



NZRPA RETIRED PLAYERS RESEARCH PROJECT

The NZRPA has completed a comprehensive survey to better enable it to support and enhance the careers of current and future generations.



It's the culmination of more than two years of ground-breaking study, the most comprehensive of its kind undertaken in the professional rugby era – and players will start benefiting immediately from the recently-completed **NZRPA Retired Players Research Project**.

THE PROJECT gathered insight from 123 former professional players who have retired since 1996, including nearly 60 former All Blacks. The purpose was to develop a better understanding of the challenges; opportunities and issues faced by players as they prepare for and transition from professional rugby into life after their playing days.

“We wanted to provide answers to some long-standing questions regarding retired New Zealand professional rugby players,” explained NZRPA chief executive Rob Nichol.

“The information we have obtained has been great. It has helped reinforce the work we currently do and will help us enhance the services provided to future, current and past professional players, on and off the field.”

In particular, the project has highlighted the need to harness the retired player network; firstly because this network involves people who are in positions to be able to help other players in terms of experiences, contacts, employment and the like, and secondly to ensure that retired players can also access services and support provided by the NZRPA.

In developing the online survey that formed a core part of the project, the NZRPA enlisted the help of past players, medical, financial, recruitment, academic, psychological and other professional specialists to ensure they were asking the right questions.

The survey itself was split into nine sections, covering personal, professional rugby career, transition, post professional rugby career, education, medical, welfare and financial information. The overwhelming themes were about the need for players to plan and prepare for their retirement from playing – especially in a financial and career planning sense – and that it is never too early or too late to start.

“We want to see the challenges and opportunities better managed by players and their families,” Nichol said. “We currently do this by proactively

THE PROFESSIONAL rugby environment within New Zealand ensures players are offered quality guidance and advice across core areas like career planning, education, medical welfare, personal welfare and financial planning to help players best prepare for their career transition period. In our August edition (www.nzrpa.co.nz), we introduced the project and took a closer look at the transition period, the challenges, complications and opportunities players face and who they lean on to provide support during this time. In this October edition we will present and discuss the learning's within the financial and medical sections of the research project.

working with the emerging talent and current professional players, imparting the messages and helping create standards and expectations within the professional rugby environments that require them to take a proactive approach to career, education, financial and personal planning.

“We have made good progress and awareness is very high, but we can always improve. Although players are more active in this space than in the past, many players out there need to do more. We're hopeful some of the survey results will provide the wakeup call for those players. We need parents, coaches, team management, fellow players and administrators all promoting these messages.”

Regardless of the preparation undertaken by a player during their playing days they will always experience challenges, and be presented with opportunities as they actually retire from playing and transition onto the next phase of their lives. The key, it seems, is to plan for that day, so they can take the time to maximise the opportunities presented by the wider world, without feeling they have to take the first job on offer to pay the bills.

“The survey results clearly show that those who have planned financially, have a good support network and have undertaken some baseline career planning (including work experience or education) will be in a better position to handle this transition than those who have not,” said Nichol.

THE SURVEY

The NZRPA recently conducted a survey of former professional players with the aim of better understanding the challenges, opportunities and issues faced by players as they prepare for, and transition from, professional rugby to life after their playing days.

Using the insight gained from this study, we endeavour to offer guidance and advice across these core areas to help you best prepare you for this career transition period:

- Career planning
- Education
- Medical welfare
- Personal welfare
- Financial planning

REAL PLAYER EXPERIENCE

Responses from 123 past professional players were collated to gain insight into their post-rugby experiences (the average age of the group was 36):

- 97% played Super Rugby
- 47% were All Blacks

The average career span was 9 years, average retirement age was 32

- 5 years in New Zealand
- 4 years overseas (78% of the group played professionally overseas)
- 54% of the group were studying prior to professional rugby,
 - 46% were working

THE PLAYING DAYS

Professional rugby is a career which presents wonderful opportunities and experiences.

It is important you:

- Maximise your potential in rugby
- Enjoy and take advantage of opportunities offered to you both on and off the field
- Are proactive in considering your long term future to ensure your success both during and after your playing days.

“Work hard to achieve your goals but spend time contemplating what your life would be like without rugby. What shape would it take then?”

Show me the Money

The good times don't last forever and research has shown that players have to be smart with their money while they are playing.

PLAYING PROFESSIONAL rugby is a lot like making hay while the sun shines. But as any good farmer will tell you, making the hay is often the easy part. Storing it and knowing when to feed out are equally important, as is locking up a paddock of lush grass in preparation.

And so it is with rugby incomes. Big playing salaries can blossom, thrive and fade like the seasons. Careers can end with one injury or a misguided selection.

That's why Westpac business development manager and former Highlanders lock John Blaikie believes a financial plan is essential to every professional rugby player.

"Players need to make the most of their playing years to build up a nest egg, which can either help supplement their income they earn post-rugby or provide a buffer until another job is secured," Blaikie explained.

"Depending on the level of rugby you achieve, that may mean owning a house and having the majority of the mortgage paid off, investment in a managed fund or property portfolio or just putting a hundred dollars aside each pay. The money players earn during their careers, if managed properly, can make the financial transition a lot less stressful."

The survey figures from the recently-completed NZRPA Retired Players Research Project clearly back him up. Of the players surveyed, 33 per cent said they suffered periods of financial hardship after retirement and 82 per cent said they experienced a period of unemployment.

Common challenges for retired players included a lack of cash flow, due to a rapid drop in salary or having savings tied up in assets that didn't produce income.

Only 38 per cent of players said they had good financial advice before retiring and of those, 30 out of the 32 players who had good financial advice were happy with their current financial position.

The NZRPA has now formed strategic partnerships with both Westpac and Staples Rodway, opening up player access to quality banking, accountancy and financial advice.

NZRPA CEO Rob Nichol believes the partnerships are crucial to players. "Westpac and Staples Rodway have quality staff members who have really made the effort to understand the modern professional rugby player - as a result, they've placed themselves in positions where they can really help," Nichol said.

"Our school system doesn't prepare young people enough, in a financial literacy sense. It should be a core part of any curriculum in the same way English, maths and science are.

"As a result, we have to pick up this responsibility within our professional rugby

environments. Westpac, Staples and the likes of TOWER all help us do that. The seminars and service Westpac have provided has been outstanding and, as most retired players will tell you, having a good bank manager, accountant and lawyer, is fundamental in a professional sports person's career."

Staples Rodway business advisor Scott Ireland, who is also a member of the Taranaki provincial team, has some simple advice for the transition period for players.

"Don't over-commit to debt that you can't service post rugby and get into good habits while you are playing rugby so you learn to live off a realistic salary, rather than an exorbitant one," Ireland said.

"It's also important players invest in income-earning assets so this money can be used to top them up during the transition."

The drop in income post-rugby is significant for most players. The Retired Players survey found that while 48 per cent of players earned more than \$200,000 over each of their last two years of rugby, only seven per cent were able to maintain that after retiring.

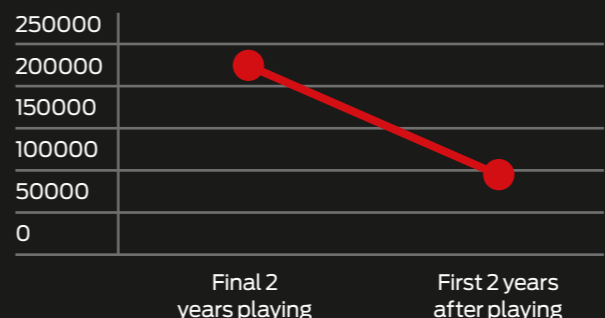
In fact, half of all players earned less than \$60,000 in their first two years after retiring.

Ireland believes rugby's first professionals found the transition harder.

"I don't think the same awareness and support was available to them - I've actually seen this post-rugby syndrome really affect lives, both financially and socially. The more recent professionals, however, tend to be more aware of it and therefore are able to plan for it. The success stories I've seen mainly involve players that have carved out a career post-rugby, while still in the game. It's amazing how far having a household name will take you so players need to capitalise on it."

Blaikie agrees wholeheartedly with this, advising that players shouldn't go to functions and stay in their groups, playing on mobile phones or twittering. Get out and make the most of your opportunities, he says, though be sensible with it.

AVERAGE ANNUAL INCOME



? Ask yourself – where are you going to be?

"Enjoy your money but use it wisely – there is a long time to live after retirement"

For 48% of players, retirement was unexpected.

Therefore it is important that you have a sound financial plan to help you through your retirement transition – expected or not – in order to set up and maintain a strong financial position for the future.

Players who prepared themselves for retirement, did not suffer financial hardship and are happy with their current financial situation typically:

- Didn't consider their retirement transition difficult
- Felt well prepared for life after rugby
- Had seen or dealt with a financial advisor

"I've heard some great stories and those that haven't worked out so well – the ones that haven't gone so well can often be as a result of players being taken advantage of. They may have invested in a business that hasn't worked out so I'd really stress the importance of doing due-diligence and getting advice from people you trust. The old motto goes if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!"

Above all, Ireland emphasises, it is never too early to put a plan in place. "A lot of the planning can actually happen before you become a fully professional rugby player, even straight after you finish school. This is really encouraged within the New Zealand rugby environment but from my experience, when players take up an overseas contract this planning tends to go on the back-burner. Unfortunately, this is normally in their last years of rugby, where planning should be a top priority."

Westpac and Staples Rodway are strategic partners of the New Zealand Rugby Players Association. This is how they can help:



SCOTT IRELAND

John Blaikie Westpac offer a banking package to NZRPA members but the key point of difference is that we are available to relationship manage each of the players. There are two other relationship managers around the country, Richie Owen in Christchurch and Sanj Silva in Auckland. We can sit down with the players one-on-one and give them advice around things like budgeting, financial planning and investments. We also present seminars to different player groups and run workshops on managing your money, buying property or a business and other investment sessions. We work closely with the NZRPA and the professional development managers in each of the franchises and provincial unions to identify opportunities for players around local community involvement, business networking and mentoring opportunities and also employment opportunities and work experience opportunities.

Scott Ireland The NZRPA partnership with Staples Rodway is really about access to quality and trusted accountancy and financial planning services for the players. We are building a relationship with them, so they are not afraid to use the access NZRPA has kindly provided them. Staples Rodway and Westpac are trusted names within New Zealand financial circles and it is comforting for players to know that they have this expertise at their fingertips. The overall aim of the partnership is to get a more educated, informed and financially literate rugby player at the end of the day. We're just here to facilitate that.

For more information on the services mentioned above, please visit www.nzrpa.co.nz

THE RIGHT ADVICE

"Be smart, invest, and seek good advice"

38% of players said they had **good financial advice** before retiring

VS

34% who did not believe they received good financial advice.

30 out of 32 players who had good financial advice are **happy with their current financial position.**

"It is important to have trusted professional advisors early in your career to assist with your financial affairs. Also, be a part of all decisions – take an interest"

Through the NZRPA and PDP you have access to preferred **chartered accountants and bank managers** who have an understanding of the professional rugby environment and will assist with **financial plans and offer specific advice** depending on your situation and financial needs, both **during your career and in preparing and planning** for life after retirement.

FINANCIAL

"It's not how much you earn, it's how much you keep"

As a professional rugby player you have the opportunity to earn a reasonable level of income early in your working life, so it is a reality that you may experience a significant **reduction in your income** when you retire.

"Save your money and invest wisely – you earn reasonable money while playing but only get one dig with it once you retire"

"Be careful and plan for the future. You may go through a year or two of significantly reduced income"

	Final 2 years playing	First 2 years after playing
\$200k + / year	48%	7%
\$100k + / year	79%	24%
\$60k + / year	83%	36%

½ of all players will earn less than \$60k in their first 2 years after retirement (28% are still earning less than \$60k).

DO YOU HAVE A PLAN?

"Seek independent, professional – but top – advice from people/advisors who understand your position, goals and commitments in order to make the best of what you have for the future"

33% of players suffered **periods of financial hardship** after retirement – and **82%** said they experienced a **period of unemployment**.

Anticipate the change in your income – ensure you save and invest wisely through seeking good financial advice and support before retirement in regards to:

- Budgeting
- Investments and assets
- Mortgage
- Risk management
- Financial planning

Putting Your Hand Up

It is vital that players don't try to hide the fact they are injured just because they are desperate to play.

PLAYING SPORT for a living can create interesting medical contrasts. The fittest, fastest or most resilient athletes tend to filter into the paid ranks, yet they're also the ones most likely to need medical treatment.

Just how likely? Well, the recent NZRPA Retired Players Research Project gives a graphic illustration. After gathering insights from 123 past professional players, including nearly 60 former All Blacks, a clear picture emerged on just how susceptible the modern rugby player is to injury.

With an average playing career of nine years, players typically averaged 14 major injuries during that time – with a major injury meaning they were out of the game for a month or more, or needed an overnight hospital stay.

Top of the hit parade was the bottom half of the body, with ankles, feet and the lower leg most likely to get hurt, followed by shoulders, wrists and hands, and the head.

Injuries or wear and tear were the biggest career-enders for players, accounting for 58 percent of retirements, while a large number of former athletes need ongoing medical treatment.

It's no wonder the NZRPA and the NZRU take medical issues so seriously, with a range of solutions and safeguards for players.

NZRPA Player Service Manager David Gibson fully understands the impact of injuries on a professional player's career, having been forced to retire early due to injury.

"My biggest message to young players is to take responsibility for looking after your body now," Gibson said. "They need to make sure they learn good habits early – pre-hab, nutrition and recovery will prepare them for an increasingly physically demanding sport."

The NZRPA has recently dealt with players leaving the secondary school system with major

rugby-related injuries, which is a concern.

"No matter what age you are, or how small the injury is, it's important to make sure you are honest with yourself. Don't ignore the injury and seek the right medical support immediately because early detection and treatment is crucial."

This is a key area that the NZRU have focused on, medical director Dr Steve Targett explains.

"In addition to NZRU making it compulsory for Investec Super Rugby and ITM Cup sides to have both a team doctor and a physiotherapist,"

Targett said. "NZRU also provides guidelines and support to all team medical staff and hold an education day for medical staff each year. The NZRU is an accredited employer in the ACC Partnership Programme which allows quick access to investigation and treatment for players."

Through the Collective Agreement, players on Provincial Union contracts and above receive comprehensive health, life and crisis insurance through TOWER, while the insurer also provides preferential rates on other benefits.

Under the Collective Agreement, retainers are now guaranteed regardless of injury, illness or non-selection for the duration of a player's contract. The NZRPA, in partnership with the NZRU, also operates a benevolent and welfare fund, set up to assist members who suffer career ending injury or illness or who fall on hard times.

With all that support in place, Targett believes the onus is on the players to take the initiative.

"At a professional level, most coaches are good at taking advice from the team doctors but the key is that players report their injuries to medical staff for appropriate advice. My gut feeling is that players are on the whole much better at reporting injuries than in the past but there are still quite a few that don't in case they are not allowed to play. With head injuries in particular it is very

MEDICAL

As a physical game, injuries are a part of rugby and with professionalism, the focus on conditioning and the physicality of the contest has increased.

Players typically averaged 14 major injuries (out for 1 month or more or hospitalisation of 1 night or more) during their career (1058 injuries across 75 players)

Average career was 9 years, which equals 1.5 major injuries per player per year

Ankle/foot and lower leg were the most commonly injured areas, followed by shoulder, wrist/hand and head

8% sustained an injury that put them out for a year or more, 33% 6 months or more and 65% 3 months or more

28% of all injuries required hospitalisation

Body part spread: lower leg (24%), ankle/foot (19%), rest (10% or below)

Normally around 20% of an injury to a body part required hospitalisation, exceptions were arm (52%), lower leg (46%) and ankle/feet (35%)

An ability to proactively manage and prevent injuries NOW through an understanding of the importance of conditioning and injury prehab and rehab are key components to decreasing long term effects and complications brought about by injuries.

"ARE YOU SERIOUS? IT'S A CONTACT SPORT!"

It is likely that anyone competing in sport at a high level will experience medical challenges later in life and without proactive injury risk management these are some of the experiences you may face:

- 37% of players are suffering major medical problems post rugby career while 51% believe that injuries suffered during their career have impacted negatively on their current health and well-being.

- 67% are worried about the implications that injuries sustained will have later in life

- Average 2.5 medical issues per player post rugby

Through the Collective Agreement players now receive **medical, life and trauma insurance** with all pre-existing injuries and illness covered as soon as they go onto a PU Contract – make yourself aware of the details.

Through the NZRPA players can also extend these benefits to their families and obtain other preferential insurance rates.

For more information visit www.nzrpa.co.nz

important that players are honest."

It's not just rugby players who get hurt, of course. Similar statistics have been recorded in other codes - 86 percent of retired UK football players and 82 percent of retired Australian Rugby league players reported having medical problems as a result of injuries sustained during their career.

But Targett also referenced a comprehensive study on retired Super Bowl finalists, where more than half had suffered a significant orthopaedic injury during their career. Common post-career problems included arthritis and chronic low back pain but nothing that rang any major alarm bells and when compared with an

MEDICAL WELFARE COMPARISON

Through medical support and education amongst management, trainers and players regarding injury and rehab we can reduce the likelihood of long-term implications from injuries.

PAST PLAYERS

- 68% felt pressured to play while injured
- 70% felt pressured to play before fully recovering from injury
- 52% felt pressured to stay on the field after being injured
- 73% hid an injury from medical staff in order to play.
- 3% felt pressured to take performance enhancing drugs.

CURRENT PLAYERS (NZRPA 2009 SURVEY)

- 10% have been pressured to stay on the field after a concussion/injury
- 18% have been pressured to play before fully recovering from injury
- 20% have not always told the medical staff about concussions
- 8% have felt pressure to take performance enhancing drugs.

age matched group their physical and mental health scores were similar. "It may well be that, as was found in the NFL study, that even though ex players report aches and pains attributable to playing rugby that their health is no worse than the general population," Targett said.

And while injuries and ongoing aches and pains seem to be issues for all past sportspeople across virtually all sports, on the flip side were the health benefits of professional rugby – 73 percent of players agreed that they'd maintained their healthy dietary habits developed whilst playing.

Just on 70 percent also believed they'd lived a healthy and active lifestyle since retiring.

"Ex-players are more likely to remain active after they retire than the normal population simply because they are used to being active - this is probably the best lifestyle intervention you can do," Targett said. "Players do also get taught about nutritional matters and I am sure that this will be taken on board by some."

Gibson has certainly followed this path since retiring. "One thing I realised when I finished playing was how important exercise was to me physically and, more importantly, mentally.

When you are playing, you always train with a goal in mind, whether it's a game or fitness testing. I found out really quickly that I needed to set new goals once I'd stopped playing, so I could still be challenged, stay healthy and feel good about myself."

Since retiring, Gibson has dived into a range of new activities, ranging from abseiling during a 24hr endurance race, to more recently jumping into a boxing ring.

To top it off, he and wife Gillian also have three kids, including twin boys.

"Outside of family and friends, staying active and healthy was one of the major things that helped me during my transition away from rugby. I'd encourage others to consider that approach too."

Of those who have post playing medical problems, joint pain (59%), cartilage damage (44%), joint immobility (40%) and neck/spinal problems (36%) are the most common medical issues players have post retirement.

A number of players require **ongoing medical treatment** or surgery - joint pain (18%), cartilage damage (21%) joint immobility (14%) and neck/spinal problems (13%).

29% of retired players believe they suffer from Arthritis, 12% require ongoing medical treatment for Arthritis.

Compared with 15% of all New Zealanders who suffer from Arthritis, whilst only 7.5% of all NZ males aged 35-44 suffer from Arthritis. www.arthritis.org

However 73% of players agreed that they have maintained their healthy dietary habits developed whilst playing and 70% of retired players believe they have lived a healthy and active lifestyle since retiring from rugby.

"Look after your body, you will need it for many years once you're finished – don't play injured"



JIMMY COWAN



TURNING TRAGEDY INTO TRIUMPH

There were no support structures in place to help **Jeremy Stanley** when his career ended earlier because of injury. But he was at least the case study that led to a better future.

JEREMY STANLEY'S story could very well have been a rugby tragedy. A decade ago, he was hit in a double tackle playing for Auckland against Taranaki, compressed his neck and had intense pain and numbness down both arms.

A couple of discs were pushing on his spinal cord and an operation and the long subsequent recovery effectively ended his playing career.

Worse, it came just two years after the 1997 All Black tourist – and son of All Black centre Joe – needed a knee reconstruction. To top it off, Stanley was forced to retire shortly before the New Zealand Rugby Players' Association secured a career-ending payment under the Collective and successfully established medical, life and trauma insurance for all players.

The NZRPA Benevolent and Welfare Fund can now also provide payments to players who suffer a career-ending event.

As NZRPA CEO Rob Nichol explains, Stanley's situation proved a major catalyst in the fledgling organisation.

"We'd only just got the Players' Association up and running and I talked with Jeremy as he was faced with making a decision," Nichol said. "Professional rugby basically had nothing meaningful in place to help a player going through the loss of a career due to injury or illness back then and I remember thinking how little we could help – from that moment on, we were determined things were going to change."

And change they did – though Nichol still laments the fact that there weren't measures in place as soon as the game went professional.

"Today's players should never forget what it used to be like, and frankly how bad it was, before the players formed their Association, got organised and made sure their interests were catered for. They owe a lot to yesterday's players, many of whom supported the Association despite the fact they knew they would not benefit personally but for the benefit of future players."

Stanley, meanwhile, managed to turn what could have been a devastating situation into a positive – the 36-year-old is now a successful surgeon at Middlemore Hospital, married to former Silver Fern Anna Rowberry and with three young children.

"Luckily I did have medicine to go back to and when I was rehabilitating from my knee injury, I was basically able to finish my degree," Stanley said. "If I'd still been playing, I don't know if I would've been able to finish it straight away."

"The funny thing was when I was young, I didn't think anything about career-ending insurance because I thought I was bullet-proof," Stanley admits. "Then when I did my ACL, I thought I'd better get it but no-one would cover my knee. I figured the only thing that was going

to end my career apart from that was a neck injury – I decided I wasn't in the front-row, so why bother?"

Pulling the pin on rugby was an easy decision, once he'd gotten advice from a fellow surgeon.

"He just said on the balance of things, if my livelihood and family depended on it, he would've contemplated letting me play again but he told me I had another career to think about and it just wasn't worth the risk."

Stanley is certainly not alone. The recent NZRPA Retired Players Research Project found that 58 per cent of players retired as a result of injury or wear and tear. Broken down, 30 per cent suffered one major injury and retired, 12 per cent quit after a combination of injuries and 16 per cent retired because of wear and tear.

Neck injuries accounted for almost eight per cent of all injuries in rugby, with 40 per cent of players surveyed suffering at least one neck injury during their career. At least 10 per cent of players needed hospitalisation because of a neck injury.

At least Stanley was able to lean on his medical knowledge when weighing up his retirement decisions.

"With my neck, I guess it made it easier because I'd seen first-hand what could've happened if I'd taken the risk and kept playing. You'd see them on the wards, guys coming in with serious neck

injuries, so it wasn't too difficult a decision. It was a bit scary at the time but I also knew the spinal surgeons personally which made it easier."

Stanley's career included stints with Auckland, Otago, the Highlanders and the Blues, while he was picked for three matches on the All Blacks' 1997 tour of Britain.

But injury was a constant companion – his knee woes kept him out of the game for nearly two seasons, he struggled through his last Super 12 campaign with a groin injury before he suffered his neck and spinal problems.

Surprisingly, however, the only lingering issues are numbness in his thumbs and an ache in his knee on cold mornings.

Many aren't so lucky. Nearly 40 per cent of players surveyed are still suffering major medical problems post-rugby career while 51 per cent believe injuries suffered during their career have impacted on their current health and well-being.

Stanley's busy surgery schedule – up to 90 hours a week – means exercising is tough for Stanley but he's just glad he had something to take over from his rugby career.

"I didn't have to worry about a career or financial issues because I knew I was going to be fine but it must be tough for guys who don't have anything else. It's something every player needs to start thinking about."

WHEN ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

"My mind was willing but my body wasn't"

Injury played a significant role in many retirements from professional rugby:

- 58% of players retired as a result of injury or wear and tear
- For 30%, one major injury directly resulted in their retirement
- For 12%, a combination of injuries resulted in their retirement
- 16% stated that 'wear and tear' resulted in their retirement

The NZRPA Benevolent and Welfare Fund, subject to certain guidelines, now provides payments to players who suffer a career ending event (note: not wear and tear). Under the Collective Agreement retainers are now guaranteed regardless of injury, illness or non-selection for the duration of their contract.

"I was not eligible for payment/compensation after a career ending injury. I instantly had no income"

Honesty is the Key

Steve Devine was forced to retire prematurely and he urges young players to be honest with themselves and others if they ever incur a head injury.

AS A rugby player, Steve Devine had a number of attributes, like skill, combativeness, resilience and strength.

But if you were to pick one character facet that helped the Australian-born halfback forge a 10-test All Black career, 70 Super Rugby caps and 78 games for Auckland, honesty would figure large.

Every time he pulled on boots, he gave an honest account of himself, never leaving anything out on the paddock. He paid a heavy price for his commitment, however, forced out of the game for good in 2007 after a series of sickening head knocks, but now Devine is encouraging that same honesty in current players, especially when it comes to injuries.

"If you try to hide the symptoms and say you're not getting them, it will bite you in the butt," Devine explains bluntly. "Professional athletes play with injuries all the time but I just think when you're dealing with the head, you need to be a bit more sensible."

The last in a catalogue of head knocks in Devine's career came against Counties Manukau in 2007, when a high tackle knocked two teeth out and left him needing the best part of three years from which to recover from migraines and intense fatigue.

In the recent NZRPA Retired Players Research Project, head injuries accounted for 10 per cent of the total injuries suffered by players surveyed. More than 40 per cent suffered at least one head injury, 11 per cent suffered six or more and 22 per cent of all recorded head injuries needed hospitalisation.

Devine was definitely in that 11 per cent – he was even knocked out twice in his first test for the All Blacks against England at Twickenham, before half-time, while he missed the 2003 Super 12 final after being knocked out in the semi-final.

The 34-year-old now receives regular injections of botox into the back of his head, his neck and temple and that has been a "huge relief" but some symptoms still linger. The survey showed 37 per cent of players are suffering major medical problems post rugby career while 51 per cent believe that injuries impacted negatively on their current health and well-being.

Devine, who is now the team manager for Auckland, is just pleased that a lot more is known about head injuries these days.

"I've been back in the rugby scene for the last



couple of years and things are certainly taken a lot more seriously these days than when I was around. Any boys that get a knock these days are pulled off the field and there are processes in place – you don't even worry about doing a brain test until the fatigue and headaches stop.

"It wasn't really a matter of me trying to hide it when I started to get some of my worst symptoms, it was just that no-one really knew what was going on. With my headaches and fatigue, people just thought I was tired but luckily things are a bit more documented these days."

"It wasn't until I started waking up in my car in my garage that I knew something wasn't right. I'd been tired before but I'd never been that tired."

NZRU medical director Dr Steve Targett says their advice to team doctors on the management of head injuries is now more conservative than the IRB concussion guidelines.

For his part, Devine would like to see more power in the hands of team doctors.

"There is always pressure on players to tough it out but a lot of that pressure comes from themselves. We're competitive people and we like to compete. If you give a player a choice, he's going to get back into battle with his mates. A lot of the time, particularly with head injuries, the decision to play on or to play next week needs to be taken out of the player's hands."

"I was a competitive person who wanted to play so if I was ever asked, I was always ready to play on. That's where we need strong, confident medical advisors."

The NZRPA survey suggests things are on the right track. Of the past players questioned, 68 per cent felt pressured to play while injured and 70 per cent felt pressured to play before fully recovering from injury.

At least 73 per cent hid an injury from medical staff in order to play. But current players have definitely learned the lessons of the past – only 10 per cent have been pressured to stay on the field after a concussion/injury, while 18 per cent have been pressured to play before fully recovering from injury.

Devine is more concerned about the 20 per cent who have not always told the medical staff about concussions.

"I struggle to force my story onto other people because I know when I was dealing with my situation, it was very difficult to hear about the guy who got knocked out in the Under 16 national champs and never recovered or stories like that. They're all so different and the injuries can affect people in lots of ways but I'm there if people need to have a yarn about it."

BE HONEST

A medical practitioner relies on a player's honest and proactive communication in order to be able to help them.

Be honest with medical staff and proactively drive the medical decisions that affect you.

Head (10% of total injuries)

43% of players suffered at least one head injury, 11% suffered 6 or more, 22% of all recorded head injuries required hospitalisation

16.3% of current players in the NZRPA 2009 survey said they had been concussed more than once that season

Neck (7.7% of total injuries)

40% of players suffered at least one neck injury, 9% six or more, 10% required hospitalisation

IT IS ALL IN THE HEAD

By Dr Martin Raftery and Dr Steve Targett

Concussion is currently one of the most topical and controversial sports medicine issues in the public arena. There are many debated areas and research is progressing at a rapid pace. The article below provides an overview of the amended **IRB Concussion Guidelines**. What is NOT debated is the fact that “an athlete should not return to play or train until full clinical and cognitive (mental processing) recovery has occurred. Return to play should only occur following the graduated return to play protocol”. What is still debated is the link between concussion and long-term cognitive and psychiatric deficits.

IN MARCH 2011 the IRB published new Concussion Guidelines and amended IRB Regulation 10 relating to the management of concussion within Rugby Union. These new Guidelines are summarised as follows:

- Concussion must be taken extremely seriously to safeguard long term player welfare.
- Players suspected of having concussion must be removed from play and must not resume play in the match.
- Players suspected of having concussion must be medically assessed.
- Players suspected of having concussion or diagnosed with concussion must go through a graduated return to play protocol (GRTP).
- Players must receive medical clearance before returning to play.

These amended IRB guidelines are aligned with the latest consensus statement on concussion developed in Zurich by world leaders in concussion.

Highlights

1. A player suspected of having a concussion **MUST** be removed from play and must **NOT** return to play in that match.
2. Players suspected or diagnosed with concussion must go through a graduated return to play protocol (GRTP).

What is Concussion?

Concussion is an injury to the brain that affects the functioning of the brain but does not result in any structural damage such as brain tissue damage or bleeding into the brain. A concussion can occur as a result of a direct head injury but may also occur with any injury that results in an acceleration/deceleration force to the brain, for example, a whiplash type injury. Concussion can present with a number of symptoms and signs and should be suspected when any of the following are present following an injury –

SYMPTOMS

Headache, dizziness, ‘feeling in a fog’.

PHYSICAL SIGNS

Loss of consciousness, vacant expression, unsteady on feet, slowed reaction, vomiting, inappropriate behavior, drowsy.

CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR

Inappropriate emotions, irritability, feeling of nervousness or anxious.

COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

Slowed reaction times, confusion or disorientation, poor attention or concentration, loss of memory.

The diagnosis of concussion should be made by an experienced medical practitioner.

Highlights

1. Concussion can occur without a direct blow to the head or without loss of consciousness.
2. Concussion affects the functioning of the brain. It does not cause damage to brain tissue or bleeding into the brain.

Returning to Play

The amended IRB Guidelines (full version available via www.irbplayerwelfare.com) highlight that a player suspected or diagnosed with concussion must follow a graduated return to play (GRTP). The important features of this GRTP Protocol are:

- A player must rest for 24 hours following a concussion and be symptom free before starting this protocol.
- A player must not progress from one stage to another unless symptom free.
- Each level to be separated by a 24 hour period.
- Moving unimpeded and without recurrence of symptoms through this protocol means a player will be fit to resume playing within a week.
- If a medical practitioner is unavailable to

manage this GRTP Protocol the player **MUST** not commence this GRTP process for 14 days and then commencement can only occur if no symptoms are present. In this situation with 14 days rest plus seven days GRTP the player will return to play three weeks after the injury.

- A player must not return to play or contact training without clearance from a medical practitioner.
- Children and adolescents require special attention and the Medical Practitioner responsible for their treatment will advise on the return to play process.

The Protocol

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Level 0 | Injury. |
| Level 1 | Rest for 24 hours from injury as a minimum or 24 hours after symptoms settle. |
| Level 2 | Light aerobic exercise (commence 24 hours after injury or 24 hours after cessation of symptoms). |
| Level 3 | Sports specific exercise. |
| Level 4 | Progressive sports specific non contact drills. |
| Level 5 | Full contact practice after clearance from a medical practitioner. |
| Level 6 | Play. |

Highlights

1. A player suspected or diagnosed with concussion must follow a graduated return to play (GRTP).
2. A player who has symptoms of concussion should **NOT** start the GRTP process or progress to the next level if they have started the GRTP process.
3. A player must get clearance from a medical practitioner before returning to play or contact training.

DR STEVE TARGETT is a sports physician and has almost 20 years experience in sports medicine. He has worked with an impressive array of professional sports teams including the Hurricanes, the Wellington Phoenix football team and the Wellington Saints basketball team and has attended Commonwealth and Olympics Games with the New Zealand team. Steve has been the medical director for the NZRU since 2004 where he works two days a week.

DR MARTIN RAFTERY has established a reputation as one of the world's leading sports medicine experts. As chief medical officer with the Australian Rugby Union between 2004 and 2011 he delivered major player welfare strategies while also performing the role of Wallabies team physician between 2002 and 2008. He has recently been appointed as the IRB chief medical officer.

United We Stand – BELIEVE

By Charlotte Gendall

“ASTONISHING, AMAZING and inspiring” was just some of the praise heaped on this outstanding rugby-driven event to benefit spinal cord injury research and rehabilitation.

Hosted by The Black Friday Trust at the Langham Hotel in August, “Believe” more than lived up to its name as guests gave - and kept on giving - to the recipient charities: the NZ Rugby Foundation for their work with injured players, The Spinal Trust (rehabilitation) and The CatWalk Trust (research).

As a result, \$200,000 will now be shared between upgrading the rehabilitation unit at Otara and supporting the newly-established Auckland University SCI Research Unit. CatWalk was privileged to be part of the evening, and just a little overwhelmed by the sheer star power of the All Blacks and Black Caps sharing our dream.

It lifted the spirits to work alongside players who held nothing back. Ali Williams may be known as one of the ‘jokers’ of the All Black squad but this time he had the crowd close to tears, recounting his father’s own experience with SCI.

With CatWalk’s Catriona Williams appearing on TV3’s Campbell Live alongside Conrad Smith, it was a chance to spread the message that a cure isn’t far away, and until it’s found, we can do much more to help those already injured.

Conrad’s revisiting of the story of Ben Leia was timely. Ben, a promising player with Marist in Samoa, suffered an horrific training injury in January 2010. That neck fracture may have left Ben a tetraplegic but as we learned from Conrad, he’s now making every post a winner, with help from last year’s inaugural Black Friday event. Go, Ben!

As the night went on, we became united in the belief that this is the way of the future: working together for a common cause. A stunning auction, so stylishly led by John Bowring from Colliers, produced red hot prices for items such as the All Black jersey for \$18,000, and the ultimate Rugby World Cup package, including



Ben Lucus, NZ Spinal Trust CEO; Catrina Williams, Catwalk Founder with the All Black and Black Cap representatives and Aaron Slight, Catwalk Patron.

an All Blacks training session and prime seats for the pool game against Tonga. A typically generous gesture by Brian Broom from DHL saw him chip in two finals tickets as well, helping spur the bidding to a massive \$23,000.

And the best part of raising all that money? Knowing that 100 per cent of every dollar raised will help get people out of chairs, and make lives easier.

So what could possibly top the astonishing auction, and send us away inspired? The crowd hushed as MC Jackie Clarke announced a special guest musician.

Mist drifted on stage and the Langham ballroom fell silent as a lone piper emerged.

Then the crowd roared as our man, Richie McCaw, strode forward, clad in full Scottish regalia amid a skirl of bagpipes.

And in the end, it’s Richie’s pitch perfect rendition of Amazing Grace that will live in my

memory and that of everyone else at Believe. It was indeed “amazing” and as the crowd sang with him, we were reminded that “the dangers, toil and snares” of SCI WILL be overcome through teamwork.

Charlotte Gendall is a long term CatWalk supporter, and a founding Trustee).

BELIEVE

... in seeing the person, and not the chair.

Believe in living life to the full.

Believe we will find a cure.

Keep Believing



Jackie Clarke and Ali Williams share a joke on stage.



Richie McCaw appearing through the mist for his outstanding bagpipe performance.

Text “Black” to 5338 to donate \$3 to Get Black on Your Feet

LIVING THE DREAM

Rising stars **Sam Cane** and **Carl Axtens** have been mates since they were five and owe their success to their hard work and sensible approach.

THEY BREED them uncomplicated in Reporoa. If it moos, milk it. If it tastes good, hunt it. If it runs at you with a ball, tackle it.

Friendships tend to last in the small piece of paradise, deep in the rural heartland of the Bay of Plenty.

Sam Cane and his best mate Carl Axtens started playing rugby together when they were five and Axtens, five months older, looked after Cane on his first day at Broadlands Primary School. But their roots go even deeper than that.

Deer farmer Malcolm Cane was a decent loose-forward for the local Reporoa club while his dairy farming team-mate Steve Axtens, the current coach of King Country, went on to play 55 matches at lock for Bay of Plenty.

The two proud dads have coached their sons through the grades and watched them rise all the way to their selection in the New Zealand Under 20 team this year.

"It was always a pretty special thing to be selected for all these teams with your best mate," Cane explains. "And we've always pushed each other along - you'd like to think you'd still be able to make it by yourself but it's definitely been easier with the two of us training together and supporting each other."

"It's also special because it meant the families could share it as well," Axtens adds. "They've always had that bond and making teams together meant they could really get behind us both."

Don't for a moment think that success has come easily to the talented pair, however. Despite

their laidback rural ways, Cane and Axtens are at the forefront of a new breed of professional rugby player - talented, smart and disciplined.

"I guess it is reward for hard work and that's something I've told other guys coming through school - as good young players, you don't realise how close you are to playing professionally," Cane explains.

At 19, Cane has already played 13 games for Bay of Plenty and made his Chiefs debut earlier this year. He was one of the stars at this year's Junior World Cup and has spent time talking to up-and-coming Chiefs players as part of the NZRPA Young Players Education programme.

"I remember thinking I'd have a couple of years out of school, then I'd try and make the Bay but it's definitely happened a lot quicker than I expected," Cane said.

Part of his rapid rise has been an intense willingness to learn - with Axtens often the unwitting teacher.

"Carl's a few months older so every second year, we'd be in different Bay teams. When he made Under 17s, he got a good training programme so I'd join in and follow that with him."

Bay of Plenty professional development manager Martin Ewen believes attitude is crucial to making it at the top level and in that respect; Axtens and Cane are ideally equipped to handle the demands of the professional game. "Among the key things a lot of these young

guys are learning is time-management and prioritisation, and it can be bloody difficult with all their various commitments," Ewen said. "It's hard enough for experienced businessmen sometimes but the likes of Carl and Sam are showing what can be done."

Like many of their New Zealand Under 20 colleagues, the pair have embraced professional rugby early, while keeping their future options open. Cane is completing a diploma in business studies while Axtens did an automotive mechanics course at Waiariki Polytechnic.

Juggling education and rugby careers has been a constant challenge since they both made the Reporoa College first XV in fourth form. They stayed there until their final year at school, when they transferred to Tauranga Boys' College to get more playing time against bigger schools.

Axtens, a rangy No 8, made his provincial debut for Bay of Plenty against North Harbour this year and could've been at Super XV level already had he not blown a knee captaining the New Zealand Schools team in 2009.

"It was a huge injury but I did all my rehab properly and now it doesn't cause any trouble," Axtens said. "In some ways, it was good to get an injury like that out of the way early in my career so I know how to get through it."

Every chance they get, Axtens and Cane head back to Reporoa to catch up with mates. They've got a solid crew of buddies who keep them level, supporting them while making sure their feet stay on the ground.

Unfortunately, chances to get home could become rarer in coming years.

Cane in particular caught the eye during this year's ITM Cup while Axtens, who had limited opportunities as back up to Steamers skipper Colin Bourke, is a player with huge potential.

"The position is quite confrontational so I'm just trying to keep fit, get a bit stronger and put on a bit of weight," Axtens said. "I guess I've just got to get a bit more battle-hardened but I'm looking forward to the challenge."



Something to Bank On

New Zealand Sevens captain **DJ Forbes** is a man of many talents and while he would love to play at the Olympics he suspects it won't happen.

DJ FORBES is a man of many talents, some of them visible and some of them less so.

His rugby sevens skills are unquestioned, with the New Zealand captain rated one of the best in the world. But you may not know that before his rugby career took off, Forbes was a bank teller and part-time fire dancer in a traditional Samoan performance group. He also loves his music and, perhaps to live up to his initials, dabbles as a DJ.

Those interests help give Forbes a wider focus, which he uses to forecast what lies in store for the abbreviated form of rugby now that it has been accepted into the 2016 Olympics.

"The sevens guys have long been the baby brothers who are looking to push on to the 15s game but the whole Olympic buzz may just change that," the 28-year-old explains. "It might be a few years too late for me to but it's exciting to see that buzz happening. I've hinted to a few guys coming through that there will be a lot of emphasis on sevens two or three years out from the 2016 Olympics and some players will have to specialise in sevens. They'll realise that winning an Olympic gold medal is the pinnacle in sport."

To be able to specialise in sevens, however, there will need to be some tweaking of the product. Forbes is hopeful the current Sevens World Series circuit will continue to expand, enabling players to make a living solely off

the shortened game. That will, in turn, give players a decent break in the off-season, whereas now most are still involved in provincial 15s rugby.

The International Rugby Players Association backs up Forbes' view, with IRPA executive director Rob Nichol explaining that currently sevens is just one avenue in a competitive market for players.

"There need to be incentives for countries to develop sevens domestically and compete in the IRB world series," Nichol said. "Ideally, the Sevens World Series should be a fully professional league so that it can attract talent and grow in a rugby sevens and commercial sense."

Forbes, the Counties Manukau flanker who made his national debut in 2006, loves what sevens has given him but he'd still jump at further opportunities in 15s.

Fiercely proud of his New Zealand honours, he also casts a wary eye towards his Pacific Island heritage when Olympic qualification is discussed. He hopes the IRB will veer away from regional qualifying tournaments for the Rio de Janeiro games, as he believes that would be unfair to those in the South Pacific.

"It brings a great balance to the game of sevens because a lot of teams can play tight, structured footy with fitness being a key role but you get the likes of Fiji, Samoa and even the Cook Islands who like to play with that flair which can open teams right up. That ticks all the boxes when it comes to what should be in the Olympics. Those teams need a fair chance to participate and regional qualifying might mean some of the top contenders missed out."

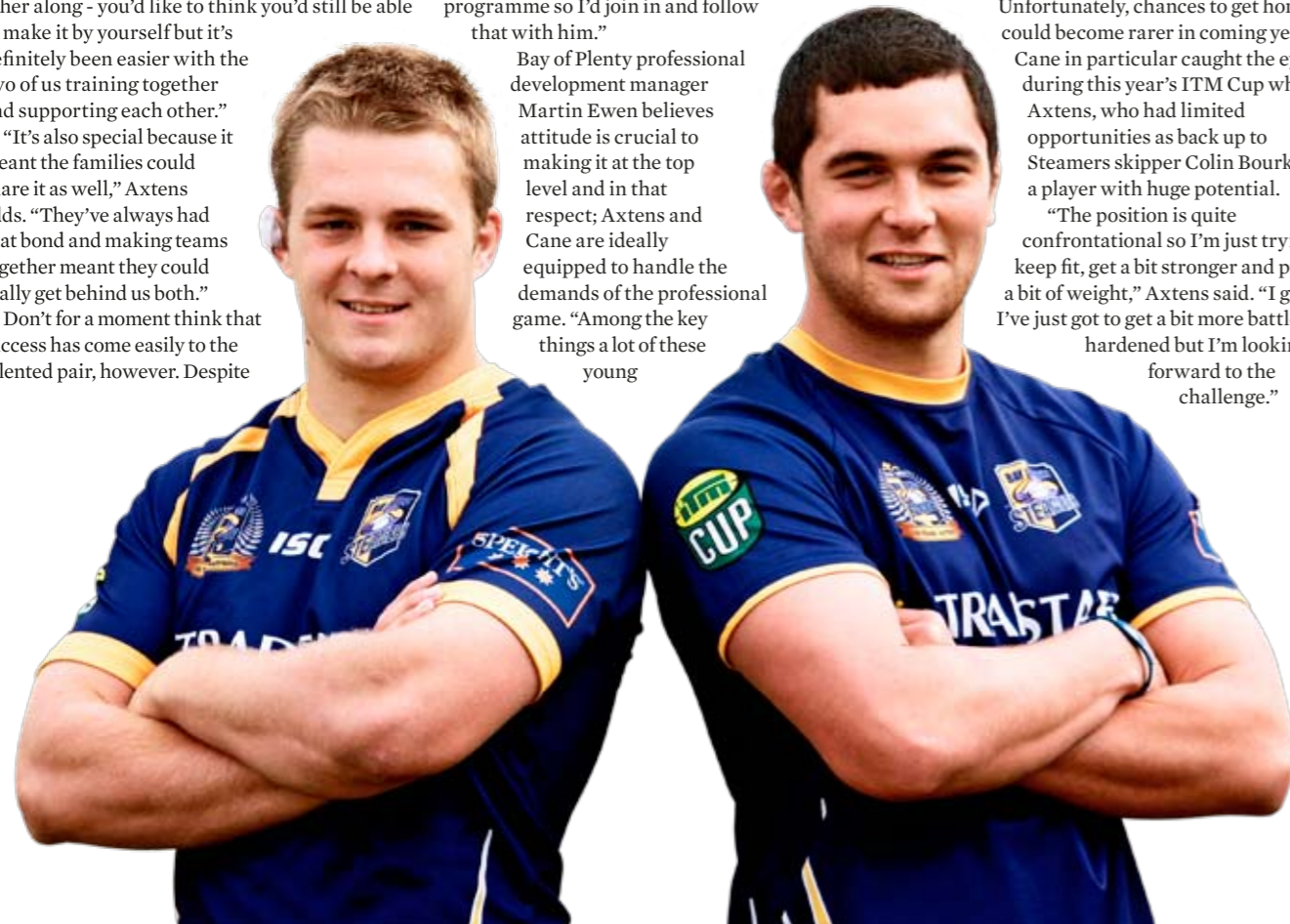
With his 29th birthday arriving soon, Forbes can't see himself lasting until the Olympics come around, so he's already working on a transition plan for when his rugby days are over.

"At the back of my mind, I've wondered about going overseas but I've always enjoyed playing in New Zealand and as an island boy, I like to stay close to home.

I'm not too fussed. I went into the workforce straight after school and didn't just play rugby right through so I'm pretty confident I'd be able to get a job if rugby came to a halt. I may even look at studying in the next year and giving myself some more options.

"Regardless of anything, wearing the black jersey and representing your country is always going to be a buzz for me and there's no loss of motivation there. I'm just trying to make the most out of wherever I end up."

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMIE TROUGHTON



THE PATH TO GLORY

Sevens will be at the 2016 Olympics and robust debate is required to ensure the qualification system is put in place. We talk with the International Rugby Players' Association executive director Rob Nichol about IRPA's thoughts on sevens and where to from here.



Q: The IRB have promoted regional qualification tournaments as the key means of qualifying for the Olympics. What do the players think?

RN: There are natural benefits to being part of the Olympic family but we feel the game needs to leverage that inclusion for the benefit of its own competitions, participants and the game. The most obvious is how we best use the opportunity and status associated with qualifying and attending the Olympics to grow the interest, status and success of the Sevens World Series in particular.

Only using regional tournaments as a means of qualifying means in Oceania, for example, some very good teams will miss out. The Pacific Island teams in particular deserve better treatment because without them, the game would not be where it is today.

Q: So you see the Sevens World Series (SWS) as being an important factor in Olympic qualification?

RN: The SWS is the world's premier sevens competition and this should remain the case. We feel that to give this competition the status and impetus to increase its relevance and standing in a commercial and rugby sense, it should provide a prioritised pathway to Olympic Games qualification.

For example, four-six teams should be able to qualify for the Olympics as a direct result of their performances in the SWS. This performance could be assessed in a

number of different ways, such as over a single nominated year, a selected group of tournaments or over a period of two or three years leading into the Olympics. All would be designed to create tension, excitement and competition within the SWS, and also a real desire for countries all over the world to be a part of the series itself. To capitalise on this, the bottom three or four teams could compete with other interested countries each year to qualify for inclusion into the next SWS. This detail can be worked on in due course but the principle highlighted above regarding the SWS providing a pathway to Olympic Games qualification is very important.

Q: How do you work out the rest of the teams and do regional tournaments have a role to play here?

RN: We also recognise this concept can apply to regional tournaments at two levels. Regional tournaments can increase their status by providing a pathway to compete in the SWS (as the game and popularity grows) and a secondary direct pathway for Olympic qualification for those who miss out on qualification through the SWS. For example, in the year immediately prior to the Olympics, each regional tournament could provide one qualifier. This would be the highest placed team in the regional tournament who has not already qualified for the Olympic via the SWS. Once again the detail can come later but the principle is important. Finally we could, which the

IRB have already identified as an opportunity, create a third and final qualification pathway through a world seven's qualifying tournament, held for those who had not yet qualified. Consideration could also be given to granting the host nation a spot if they have not already qualified, provided they meet certain competitiveness criteria.

Q: Have you passed on these views to the IRB?

RN: The IRB have been working on a Sevens Strategic Plan and the International Rugby Players' Association has had an involvement and provided submissions as part of that process. We tabled all these thoughts in February of this year in response to the IRB's draft plan.

Q: What other views did the players table?

RN: In looking at the business and commercial models around sevens, we believe it is important to recognise that sevens is in a professional sporting environment competing for talent. The IRB planning needed to consider making a professional sevens career a seriously compelling option for young talented athletes and rugby players, in both a rugby and financial sense.

At this stage almost every sevens player plays sevens in the hope of developing and/or being noticed and securing a decent 15s contract. The Olympics alone will not be enough to curb this aspirational pathway for sevens players.

We feel the business model around the SWS and its various tournaments needs to ensure the series and tournaments themselves are successful and sustainable, that countries have financial incentives to develop sevens rugby domestically and to compete in the SWS and that players and other key talent are rewarded for being a part of this success.

If the business model does not provide enough of an incentive for players financially the overall plan around sevens may be at risk of losing talent to a competing option, be it 15s, other sports or competing sevens tournaments.

HOME ON THE FARM

Casey Williams has achieved so much in netball yet she is only in her mid-20s and the Silver Ferns captain loves nothing more than winding down on the family farm.

SOME PEOPLE reckon Casey Williams was destined to captain the Silver Ferns but it's not quite true.

The 26-year-old could've also been a Black Fern if she'd leant her athletic 1.88m frame that way. Dad Murray played rugby for Waikato and brother Rhys was a lock or blindside for Canterbury and New Zealand Universities in the early 2000s. Even older sister Jan Marie got in on the act, playing for the Waikato women's team.

How about volleyball? Williams also played for the New Zealand Under 19 team in 2003. She was a star athlete at Matamata College, winning a Waikato schools high jump title, and dabbled in tennis.

"Coming from a sporting family has had a big influence - we were always active at home and were either out on the farm or playing rugby and netball in the back yard. Mum and Dad were both very active and they are so proud of us and supportive and are always there on the sideline, so they've all had a positive influence in different ways."

In fact, Williams still hasn't completely ruled out a stint in rugby - "that would be awesome - I would love to give it a go sometime!" - but it's netball's everlasting luck that she eventually concentrated on that code.

She was still at college when she joined the

Magic development team in 2003 and was selected for the Silver Ferns squad in 2004.

Captain by the time she was 24, a double Commonwealth Games gold medal winner by 25, Williams now has 64 test caps, with 30 of those as skipper.

She's already had seven seasons involved in the national team and is a true veteran, still a long way short of her 30th birthday.

Only her body may keep her from setting all sorts of records as a Silver Fern - she's had recent ankle surgery after the heart-breaking

At the end of the day, you need something to fall back on because you never know how long you're going to be playing. You need to make the most of it.'

58-57 overtime world championship loss to Australia in Singapore in July and won't be back in action until next year.

"I am really amazed how long I have been in the game," Williams admits. "Time has just been flying by but I wouldn't change it for the world. I have no idea how much longer I'll be playing because there are so many variables

that could contribute, including my body, my family and career."

Her future planning is already well underway, having completed a Diploma in Sport and Recreation from Hamilton's Wintec. She's currently studying towards her Bachelors degree, with plans to complete a teaching qualification and teach PE.

"It all takes a little bit longer with doing the netball at the same time."

She's taking plenty of guidance from older brother Rhys, who spent time playing semi-professionally in England before moving back to the Waikato and starting farming.

"He's loving it - he's made me realise that sport isn't everything and how awesome family are. At the end of the day, you need something to fall back on because you never know how long you're going to be playing. You need to make the most of it."

Williams also finds it hard to shake her rural roots, with her parents' dairy farm providing the ideal place to escape the pressures of top-level sport.

"The farm is the place I go to get away from everything: go and have a blat on the motorbike, or drive the tractor or chase the cows and calves around," she said. "I don't mind getting my hands dirty and will give everything a go."



THE PAKURANGA GLOBE TROTTER

James Arlidge has played around the world but was delighted to be back at 'home' to play in the World Cup with Japan.



Q: You've had a particularly well-travelled career. What's been your playing highlight so far and which team was the most enjoyable to play for?

JA: I've been lucky enough to play rugby in four different countries and, through rugby I've been able to see a lot of the world. I played for a number of teams in New Zealand including Northland, Auckland, the Blues and a short stint with the Highlanders. After leaving New Zealand I spent four years playing for NTT Docomo in Osaka, Japan before heading to Wales to play for the Newport Gwent Dragons.

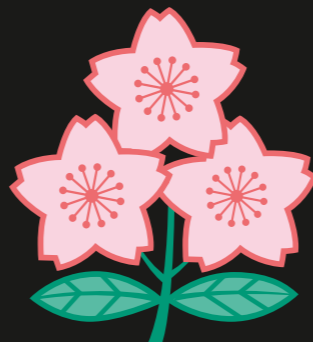
I've spent the last year in England with Nottingham (everyone enjoyed having Ali Williams with us for a few games at the start of this year.)

The highlight for me, still, is being a part of the Northland team that beat Auckland on Eden Park in 2001. We had a great team spirit, everybody worked hard for each other and we had a couple of decent Fijians on the wings!

Q: Having experienced both Japanese and European rugby, what are the biggest differences in style and culture?

JA: There are some pretty big differences in playing style between the two regions. The Japanese don't always have the size to play massively forward-dominated games, so the ball gets thrown about a lot, the teams try to play a really fast game, moving the ball at speed with really fast rucks. Sometimes in the northern hemisphere, the weather - particularly between December and February - plays a part but there seems to be more of an emphasis on forward play, and teams are very structured in their approach to each game and what to do in various situations. In terms of team culture, there aren't too many differences, in all of the teams I've been involved in the players work hard but love having a laugh and joke and enjoy each other's company in social situations.

Q: How much does it mean to be playing a World Cup in your home country,



especially after missing the 2007 RWC with injury?

JA: It means a huge amount to be playing for Japan in a World Cup here in New Zealand, mainly because it means my family and friends are able to be close and feel like they are a part of it. When I was named in the final cup squad, I was really happy to have achieved a goal I set four years ago when I broke my leg.

Q: What sort of career transition plans have you got in place? Has it been hard planning with the change in teams?

JA: I studied Commerce and Property at Auckland University and was lucky enough to finish both degrees before I really got stuck into my rugby so hopefully I will be able to use these once I finish playing. I have at least another two years of rugby and am hoping to get something sorted before I head back to New Zealand.

before I head back to New Zealand.

Q: What's been the funniest thing happen off the field during your time overseas?

JA: In Japanese shabero means 'more talk/communication'. A Kiwi player new to the country and trying hard to get involved with the language was shouting out 'shaburo, shaburo' (only one letter difference) very loudly. This means 'more sucking'. The Japanese boys looked at him sideways, and cracked up.

Q: Where do you see yourself ending up and will you still be involved in rugby?

JA: I'll definitely end up in Auckland when I finish playing. I'm not sure how much involvement I'll have in rugby, although I'll always support my old club Pakuranga, and am looking forward to seeing if my son has any interest in the game.

Q: What's your idea of the ultimate holiday in New Zealand?

JA: Anywhere near the beach in summer.



New Port of Call

Luke Andrews has begun his new life at sea and his decision to study and take work experience is now paying off.

Luke Andrews' retirement lasted less than a week. He removed his boots for the last time in Invercargill, the town he was born in, as his Bay of Plenty side ended their ITM Cup season against Southland.

Just six days later, Andrews set sail on a new career as a marine operator, with the 35-year-old lock permanently swapping his sprigs for a spot on board the Rawinia, Port Taranaki's 17.6m support boat.

The next stage of his working life will see Andrews delivering maintenance workers, technicians and emergency personnel to the Pohukura gas field production platform, about 15 miles north of New Plymouth.

"At the end of the Southland game, there was relief and a bit of sadness, because rugby's been a big part of my life," Andrews admitted. "There was also a little bit of nervousness about where I was going - the nerves were because I'm relatively new to the industry and there's a lot for me to learn. I'm back to being a rookie again, the new boy on the block.

"But it's an area that I love and I'm passionate about and I'm sure it won't take long to get into the swing of things. It's all pretty exciting."

His super-fast transition from rugby player to launch master was no fluke, however. The recent NZRPA Retired Players Research Project found those who studied and got work experience during their career had a far smoother retirement transition.

Survey results suggested 87 per cent of current players are undertaking some form of meaningful career education or personal development outside of rugby and 90 per cent are actively seeking to develop a potential career.

After a 13-year career with Otago, Southland, Wellington, the Hurricanes and overseas, Andrews arrived in Tauranga last year with wife Kylie and young son Kingston, who is now 18-months-old. The couple are also expecting their second child in March and Andrews knew what he wanted to do post-rugby but just needed a bit of help to get there.

"Luke emailed me as soon as he signed with the Bay in May last year, explaining he needed to complete a couple of papers for his inshore launch-operator ticket," Bay of Plenty professional development manager Martin Ewen explained.

"I made a couple of calls and he was able to do a radio operator course through the Tauranga Coastguard and get his radar operator ticket through the Bay of Plenty Polytechnic."

Andrews and team-mate Tanerau Latimer also started work experience at the Port of Tauranga, crewing on tug boats and pilot craft and getting practical skills, and Ewen believes it was invaluable use of their personal development time.

"They both really enjoy the marine environment and they'd go out any chance they got, even on days off, if a ship was coming in or anything. They say if you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else. Luke ended up doing exactly what he wanted because he knew what was out there and knew a commitment had to be made."

When his season finished last year, Andrews headed down to Port Taranaki, where he spent three months getting more experience. He was offered a job a week before he went back to Tauranga for the final year of his contract.

"I couldn't have hoped for the cards to fall any better, really. Finding a job after rugby has always been a scary thought and to be honest, if I didn't have anything lined up, I would've played another season. I'm really lucky I was able to narrow my focus and a spot became available at the right time.

"Marty got me down there to the Port and all that experience added to my CV, so that when I turned up at Port Taranaki, they could see I knew what the industry was about."

While he was at Otago University in the late 1990s, Andrews completed a Bachelor of Science and Zoology and was two papers off finishing a post-grad diploma in marine science.

With a life-long love of the ocean, he knew it was a place he wanted to find a career - the trick was finding the right job.

"I narrowed my search on my career which was a big thing. I was able to identify what area I wanted to go into so I could really focus on it.

"All rugby players, including myself, think that they're bullet-proof and their careers are going to last as long as they want it to. I was lucky that mine has but I could've easily been injured or got a tap on the shoulder by a coach saying I might want to consider something else next year. If I'd been left in the lurch, my one regret would've been not getting enough work experience. You've got to do it as soon as possible, get proactive and get some sort of qualification behind you."

Retired Players survey figures back that up - 88 per cent of players agree having an education or a trade is an important part of life after professional rugby, while 42 per cent said the qualifications they obtained before or during their rugby career helped them gain employment on retirement.

And Andrews reckons his rugby skills will hold him in good stead in his new career. "You're in charge of a vessel so you're kind of like the captain of a team and you've got groups of guys working around you and working under you. There are definitely a few similarities to team sport."



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