

"It is a great achievement to even get this far, some of you will go further today..."

The Chairman's message. Hmmm. It's embarrassing, isn't it? Since Kevin Stratful took over as NZ Soccer chairman in 1998, the traditional message at the front of the final programme has slid from mediocrity to total naffness.

To the casual outsider it must look as if we are being led by a moron. Soccer is a vibrant sport, in a great state of flux, and in the middle of major changes.

With the return of summer soccer in a few months, you might have thought our leader had something to share with the grass roots on the underlying philosophies.

But no. He can't even muster many platitudes these days.

We know Stratful is a poor speaker -- and we certainly don't want him to cultivate a habit of picking up the microphone -- but writing down a few thoughts in perhaps his only annual mass communication direct to soccer's rank and file can't be that difficult can it?

To be fair, for years we didn't bother with a chairman's message in Cup Final programmes.

Look back to the 70s and there was usually somebody like Josh Easby or Gary Dixon providing a fiesty editorial. Mind you, even then there would often be a sponsor's message (NZ Breweries' Sir Clifford Plimmer in 1975 acknowledged soccer -- even then -- as New Zealand's fastest-growing winter sport) tolling the bell on the platitude front. Since then other chairmen have had no problem in offering a few

thoughts or observations at Cup final time. In 1988 Warwick Gendall drew pithy contrasts between contestants Christchurch United and Waikato United: *".. A club in the first year of its history and a club with a long and proud record and tradition in the Chatham Cup"*. He went on to poetically note:

"The final means action, excitement, and sporting combat but let not the cost of success be so high as to mean the loss of fair play and humanity."

Even more significantly, he found something totally fresh to add the following year. In 1989 Gendall pontificated on the lure of a David and Goliath contest between Rotorua City and Christchurch United. *"But one must remember that each side has earned the right to compete in the Final, and despite labels that some may choose to give to teams, no team is a favourite or underdog in a Chatham Cup final."*

In 1992 Harry Dods was active enough in the game to be able to observe: *"Barrie Truman, although absent from today's final, has continued to produce quality teams, using an excellent Youth development policy and a win today would be a fitting tribute to his contribution to NZ soccer"*. Dods waxed eloquently on the *"outstanding young talent of Vaughan Coveny"* and was bold enough to suggest Miramar should start as favourites -- despite Gendall's words of three years earlier. At the same time he acknowledged Waikato as *"a very sound and workmanlike*



Empty vessel?

The chairman without a message

The following are the complete texts of Kevin Stratful's "Chairman's message" contributions to this year's national league and Chatham Cup final programmes...

As Chairman of the Board of Directors of New Zealand Soccer, I would like to welcome everyone to the "fortnight of football" including today's match the Southern Trust National League Final, and next week the New Zealand Soccer Awards Dinner, the Uncle Toby's Women's Knockout Cup and the Bluebird Chatham Cup.

Congratulations to all teams involved over the week, it is a great achievement to even get this far, some of you will go further today, and all the best to you all.

In today's game, Miramar Rangers are up against Central United in the Southern Trust National League Grand Final, which should be a real thriller and great entertainment.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all our sponsors, without whom this would not be possible. A special thanks goes to the Southern Trust, for sponsoring the National League, Bluebird Foods, who sponsor both the Uncle Toby's Women's Knockout Cup and the Bluebird Chatham Cup, and to all other sponsors acknowledged in this programme.

My sincere thanks to everyone for attending these games, we hope you enjoy them, and a big thank you to everyone at the stadium involved in the events.

Best Wishes, Kevin Stratful, NZ Soccer Chairman.

team". In 1993, in a briefer than usual effort (to leave room for NZFA president Terry Killalea to also give his views) Dods used the forum to explain why the final was awarded to Napier.

In 1997 CEO John Morton did the honours instead of Jock Irvine, and commented on the improving standard of the women's game, before noting the Chatham Cup finalists had both done much

As Chairman of the board of Directors of New Zealand Soccer, I would like to welcome everyone to the carnival atmosphere of today's match day which includes the the Uncle Toby's Womens Knockout Cup and the Bluebird Chatham Cup.

Congratulations to all teams involved, it is a great achievement to even get this far, some of you will go further today, and all the best to you all.

In today's games, Lynn Avon are up against Eilerslie in the Uncle Toby's Womens Knockout Cup, and Central United take on University-Mt Wellington in the Bluebird Chatham Cup, both of which should be real thrillers and great entertainment.

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to improve the profile of soccer in recent seasons. So, the question has to be asked. If Morton can do it, what's wrong with Stratful? Or should Bill MacGowan do it for him? Incidentally, I emailed MacGowan asking him if Stratful wrote there dire efforts himself or had somebody at head office ghost write them. Rather than defend his chairman, McGowan chose not to reply.

-- Bruce Holloway