

Rhino Rugby Players of the Week - Ernest Saimoni and Mike Valeti

Written by Alex Goff
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First place doesn't look all that far away for the Provo Steelers, after they beat the Kansas City Blues 20-16 Saturday in Utah.

Now 2-0-1, the Steelers are just two standings points behind Glendale (2-1-1). The other four teams in the league have at least one loss.

Both Provo and Glendale have the Denver Highlanders to play, the Steelers this weekend, the Raptors the weekend after. Both are favored, and if they do both win, then Provo simply has to win in Boulder April 6 to likely clinch 1st place (assuming the Denver Barbarians don't pile on the bonus points).

But so far so good for the Steelers.

Led by forwards MVP Mike Valeti at hooker and backs MVP Ernest Saimoni at center, they did enough to win. The forward pack was solid, said Provo lock Solomon Mo'unga, "but we played a little sloppy - I wasn't too impressed. We [also] need to work on our defense."

Provo got an early lead over Kansas City with a penalty from captain Saimoni. The teams battled on without scoring until midway through the first half, when workhorse flanker Manase Finau raced in for a try.

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It was still a tight game, though, with few good scoring opportunities. It wasn't until halftime neared that the points started to come. Quickly Kansas City scored a penalty and then scored right from the restart to tie the game.

With about eight minutes left until halftime, Valeti bulldozed his way over to make it 15-10.

A tough, physical game got more so in the second half, and tempers flared a few times, as happens in hard-hitting matches. Kansas City kicked two penalties, but Provo's third try, this one from prop Etu Lavulavu, did enough to win the game.

Michael Valeti, 28, has been playing with the Steelers for 11 years. His dad played for the Steelers and his brothers still do.

Anisi Saimoni was born in Western Samoa, is 27, the oldest of six kids, and moved to Provo in 2008, and started playing for the Steelers then.

This week we give the Rhino Rugby Player of the Week to Valeti and Saimoni, as they led Provo to a crucial victory. After all the difficulties (some self-inflicted) that Utah club rugby has encountered, Provo's run of form is something to be celebrated.