

Crusaders chasing winger

by Ken Nicholson

THE Crusaders will know on Friday if their attempts to attract an un-named three-quarter from an opposing franchise to boost their limitations on the wing is successful, coach Robbie Deans said yesterday.

The recent 12-week banning of the Crusaders' Fijian winger Marika Vunibaka has highlighted an already under-staffing of wings, essentially making the Crusaders squad two short in that department.

"We have applied for a player from an outside franchise but obviously, that franchise has first choice on him," Deans said. He refrained from naming the player but confirmed he was a three-quarter.

"We will know on Friday morning," he said.

There is a shortage of quality wingers available to the Crusaders which could be plugged if the Canterbury management decided to look overseas. But Deans said he would rather have a New Zealand-based player added to his squad.

"We can go overseas but that is not our preference," he said.

Meanwhile, Deans and co-coach Colin Cooper are showing a lot of innovation in their pre-Super 12 preparations, with the whole squad enjoying a dabble into a new sport, korfbal. But, while Deans said it was a novelty and a fun thing for the players, he also said korfbal requires skills which are essential in rugby.

'We have applied for a player from an outside franchise but obviously, that franchise has first choice on him'

– Robbie Deans

"Some of the principles needed in korfbal are valuable for rugby," Deans explained. "It's a sport in which the players need to work extremely hard off the ball, making themselves available for a pass."

Deans said that the inability of support players in rugby to position themselves correctly for the ball carrier was a common fault and the experience gained in korfbal will help them to realise that, he said. Certainly, the competition between the Crusaders at Cowles Stadium was keen and, while there were plenty of laughs created by some of the antics, all seemed to enjoy the skills required in the little-known sport which hails from The Netherlands.

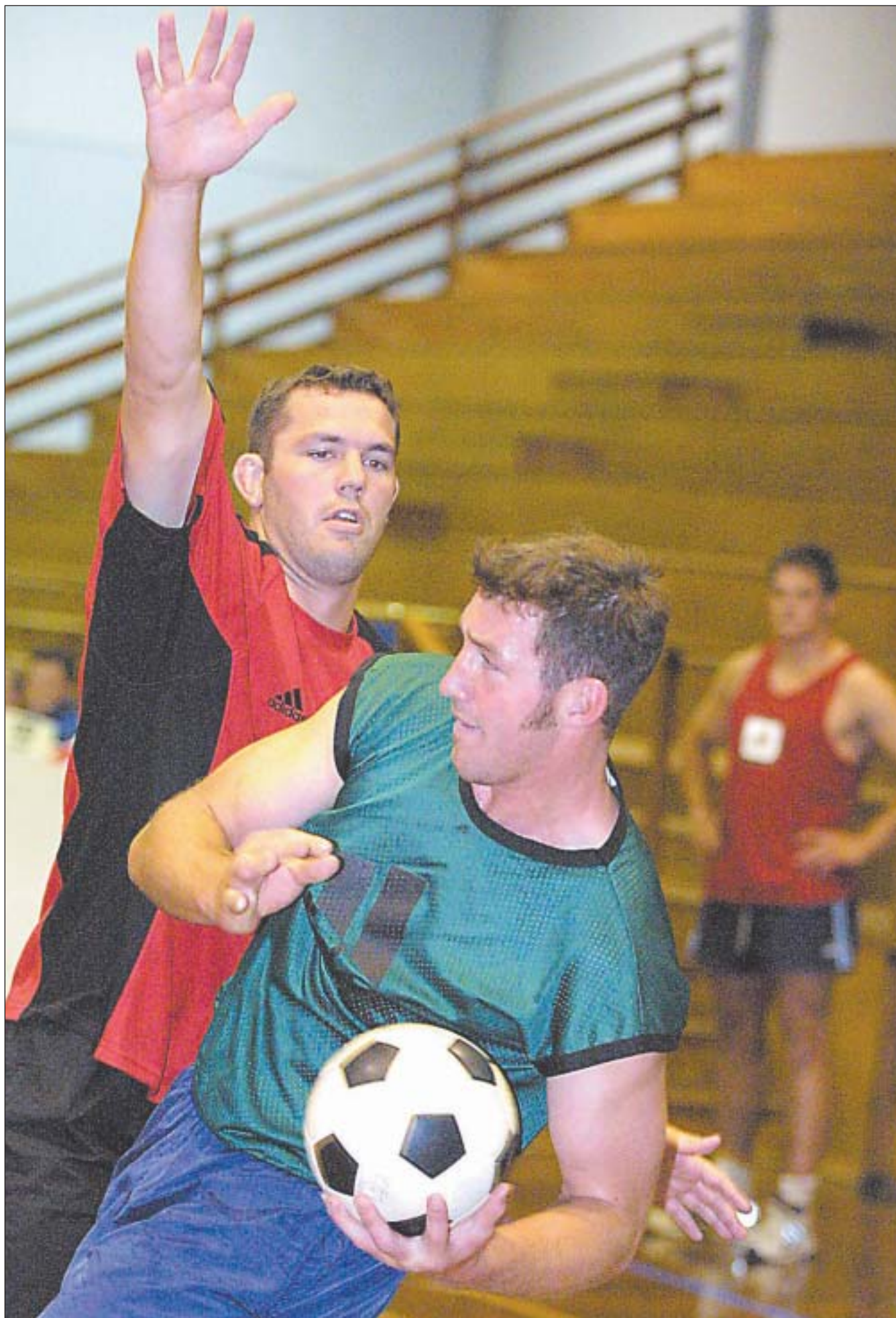
"They were working hard – you have to work hard for off-the-ball position," Deans said.

It was interesting to see huge men, like Chris Jack who towered over many of his team mates, demonstrating a natural athleticism not usually associated with size.

For years, rugby coaches have restricted themselves to the drills within the bounds of rugby, refusing to recognise the benefit of skills derived from other codes.

Deans, though, is one of the modern coaches who realise that rugby can learn from other sports and the experiences gained by his men on the korfbal court might create that crucial try in some future Super 12 game.

"It is purpose-built," he said of the Crusaders excursion on to the korfbal court.



NO LIFTING ALLOWED: Crusaders lineout stars, skipper Reuben Thorne and Chris Jack, with ball, try out new skills on the korfbal court. Photo: Iain McGregor