

OPINION PIECE
BY PAST PLAYER
IAN JONES

The LIVE experience – creating the memories.

Attending live sporting events creates memories and provides aspirations for generations to come. With live sport you just never know when those magical sporting moments are going to happen, just like Brendon McCullum's fastest world test century in Christchurch or the All Blacks Sevens team beating South Africa twice in overtime to win the tournament in Wellington earlier this year.

Those are just two of many exceptional sporting moments that make it special to be the fan in the stand. To be a part of history and experience those truly unique sporting moments first hand in the stands creates memories that you hold onto for life and share with others for years to come which is why the live experience of sports can't be beaten.

I can still recall the first day my dad took me to a test match. It inspired me. By taking kids to live sports we are fostering that enthusiasm and passion for sports for the next generation.

The Wellington Seven's earlier in the year gained plenty of criticisms about low crowd numbers, however having been to the event for the past 12 years I want to point out that if you were actually there you didn't focus on the crowd number but how enjoyable the occasion was.

Organisers did an impressive job and in my experience, the changes they made were positive - the atmosphere was brilliant. They provided family zones with plenty of giveaways and things for the kids to do. They had the players warming up right in front of the zone. The kids were able to get autographs and able to interact with the players after the matches which the kids and athletes loved. Importantly those kids went away with special memories that they could share and be inspired by. Where else do you get this close to the biggest stars in the game?

The rugby was next level and highly entertaining, the stadium was amazing and the weather was great. Those in the party zone really enjoyed it, the rugby fans enjoyed it and there was a strong focus on the people.

Savage and Jason Kerrison and all the bands who provided the fantastic entertainment made it rock and the fans truly made the atmosphere outstanding. The Fijian supporters were special and the New Zealand team really responded to the kiwi fans by digging deep and putting on some incredible performances. As with live events, the fans play a big part in a team's success and players feed off the energy and atmosphere they create.

After big peaks in attendance at the Sevens if the numbers sit around where they are so be it. Don't knock the numbers, embrace the atmosphere. The numbers were still good enough to create a great atmosphere and the people in that stadium had an awesome weekend.

Obviously there is a focus on the people at events and making the most of the experience, so it is a balancing act for the stadiums to deliver that with their functionality and performance.

In an age where we are dominated by social media just remember that social media gives you instant gratification but it doesn't give you the true elation of watching the match-winning try live, or the same euphoria of sharing the thrill of winning with passionate fans beside you.

So next time you think 'I can't be bothered going to a live match', think about it - you could be about to miss out on a truly magical sporting moment and the opportunity to create life-long memories for you your mates and your kids.

See you at the game, Ian Jones



"It's always fun to play in front of your friends and family. But it's pretty special to play in something like the Sevens in Wellington with all the Kiwi fans supporting us. We would warm up right beside heaps of young Kiwi fans and that was a lot of fun."
All Blacks Sevens player **AKIRA IOANE**