2027

PLAYER MEDIA GUIDE

WIDER TRAINING GROUP

HIGHLANDERS LOYAL. *EVERY DAY*

HIGHLANDERS | SUPER RUGBY PACIFIC

2027 WIDER TRAINING GROUP

FORWARDS

Prop	**Benjamin Lopas**
	Solomone Tukuafu
Hooker	**Manaaki Boyle-Tiatia**
Lock	**Reuben Allen**
Loose Forward	**Phoenix Abbott**
	Senita Lauaki

BACKS

Halfback	**Kieran McClea**
Midfield	**Austin Anderson**
Midfield / Outside Back	**Nic Sauira**
Outside Back	**Sam Nemec-Vial**

PLAYER DIRECTORY

WIDER TRAINING GROUP

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Austin Anderson

WIDER TRAINING GROUP



HEIGHT	1.86m
WEIGHT	94kg
POSITION	Midfield
DOB	18/11/2003
PROVINCE	Waikato
SUPER RUGBY CAPS	5

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Australian born Austin Anderson brings strong running, physical defence and versatility to the Highlanders midfield.

Developing his game in Waikato, Anderson progressed to NPC rugby before broadening his experience in Australia. His performances for the Wests Lions in Canberra's John Dent Cup helped him push into the Brumbies' Super Rugby Pacific and Junior Wallabies environments.

Anderson has continued to build experience with the Brumbies and Waikato, developing a balanced midfield game built on toughness, skill and composure.

Heading into 2027, he will look to bring that experience to the south and push for opportunities in a competitive Highlanders backline.

Benjamin Lopas

WIDER TRAINING GROUP



HEIGHT	1.80m
WEIGHT	115kg
POSITION	Prop
DOB	28/12/2001
PROVINCE	Otago
SUPER RUGBY CAPS	0

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Benjamin Lopas is a loosehead prop whose rugby journey has taken him from Christchurch school rugby to Otago and the Highlanders environment.

A former Christchurch Boys' High School student, Lopas represented New Zealand Schools in 2019 before continuing through development rugby. He later headed south, playing for Green Island and making his Otago NPC debut in 2023.

Lopas built valuable provincial experience over the following seasons, earning a place in the Highlanders' wider training group for 2026.

Heading into 2027, he will look to keep developing his scrummaging and work around the field while pushing for further opportunities in the front row.

Kieran McClea

WIDER TRAINING GROUP



HEIGHT	1.73m
WEIGHT	82kg
POSITION	Halfback
DOB	01/07/1998
PROVINCE	Otago
SUPER RUGBY CAPS	0

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Kieran McClea brings a varied rugby background and experience across several competitions to the Highlanders' halfback group.

Originally from Ashburton, McClea attended Waitaki Boys' High School and represented North Otago before progressing through University club rugby in Dunedin and into the Otago NPC side.

His career has also taken him to the United States with the New England Free Jacks, while further provincial experience with Mid Canterbury has added to his development.

Kieran's sharp running game and quick delivery from the ruck help generate momentum and put his team on the front foot.

Returning to Otago's NPC squad in 2026, McClea continued a journey built on taking opportunities across different rugby environments. Heading into 2027, he will look to bring that experience to the Highlanders.

Manaaki Boyle-Tiatia

WIDER TRAINING GROUP



HEIGHT	TBC
WEIGHT	TBC
POSITION	Hooker
DOB	24/11/1999
PROVINCE	Waikato
SUPER RUGBY CAPS	0

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Manaaki Boyle-Tiatia adds international experience and a fresh perspective to the Highlanders' front row.

Boyle-Tiatia established himself with Waikato in the NPC, making 30 appearances for the Mooloos. His progression earned him an opportunity with Gloucester in 2026, joining the English club on a short-term contract as injury cover.

That move gave him the opportunity to experience a different rugby environment and continue developing his craft in the front row.

He also earned a spot in the Samoan team and recently played 3 tests in the 2026 Nations Cup.

Heading into 2027, Boyle-Tiatia will look to draw on those experiences and look for opportunities to continue his development with the Highlanders.

Nic Sauira

WIDER TRAINING GROUP



HEIGHT	TBC
WEIGHT	TBC
POSITION	Midfield/Outside Back
DOB	01/02/2003
PROVINCE	Tasman
SUPER RUGBY CAPS	0

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Nic Sauira is a midfield back who has progressed through the Nelson and Tasman rugby pathways.

A former Nelson College student, Sauira represented the Crusaders U20s before continuing his development with Marist. He made his mark at provincial level with Tasman, gaining NPC experience and contributing to the Mako backline.

His progression through school, club and representative rugby has provided a grounding as he moves into the next stage of his career.

Heading into 2027, Sauira will look to build on that experience, develop his game and compete for opportunities in the Highlanders environment.

Phoenix Abbott

WIDER TRAINING GROUP



HEIGHT	TBC
WEIGHT	TBC
POSITION	Loose Forward
DOB	27/10/2004
PROVINCE	Canterbury
SUPER RUGBY CAPS	0

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Phoenix Abbott is an emerging forward whose progression through Canterbury rugby has brought opportunities at NPC level.

A former John McGlashan College student, Abbott continued his development in Canterbury, earning recognition as Canterbury B's Player of the Year in 2025. He has since gained experience in the provincial squad, taking another step towards establishing himself in provincial rugby.

Abbott debuted for the Canterbury NPC side in 2026, playing four games in total throughout the season.

Heading into 2027, Abbott will look to build on that foundation, develop his game alongside experienced forwards and make the most of his opportunities in the Highlanders environment.

Reuben Allen

WIDER TRAINING GROUP



HEIGHT	1.97m
WEIGHT	115kg
POSITION	Lock
DOB	23/07/2004
PROVINCE	Manawatu
SUPER RUGBY CAPS	0

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Reuben Allen is an emerging lock who brings size and provincial experience to the Highlanders' forward group.

A former Hastings Boys' High School student, Allen developed alongside his twin brother, Tom, before progressing through representative rugby. He represented the Hurricanes U20s and earned selection for the New Zealand Barbarians U21s, building experience against other promising young players.

Allen joined Manawatū's NPC squad in 2025 and 2026, taking the next step in his provincial career.

Heading into 2027, he will look to develop his work at the set piece and turn those experiences into further opportunities at the Super Rugby level.

Sam Nemec-Vial

WIDER TRAINING GROUP



HEIGHT	TBC
WEIGHT	TBC
POSITION	Outside Back
DOB	18/03/2004
PROVINCE	Otago
SUPER RUGBY CAPS	0

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Sam Nemec-Vial brings pace, elusive footwork and a sharp counter-attacking instinct to the Highlanders' outside backs. Primarily a fullback, he combines an eye for space with the determination to chase down opponents and save tries.

A product of King's High School in Dunedin, Nemec-Vial began his senior rugby journey with Zingari-Richmond before moving to Green Island. He helped the Grizzlies claim their first premier championship since 1978 in 2024, with his performances earning an Otago development contract the following year.

Nemec-Vial made the most of his provincial opportunity in 2025, progressing from an uncontracted pre-season prospect to NPC selection. He scored his first Otago try in the memorable Ranfurly Shield victory over Canterbury in Christchurch.

He continued to impress in 2026, showcasing his attacking instincts and recovery speed from the backfield. Heading into 2027, Nemec-Vial will look to carry that confidence into the Highlanders environment and take the next step with the team from his home region.

Senita Lauaki

WIDER TRAINING GROUP



HEIGHT	1.90m
WEIGHT	110kg
POSITION	Loose Forward
DOB	21/07/2003
PROVINCE	Waikato
SUPER RUGBY CAPS	0

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Senita Lauaki is a powerful loose forward who offers size and versatility across the back row.

A former Kelston Boys' High School captain, Lauaki earned selection for the New Zealand Schools Barbarians before progressing through the Chiefs' development pathway. He represented the Chiefs U20s and developed his senior game with Hautapu.

Lauaki made his Waikato NPC debut in 2024, building provincial experience before joining the Highlanders' wider training group in 2026.

Heading into 2027, he will look to build on that development and use his physical presence to make an impact in the Highlanders pack.

Solomone Tukuafu

WIDER TRAINING GROUP



HEIGHT	1.86m
WEIGHT	132kg
POSITION	Prop
DOB	14/09/1996
PROVINCE	Bay of Plenty
SUPER RUGBY CAPS	3

PLAYER BIOGRAPHY

Solomone Tukuafu brings size, international experience and a well-travelled rugby background to the Highlanders' front row. A tighthead prop, he offers a physical presence at scrum time and experience gained across several competitions.

Originally from Huntly, Tukuafu attended Hamilton Boys' High School and represented New Zealand Schools in 2014. He later established himself with Waikato in the NPC and made his Super Rugby debut for the Chiefs in 2022.

Tukuafu joined the Highlanders' wider training group in 2024 and made his debut against the Western Force that April. His career has also taken him overseas, with time in Japan and a move to French club Biarritz adding to his experience in the front row.

His progression brought international recognition in 2025, earning his first selection for Tonga ahead of the Pacific Nations Cup. He returned to New Zealand provincial rugby with Bay of Plenty in 2026.

Heading into 2027, Tukuafu will look to draw on that varied background, strengthen the Highlanders' tighthead options and make the most of his return to the south.