

# PLAYING PERSPECTIVE

## DEALING WITH INJURY NATHAN HARRIS



**ALL BLACKS HOOKER NATHAN HARRIS KNOWS FIRST-HAND WHAT IT IS LIKE TO ACHIEVE YOUR BOYHOOD DREAM OF BECOMING AN ALL BLACK – ONLY TO HAVE IT SHATTERED BY INJURY, NOT ONCE BUT TWICE.**

The 24-year-old hooker injured his ankle in Chicago in 2014, while playing in only his second test match in the black jersey.

He was on a massive high having just scored his first try. A few minutes into play after the restart, Nathan saw an opportunity and ran 20 metres to get into position to catch the ball. He received a terrible pass, which landed at his feet, so he kicked the ball and then got pulled back by an opposing player. Nathan went down like he had been shot by a sniper. He had done his ankle. Nathan shares his story:

My initial thoughts were this is incredibly sore. Well, actually the language was a bit more colourful than that, but I thought I had rolled my left ankle. The medical staff came over and did a few tests then heavily strapped it, and I tried to get up and convince myself I was okay. I was able to run, which was purely due to the adrenaline in my body.

A few minutes later I couldn't turn on my foot, so I signalled that I needed to be replaced. I came off and watched the rest of the game.

I saw an ankle surgeon from Chicago in the changing room who said I had ruptured my medial ligament in my foot. Upon hearing that I was in a bit of shock.

I got sent home two days later, which was gut-wrenching. It was then that it sunk in that I would have to have surgery. I saw the surgeon in

Tauranga and the reality hit home that it was going to be a long process.

My dad was a good source of support, and he just made me focus on the fact that I was young and would come back from it. Dad was right, but it was still a bitter pill to swallow.

A week later I had surgery. Then I had to sit on my backside for a month, which was really hard to take when I had been training constantly for the last few years. I have never had that amount of time off, so I had to learn to fill in my time. I surrounded myself with family and friends who tried to keep me upbeat and not let me dwell on it.

**"I used that time to concentrate on my off-field life. I consulted my Personal Development Manager, Judy Clement, and we made a plan." NATHAN HARRIS**

I used that time to concentrate on my off-field life. I consulted my Personal Development Manager, Judy Clement, and we made a plan. I got into a bit of property development, which I found a really interesting experience as it was the first house I had built. I also did some charity work, which gave me a good perspective on how lucky I am. There are people out there who need help so I just wanted to do my bit.

I was getting up at around 5am to stretch out in the morning before training so I could give myself the best chance I could to recover properly. At around six months post-surgery, when I was getting near to returning to play, I was doing some finer touches like fending and game-specific sprints when I noticed pain in the balls of my toes on my left foot.

I told the physios and went off for a scan, and was told my return to play would be set back another three to four months. I was just lost!

I didn't know what to do, I was so close to getting back to play and now I felt it was slipping away. I was really, really down and it took a lot more inner strength to deal with it. I had lots of thoughts going through my head. Do I retire or do I guts it out? What was going to make me happier: playing club rugby and working my way back to live my dream to the full potential or finding a new career?

The rugby won and my passion drove me to refocus on my recovery.

I missed out on the 2015 Rugby World Cup and that was a hard pill to swallow, but the boys winning it was hugely satisfying. After every match I watched, I would go for a run and it motivated me to train harder to get back there.

I would have already done a full day's training but I would still do a run after the match to help ease my frustration of not being out there, which I was still struggling with. I found the exercise was good not only for the body but also for the mind.

When I played my first Investec Super Rugby game, it is fair to say I was incredibly nervous. I got through it and then managed to work my way back into the All Blacks, which was such a satisfying feeling.

I had a head knock during the Super Rugby season, so sat out with concussion for a month, which made me think that I wasn't going to make it back into the All Blacks. But, when my health came right, I just tried to empty the tank for that last month to earn selection so I wouldn't have any regrets.

When I got called back into the squad, I was over the moon. I felt really happy for my family and friends who had supported me during some very dark days. However, there were more dark days to come.



Nathan scores a try in Chicago, 2014.

**"Internally, I went to a dark place. I had done everything by the book and then this happened. I was devastated."**  
**NATHAN HARRIS**

My next injury happened on tour in Australia, prior to the first Bledisloe game this year. We had a good week leading up to it and I had been named to start. I was in a good state physically and mentally. On the Thursday afternoon, we had a training session and we were doing some footwork into contact and I popped my ACL in my right knee. I went down again just the same, like I had been shot. I just thought "F@&k! What have I done this time?"

I was keen to get moving and I got up and walked away, but the medical team's quick assessment confirmed my worst thoughts.

I watched the end of training with all these thoughts of "Why did this happen to me?" and, internally, I went to a dark place. I had done everything by the book and then this happened. I was devastated.

So it was a plane home again and more surgery. This was a tough one to take, but I have a mate who is going through chemotherapy, and he gives me perspective. I have to be grateful and use it as motivation as there really is someone worse off than me.

I feel like I have unfinished business still trying to chase my dream, so I just simply have to focus on what I need to do to get back on the field. After surgery to reattach the ACL, I am now back on the rehab road.

Through my experiences I have learned that life can be very challenging, but just take every day as it comes and be grateful for what you have. Live in the moment and enjoy what you do.

Yes, it is hard to stay positive and you will have dark days, but surround yourself with good people. Make the most of your time off the field by setting things up for life after rugby, because you never know when that injury could be career-ending.

People don't see the hard road behind the scenes of injury, the loneliness of recovery and the commitment it takes to get back, but if you do make it back it is hugely rewarding because you appreciate it more. Those people who have helped you during your injury also come along on that journey of recovery with you and get enjoyment out of seeing you make it back on the field.

I am grateful to everyone that had an impact and helped me and I want to really thank them for their support through both the dark and the light days.

## SUPPORT

**Players should never feel embarrassed about asking for assistance or help. People to go to for help include:**

- Friends, family members or a trusted confidante
- The team's Personal Development Manager
- The coach or CEO of the provincial union
- The team doctor
- Your own personal doctor if you would prefer not to discuss the issues with your team doctor
- NZRPA via 0800 Player
- Confidential free independent professional support for contracted players via InStep on 0800 284 678, or other independent support programmes such as Lifeline 0800 543 354

**Not seeking help for mental health problems is a major issue for players and non-players alike. Early identification and intervention for mental health problems is extremely important, as this can mean less disruption to a player's life and quicker recovery.**

**Remember: a problem shared is a problem halved.**

**See page 88 for information on New Zealand Rugby's new mental well-being website called HeadFirst, which will be launched early in 2017.**



## ANNUAL PLAYER AWARDS

Every year our members honour their biggest and brightest in the annual Players' Choice Awards.  
Here are the 2016 nominees:

### 2016 PLAYERS' PLAYER OF THE YEAR: WOMEN Nominees:

Kendra Cocksedge  
Fiao'o Fa'amausili  
Aroha Savage  
Silica Winiata



### 2016 PLAYERS' PLAYER OF THE YEAR: MEN Nominees:

Beauden Barrett  
Dane Coles  
Jerome Kaino  
Brodie Retallick  
Ben Smith



### 2016 PLAYERS' PROVINCIAL UNION PLAYER OF THE YEAR Nominees:

Augustine Pulu  
Damian McKenzie  
Jordan Taufua  
Luke Whitelock



### 2016 PLAYERS' PLAYER OF THE YEAR SEVENS WOMEN Nominees:

Huriana Manuel  
Ruby Tui  
Tyla Nathan-Wong  
Portia Woodman





## 2016 PLAYERS' PLAYER OF THE YEAR SEVENS MEN

### Nominees:

Kurt Baker  
Sam Dickson  
Tim Mikkelsen  
Regan Ware



## 2016 PLAYERS' YOUNG PLAYER OF THE YEAR

### Nominees:

Jordie Barrett  
Anton Lienert-Brown  
Bryn Gatland  
Rieko Ioane



## WE CHECK OUT HOW SOME OF OUR OLYMPIC SILVER MEDALLISTS WILL BE SPENDING *Christmas Day*



### Huriana Manuel

This year will be a little different than how we usually spend our Christmas. I will be spending Christmas in Japan. I'm looking forward to experiencing my first white winter Christmas. For Christmas, I love a good roast pork or chicken meal with all the trimmings, and plenty of roasted potatoes, veggies, gravy, freshly baked bread and seafood. For dessert, I love Mum's trifles, and endless amounts of cheesecakes. Yum!

### Tyla Nathan-Wong

I will spend the day with my grandparents, parents, brother, sister, and Mum's

side of the family [aunties/uncles/cousins]. We rotate whose house it is at each year or two. This year we are having everyone over to ours. We usually eat Grandad's traditional ham plus what everyone else brings over.

### Portia Woodman

We will spend the day at our bach up north, our slice of paradise – Waimahana Bay – with Mum, Dad, brothers, my niece and nephews, and my fiancé and baby. If it's at our family farm, it's a hangi, otherwise we'll have roast pork with crackling, and roasted veggies. Then lots of desserts – pavlova, chocolate logs, trifle.

### Theresa Fitzpatrick

I will spend the day with lots and lots of family. We will start off at our family house for breakfast then head to Long Bay for the day. We usually eat glazed ham, barbeque, my uncle and auntie's famous fried rice and sweet and sour pork, plus more traditional Samoan cuisine – lots of food!

### Niall Williams

I'll spend the day in Auckland with my family. With Mum and my in-laws and we'll definitely Skype my family over in Australia. We usually eat lots of different meats, and my favourite is the seafood and desserts.

### Ruby Tui

I'm going to be spending the day at my mum's in Nelson with my partner Taryn, her parents and also my mum and her partner. I was in Wellington last year with my dad. I look forward to chocolate almonds and sparkling grape juice – does that count as a meal?

### Sarah Goss

I will spend the day at my parent's farm with my fiancé, my mum, dad, brother and sister. We usually have breakfast together, so we have waffles, bacon, eggs, hash browns, tomatoes, mushrooms... a full on cooked meal.

# BUILDING RESILIENCE



Instagram

Hugh van Cuylenburg [L] and Jonathan Thurston [R]

**FORMER CRICKETER AND TEACHER HUGH VAN CUYLENBURG HAS DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO HELPING ATHLETES, EMPLOYEES AND SCHOOL CHILDREN LEARN THREE SIMPLE CONCEPTS TO ASSIST THEM TO COPE WITH THE PRESSURES** of modern life, help avoid mental illness and prevent suicide. He calls it The Resilience Project.

Hugh believes mental health issues are an epidemic, which does not spare elite sportspeople. He has worked with some of the biggest names across multiple sporting codes including Jonathan Thurston, Billy Slater, Alex McKinnon and Mitchell Pearce.

Hugh has based his programme on practising gratitude, empathy and mindfulness every day. He has taken Australia by storm and now New Zealanders are jumping on board. Hugh recently addressed the North Harbour and Counties Manukau

Mitre 10 Cup teams.

The crusade to assist people with their mental well-being stemmed from Hugh's sister's personal struggle with anorexia, which eventually saw the family advised to prepare for her death. Hugh felt quite helpless with his sister, but his mind set and the direction of his life were changed during a cricket trip to India in 2008 and a three-month stint at a school in the Himalayan village of Thiksey. There he met an eight year-old boy call Stunzin Sherap.

Stunzin had no family, no running water, no electricity, lived under a cardboard box and had shoes with the toes cut out as his feet were too big to fit them anymore, but he was the happiest and most grateful child Hugh had ever met.

"He was so grateful for

**The Resilience Project works with three strategies: practising gratitude, empathy and mindfulness every day.**

absolutely everything, despite having nothing he was the happiest person I had ever encountered. I thought this kid has got to be onto something and I realised it was his mind set about thinking how lucky he was to have opportunities to go to school, to help people and not focus on the bad things."

Since then Hugh has developed a programme focusing on these fundamentals in order to shift people's mind sets to help enhance their mental well-being. He states that positive emotion builds cognitive capacity.

Hugh complements the programme with a well-being journal he designed, in which people can complete 21 days of simple wellness tasks that take less than 10 minutes a day. The A5 size workbook is 21 days long because research shows that it takes 21 days to create change in your mental health and well-being. The tasks are as simple as writing down three things that went well for you today and what you are most looking forward to tomorrow. Hugh acknowledges that it is simple but that it works because working on it helps you to start to rewire the brain.

According to Hugh, we are seven times more likely to notice a negative than a positive, but after 21 days of working on the journal you are three times more likely to notice a positive than a negative.

Part of Hugh's programme is gratitude, which he says is crucial for mental well-being. When an athlete is faced with injury instead of feeling devastated by the lost opportunities, he encourages them to focus on what they have. For example, when league legend Billy Slater had a shoulder injury and missed out on the State of Origin, the media asked him if he was gutted. His response included that he gets paid to play the sport he loves and has a wonderful family. Slater opted to focus on what he had instead of what he was missing out on. He now spends some of his time doing random acts of kindness, which contribute to another one of Hugh's tips: empathy.

"When we do things to help people, our brains release oxytocin, which makes us feel good. Oxytocin leads to increased self-esteem and confidence, increased energy and increased levels of happiness and positivity.

"We also receive more information in a week than we use to in a year which is why mindfulness has become so important.

"I know athletes who are more worried about what the media are going to say when they make a mistake on the field instead of being present in the game. So we try to encourage them to enjoy the occasion, focus on living in the moment and not worry about



Hugh van Cuylenburg with the North Harbour and Counties Manukau Mitre 10 Cup teams.





"When we do things to help people, our brains release oxytocin, which makes us feel good. Oxytocin leads to increased self-esteem and confidence, increased energy and increased levels of happiness and positivity." **HUGH VAN CUYLENBURG**

anything else."

Hugh acknowledges that social media makes criticism harder to avoid so we have to be mentally healthy to deal with it. He says, "Mindfulness is not spiritual or philosophical. It is just about spending 10 minutes a day shutting off everything else and giving your brain a bit of a rest from what is going on around you."

He suggests some basic apps, which make it simple to plug in your earphones and let someone else talk you through it. These are Smiling Minds, Buddhify and Headspace.

He also says that music and exercise can assist with putting you in a better frame of mind. "It takes seven seconds of your favourite song to feel happier and 30 seconds of exercise to change your mood."

Many people use an 'if and then' model of happiness. 'If I win this game, I will feel happy,' or 'If I get picked for this team, then I will feel

happy.' 'If I win Lotto then I will be happy.' Hugh believes this is a really dangerous model to live by. The reality is those feelings don't last forever, which is why we need to build our resilience. With more resilience, when we have major life-changing events we have the ability to get back to where we were mentally prior to the event. The speed with which we can return to our previous state has a lot to do with our resilience, but clearly this will differ with the impact of the event.

Having presented to over 150,000 people already, Hugh has seen first-hand the difference that adopting these strategies can make. He has also started a wave of social media popularity with his 'Dis' hashtag.

"Stunzin couldn't pronounce the word 'this' properly, so he would say 'dis' when he wanted me to look at something that he thought was amazing. So we encourage people to use 'dis' when referring to things that they are grateful for or 'dis moment' when special things happen. It just makes people stop and appreciate what they have, which can only be good for mental well-being.

**For more information on The Resilience Project visit:**  
**Facebook:** Resilience  
**Twitter:** @Resiliency  
**Instagram:** @theresilienceproject

**NZ RUGBY** are developing a mental well-being website called **HeadFirst**. The site will provide information and awareness around mental fitness, strategies to help you stay mentally healthy, as well as key information on the signs and symptoms of a range of well-being issues such as depression, anxiety and stress. The site will also provide information on how to look after mates who might be struggling and where and how to seek help. There will be video stories from a number of players – both past and present – who will share their journey through the ups and downs of life. These stories help highlight that we all have different experiences and challenges when it comes to our mental health and well-being, and that getting support can have a positive impact on the way you feel and act. HeadFirst ([www.headfirst.co.nz](http://www.headfirst.co.nz)) will be launched early in 2017 and will be a public website available to all members of the wider rugby community and beyond.

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PHOTOS

Smile!

Counties Manukau Steelers trades day.



Counties Manukau learn about building apprenticeships from BCITO.



Hawke's Bay hitting the building workshop.

Fijian HPU financial literacy workshop.



Fijian HPU community work day.



Continued over »



# PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PHOTOS



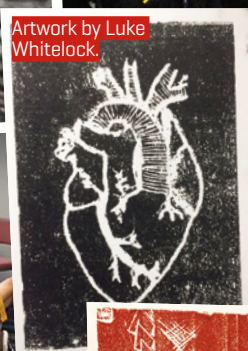
Bay of Plenty First Aid course.



Paul Ifill session with Wellington.



Bay of Plenty First Aid course.



Artwork by Luke Whitelock.

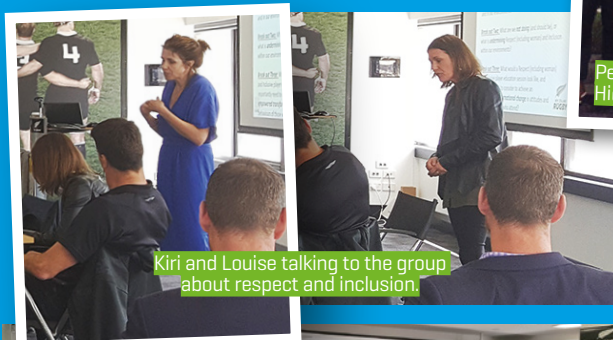


Artwork by Inga Finau.



Canterbury at the Christchurch Art Gallery.

# PDM CONFERENCE PHOTOS



Kiri and Louise talking to the group about respect and inclusion.



Personal Development Managers farewell Highlanders PDM Peter Sinclair.



Dr Paul Woods with 'What's Your Prison'



Aiden Vince from ASB talks about player savings schemes.



# NEW PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER FOR THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

**A**AYDEN CLARKE HAS BEEN APPOINTED THE PACIFIC ISLAND PLAYERS ASSOCIATION (PIPA) PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER (PDM). THE THIRTY-FOUR-YEAR-OLD'S INITIAL FOCUS WILL BE ON ESTABLISHING A PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR SAMOAN AND TONGAN PLAYERS, WHILE SUPPORTING GAYLENE FINEKASO, THE FIJIAN PDM.

Aayden has a strong background in the tertiary education industry, having worked for the Eastern Institute of Technology as the manager of their trades department. Aayden also worked as the Hawke's Bay Rugby Personal Development Manager for two years prior to moving to Christchurch, where he was employed by Ngai Tahu as a project manager.

Prior to his shift south, he had travelled around New Zealand working with rugby players on entrepreneurship and small business start-ups.

Aayden understands the challenges players face first-hand having been a professional player starting at first five-eighth with Hawke's Bay, before heading offshore to Prato in Italy and Kintetsu in Japan, where he played two years for each team.

Aayden said, "What attracted me to this role are the opportunities to establish a meaningful programme for players who so desperately deserve and need it. For our Pacific Island players it is about setting up a worldwide strategy that will be effective given the global scale of where our players are based."

He is interested in languages and

can speak conversational Japanese and Italian and is now studying level five Te Reo Maori, and is looking forward to learning more Samoan, Tongan and Fijian. In his spare time Aayden likes to hang out with his wife and three children.

The Pacific Island Players Personal Development Programme aims to provide player education to support ongoing sustainable futures for Pacific Island rugby players, and deliver benefits to their countries. It is the culmination of support from World Rugby and New Zealand Rugby Players Association.

**Contact Aayden Clarke:**

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**Follow PIPA on Twitter:**

@PacificIslandPA

www.pacificislandpa.com



PIPA Personal Development Manager Aayden Clarke in Samoa.

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Liam Squire with Taine Kinzett and Charlie Teddy.

**Winner!**

**LIAM** caught these three pigs in Nelson on his break before the end-of-year tour. He caught a 50kg (112lb) boar, a 40kg (90lb) boar and a 45kg (100lb) sow this day. He wants to say a massive thanks to Dean Kinzett and Ted 'The Mad Butcher' for taking him out. His dogs Pip, Pride and Fly loved it!

Business partners



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