

# PENRITH PANTHERS

## 2022 GRAND FINALISTS

### 1. DYLAN EDWARDS

Claiming the Merv Cartwright Medal as Penrith's Player of the Year following another stand-out campaign, the unsung fullback heads into his third consecutive decider leading the league for running metres.

**NRL appearances:** 104

**Grand Final appearances:** 2 (2020, 2021)

### 2. CHARLIE STAINES

Regaining his place in the team after falling down the pecking order over the past 12 months, the diminutive outside-back may lack size but more than makes up for it with blistering pace.

**NRL appearances:** 37

**Grand Final appearances:** N/A

### 3. IZACK TAGO

Enjoying a break-out year as a regular first-grader and international with Samoa, the local junior has crossed for 13 tries, including a decisive score to get the side into the Grand Final last week.

**NRL appearances:** 31

**Grand Final appearances:** N/A

### 4. STEPHEN CRICHTON

Already holding legendary status with the Panthers following his match-winning intercept in last year's Grand Final, Crichton's versatility has seen him play throughout the backline since coming into grade as a teenager three years ago.

**NRL appearances:** 75

**Grand Final appearances:** 2 (2020, 2021)

### 5. BRIAN TO'O

Finishing the year in fine form after missing much of the early rounds with a knee injury, To'o produced a game-breaking four-pointer last week showcasing his speed, power and desire to succeed.

**NRL appearances:** 69

**Grand Final appearances:** 2 (2020, 2021)

### 6. JAROME LUAI

Showing no ill effects of a leg injury that saw him miss a number of games in the run towards September, Luai will be out to showcase his skills as a big game player.

**NRL appearances:** 84

**Grand Final appearances:** 2 (2020, 2021)

### 7. NATHAN CLEARY (C)

Returning from suspension rejuvenated and intent on backing up his Clive Churchill Medal winning performance last year, the Panthers co-captain will head into the grand final determined to further his standing as a club great.

**NRL appearances:** 136

**Grand Final appearances:** 2 (2020, 2021)

### 8. MOSES LEOTA

Growing into a formidable front-rower during his time with the Panthers, Leota earned his first New Zealand appearance this season off the back of his reliability and impact.

**NRL appearances:** 122

**Grand Final appearances:** 2 (2020, 2021)

### 9. APISAI KOROISAU

Lining up with the Panthers for the final time ahead of a move to the Tigers next season, Koroisau is likely to come off the bench following a successful strategy employed by coach Ivan Cleary during the finals.

**NRL appearances:** 169

**Grand Final appearances:** 3 (2014, 2020, 2021)

### 10. JAMES FISHER-HARRIS

Regarded among the premier front-rowers in the league due to his fearless approach to the game, Fisher-Harris has proven to be a more than capable captain when called upon over the past two seasons.

**NRL appearances:** 156

**Grand Final appearances:** 2 (2020, 2021)

### 11. VILIAME KIKAU

Finishing up his time at the Panthers as one of the most destructive forwards in the game, the Fijian second-rower will be eyeing off a second premiership ring ahead of a highly publicised move to the Bulldogs.

**NRL appearances:** 122

**Grand Final appearances:** 2 (2020, 2021)

### 12. LIAM MARTIN

Appearing in all three Origins for NSW as a starting forward this season, Martin has been known to cause opponents plenty of trouble close to the try line with his bullocking running style.

**NRL appearances:** 85

**Grand Final appearances:** 2 (2020, 2021)

### 13. ISAAH YEO (C)

Having tasted premiership glory once before as Penrith captain, Yeo will be determined to achieve the feat a second time and cement his status as one of the club's greatest ever players.

**NRL appearances:** 195

**Grand Final appearances:** 2 (2020, 2021)

### INTERCHANGE

#### 14. MITCH KENNY

Missing last year's decider through injury, Kenny will be out to make the most of his second chance and join in on the spoils of premiership glory.

**NRL appearances:** 59

**Grand Final appearances:** N/A

#### 15. SCOTT SORENSON

Facing retirement before a lifeline from the Panthers culminated in a premiership last season, Sorenson was included in the extended New Zealand squad earlier this season and is expected to be part of the World Cup squad announced shortly after the decider.

**NRL appearances:** 81

**Grand Final appearances:** 1 (2021)

#### 16. SPENCER LENIU

Averaging 71 running metres in 24 appearances exclusively off the bench this season, Leniu's impact saw him represent Samoa earlier this year.

**NRL appearances:** 61

**Grand Final appearances:** 1 (2021)

#### 17. JAEMAN SALMON

Providing solid service as an interchange utility after struggling to secure a regular position as playmaker with the Eels, Salmon will be hoping a premiership ring enhances his chances of securing a new NRL deal.

**NRL appearances:** 43

**Grand Final appearances:** N/A

### RESERVES

#### 18. SEAN O'SULLIVAN

Developing his craft with regular game time alongside some of the best players in the game, O'Sullivan will head to the Dolphins fresh from leading the Panthers reserve grade side to victory last weekend.

**NRL appearances:** 32

**Grand Final appearances:** N/A

#### 19. MATTHEW EISENHUTH

Returning home for the first time since mid-2021, the reigning premiers were in complete control as journeyman Sean O'Sullivan directed the side around the park in the absence of Nathan Cleary with distinction.

**NRL appearances:** 105

**Grand Final appearances:** N/A

#### 20. J'MAINE HOPGOOD

Limited to just four appearances in first grade after signing a deal to join Parramatta next season, Hopgood led the Panthers to a reserve grade title last week and will be hoping to add a State Championship title on Sunday afternoon.

**NRL appearances:** 10

**Grand Final appearances:** N/A

#### 21. SUNIA TURUVA

Making his debut late in the season off the strength of an impressive showing with Fiji in the mid-year test, Turuva claimed a brace of tries during last weekend's reserve grade premiership victory.

**NRL appearances:** 3

**Grand Final appearances:** N/A

#### 22. CHRIS SMITH

Coming full circle with the Panthers after shifting to the Roosters and Bulldogs for an opportunity in first grade, Smith has performed admirably when called upon in six matches this season.

**NRL appearances:** 39

**Grand Final appearances:** N/A

### COACH

#### IVAN CLEARY

Hoping to join a reffed company in coaching a side to back-to-back premierships, Cleary will become only the third coach in NRL history, alongside Ricky Stuart and Craig Bellamy, to oversee three consecutive Grand Final appearances.

# ROAD TO GLORY: PENRITH

## HOW THE PANTHERS MADE THEIR WAY TO ACCOR STADIUM THIS SUNDAY

Where do you go when you reach the mountaintop? If you're the Penrith Panthers - you stay there.

Coming into 2022 carrying the weight of the premiership crown rather than striving for success as underdogs, the standards instilled across the club proved beneficial as a new batch of young guns complemented the stars that tasted Grand Final victory last October.

Dropping a single match during the opening 19 rounds, incidentally at the hands of their Grand Final opponents, injuries and suspensions threatened to halt the side's momentum leading into September, resulting in late season losses against fellow finalists Parramatta, Melbourne and North Queensland.

Claiming a week off following a clinical victory over Parramatta in the first round of the finals, a preliminary final match-up against South Sydney went the same way as last year's decider, leaving the minor premiers to reach their third consecutive Grand Final and the prospect of becoming only the second club in the NRL era to go back-to-back.

The Panthers fell short on Grand Final day in 2020 before using their heartache to go one better the following year. How long can a team remain on top when everyone else is determined to pull them down? Penrith are about to find out...

**GAMES:** 26  
**WINS:** 22 // **DRAWS:** 0 // **LOSSES:** 4  
**FOR:** 695 // **AGAINST:** 350  
**FINISHED:** 1ST

#### ROUND 1 - PANTHERS 28 v SEA EAGLES 6

In a low-scoring first half, which saw the premiers trail at the break for the first time in 13 matches, two scores shortly after halftime put the Panthers in prime position to go 8-0 in their premiership defence. **Panthers 18** (Tago, Cleary, Luai tries. Cleary 3/3 goals) def **Titans 4** (Marzhew try. Sexton 0/1 goal)

#### ROUND 2 - PANTHERS 20 v DRAGONS 16

Blockbusting second-rower Viliame Kikau capped his 100th appearance in first grade with a try double to give the Panthers back-to-back wins to start a season for the third straight year. **Panthers 20** (Kikau 2, Leniu tries. S. Crichton 4/4 goals) def **Dragons 16** (Sloan, Su'A, Lomax tries. Lomax 2/3 goals)

#### ROUND 3 - PANTHERS 38 v KNIGHTS 20

Making the annual pilgrimage to Bathurst for a top of the table clash, rookie winger Taylan May bagged a hat-tick in his second NRL appearance, but the biggest story of the afternoon was Newcastle forward Mitchell Barnett being dismissed for an inexplicable elbow to the head of returning junior Chris Smith. **Panthers 38** (May 3, Tago 2, S. Crichton, Staines tries. S. Crichton 5/8 goals) def **Knights 20** (Young, Hoy, Best, Tuala tries. Clifford 2/4 goals)

#### ROUND 4 - PANTHERS 26 v RABBITOHS 12

Facing off against their grand final opponents for the first time since lifting the Provan-Summons trophy, halfback Nathan Cleary made a successful return to the delight of a vocal Penrith home crowd. **Panthers 26** (May 2, Tago, S. Crichton, Martin tries. Cleary 3/6 goals) def **Rabbitohs 12** (Graham, Walker tries. Mitchell 2/2 goals)

#### ROUND 5 - PANTHERS 32 v BULLDOGS 12

Accounting for the lowly Bulldogs without breaking into a sweat, underrated utility Mitch Kenny delighted fans by crossing for his maiden try in the top grade. **Panthers 32** (May, Edwards, Martin, Leniu, Kenny tries. Cleary 6/6 goals) def **Bulldogs 12** (Pangai Jr, Stimson tries. Flanagan 2/2 goals)

#### ROUND 6 - PANTHERS 40 v BRONCOS 12

Getting a great result at home on Good Friday, the Panthers weathered early pressure from the much-improved Broncos, but a late flurry of points failed to reflect the closeness of the contest overall. **Panthers 40** (Luai, Sorenson, Staines, May, Martin, Leniu, Tago tries. Cleary 6/7 goals) def **Broncos 12** (Niu, Staggs tries. Reynolds 2/2 goals)

#### ROUND 7 - PANTHERS 36 v RAIDERS 6

Proving far too strong for their free-falling opponents, former Under 20s premiership-winning captain Soni Luke capped his belated NRL debut by setting up a try moments after taking the field. **Panthers 36** (S. Crichton 3, Yeo, May, Kikau tries. 6/7 goals) def **Raiders 6** (Tapine try. Schneider 1/1 goal)

#### ROUND 8 - PANTHERS 18 v TITANS 4

In a low-scoring first half, which saw the premiers trail at the break for the first time in 13 matches, two scores shortly after halftime put the Panthers in prime position to go 8-0 in their premiership defence. **Panthers 18** (Tago, Cleary, Luai tries. Cleary 3/3 goals) def **Titans 4** (Marzhew try. Sexton 0/1 goal)

#### ROUND 9 - PANTHERS 20 v EELS 22

In a hugely anticipated Battle of the West between the two high-flying rivals, the Panthers fell short to bring a run of 21 consecutive wins at home to an end. **Panthers 20** (May 2, Edwards, Leniu tries. Cleary 2/4 goals) lost to **Eels 22** (Gutherson, Mahoney, Matterson, Brown tries. Moses 3/4 goals)

#### ROUND 10 - PANTHERS 32 v STORM 6

Billed as the must-see match of Magic Round, the top of the table clash failed to deliver on expectations with the reigning premiers proving far too strong for an out-of-sorts Melbourne outfit. **Panthers 32** (Tago 2, Kikau, Luai, S. Crichton tries. Cleary 6/6 goals) def **Storm 6** (Meaney try. Meaney 1/1 goal)

#### ROUND 11 - PANTHERS 32 v ROOSTERS 12

As the results of the Federal Election signalled a changing of the government, the Panthers maintained the rugby league status quo with a comprehensive victory at the Sydney Cricket Ground. **Panthers 32** (Luai 2, Koroisau, S. Crichton, Fisher-Harris tries. Cleary 6/6 goals) def **Roosters 12** (Tedesco, Momirovski tries. Walker 2/2 goals)

#### ROUND 12 - PANTHERS 22 v COWBOYS 0

Putting the much-improved Cowboys in their place with dominant first half on the lands of the Dharug People, the Panthers finished Indigenous Round atop the premiership ladder and with seven players named in the extended NSW squad. **Panthers 22** (Yeo, Edwards, To'o, May tries. Cleary 2/3, S. Crichton 1/1 goals) def **Cowboys 0**

#### ROUND 13 - PANTHERS 30 v BULLDOGS 18

Mature-aged debutant Kurt Falls enjoyed a night to remember as a host of reserve graders stepped up to hear more misery on the last-placed Bulldogs. **Panthers 30** (Smith, Edwards, May, Kikau, Salmon tries. Falls 5/6 goals) def **Bulldogs 18** (Addo-Carr 2, Burton tries. Burton 3/3 goals)

#### ROUND 14 - PANTHERS 42 v KNIGHTS 6

Making a mockery of the Knights to continue a six-year run of dominance in Newcastle, the final margin could have been much more had the Panthers maintained their killer instincts. **Panthers 42** (To'o 2, Cleary, Kikau, May, Tago, S. Crichton tries. Cleary 7/8 goals) def **Knights 6** (Lee try. Clifford 1/1 goal)

#### ROUND 15 - PANTHERS 40 v WARRIORS 6

Handing the Warriors a thumping in their final match before returning to New Zealand, the side's stellar start to the season was rewarded with 17 members of the first grade squad selected in various representative teams. **Panthers 40** (To'o 2, Leota, Edwards, May, Yeo, Martin tries. Cleary 5/6, S. Crichton 1/1 goals) def **Warriors 6** (Curran try. Walsh 1/1 goal)

#### ROUND 16 - PANTHERS 26 v ROOSTERS 18

Outlasting a gallant effort from a Roosters team in dire need of a win, late tries to Izack Tago and Apisai Koroisau ensured the Panthers remained on top of the ladder. **Panthers 26** (To'o, Kikau, Tago, Koroisau tries. Cleary 5/5 goals) def **Roosters 18** (Walker, Taukeiaho, Verrills tries. Walker 3/3 goals)

#### ROUND 17 - BYE

#### ROUND 18 - PANTHERS 18 v TIGERS 16

Electing to rest their entire New South Wales contingent days after the epic State of Origin decider, stand-in co-captain James Fisher-Harris capped his 150th appearance for the club with the match-winning try. **Panthers 18** (Tago, Kikau, Fisher-Harris tries. Falls 2/2, O'Sullivan 1/1 goals) def **Tigers 16** (Tupou, Doueihi, Maumalo tries. Doueihi 2/3 goals)

#### ROUND 19 - PANTHERS 20 v SHARKS 10

Forced to come from behind against a courageous Cronulla outfit that went the distance, the victory came at a cost with Stephen Crichton and Jarome Luai sustaining short-term injuries. **Panthers 20** (Tago, Edwards, Luai tries. Cleary 4/4 goals) def **Sharks 10** (Tracey, Moylan tries. Hynes 1/2 goals)

#### ROUND 20 - PANTHERS 10 v EELS 34

In a moment that threatened to derail the side's hopes of going back-to-back, Nathan Cleary was sent off for a dangerous tackle, which allowed the Eels to capitalise with an extra man on the field. **Panthers 10** (O'Sullivan, Martin tries. O'Sullivan 1/1, Cleary 0/1 goals) lost to **Eels 34** (Mahoney 2, Sivo 2, Papali'i, Gutherson tries. Moses 5/6 goals)

#### ROUND 21 - PANTHERS 26 v RAIDERS 6

Dylan Edwards celebrated his 100th game with a try, Sunia Turuva made a debut cameo, but the biggest story to come out of the match was the sensational comments made by Raiders coach Ricky Stuart towards Jaeman Salmon in the post-match press conference. **Panthers 26** (Koroisau, S. Crichton, Edwards, Salmon tries. S.Crichton 5/5 goals) def **Raiders 6** (Papali'i try. Fogarty 1/1 goal)

#### ROUND 22 - PANTHERS 0 v STORM 16

Failing to score a point for the first time in seven years - incidentally against Melbourne at home as well - the result served as a reminder that the premiership was far from a one-horse race. **Panthers 0** lost **Storm 16** (Meaney, B. Smith, Nfoaluma tries. Meaney 2/3 goals)

#### ROUND 23 - PANTHERS 26 v RABBITOHS 22

Leaving it until late with Liam Martin barging over after Apisai Koroisau elected to run rather than passing back for a field goal, the victory confirmed the Panthers as deserving minor premiers. **Panthers 26** (S. Crichton, Edwards, Leniu, Martin tries. S. Crichton 5/6 goals) def **Rabbitohs 22** (Johnston 2, Walker, Graham tries. Mitchell 3/5 goals)

#### ROUND 24 - PANTHERS 46 v WARRIORS 12

Enjoying a victory lap in front of their home fans who celebrated the presentation of the J.J. Giltinan Shield post-game, the Panthers were rarely troubled by a spirited Warriors outfit. **Panthers 46** (To'o 2, May 2, O'Sullivan, S. Crichton, Kikau, Yeo tries. S. Crichton 7/8 goals) def **Warriors 12** (Walsh, Katoa tries. Walsh 2/2 goals)

#### ROUND 25 - PANTHERS 8 v COWBOYS 38

Mitch Kenny captained what amounted to a reserve grade side, featuring three NRL debutants, a club debutant and a further four players with fewer than four games of experience; nonetheless, the young Panthers put up a committed effort. **Panthers 8** (Jennings, Turuva tries. Falls 0/2 goals) lost to **Cowboys 38** (Holmes 3, Taulagi, Drinkwater, Tabuai-Fidow, Robson tries. Holmes 3/5, Townsend 2/2 goals)

#### QUALIFYING FINAL - PANTHERS 27 v EELS 8

Welcoming back a well-rested Nathan Cleary who delivered a five star performance in the opening match of the finals, rookie winger Taylan May drew the scorn of supporters after a penalty imposed by the NRL for an assault charge was held over until next season. **Panthers 27** (To'o 2, Edwards, Fisher-Harris tries. Cleary 5/5 goals. Cleary field goal) def **Eels 8** (Kaufusi try. Moses 2/2 goals)

#### PRELIMINARY FINAL - PANTHERS 32 v RABBITOHS 12

Holding their nerve in the face of adversity during the first half, a game-changing length-of-the-field try to Brian To'o on halftime paved the way for the Panthers to reach their third Grand Final in as many years. **Panthers 32** (Koroisau, To'o, Leniu, Tago, Cleary tries. Cleary 6/6 goals) def **Rabbitohs 12** (Walker, Kennar tries. Mitchell 2/2 goals)