

# PLAYER RECOGNITION

## Andy Ellis receives 2020 NZRPA Kirk Award



ANDY ELLIS



**ANDY ELLIS IS THE LATEST RECIPIENT OF THE NEW ZEALAND RUGBY PLAYERS' ASSOCIATION KIRK AWARD. THIS AWARD RECOGNISES ANDY'S CONTRIBUTION TO HIS FELLOW PLAYERS AND HIS LEADERSHIP OFF THE FIELD THROUGH HIS COMMUNICATION, ADVOCATING FOR PLAYERS, DEVELOPING OPPORTUNITIES AND FOSTERING NETWORKS. THE AWARD WAS ANNOUNCED LIVE ON SKY TV LAST NIGHT AS PART OF THE NEW ZEALAND RUGBY AWARDS.**

The 36-year-old has had an on-field career spanning more than 15 years. During that time, he has played for Canterbury, the Crusaders, the Kobe Steelers, the Junior All Blacks, the All Blacks, the World XV and captained the Barbarians team. However, it is Andy's ethos of not only giving back to other players, but also leading the way and encouraging them to further develop themselves off the field that has seen him become the

2020 NZRPA Kirk Award recipient. Off the field, Andy's personal development has seen him win awards at international flower shows, including a gold at the highly notable Singapore Garden Festival and a supreme award at Auckland's Ellerslie Flower Show. He has also been involved with opening two Japanese restaurants, Mad Samurai in Auckland and Bar Yoku in Christchurch. His Wagyu beef business, Black Origin, also supplies these restaurants. He has owned horses, sung in a boy band for charity alongside Crusaders team mates Israel Dagg, Robbie Fruean, Telusa Veainu and Willi Heinz (with Dan Carter as manager), studied landscape architecture at Lincoln University, written a book about Kiwi backyards, worked as a television host as Seven Sharp's garden guide, and done stints as a radio DJ and sports commentator. His latest venture is as part of a start-up satellite internet company called Get Gravity, which aims to

get better internet into the rural community, thereby enhancing online learning in remote areas – something that has been especially vital during this year's COVID lockdowns. He has done all of this while also achieving a Rugby World Cup victory, playing over 150 Super Rugby matches and nine years of Mitre 10 Cup, and winning back-to-back Top League titles in Japan with the Kobe Steelers. Andy was extremely surprised to receive the NZRPA Kirk Award, saying, "I am really proud to receive this prestigious award and want to thank my family, especially my wife Emma. I feel like I am a custodian of the game, so I believe that it is part of the role to give back to the sport. It is nice to be able to help those who are still playing and those who have retired. It is important to support each other and make the most of the special opportunities that rugby provides us. I really consider that New Zealand players are the most

fortunate in the world due to the support we get in rugby, including from the NZRPA, who do a fantastic job of helping players in such a wide variety of areas. I think, as a New Zealand rugby family, we look after each other and like to help where we can, and that is a special."

NZRPA Chairman David Kirk MBE, after whom the award is named, said, "Andy epitomises the values the award seeks to recognise. His energy, enthusiasm and care for other players and the game itself shine through in everything he achieved as a player and in the many ways he has supported and helped others since retiring from playing."

The former halfback's communication, ability to connect to people and networking are all first class. His openness and willingness to share his knowledge and experience with other players in teams such as the All Blacks Sevens and Black Ferns Sevens have seen him become an important resource for these players.

Andy has supported many NZRPA initiatives by providing valuable information to share with fellow players. As well, he has been a key driver in establishing business education programmes for players and was instrumental in facilitating these initiatives for his fellow players.

Richie McCaw, who has captained Andy in both the All Blacks and Crusaders, said of his former teammate, "One of Andy's greatest attributes is that he is genuinely interested in people and what they do. He always gives his time to help others. He has an abundance of energy and cares about his teams being successful and the people around him. Andy has a highly competitive side, which means he is always looking for ways for him and his team to push to be better. He always



ANDY ELLIS

puts the team first and has a special ability to make people work together."

During the initial COVID outbreak early in 2020, Andy was one of the key conduits for information for New Zealand players in Japan, who – like many – were experiencing much uncertainty. As such, Andy knew the importance of good communication for his fellow players. He has also been an impressive connector, encouraging players to reach out for support.

Andy's enthusiasm, energy and experience have seen him greatly contribute to the culture of every team he has been part of. The father of two is extremely competitive and has a true growth mindset, which he applies to all aspects of his life. His creativity is limitless, and he is well known for his real 'can do' and 'why not?' attitudes.

Speaking from Japan, former All Black and coach, Wayne Smith, who has worked with Andy in multiple teams including the All Blacks and Kobe Steelers, said: "Andy is a player you dream about coaching and calling a mate. He is all about team, connections with people, legacy and family. He backs this up by being the fittest in the team and having the greatest personal meaning. Andy is one of the greats."

**Award history: The NZRPA Kirk Award was established in 2005 and named after NZRPA**

founder chairman and former All Black captain David Kirk MBE. Kirk led the All Blacks to their first Rugby World Cup title in 1987.

Previous recipients include Conrad Smith, Richie McCaw and Tana Umaga, in recognition of their off-field roles in helping to establish the commercial and employment partnership between the players and the game's administrators, which has underpinned the professional rugby environment and achievements ever since.

2016 recipient - Justin Collins  
2017 recipient - DJ Forbes.  
2018 recipients - Fiao'o Fa'amausili and Keven Mealamu  
2019 recipients - Josh Blackie, Hale T Pole and Seilala Mapusua

### Award name

The NZRPA Kirk Award was named after the New Zealand Rugby Players' Association Chairman David Kirk. Former All Black, David Kirk, captained the All Blacks to their first Rugby World Cup title in 1987. A medical doctor, Rhodes Scholar and former advisor to the Prime Minister, David was awarded an MBE in 1988 for services to rugby. The former Fairfax Media CEO and Chairman of TradeMe, Kathmandu and Forsyth Barr sits on several boards, is a trustee of several charities and is the co-founder and partner of Bailador Investment Management. The author of two books, David was inducted into the World Rugby Hall of Fame in 2011. Unknown to many, David has served as the Chairman of the New Zealand Rugby Players' Association since its establishment in 1999, and this award is named in recognition of his outstanding, selfless contribution and leadership in this regard.