three tries in the final 15 minutes.

It was a thrilling end to a competition that remained truncated, with four teams clashing over seven weeks while most players hold down fulltime jobs.

Off-field demands mean teams can practice only once a week and individual development is sacrificed for game preparation. Wary of a growing gap to England and France, where [women’s rugby](#) is more professionalised, Demant insists that must change and a greater financial commitment is required.

“Aupiki’s a really challenging set-up,” she said. “If the competition was longer, it would give opportunity for us to be together for a longer period of time.

“I think New Zealand Rugby need to put a bit more money into it so that players have the option to walk away from their jobs and we can get a full week preparation. And the same for our coaches as well.

“It’s tough, and that’s just what’s required by the competition. But I know that for all of us involved, players and management included, we would like to see that change.

“That’s just the bullet we have to bite for now. But it’s not where we want the competition to end.”

Demant’s ideal next step for Aupiki, which has completed its third season, lies across the Tasman.

Super W, as the women’s Super Rugby competition is known there, is contested over a similar timeframe and features five Australian teams alongside the two-time defending champions, the Fijian Drua. The benefits of Aupiki joining forces with that competition, Demant believes, will extend to player, team and nation.

“Opening the competition up to play the Super W teams would also allow Australia to get better and we need Aussie to be better internationally because we play them the most,” said the Black Ferns skipper.

“That will also give our coaches the opportunity to rotate our squads a bit more. We came first, but all the teams that play in Aupiki are hard - there’s actually not much difference between first place and fourth place.

“So all the top players are going to get named each week and it’s hard to develop the rest of our squad. But if we were able to play the Super W teams, we would be able to do that and create more depth within women’s rugby in Aotearoa.”

Blues coach Willie Walker concurred with his captain and pointed to the evident development of the 30 players employed by New Zealand Rugby on Black Ferns contracts.

“What we have seen over the last 18 months is that the girls who are actually in fulltime training, the change in the level of play has been huge,” Walker said. “The ability to put players into a fulltime programme, the development opportunities and what can come from that, is huge for New Zealand rugby.

“We are competing with the likes of France and England who are in fulltime programmes and we’ve seen that they’ve made a lot of changes and they’re leading the way.

“We’ve got to allow our players to have that same opportunity so that we are competing at that very top end of the game. It might take a little bit of time and money, but I think that’s part of the sacrifice for what it is.

“The only way we can get better is by playing top-level competition, week-in, week-out, and allowing our athletes to actually develop properly.”

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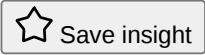
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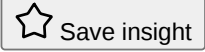
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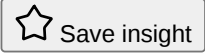
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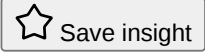
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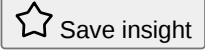


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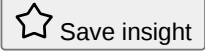
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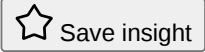


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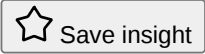
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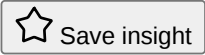
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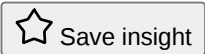
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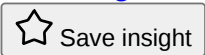
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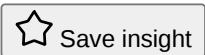
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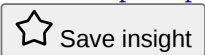
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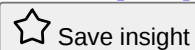


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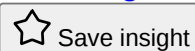


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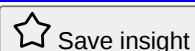


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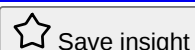


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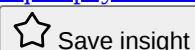
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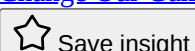


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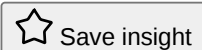
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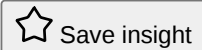
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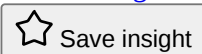
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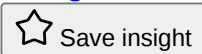
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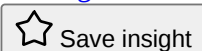
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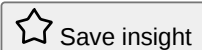


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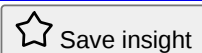
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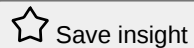
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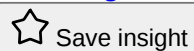
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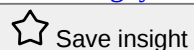
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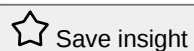
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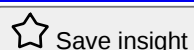
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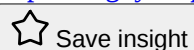
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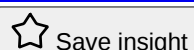
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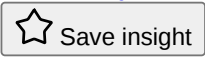
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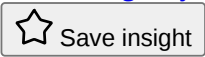
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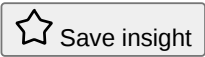
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