Highland Rugby's players finished off the script mapped out by everyone.

Larry Gelwix, honored with a dinner Friday night in recognition of this being his last game as coach after 36 years, saw Highland rugby claim their 20th national championship, and Gelwix's 410th victory against ten (that's 10) losses.

Highland overcame some early-game jitters and a determined United team to avenge last year's finals loss, and defeat United 38-24 in the National U19 Championship.

Early on Highland looked anything but a championship team, as they dropped balls, missed tackles, and made poor decisions as Untied tested them with probing kicks and some smart running.

United got on the board first, punishing some Highland errors and pressing their advantage. Flanker Thayne Soloai went over to give his team a 7-0 lead.

Highland looked shocked and for the next 20 minutes players as if they had to score three tries right this very second. It of course, didn't work out that way, and the Black Planet became increasingly frustrated. But eventually both teams settled down. And at 31 minutes inside center Josh Faagalu broke through and set up an attack that ended with fullback Jayce Hansen scoring. Moments later, Hansen was over again, and suddenly, just before halftime, it was 12-7 Highland.

In the second half, Highland punished a silly United error to get a turnover and center Antonio Lavemai went in under the posts. Jakobi Harris's second conversion put his side up 19-7.

So it looked as if Highland would roll. Faagalu was catching passes now, and the massive, fleet-footed center was a handful as a result. But United struck right back. Russ Parai hit a penalty, and then exciting local product Kisi Unufe jumping in front of a pass and taking it all the way in for a huge try. Parai hit the conversion and it was 19-17.

United continued to try to control the game by kicking and forcing Highland to run a long way to score. For the most part it worked, but all that chasing wore down the United team. Gaps started to show, and to maintain their defensive line United stopped defending rucks. Highland saw that and simply ran their forwards up the middle, making big gains, and setting up a try for No. 8 Doug Ferris from an eightman pick.

Up 24-17 Highland began to relax, and it was United that felt the tension. Faagalu lumbered in for a try that again appeared to put the match away, 31-17. But United struck once more, with the exciting Unufe slicing through the Highland D as if they were nothing. 31-24. Finally Lavemai put the game away to stay.

It capped perhaps the end of an era, as Gelwix leaves Highland to be president of a Mormon Mission in Fresno, Calif. and U19 rugby looks likely to change dramatically. In the end the Highland players did what they had to do to finish the story right.

Highland 38
Tries: Hansen 2, Lavemai 2, Ferris, Faagalu
Convs: Harris 4

United 24
Tries: Soloai, Unufe 2
Convs: Parai 3
Pens: Parai