

RUGBY

A NEW ZEALAND HISTORY

Ron Palenski



“For anyone who is interested in looking beyond the names, the dates, the half-truths and the mythologies and entering the realm of rugby’s place in our history, this is a must read.”
– Chris Laidlaw

Rugby is New Zealand’s national sport. From the grand tour by the 1888 Natives to the upcoming 2015 World Cup, from games in the North African desert in World War II to matches behind barbed wire during the 1981 Springbok tour, from grassroots club rugby to heaving crowds outside Eden Park, Lancaster Park, Athletic Park or Carisbrook, New Zealanders have made rugby their game.

In this book, historian and former journalist Ron Palenski tells the full story of rugby in New Zealand for the first time. It is a story of how the game travelled from England and settled in the colony, how Māori and later Pacific players made rugby their own, how battles over amateurism and apartheid threatened the sport, how national teams, provinces and local clubs shaped it. But above all it is a story of wing forwards and fullbacks, of Don Clarke and Jonah Lomu, of the Log of Wood and Charlie Saxton’s ABC, of supporters in the grandstand and crackling radios at 2 a.m.



Ron Palenski is an author and historian and among the most recognised authorities on the history of sport, and especially rugby, in New Zealand. He has written numerous books, among them an academic study, *The Making of New Zealanders*, that placed rugby firmly as a marker in national identity.

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The Post and Telegraph Department regularly fielded rugby teams. This one captured by photographer Frederick James Halse is typical of the type when players provided their own gear. The team was not identified, but it is most likely to be in the Wellington area. ½-010310-G, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY

3 Thinking nationally – sometimes

*An English sport – though fair Zealandia boasts
Her crowning triumphs; for can there be found
A township named within her rugged coasts
Wherein this much-loved game doth not abound?*¹

New Zealand changed rapidly in the 1870s: the wires of the telegraph spread to capture the whole country in their web and steam engines chugged away doing their best to follow suit, though hampered by terrain in the North Island. More people travelled and learnt what the rest were doing, or not doing, more thoroughly than was possible when communities were isolated and accessible mainly by sea, by horse or on foot. And although the 1870s were a period of great immigration, the percentage of the population that was native-born was also on the rise: young men grew up knowing no other country.

It was a time of thinking nationally. Several companies which had a lasting effect on New Zealand were founded during the decade, among them the Union Steam Ship Company, and rugby took its first baby steps toward a national outlook to balance the parochial view that had hitherto ruled. The first provincial rugby unions were formed within a decade of the game taking root. But even before the first of them, Canterbury, was established, it had already played interprovincial rugby. The team went by the name of Christchurch Clubs

and in 1877 met Dunedin Clubs for the first time in Cranmer Square in Christchurch. The Dunedin men wore red and black jerseys, so the Christchurch boys had to wear blue and white. Such must have been the shock at playing against their own colours, Christchurch lost by two tries to none.² (Blue and white were the colours of Christ's College.)

Clubs from South Canterbury, Christchurch, Temuka and Ashburton met in 1879 at the Grosvenor Hotel in Timaru to form their union. Delegates toyed with the idea of rising above their provincial status and calling their new organisation the New Zealand Rugby Union and 'to invite the other Clubs of the colony to join'. But pragmatism replaced enthusiasm. Timaru (or its environs) can lay reasonable claim to much in New Zealand sport: athlete Jack Lovelock, racehorse Phar Lap, boxer Bob Fitzsimmons. . . . It was where the Canterbury Rugby Union was formed and also was the site of the first amateur athletics club in New Zealand; it was at its instigation that the New Zealand Amateur Athletic Association took shape.

The administrative pioneers in the Grosvenor Hotel saw practical difficulties in the way of

forming a New Zealand union. As the *Timaru Herald* reported:

... the great disadvantage attendant on the working of an Association of the separate Clubs of the whole Colony being pointed out, it was resolved to form, in the first instance, a Canterbury Union, with which the other provinces might be conjoined to form a Union for the colony. It was shown that each Club could not send delegates to any annual meeting of the Union, if the Union embraced the Clubs of the whole colony directly, whilst a sub-association in each province could be attended and from the club delegates a certain number could be elected to represent the province at a meeting of the New Zealand Union, should one be afterwards formed.³

And that was pretty much how it turned out: a New Zealand union at the apex of the triangle, provincial unions in the middle and clubs at the base.

The founding secretary, Monty Lewin, was told to find out what other provinces thought. His enquiries appear to have amounted to very little because a New Zealand union was not formed until thirteen years later. Lewin was a man who liked to make things happen. He was born at Chittoor in what was known as the Madras presidency in imperial India, the son of an English member of the Indian civil service and grandson of a High Court judge in India. He was sent home to be educated and spent a year at Caius College, Cambridge, before making his way to the farthest-flung part of Victoria's empire.⁴ He became a member of the Christchurch Football Club and, concerned about the prevalence of the Australian game in the city, tried in 1873 to persuade the club to switch to rugby rules. He failed then, but succeeded three years later. According to one of the Canterbury union's historians, Larry Saunders, the union was formed to keep Australian rules



The Canterbury pioneer, Monty Lewin.

at bay.⁵ A Victorian team apparently planned a visit to Christchurch and the Christchurch club, with Lewin to the fore, thought such a visit might deal a death blow to rugby unless a union was formed. It appears the foundation meeting was held in Timaru because it was convenient to do so the night of the annual match between South and North Canterbury ('North' then including Christchurch).

Three weeks after the Canterbury union was formed, its players were joined in Christchurch by teams representing the combined clubs of Dunedin and Wellington for a three-way tournament. During the partying that followed – with women wearing the colours of the visitors, it was disclosed – the blokes must have talked about the Canterbury union because just over a month later, the Wellington and Athletic clubs followed suit. As in Christchurch, the players led the charge. The captain of the team in Christchurch, 27-year-old Tom Cowie, who worked for the

government audit department, presided over a meeting in Wellington in the Star Hotel at which the decision was made to form a union. Two of the first committee were noted cricketers as well as footballers, Charles Knapp, who was then 33, and a lawyer who had played both sports for Canterbury (or what became Canterbury), Frank Ollivier, who was 34. Knapp came from an English clerical family and worked in insurance until he moved to the Public Works Department in 1881.

Two other men involved with Wellington at the time were influential in involving New Zealand in international rugby. One was 22-year-old Arthur Bate, who was establishing himself as a sharebroker and was a busy man about town as secretary of several sports organisations, including the Wellington Football Club. He became the founding secretary of the Wellington union. Bate's influence was in organisation. The influence of the other, Joseph Astbury Warbrick, was in playing and in pushing Māori to the forefront of what became the national game. At the time of the formation of the Wellington union, Joe Warbrick was still just seventeen but had already played for both Auckland and Wellington. The second-born son of an English-born trader in Bay of Plenty, Abraham Warbrick, and his first wife, Ruhia Ngākarauna, of Ngāti Rangitihi, Warbrick was sent to school at St Stephen's in Parnell, Auckland and thereafter seemed to live a peripatetic life as a footballer and farmer, popping up in rugby teams in Tauranga and Napier as well as Wellington and Auckland.

He was not the first Māori footballer at first-class, that is, provincial, level, but he was undoubtedly among the best of the nineteenth century alongside the two Taiaroa brothers, Jack and Dick, and their cousin, Tom Ellison. Each in their own way had an influence beyond playing and, given this was at a time when the Māori race was thought to be dying out, a disproportionate influence on the way rugby in New Zealand developed and progressed.



The brothers Taiaroa, Jack and Dick.
TOITŪ OTAGO SETTLERS' MUSEUM

Bate did most to provide the stage on which Warbrick and others could perform. Within two years of the formation of the Wellington union, he talked about a combined New Zealand team – that is, a first All Black team if not in name – and bringing the other provinces into a New Zealand union. He wanted a New Zealand team, made up of players from the three provincial unions then in existence, Canterbury, Wellington and Otago, plus Auckland, to be chosen and dispatched to Sydney to play there, Newcastle and Bathurst. Bate's brainwave came in July 1881 and that was too late in the season for the people in Dunedin, who thought not enough time was left to make arrangements.

Bate tried again the following year, in 1882, but Otago came up with a different excuse for not



The 1882 New South Wales team, the first from overseas to play in New Zealand.
The captain, Ted Raper, is second from the right in the front row.

wanting anything to do with it. The president of the Southern (NSW) union, John Calvert, had been in Dunedin and urged the locals to support sending a New Zealand team to Sydney. (Calvert, who was president from the union's formation in 1874 until 1915, was another early rugby man characterised as a muscular Christian. The son of the professor of divinity at Cambridge, he was a graduate of Oxford.) At the Otago union's annual meeting in May, at which Calvert's urgings were reported, one of the delegates said that since the Sydney union was the older of the two, it should travel first. And there the matter lay until the irrepressible Bate exchanged letters with William ('Monty') Arnold, who with brother Richard had founded the Wallaroos club in Sydney and had been prominent in the Southern union. The Arnolds, relatives of Thomas Arnold of Rugby,

had helped organise the first interstate match with Queensland in August 1882, and they were keen on extending rugby's influence. (Another of the Arnolds, Tom – 'Thomas the Younger' – had spent some time in New Zealand and may not have been keen on extending rugby to Otago. He wrote to his mother: 'There is nothing either in the country or in the colonists which would make me wish for one moment to stop at Otago.'⁶ To be fair, he wrote that in April 1848, not even a month after the first settlers arrived.)

Since Bate could not organise a team to go to Sydney, he and Arnold fell back on an alternative plan to get a New South Wales team to New Zealand, and in September 1882 it happened: the first rugby contest between New Zealand and one of the Australian colonies. Although the provinces had not been keen to support a visit to Sydney,

When mind and muscle met

After the first game in New Zealand by an overseas team, New South Wales against Auckland in 1882, the mayor of Auckland, James McCosh Clark, had to propose the toast to the visitors at a dinner in the Star Hotel. He did so with some reluctance, he told players from both sides and about forty others, because he did not understand the game of football sufficiently well to talk about it.¹

The Ayrshire-born mayor would have been in good company. Few others throughout New Zealand, including players, could have honestly admitted to a thorough understanding of the game because even then, ten or twelve years after rugby was first played, different rules applied in different areas. Sometimes even the players would not have known what game they were playing; there were cases of Rugby (after the school) rules one half and Association (for Football Association) rules the other.

In these rudimentary playing days, the handling version of football was a heaving mass of forwards with only occasional attempts to run the ball at or past the opposition. The scrummage, or scrummage as it was still sometimes called, was in effect the equivalent of today's rolling maul, but with most players involved. The end in rugby was the same as it has always been, to somehow get the ball over the opponents' goal-line, but the means frequently were different and confusing.

Progression was often through the forwards taking the ball upfield at their toes – the old and lost art of dribbling. An account of a move in the first match against a British side in New Zealand described the ideal: 'The . . . forwards now buckled down to their work in real earnest and gradually,

inch by inch, they pushed their stalwart opponents before them, amid the cheers of the onlookers, [Bob] Martin appearing in the van with a nice dribble after the scrum broke up.'²

Paintings of games in the nineteenth century that portray movement and space are more a reflection of the artists' wishful thinking or of artistic licence than they are a true representation of the game. The reality was more like this description of play in the first interprovincial game, Auckland Clubs against Dunedin Clubs, in 1875: '[James] Cleverdon next got the ball pretty well clear of the scrimmage and sent it skying into the air; but on it reaching terra firma it was at once surrounded by about thirty of the players and a most exciting scrimmage took place.'³

Sometimes, players did not even know which rules would be applied until shortly before they played. In Wellington in 1875, one club was convinced rugby rules were the way of the footballing future, but another wanted to switch to Victorian rules. They agreed on rugby a few days before a game in Nelson and joined forces to put a combined Wellington team on the field for the first time. This was the team portrayed in an early and well-preserved photo and featured some of the notable men of early New Zealand football. Among them were George Campbell, who turned down a chance to be in the first national team, and Peter Webb, who replaced him; Charles Wray Palliser, who was briefly high commissioner in London; and three Bishop brothers who later played prominent roles.

Footballing confusion was compounded by different areas having different scoring values. In some games, points were awarded to the



This was captioned 'An upcountry football match' when it was published in the *New Zealand Graphic* in 1892. Readers could have been forgiven for thinking it must have been a game out in the North or South Island backblocks. But in fact it was a game in England, sketched by William Barnes Wollen. *NZ GRAPHIC*, 17 SEPTEMBER 1892

attacking team for force-downs, given when the defending team touched down in goal. In the Otago–Auckland game of 1875, however, a force-down early in the game was disputed. 'After some minutes' spirited play,' a report went, 'Auckland obtained a force down; but the captains not having decided whether to score for this, the points were left in dispute.'⁴ The captains must have agreed at some stage because the half a point for that first force-down was Auckland's complete tally.

By 1888, general New Zealand practice was one point for a try, two points for a conversion, three points for a dropped goal and three points for a goal from a mark. A converted try was referred

to as a goal. In Sydney, however, a try was worth three points and a dropped goal worth four. In Queensland, the try was worth two points and the conversion three. Then there was the field goal, an impromptu kick over the crossbar that rugby dropped in 1905. This was a description of one: 'Simpson . . . took a speculating kick at the ball as it was bounding along and, greatly to the astonishment of everyone, it went flying over the bar between the posts.'⁵ (The field goal as it used to be should not be confused with a dropped goal, which is still referred to in Australia as a field goal.)

Tom Ellison, the Poneke and Wellington forward who was among the foremost of rugby thinkers, reckoned the critical time for the

development of the game in New Zealand came with the visit of the first British team. New Zealanders until then believed forwards in front of the ball when it had been heeled from a scrum were offside and therefore there was a general desire to keep the ball in front of all players. But the British showed that heeling out was legitimate and back play thus developed. Forwards, it became clear, in front of the ball were not offside provided they made no attempt to play the ball when it was behind them.⁶ The base of the scrum thus became a launch pad for backs to attack and this in turn led people such as Ellison to come up with different back formations, and these evolved into what is familiar today.

At the risk of making a simple game complicated, the British lesson did not mean New Zealand backs had not passed the ball before – it meant New Zealanders could be more systematic with their back play. The Natives began their tour just a couple of months after some of the players had played against the British team; it was this period, 1888–89, in which the birth of the modern New Zealand game occurred.

The British team's first match provided lessons for New Zealanders, even though it was conceded the British players were not wholly representative of the best in the game. This passage from a report of the first match shows what an eye-opener the British play was:

Very shortly . . . it was beyond doubt that the Englishmen must win, their passing, running and dodging being alike a treat to witness and of such a calibre as we have not hitherto been accustomed to. It was not only with their hands that they passed, for their feet were occasionally employed for the same end; and it was the exception rather than the rule for a back to fail to take the ball when passed

to him. The style of play indeed resembled a set of machinery pieced together, every man apparently knowing when the ball was to be passed to him and from what direction it would come – whether thrown back, horizontally, or over the shoulder.⁷

The reference to a set of machinery is interesting because it was for this type of organised, systematic play that the Natives and the 1905–06 New Zealand team came to be known.

Ellison's view that heeling out was not practised before 1888 because of a fear of being offside did not find agreement elsewhere. Irwin Hunter, an early Otago player and later writer about the game, said the ball was heeled back from an early stage. But Hunter felt that it wasn't quite in the spirit of the game unless the scrum was pressing hard on the opponents' line because 'it does away with the hard fighting and good footwork which makes forward play interesting'. Hunter was a practitioner as well as a theorist: 'I was playing football in Dunedin in 1884. Heeling out was quite legitimate then, and was often resorted to.'⁸

Andy Spence, a journalist in Dunedin and Wellington in the early years of the twentieth century, made a name for himself by writing columns about war and rugby. When the Anglo-Welsh team toured New Zealand in 1908, Spence wrote a poem for a book about the tour by a colleague, Robert Barr. Spence's verse looked back over the game's history and seemed to attribute enlightenment to the tour of 1888:

Till '88 we played a kind
Of ancient game of scrum and maul,
Where muscle triumphed over mind.
And heavy feet chased tortured ball –
Indeed, a very stupid game
Till '88 when Stoddart came.⁹



9 The shadow of the wing forward

*I'm sure I fairly dealt with you,
With me then fairly deal;
I played the game, just do the same,
Don't raise a bally squeal!*

In the early evening of Wednesday, 31 May 1930, a Cheshire insurance company manager, James Baxter, walked into a dinner at the Grand Hotel in Wanganui. He was manager of the British rugby team that had just begun its 21-match tour of New Zealand with a 19–3 win against the local side at Cook's Gardens. The words he spoke in his first formal speech in New Zealand echoed down the years and sometimes he has been blamed for the death of the wing forward, that distinctive if controversial position that was seen as central to the All Blacks' success in the first third of the twentieth century.

This was the first visit by a British team since 1908, and it is possible that it might have slipped some minds in the intervening years that rugby as it was played in New Zealand was not exactly as it was played in England. The wing forward was one of the main differences, but far from the only one. The position was adapted from what the Natives saw in northern England in 1888 and developed

primarily by Tom Ellison. The wing forward was like a second halfback because, so the theory went, the ball went into and out of the New Zealand two-three-two scrum so quickly that two halfbacks were needed – one to put the ball in and the other to take it from the back of the scrum and give it to the backs. The second halfback, the wing forward, was also handily placed to prevent opponents from reaching the opposing halfback. Some exponents of the role, such as the 1905 pair of David Gallaher and George Gillett and the 1924 captain Cliff Porter, were expert at staying on the correct side of the fine line between being on or offside. Less polished or less scrupulous practitioners were not. New Zealand referees wanted rid of it. But as long as the unique New Zealand two-three-two scrum existed, so too did the wing forward. By the time of the 1930 tour, the New Zealand scrum's drawbacks had been exposed, especially in South Africa, and change was in the air. The British manager, Baxter, changed nothing, but he unwittingly created a

In isolated splendour, as such a great player often was, George Nepia kicks a restart when playing for New Zealand Māori against Great Britain in Wellington in 1930. The Māori, like the All Blacks, had to change to white jerseys to avoid a clash with Britain's dark blue.

national mood that was a catalyst for change.

He watched his team beat Wanganui and was appalled by what he saw of the play of Wanganui's wing forward, Maurice Waldin. Baxter was not the type of manager who saw his job only as counting heads to ensure all his players were on the bus or picking up wet jerseys from a dressing room floor before heading for the nearest bar. He was a man of experience and influence in rugby and the epitome of the middle-class self-made man.² He played three tests for England and 27 times for his county, Cheshire, and, unusually for a rugby player, had a yachting silver medal from the Olympic Games in 1908. He served throughout

the First World War as a lieutenant-commander in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and when rugby resumed he pursued refereeing and had control of six test matches. He became an England selector and president of the Rugby Football Union in the 1926–27 season. He was also manager of a British side that toured Argentina in 1927, a team that retrospectively has been rebranded as one in the series of 'British and Irish Lions' tours. Baxter would have seen the All Blacks in Britain in 1924–25 and may have had other gaps in his New Zealand knowledge filled during the Argentine tour by one of the halfbacks, Jules Malfroy, a Hokitika-born lawyer who had played

British players, later to be known as Lions, assemble at Waterloo Station in London at the start of their 1930 tour of New Zealand.





Rugby a man's game? Not for Agnes, who according to this 1930s advertisement likes to follow it on the radio.

rugby for Wellington before gaining a scholarship to Cambridge.

Baxter was very well aware of New Zealand's continuing grievance that it had no say in the international running of the game or in the framing of its laws. Rugby had slowly changed and the RFU had ceded its self-appointed role as arbiter of the laws to the International Rugby Board. But none of the outriders, 'the colonies' as they were still sometimes known, was allowed to exercise any influence. Baxter had this in mind when he rose at the dinner to respond to a toast to his team:

I watched this game today very carefully. I know that some gentlemen sitting at this table [he meant NZRFU officials] are hoping for certain events to come to a head and one of the best means of arriving at an understanding is to have one universal law and to play exactly the same game to the best of our ability. I am not going to criticise tonight but there is one thing I dislike and that is your wing forward play. I am sure that the gentleman who had the misfortune to play

there, if he looked into his own heart, didn't like it either. I won't say he is on the borderline; he is over it, and must be discouraged. He causes irritation to both sets of forwards. I am not speaking about the man who played there today, but speaking of a man playing in that position. It is contrary to the spirit of rugby football.³

Baxter's comments created an immediate flurry of reactions, some supportive, some opposed, and they continued after the following game, against Taranaki, when he called the wing forward a cheat. There seemed more emotion than logic in Baxter's argument. It cannot be a position, per



This advertisement linking the 1905 captain, Dave Gallaher, with the promotion of Player's cigarettes appeared in several British newspapers in the 1930s. It is assumed the advertisers did not have the permission of either Gallaher's widow, Nellie, or the New Zealand union (and they probably were not aware of it). Gallaher and his vice-captain, Billy Stead, warned about the potential harmful effects of smoking cigarettes in their 1906 book on the tour, *The Complete Rugby Footballer*.



Geoff Alley, former All Black and future national librarian, wrote this book about the British team's tour in 1930.

se, that cheats but a player in that position at any particular time. A 1928 All Black, Geoff Alley, made this point in his book about the 1930 tour. Baxter's strictures, he wrote, could be reduced to a simple form such as:

'The wing forward today appeared to be offside and generally a nuisance.' Therefore all wing forwards have been, are and will be offside and general nuisances. 'This is a pig and it is brown – therefore all pigs are brown.' Of course one may convince oneself by this kind of reasoning but something a little less ambitious is generally looked for in analysing statements

made in public by men other than politicians.⁴

The most biting response to Baxter came later in the tour, at the dinner after the third test in Auckland. The manager of the All Blacks, Ted McKenzie, who was both chairman of the national selectors and a member of the NZRFU management committee, was noted, as were his illustrious brothers, for not holding back on expressing an opinion. Speeches at test dinners and after-match functions were normally as bland as thanking captains and referees and, at after-matches, the ladies for bringing a plate. But not on this occasion. McKenzie was forthright and blunt. 'The wing forward has been described as the wolf of the game,' he said. 'We appreciate this criticism, coming as it does from a man so high in the rugby world in England.' But he had seen the majority of the British team's games and had some criticisms of his own:

There have been points in the British play to which strong exception can be taken. I have noticed frequently cases of obstruction and what we in New Zealand know as shepherding. . . . I must say that some of the instances of obstruction appeared to have been deliberately studied. Shepherding a player with the ball so that he cannot be tackled has also been common. Frequently members of opposing teams have been held by their jerseys after they have got rid of the ball. . . . I will not pretend that our own players are perfect . . . I will say that the British team is a fine enough side to win matches without resorting to obstruction and similar tactics which may or may not be intentional.⁵

McKenzie's unexpected tirade was greeted, apparently, with astonishment, and at one point the captain of the British test team, Carl Aarvold, had a muttered conversation with a fellow lawyer, the president of the NZRFU, Jim Prendeville. They were, like McKenzie, at the top table. McKenzie looked along at them and said: 'I am speaking



Part of the crowd of about 40,000 at Eden Park in Auckland for the third test against Great Britain in 1930. The All Blacks' 15–10 win put them two–one up in the four match series. They also went on to win the fourth test in Wellington. PH70/3.25, AUCKLAND WAR MEMORIAL MUSEUM

at present, Mr Aarvold, not you.' It's unlikely that Aarvold, who became a senior Old Bailey judge and was knighted, was spoken to in such a way very often. Stan Dean, the chairman of the NZRFU and chairman of the dinner, quickly restored proceedings to the more orthodox when he invited the New Zealand captain, Cliff Porter, to speak and he began in predictable fashion: 'It was a great pleasure to me to lead the New Zealand side against Britain.'

The McKenzie incident, as it became known, was relevant because in the opinion of journalist

Gordon McLean (who was at the dinner and whose brother Hugh was a member of the New Zealand team), McKenzie would never have spoken as he did had Baxter held his tongue at the beginning of the tour. McLean said Baxter's comments on the wing forward were ill-timed, but to his credit, he realised he was on delicate ground and thereafter kept to non-controversial topics. The damage had already been done, however. Baxter seemed as upset by McKenzie's comments as the reverse and, according to McLean, vowed not to speak again and not allow the fourth test to proceed

Preparing 'the bible' in prison

The *Rugby Almanack* is to New Zealand rugby what *Wisden* is to world cricket. That is not overstating the value of either in recording the statistics of their sports. For a record of who did what and when in New Zealand rugby, the *Almanack* is as necessary to the game as a pair of goalposts and a ball.

Modern methods of data assembly and dissemination such as websites and blogs, even so-called official ones, do not remotely approach the breadth of material available in the *Almanack*. A list of first-class games in New Zealand on the web? Forget it. Obituaries of former players? Rarely. Even details available on the web of All Blacks are unreliable.

The *Rugby Almanack of New Zealand*, to give it its full title until 1995, first appeared in 1935, just a Johnny come lately when compared with the first edition of *Wisden Cricketer's Almanack* in 1864 (which changed the apostrophe to the collective after the 's' for the 1869 edition).

But the *Almanack* can boast something *Wisden* cannot: one edition was worked on while its editor was in jail.

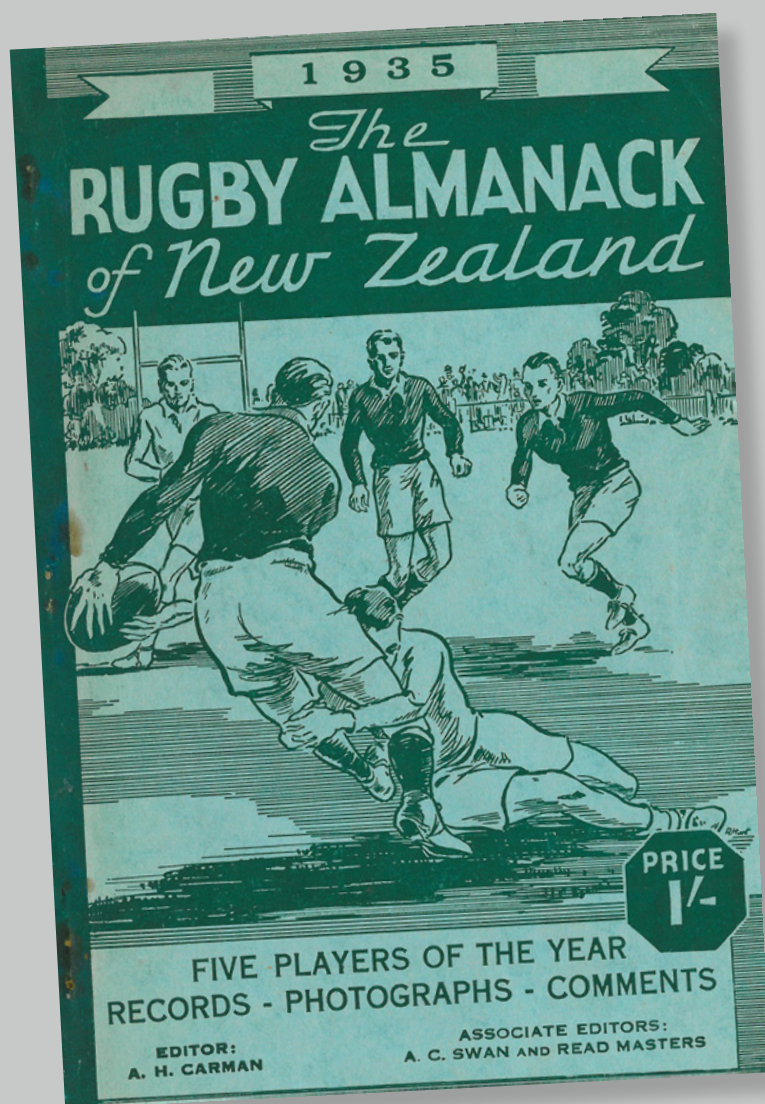
A need to record the game's statistics has always been recognised. Sam Sleight, who underwrote and managed the first New Zealand team in 1884, recorded the team's deeds in the *New Zealand Rugby Football Annual 1885*, which he published himself. The next attempt at a national annual came in 1920 when the treasurer of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union, Tom ('Ponty') Jones, embarked on the task. He produced seven until 1932 when he moved from Wellington to Auckland and became a columnist on the *Auckland Star* as 'Ponty'.

Arthur Herbert Carman, a young man who worked for the Government Audit Department

(and whose boss was George Campbell, who turned down a chance to be an All Black), saw the value of Jones's *Annuals* and thought one day he would pick up the publishing torch.¹ In the meantime, he paid his own way as a journalist to follow the 1924–25 All Blacks in Britain, France and Canada. His younger brother, Walter, did the same with the Māori tour of France, Britain and Canada in 1926–27.

Carman knew he could not do it on his own and he turned first to a friend and a referee, Arthur Swan, who had a similar liking for keeping a record of the game. Carman and Swan, who moved from Gisborne to Wellington in 1935, hit it off so well that they ended up in a bookselling business together. (Swan became the only official historian the New Zealand Rugby Football Union appointed and on its behalf he produced several volumes of official records.) They were not business partners in the normal sense; Carman owned the shop and Swan spent his days there, selling newspapers, books and smokes while at the same time tending to rugby matters.

As the pair worked on the first *Almanack* over the 1934–35 summer, Carman thought the name of a well-known player might help the new publication's credibility (and sales). He wrote to the Canterbury lock, Read Masters, whom he knew from 1924 and whose diary of the Invincibles' tour had been published. 'I was wondering if you would care to have your name associated as an associate editor,' Carman wrote. 'We have most of the record stuff ready and as soon as proofs are out you could have them for comment . . . I want immediately to know your answer. You would have a share in profits, if any.'²



The first *Almanack*, edited by Arthur Carman with assistance from Arthur Swan and Read Masters.

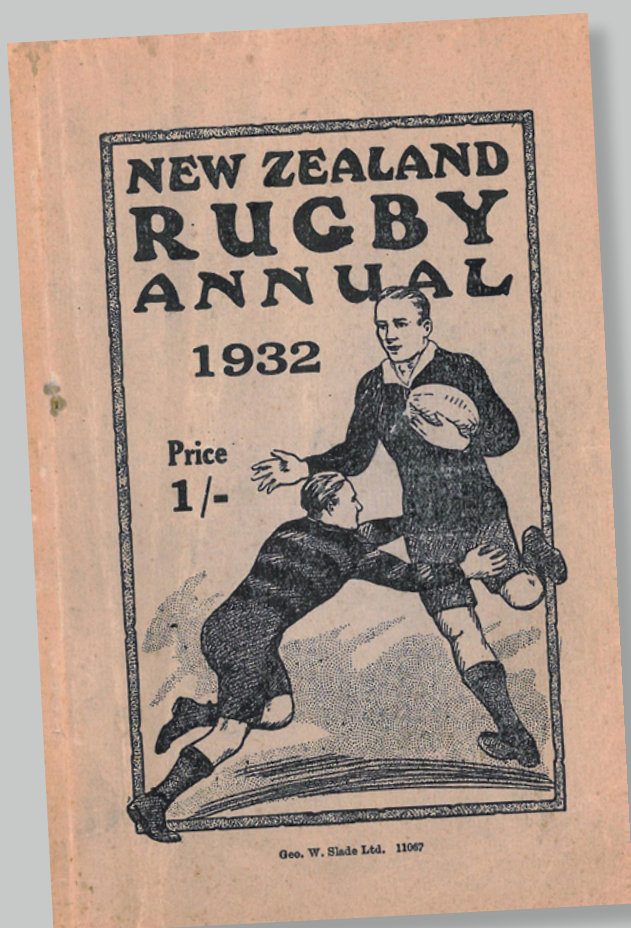
Masters was keen and the trio produced the *Almanack* each year until Masters' death in 1967. Swan died in 1973 and Carman was left on his own until 1981, when he agreed to pass on the responsibility to Aucklanders Rod Chester and Neville McMillan, who by then had already published their magnum opus, *Men In Black*, and the first edition of the *Rugby Encyclopedia*. Publication moved from Carman's own Sporting Publications to Moa Publications, which later was absorbed by Hachette New Zealand. (The *Almanack* now has three editors again: Clive Akers, Geoff Miller and Adrian Hill, and is published with the support of

the New Zealand union.)

It was never a profitable venture. 'We always sought to cover our costs, the costs of printing and travelling,' Carman once said in a radio interview. 'We've never made a profit and if there was any surplus it just went into the business.'³

He initially had no contact with the New Zealand union and never sought its approval. In later years, when Swan was the official historian, the union provided team sheets from first-class matches and unofficial assistance but not much else.

For a time in 1941, Carman must have wondered



The last of the *Rugby Annuals* produced by the former treasurer of the New Zealand union, Tom ('Ponty') Jones.

if the *Almanack* could be produced. Not for any rugby reasons, although the war had severely restricted the game. What put it in doubt was Carman's attitude to the war.

Carman, 37 when the war began, was one of several members of the Christian Pacifist Society who faced subversion charges in early 1941. Another was Ormond Burton, who was a decorated veteran and author from the First World War but who had turned against war and co-founded the society. Carman was arrested and appeared in the Supreme Court in Wellington charged with publishing a subversive statement, attempting to publish it and taking part in a prohibited meeting, or attempting to. Carman defended himself and on the second

day of the trial, the jury found him guilty after a 20-minute deliberation. All the charges were laid under a wartime measure, the Emergency Regulations Act 1939.

A day after being found guilty, Carman was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment by the Chief Justice, Sir Michael Myers.⁴ (Such was Carman's rugby knowledge he probably knew the man on the bench as Mickey Myers, keen rugby man and onetime member of the Wellington College First XV.)

Carman was taken to Mt Crawford prison overlooking Evans Bay in Wellington and remained there until he was freed on Christmas Eve, 1941. While in prison, he carried on his 'outside' life as best he could. He continued to be a candidate for the Wellington City Council after the city's solicitor said there was no reason his sentence should stop him.⁵ (There was a precedent: a Wellington lawyer, George Barton, was elected to Parliament in 1878 while behind bars for contempt of court.) Carman, an independent candidate for the council, received 2239 votes – nowhere near enough.⁶

Swan ran the shop at 80 Lambton Quay for him while he was in prison. Both before and after 1941, the shop was a well-known place for catching up on rugby or political gossip. After Carman's sentence, Prime Minister Peter Fraser was said to have 'blasted' Labour MPs for calling in to it. (The shop was not far either from another well-established rugby gathering point, the Grand Hotel; the owner of the former would never be seen in the latter but many in the latter would seek out the former to settle rugby arguments.)

The two Arthurs and Masters in Christchurch continued to work on the *Almanack* through 1941 and, perhaps fortunately, the reduced rugby meant the 1942 and 1943 *Almanacks* were combined. Swan was calculated to have written 23 letters to Carman during the seven months he was in jail, although few survived. One that did read in part:

I see, when you referred to Rugby you meant the Rep. Games. I took it you desired results of the Club contests. How will this work: I will send in the file and a duplicate cover, and you could make a copy for your own use and return the original for me to keep up to date? I cannot see any better method and will post in the necessary today. The file I will give to Mrs C [Arthur's wife Edith]. I am waiting reply for a North Otago and an Otago team to bring that game into line with the others. Yes, I caught up with the Almanack settings. That will always happen with last minute changes. You see, time only allows for the line or paragraph to be lifted. Any further alteration to the page would have to be charged for. Actually such changing about of matter means unlocking frames and re-making up . . .⁷

Carman was trapped by New Zealand's conscription in 1942, but he was eventually excused military service because of poor eyesight. By then, he was 40 years old and supported a wife and four children. He also stood as an independent in the safe Labour seat of Wellington North in 1943 and gained 298 votes. From the early 1930s until the late 1970s, Carman took an active interest in local government; he served on several authorities and wrote several local histories in addition to his rugby work. He sold his bookshop in 1959 and worked from his home in Linden where he produced both the *Rugby Almanack* and its cricket equivalent, which he had begun in 1948.⁸ He was a familiar figure in Tawa, at NZRFU gatherings and in the press box at Athletic Park until his death in 1982.



The blue jersey of the British team in 1930 that forced the All Blacks to wear white for the first time.

unless McKenzie apologised. 'Fortunately, he was mollified by the conciliatory attitude of other of the New Zealand union's officials,' McLean wrote.⁶

Another disagreement in 1930 between New Zealand and Britain was also portentous in its way, although much more superficially. The British arrived with blue jerseys bearing three golden lions 'passant guardant' and to dismayed comments that they clashed with black, Baxter replied that blue was the British team's 'traditional colour'. The first two British teams to New Zealand, in 1888 and 1904, wore jerseys of red, white and blue hoops, and the third, in 1908, wore red and white hoops (the blue stayed at home with Scotland). The only British teams to wear dark blue were in South Africa in 1924 and the quasi-official team in Argentina. Both sides said the other would need to change, then both sides changed their minds and offered to change. The final word was by the NZRFU which, in the week of the match against Wanganui, told Baxter the All Blacks would wear

white jerseys with a 'silver' fern on a black shield, black shorts and black socks with two white hoops.⁷ In some reports, the All Blacks became the All Whites. The British adopted their now-familiar scarlet jerseys for their tour in 1950.

There were other minor, even comical, differences in the way New Zealanders and Brits read the laws. At halftime in Wanganui, the local players trooped off Cook's Gardens for a sit-down in the dressing room and a lemonade, a cup of tea and for those who did, a smoke. The British players, made to look larger than life by the knee-length size of their voluminous shorts, stayed on the field for what they called 'lemon time'. Baxter complained and New Zealand teams thereafter had to comply with the law and stay on the field. It was a common occurrence for curious spectators to wander onto the ground at halftime and have a close-up look at the players or listen to what was being said. No one seemed to be bothered.

The background to all of this was New Zealand's desire to get a say in framing the laws and England's desire that everyone do it their way. The previous November, the NZRFU secretary, Alf Neilson, sent a letter to all provincial unions asking for their views of an English resolution which said, in effect, 'the dominions' must play by England's laws if they want a future say in framing laws. The provincial unions delivered a collective view at their annual meeting in 1930: 'That in New Zealand all games in future be played under the rules of the international board if and when we are given satisfactory representation in the framing of such rules.'⁸ The differences were as much a question of national attitude or characteristics as they were a rugby issue. Alley noticed this:

The lack of desire to change anything in the game is a most galling thing to New Zealanders, who are freed from the bonds of tradition in a way that the English mind is not, and we should be false to the idea of progress if we abandoned our attitude. Growth is the only excuse for life,

or at any rate one of the strongest of reasons for it, and we must be prepared to scrap anything that can be superseded by something better.⁹

Away from the longer-term issues of laws and who ran the game, the British team was enormously popular with the public. Record crowds watched it play and, off the field, the players' every move was followed with intense interest. The tour made a profit for the NZRFU of £22,000 (about \$1.9 million today). 'Every home, every dance-hall and every picture show in the country was thrown open to them,' McLean wrote. 'They played on practically every golf course in New Zealand and never had to pay a penny in green fees.' Unlike their predecessors of 1904 and 1908, 'intemperance was not one of their faults', as McLean neatly put it. In Dunedin, two of the players received a letter in which two women detailed their charms and offered to meet them at any time at any place.¹⁰ The public interest in the tour, more intense than it had been with the South Africans in 1921, set the pattern for major tours for the next sixty or so years, until professionalism reduced tours to a rump of a test or two. Everywhere the team was referred to as Great Britain or the British team, never the Lions although that nickname had been acquired six years previously in South Africa because of the lion lapel badge that was worn. Strangely, the 1950 team in New Zealand was seldom – if at all – referred to as the Lions either, and it was only in 1959 that the term came into general use in New Zealand.

A touring team was most likely to be popular if it did not beat the All Blacks and if it took its defeats with cheery demeanour (at least publicly). As became the norm with British teams on three-month tours in the twentieth century, many players were unavailable because of work, injury or simply because they did not want to be away from home for so long. For New Zealanders then and now, long trips and long tours were commonplace; for the British, they were a significant undertaking.



The 1930 British team manager, James Baxter, insisted that teams had to stay on the field at halftime, contrary to the New Zealand practice of returning to the dressing room. This is the British team at halftime in the fourth test in Wellington. At least two women have joined the players, one taking particular notice of a player on the ground; at least three policemen are there and a local St John man treats one of the players.

Among those who did not come to New Zealand in 1930, and it may have been a different tour if he had, was the England captain from 1924, Wavell Wakefield (later Lord Wakefield). He was named as captain when the touring squad was first made public, but later withdrew because of a chronic groin injury. For all Wakefield's influence on the game through the 1920s (and beyond), McLean thought he may have been more a hindrance than a help. (Wakefield had not played for England since 1927.) He wrote:

From remarks made by several members of the team during the tour, it is doubtful if the loss of Wakefield was a serious one. Not only was he said to be past his best playing days, but also he was considered to be something of a martinet, and a man who would not have been conspicuously tactful in his dealings either with the team or with New Zealanders.

This was the man who, as England captain, showed not the slightest interest in preventing the sending



10 Defeat at home and abroad

*The rugby winger nowadays
Is showing signs in lots of ways
Of getting quite dejected –
He's woefully neglected¹*

Rugby continued as best it could during the years of the Second World War and the best was better than it had been during the First World War. In one year of the first, 1916, no representative rugby was played at all and in other years the game at first-class level was restricted to players under twenty years of age. The New Zealand union's policy for the second war was summed up by its chairman, Stan Dean, at the annual meeting in 1940: 'We should not play any matches which are going to be a discouragement to recruiting. We should carry on with our football as far as we can . . .'² Interisland and Ranfurly Shield matches were suspended for the duration of the war (the interisland game resumed in 1944) and the union decided to abandon tours, which would have become impossible anyway. Some provincial unions organised only club competitions at various stages during the war and did not field representative teams. The national union encouraged school

rugby and gave a grant of £750 to assist schools with equipment and clothing.³

The years between 1940 and 1945 also saw the advent of services teams in club and interprovincial competitions. The union relaxed residential rules to allow servicemen to play without needing special permission in the areas in which they were stationed. A future All Black captain and coach, Fred Allen, who had already played for Canterbury, thus found himself playing for Marlborough; a staunch Auckland, Eric Boggs, played for Wellington; a true-blue Otago man, Jim Kearney, had to don the red and black of Canterbury. The changed nature of rugby was evident with the opening match of the 1940 season in Auckland. The Māori Battalion, which had been in camp at Palmerston North, played a Combined Fifteen from the Ngaruawahia and Papakura camps. The latter included All Black Cyril Pepper, who was to die in Wellington in 1943 after being invalided home from North

New Zealand soldiers play in what appears to be an impromptu match in Egypt in 1941, given the lack of playing gear and unmarked field. Such games abounded wherever there were enough men, and sometimes not, and enough time. DA-00793-F, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY



This is the way we kick the ball in New Zealand, a member of the Divisional Cavalry might be saying to some locals he ran into in Syria in 1942. DA-02505-F, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY

Africa, and two members of the national league team whose tour of England had to be abandoned the year before, Jack Campbell and Ivor Stirling.⁴ The inclusion of the latter two in a showcase rugby match demonstrated that, as in the first war, animosities between the two versions of rugby would be suspended during the greater animosity. This allowed players who had had league careers in England, including luminaries George Nepia, Rex King and Jack Macdonald, back into rugby. King, captain of the 1939 league team, played for a Second Echelon team in a hastily arranged match against a University of Cape Town team. The Second Echelon, which included the Māori Battalion, although none of its members seemed to have played in the game, was in Cape Town for three days on its way to Britain in 1940. The game, which was played at Newlands, attracted a crowd of ‘some thousands’ according to a report published in New Zealand. The New Zealanders were led by the 1935 All Black – and national cricketer – Eric Tindill and among them were several players with provincial experience. The side

was, though, ‘a far remove from what would have been but for the war.’⁵

In the Second World War, unlike the first, the air force and navy entered provincial competitions; the New Zealand Army played the Royal New Zealand Air Force for the first time in 1943 and in 1944 in Wellington, a New Zealand XV played Combined Services. The Wellington game, which had a sprinkling of All Blacks through both sides, attracted a crowd of about 18,000.⁶

An indication of the different shape first-class rugby took in the two world wars is amply shown by the following table.

Wartime matches comparison

	INTER-UNION	OTHERS	TOTAL
1915	13	2	15
1916	0	0	0
1917	8	6	14
1918	16	5	21
1940	54	18	72
1941	49	8	57
1942	21	35	56
1943	29	13	42
1944	39	9	48
1945	52	11	63

A. C. Swan, *History of New Zealand Rugby Football*, vol. 1 (Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1948), p. 257.

Wherever New Zealand men found themselves overseas, most commonly in North Africa and Italy but also in Fiji and New Caledonia, they played rugby. Some of it was organised officially on a unit basis, culminating in the selection of 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force or divisional or combined services teams, and some of it organised haphazardly wherever there happened to be some flat ground, a ball and a lull in the fighting. And sometimes not even that. Royal Air Force aircraft once roamed the skies above a rugby ground to allow the game to proceed unhindered.



Jack Finlay leads the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force team onto the field in Alexandria on Sunday, 1 February 1942, to play Rest of Egypt. The New Zealanders, who included pre-war All Blacks Tom Morrison, Artie Lambourn and Athol Mahoney, won 22–0. Finlay became vice-captain of the 2NZEF Kiwis in 1945, was an All Black in 1946 and later a national selector. DA-02380-F, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY

Two significant teams were the Kiwis, the 2NZEF team captained by 1938 All Black Charlie Saxton, and the lesser known New Zealand Services team.⁷ Both toured Britain, Ireland and France after the war while the Kiwis also played in New Zealand. Several New Zealanders played in what were known as ‘services internationals’ during the war; that is, matches involving England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales.

Among the myriad of matches in Britain while servicemen were waiting for ships home was one at Richmond between Pākehā and Māori, the latter captained by Jack Macdonald. There were oddities in the wartime rugby. One was at Bradford between a ‘Rugby Football Union XV’ and a

‘Rugby League XV’. This was no scratch match thought up on the spur of a moment. Both teams were made up of the best available players, many of them internationals and, ironically, the rugby side included two future custodians of the amateur ethic, secretaries of the RFU, Robin Prescott and Bob Weighill.⁸ The game was played according to rugby rules and the league team won. During the 1970s, when rugby was going through one of its periodic searches for players who had dabbled with money, Weighill was reminded of the match. Had he been caught going down in a scrum with a professional, he would have been instantly banned. A jovial former air commodore, Weighill laughed: ‘Ah but that was wartime. You can get away with



Sport and war come together through the pen and ink of *Observer* artist Alex Garmonsway as he links rugby with the first confrontation of the Second World War between New Zealand and German troops, in Greece. *OBSERVER*, 16 APRIL 1941

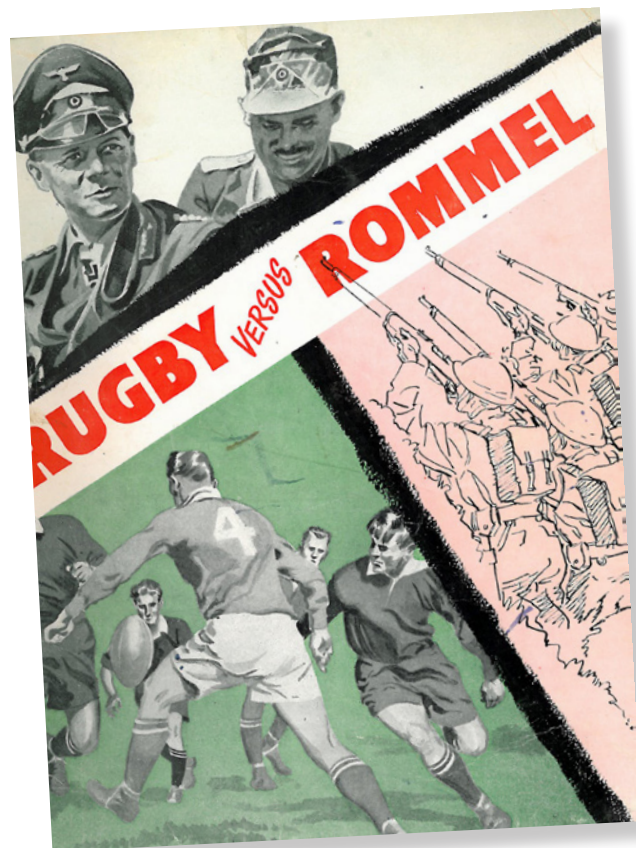
anything when there's a war on.'⁹ That was around the time that the England captain, Bill Beaumont, was banned for taking proceeds from a biography, a clear breach of amateur regulations.

Surely one of the oddest wartime rugby matches was in the Cassino area of Italy at a time of prolonged and difficult fighting. The New Zealand Division's chief engineer, Fred Hanson, told the story at a reunion of army rugby players in Wellington in 1961.¹⁰ Hanson related how he went to see a company of his sappers working on a section of Allied ground held by the Free French. Among Hanson's listeners was a 1928 All Black and later brigade commander, Jim Burrows, and he related Hanson's tale:

As he approached the area where his sappers were working he saw that under the shelter of some high ground a game of rugby was in progress. There were no rugby posts and the sidelines were made by the soldiers in the uniforms of France

and New Zealand, all shouting and cheering their respective teams. The players themselves were also dressed in the uniforms of France and New Zealand but the game lost nothing because of this. Play swept up and down the field and the spectators had worked themselves up to a high pitch of excitement. As Fred drew near he began to wonder why, so far, no one had kicked the ball. . . . Suddenly he realised why. The football was a dead fowl.¹¹

The French team was in Wellington for the second test against New Zealand at the time of the reunion and among the guests was the French manager, Marcel Laurent, and a few other members of the touring party as well as French journalists. Burrows recalled how one of the Frenchmen turned to him and said:



This book was produced by a Wellington rugby player and returned soldier, Paul Donoghue, for a 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force rugby reunion in 1961.



Members of the 22 Battalion team celebrate winning the Freyberg Cup at Forlì in Italy in December 1944. The 22nd, captained by Wellington five-eighth Lin Thomas who is pictured in the centre holding the base of the cup, beat the Divisional Ammunition team in what turned out to be the last rugby tournament of the war for the New Zealanders. DA-07858, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY

What is it about sport that it can bring people together in this way? Here at Cassino, under conditions that . . . could only be described as dangerous, two armies from foreign countries, neither speaking the other's language, suddenly decide to play a game of football. They have no jerseys or studded boots, no marked field and no football posts. They have no football. But does that bother them? Never. They take the field as if they were at Twickenham. Tell me, what is the appeal, what is the magic of this game called rugby, that under such conditions grown men will play it with a dead fowl?¹²

Another example of how seriously soldiers took their wartime rugby was the determination to broadcast a battalion's match that not all its members could get to. In Italy, the 22 Battalion team was scheduled to meet Divisional Signals in a semifinal of the divisional championship for the Freyberg Cup. The 22 Battalion team, which was coached by a 1936 All Black, Jock Wells, was withdrawn from the line ahead of the rest of the battalion. One of the battalion officers, Stuart McKenzie, a Palmerston North accountant in

peacetime and a son of Norman McKenzie of rugby renown, borrowed a wireless-telegraphy truck from brigade headquarters and throughout the match progress scores were passed on by field telephone to the men in the line. As the battalion's history noted: 'At every telephone in the battalion (no matter how remote or exposed the position) a listener took down the latest score and relayed it to the expectant group around him.' Wells said: 'That was one broadcast which fooled the Hun intelligence.'¹³

Even before the war was over, rugby administrators again turned their minds to tinkering with the laws of the game. Germany was beaten but Japan resisted over the New Zealand winter months of 1945, and in Dunedin, the Otago union urged the national union to allow referees to put the ball into scrums.¹⁴ They had been doing this, off and on, in various provinces for years, and Otago wanted it to be official. The reason was that referees, being objective and impartial by definition, would put the ball in fairly and the game would be rid of time-wasting resets and accusations of cheating. Some chance. The NZRFU

From war to sport

In January 1940, the Second World War had barely begun. An advance party of New Zealand troops had arrived in Egypt and their recently appointed general officer commanding ('GOC' as they knew him), Major-General Bernard Freyberg, had just arrived from London. Among the ten officers of the advance party was a captain, Allan Andrews, who had been a noted rugby player and who was just as well-known for having turned down a chance in 1934 to be an All Black. Rather than go to Australia with the New Zealand team, he chose to stay in Christchurch for university exams. It was a decision he regretted for the rest of his life.

Freyberg knew Andrews, who was a professional soldier, either personally or by reputation. Either way, the general invited the captain to his Cairo flat for dinner. 'After dinner and over a brandy and cigars,' Andrews recalled, 'he first propounded his vision of a 2NZEF rugby team touring the UK after the war, as happened in 1919.'¹

In January 1940, there was still more than five years of war to come. In those five years, the New Zealand army men under Freyberg's command would fight in Greece, Crete, North Africa and Italy. Many would die, many would be taken prisoner. 'Right throughout the war the General, even in the black days when the Division was being mauled and hammered,' Andrews wrote, 'never lost sight of his great ambition to see his rugby team march through the British Isles after the war playing rugby of a quality that would be an inspiration to all rugby players who either played against the Kiwis or watched them play.' On 13 May 1943 near Enfidaville in north-eastern Tunisia, Freyberg waited to accept the surrender



Bernard Freyberg, the general officer commanding the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, played senior club rugby in Wellington and Dunedin before the First World War as well as being a national champion swimmer. He encouraged rugby among troops during the Second World War and his orders led to the formation of the 2NZEF Kiwis team. Freyberg is pictured among spectators at a match in Egypt. DA-00956-F, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY

of the senior German and Italian commanders in North Africa. While waiting, Andrews recalled, the conversation went back to rugby. 'It became clear to me that a successful 2NZEF rugby team playing rugby of a high standard was almost as important to the General as winning the war.'²



A 2NZEF Kiwis jersey. The Kiwis were a team organised by the army and paid for by the government but, as a courtesy, asked the NZRFU if they could use the silver fern. The device was not registered then, but the union said yes anyway. 1997.222, STAN YOUNG COLLECTION, NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM NZ

Two years later, when the New Zealand soldiers were having a break after helping rid Florence of Germans, Freyberg sat down at a table with some of his senior rugby men. There was Jim Burrows, a brigadier who had been an All Black in 1928; Andrews, who had risen to lieutenant-colonel; Captain Jack Griffiths, a 1930s All Black who had been aide to Freyberg for much of the war; Captain Charlie Saxton, a 1938 All Black who had got into all manner of scrapes as a member of the Long Range Desert Group; Captain Murray Sidey, who like Griffiths had been by Freyberg's side for much of the war; Lieutenant Mac Cooper,

a lieutenant from Auckland who had played for Cambridge and Scotland; Lieutenant John Wade, who had played for Canterbury; and Gunner Ron Stewart, an Invincible from 1924 who also went to South Africa in 1928 and played his last test against the British team in 1930.³

Freyberg said he hoped they were not being over-optimistic in talking about a rugby tour when the war was far from over. But he said it was necessary to get to work and get the machinery set up. It was to be a 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force team and not just the division, which meant troops back in Cairo and scattered over various parts of North Africa and Italy would also be eligible. 'Every unit or detached unit must have a chance,' Freyberg told his men. The minutes of the meeting then recorded:

GOC went on to say that we should produce as good a team as ever left New Zealand – team should have good combination after a long period of training. On the other hand the men were soldiers, not sports specialists, and would have to continue their duties as soldiers in the meantime . . . the question of including New Zealanders in England was considered but decided against as New Zealand personnel there were mainly air force and navy. As this was an army team professional and league players would be eligible.

It was fine to tell the troops; not so fine to tell the world. Bill Brodie, one of the 2NZEF war correspondents, fired off a story to London to be sent on to New Zealand. In the money-saving 'cablese' of the day, Brodie wrote: 'Initial steps have been taken proselection rugby team representing 2NZEF primarily adplay sixth south african armoured division but cumpossibility in mind of tour postwar stop.' And it did stop. Freyberg's personal assistant, John White, called a halt to the message: 'The GOC has considered this matter and feels that at the present moment it would be unwise to give the report publicity . . .' It would be



A rugby phenomenon. Jonah Lomu, almost unstoppable when at his best, played seventy-three matches for New Zealand between 1994 and 2002 – then had a kidney transplant. PETER BUSH

14 The more things change . . .

*McCaw lifts the Webb Ellis Cup,
Tired joy is on their faces:
It's a hard road to win the cup.¹*

In the dying days of amateurism and the wondering early days of pay for play, there was some speculation that New Zealand would suffer. The argument, one that some national administrators had used in favour of staying amateur, went along the lines that in rugby as in war, god would be on the side of the big battalions. New Zealand, then with a population approaching four million and geographically remote, could not hope to compete for players and money against countries such as England and France with their greater playing numbers and commercial pull. Even Australia, despite rugby on the other side of the Tasman still being seen as an elitist game, would gain from money in the game while New Zealand would be the loser.

How could a couple of island dots – or ‘poxy little island’ as Wales’s Australian assistant coach, Scott Johnson, in 2004 described New Zealand – continue to be successful in rugby when success was determined not by the ability to take time off work to play, but by money and market?² They were valid concerns that proved to be without foundation. As the money years unwound, New Zealand showed it could adapt and dominate the game in

the professional era as much as it did when the game was amateur.

In international rugby, the All Blacks have a greater success rate as professionals than they did as amateurs. The figures are illuminating. By the end of 1993, six years after the first World Cup and when the end of amateurism was nigh, the All Blacks had played 277 test matches and won 199 of them with 64 losses and 14 draws. That gave them, from their first test in 1903 until their last in 1993, a winning percentage of 71.8. From their first test of 1994, a loss against France, until the end of 2014, they had played 249 matches for a winning percentage of 81.92. No other national team is close. The All Blacks’ success rate in the professional era of 82.83 per cent is about 20 percentage points better than the next best, South Africa. It could be – and probably will be – argued that in the professional era New Zealand have played many of the game’s lesser lights such as Portugal, Fiji, Samoa and Romania, and that is true. But so have all the other countries. In the same period the leading countries, and especially New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, have also played each other much more frequently than they ever did.

England, for all their playing resources and money, have made little impact on New Zealand under professionalism. The two countries have met on 40 occasions and England have won only seven of them – and only three of those wins (2002, 2003 and 2012) have been in the professional era. Wales have not beaten New Zealand since 1953 and Scotland and Ireland have never done so (though both have gone close). The Lions, that marketing dream of the British and Irish countries combined, have toured New Zealand just once as professionals, in 2005, and were a failure. The following table demonstrates New Zealand's continued dominance.

**Leading countries in the professional era
(from 1 November 1995 until 31 December 2014)**

COUNTRY	TESTS	WON	LOST	DRAWN	% WINS
New Zealand	233	193	36	4	82.83
South Africa	238	152	82	4	63.86
Australia	244	150	87	6	61.47
England	216	131	81	4	60.64
France	224	133	87	4	59.37
Ireland	203	112	87	4	55.17
Wales	228	111	113	4	48.68
Scotland	195	76	116	3	39.74

Source: ESPN Scrum

The All Blacks went through the 2013 calendar year unbeaten, the only country in the professional era to do such a thing. While they were in London for the second-last match of the year, a *Daily Telegraph* reporter was invited into their hotel team room and someone overlooked the potential embarrassment of motivation slogans plastered around the walls reaching the public's eyes and ears. The All Black of the past was generally humble and modest, hanging his head as he trotted back after scoring a try. But the high-fives and emotive jubilation of the modern era have been matched by words off the field. 'We are the most dominant team in the history of the world,' one of the slogans read.³ Such



This was how the *Guardian* newspaper in England saw the All Blacks in 2013, when they became the only team in the professional era to win every test in a calendar year. *GUARDIAN*, 16 NOVEMBER 2013

things, if they must exist, are best left unseen. Most players would cringe at such a trite comment and just let their record speak for itself. And it does.

Much changed in rugby after the momentous decisions of 1995, but there was much that stayed the same. The game was still played by fifteen people on either side with an odd-shaped ball that added chance to enthusiasm and skill. People still talked about the game, people still watched it and it remained by far the most dominant sport in the country. The effects of the game going professional were not fully apparent for several years; it was as if rugby could continue more or less as before, with the only difference being that players could be paid.

The most obvious public change was the introduction of the Super 12, the tripartite (Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) competition that was part of the deal reached with News Corporation. It was an expanded version of early season competitions that had been played since 1986 with benefits for the provincial unions involved but of minimal interest to those which were not. The first of them, involving Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury of New Zealand unions, was grandly named the South Pacific Championship, but with changes and additions it became the Super Six and finally the Super 10. It required not a hint of original thought for the new Murdoch-funded competition to become the Super 12. The plan was idealistically sound but flawed in a practical sense. To overcome the parochial disinterest that characterised the earlier competition, the new one introduced new teams with new names and called them 'franchises', owned by the national union with administration delegated to specially created boards.

They were, and remain, based in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, but their 'franchise' extended to other provincial unions, from which they could – in theory – draw their players. In addition the union introduced a draft system. The idea was that the best players in the country would play in the competition and return to their home provinces at the end of it. In the initial years, there were even 'commissioners' to ensure this happened. But they soon became superfluous when it became apparent that the unions in which the 'Super' teams were based held most of the strings, including those attached to the purse.

During the settling down period, the teams were known by their provincial names as well as their contrived ones: the Wellington Hurricanes, the Waikato Chiefs and so on. This did not sit well with other unions – for example, Taranaki people found it hard to get enthusiastic about a team called Wellington (Taranaki later became part of

the Chiefs). Gradually, the provincial names were dropped and they became just the Highlanders, the Chiefs etc. This has always confused rugby journalists and commentators in other countries, especially Australia where there was more of a nickname tradition. After nearly twenty years of the competition, references are still made to 'the Otago Highlanders' or 'the Wellington Hurricanes' or whatever.

The original intentions were good – it was thought that at the end of the Super 12, the top 25 or so players would go on to the international games, including the new Tri Nations series with Australia and South Africa, but that the rest would go back to club rugby. This would have meant a lift to the game at all levels, but it did not work out that way. The gradual expansion of both the 'Super' series (first 12, then 14, now 15, soon 17) and the Tri Nations into the Rugby Championship had quite the opposite effect. The best players do not play club rugby, many probably do not belong to clubs; most of them do not even play provincial rugby.

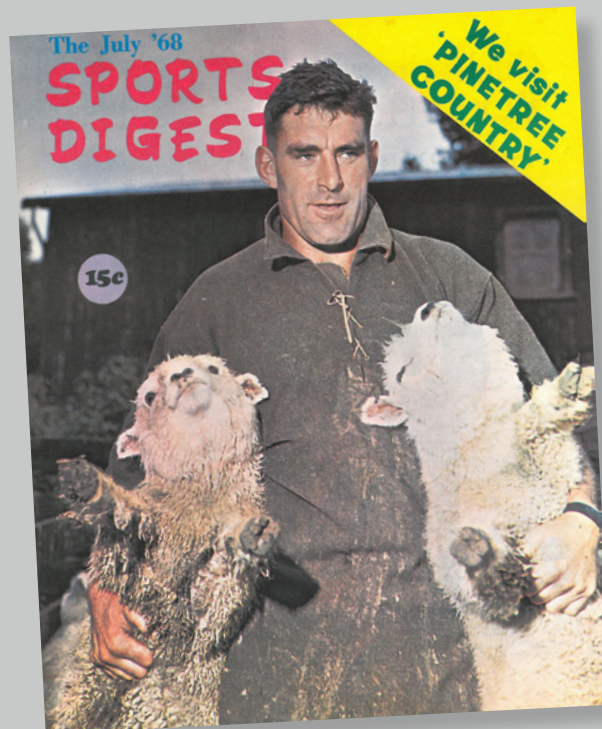
The top rugby officials would admit there were faults as they adapted to the new world, but New Zealand seemed to take the more sensible and manageable course by contracting players centrally; that is, the best players owed their pay packets and their contractual allegiance to the New Zealand union first. In some other countries, most notably England, rugby followed the soccer model and players were contracted to clubs, which meant they had the final say on when players could be freed for internationals (or not). It took years of negotiations, arguments and the intervention eventually of a reorganised International Rugby Board to bring some order. Friction between unions and clubs in Europe simmers away still. It seems to have become a characteristic of rugby that precedents in other sports are followed rather than rugby itself initiating something. Sirens indicating half and fulltime were confined to Australia until professionalism saw them added elsewhere;

Farmers and footballers

New Zealand's rugby players at whatever level they play come from all sections of society and, in the amateur days, top level players were from a wide range of occupations. Farmers or workers in the broader agricultural industry have always had a considerable presence. At least twenty All Black captains have been farmers or in farm-related work, and included among them are some of the most illustrious rugby names: Wilson Whineray, Colin Meads, Brian Lochore, Sid Going, Alex Wyllie, Dave Loveridge, Graham Mourie . . . if rural workers such as stock and station agents are added, the list goes on. Joe Warbrick, who played in the first New Zealand team and organised and led the Natives tour in 1888, was a farmer. As Terry McLean once wrote: 'Down through the years, the boys from the waybacks have contributed an enormous amount of players, a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and a goodly quantity of outstanding talent to the cause of rugby in this country.'¹

Colin Meads, whose farming brother Stan was also an All Black, reckoned the rural life gave him basic rugby training that no sedentary occupation in the city could ever provide. He did not always wander round his King Country farm with a sheep under each arm, as he was once pictured doing, but in the days before quad bikes, he frequently ran rather than used tractors or horses on his property.² Brian O'Brien, editor of the monthly *Sports Digest*, once recalled a Christmas visit to Meads's farm: 'I could see with half an eye that even then, four months before the rugby season, he was fine and lean. He was working his guts out.'³

Another All Black farmer, Ken Gray, told O'Brien: 'I find the farm environment is a



A sheep under each arm, Colin Meads at work. Meads and his brother Stan came to be the epitome of the hard farmer All Blacks, trained to perfection on rough farmland rather than in a gymnasium. *SPORTS DIGEST*, JULY 1968

tremendous help. Carting fence posts on your shoulders up steep hills can't, in my opinion, be excelled for your legs.' Gray said that during the South African tour of New Zealand in 1965, he took a Springbok centre, Francois Roux, a farmer from Griqualand, to his farm in the hills north of Porirua. Gray said:

Roux gave me his opinion that New Zealand is the last country on earth, in a rugby-playing sense, where men who play the game also sweat and work hard. He said to me: 'All the old brand of Boer farmer is gone now. Kaffirs do all the hard work.

In New Zealand, the farmers still do it themselves and these are the men who wear All Black jerseys.'

(Gray retired at the end of 1969 because he was opposed to the 1970 tour of South Africa.)

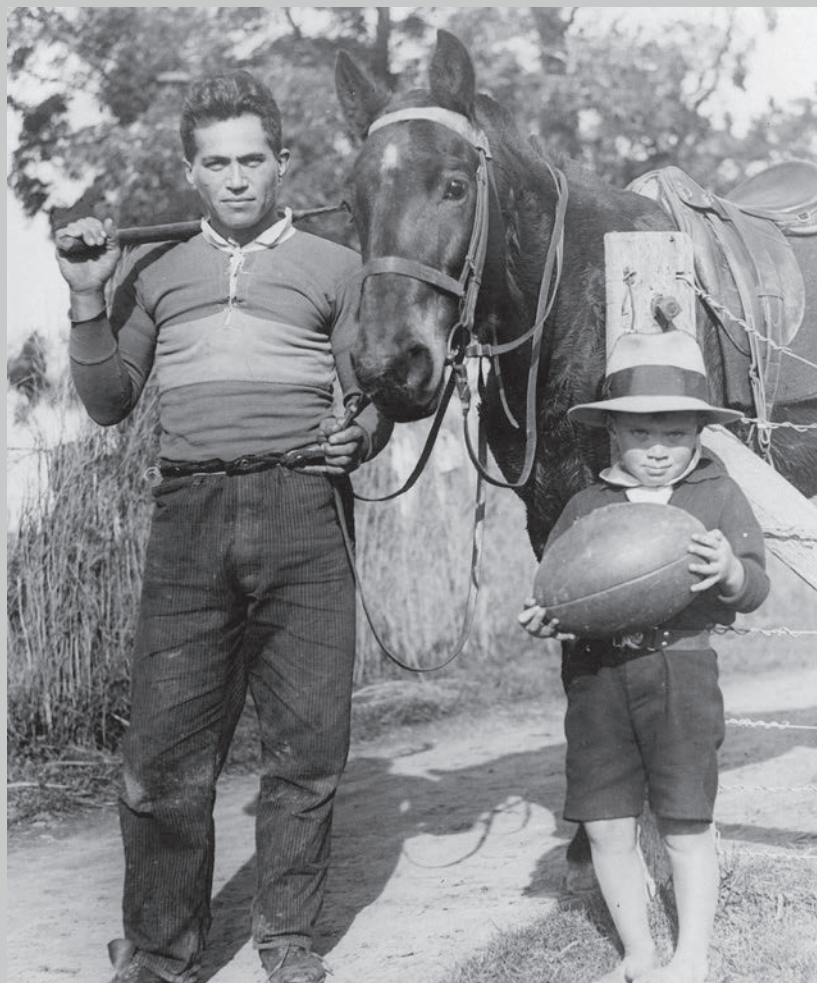
Terry McLean went through a list of notable farmer-footballers and reckoned among the strongest was a Canterbury lock of the 1950s, Nelson Dalzell:

They used to swear that he could pick up 44-gallon drums (loaded) and sling them on to the back of a truck. . . . I always used to doubt its practicality – after all, that would have made 'Dad' the strongest cove in the world – but the last man I would ever have expressed the doubt to would have been Nelson himself.⁴

Since professionalism, all players have listed their occupations as 'rugby player'. Only Andy Haden, another brought up on a farm, did that in the old days. But the farming background and genes are still there. Richie McCaw was brought up on a farm and enrolled at Lincoln College on a rugby scholarship, intending to do an agricultural science degree until rugby took over. Three of his teammates, the Whitelock brothers Sam, George and Luke, are all prime farming stock: they are grandsons of 'Dad' Dalzell.

McLean wrote his piece on footballer-farmers in 1964 just after Brian Lochore's first season as an All Black. Professionalism then was in an unimaginable future. McLean worried about a farmer-less time: 'When the day comes when New Zealand rugby can no longer rely on its farmer boys, New Zealand rugby will really be in the cart.'⁵ Not quite yet. All Black hooker Andrew Hore played his last game for his country during the unbeaten year of 2013 and when it was all over, he went back to the family farm in the Maniototo.

For all the rural influence, rugby's playing population has reflected the overall population; that is, cities and towns provide more players than do



Not all forwards were farmers and not all farmers were forwards. One of the best of fullbacks, George Nepia, heads off for a day's work on his Rangitukia farm, accompanied by his son George. Young George was accidentally killed while serving with the Fiji Battalion in Malaya in 1954.

country areas, although there are doubtless many examples of areas that once were rural and are now urban, Manurewa or Papakura for example. Of the 495 players to play for New Zealand before 1950, 182 were born in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin or Invercargill, about 37 per cent. But such statistics are indicative rather than conclusive.

Just how rural New Zealand rugby was, especially in its first fifty or so years, has been a matter of interest to those few professional historians who have ever bothered about the game. One of them, Jock Phillips, saw the origins



A long-established farmers' magazine, *Straight Furrow*, featured one of the farmer-All Blacks, recently retired captain Graham Mourie, on its front page in 1982.

of a New Zealand 'type' in a frontier rural setting and the poor chaps who lived in towns had to compensate. 'Men who pursued sedentary urban occupations therefore felt a special urgency to prove their virility on their Saturday afternoons off.'⁶ That theory belongs almost in the same category as the Phillips belief that 'the scrimmage was rather like an organised hug' or that in a society that was short of women, men found solace in a scrum.⁷ Greg Ryan delivered the urban riposte to Phillips and backed his comments up with a range of tables which included players' occupations, the provincial origins of All Blacks, the main centre dominance of national touring teams and compared occupations of All Blacks of one era with another.⁸ The cumulative effect was that New Zealand rugby has always been weighted towards the towns and Ryan's work provided the actuality to override the myth. This is not to detract from the quality and contribution of some of those players from country areas.

Super rugby teams get competition points even during their bye week, a practice introduced by league in Sydney; most of the myriad of rules surrounding the World Cup have been used by soccer.

The strength of New Zealand rugby had always been the organisational pyramid, with the clubs at the base, then provincial rugby, island and national rugby such as trials and Māori, then the national team at the apex. Professionalism introduced the new level of the 'Super' competition, which pushed provincial down a level, but societal and demographic changes had their effect too. The interisland game, for so long a season staple and seen at times as just below test level, lost its allure before the advent of professionalism because of the perceived strength of the North and because players increasingly saw it as a waste of time (and could not be compelled to play in it). A contrived effort to have an interisland game in 2012 based on franchises as a financial boost for Otago rugby was marked by public disinterest. Trials during the professional era have become occasional matches to suit the desires of national coaches, while national Māori matches, despite the marketing elevation to being 'Māori All Blacks', are usually the next-best Māori after the All Blacks have been excluded. Various other national teams have come and gone – 'Emerging Players' in the dying years of amateurism when many of the players chosen had emerged long since, and in the professional era, New Zealand A (which meant 'B') and New Zealand Juniors or 'Junior All Blacks' (another marketing contrivance that had nothing to do with age or with the earlier team of the same name but prouder provenance).

Provincial unions took time to find their place in the new order. For a time, the unions that were used as a base for the Super teams were seen as the rich getting richer while the others were poor and getting poorer. It was never that simple. Provinces had to pay players and, in the case of All Blacks, the Super provinces had to pay them to keep them,

even though they seldom if ever played for their provinces. Their retention was necessary for their Super eligibility. Several provinces, notably Otago, Southland, Counties-Manukau and Bay of Plenty, went to the brink of dissolution. A salary cap was introduced to provincial rugby to prevent financial excesses and in the case of Super rugby, each of the teams became centrally funded to make its own purchases of players rather than rely on provinces. Private investment in the franchise teams was also sought to spread the load and risk.

The Super 12/14/15 and whatever it ends up did not replace provincial rugby, the level of the game that remains largely based on settlement patterns and political decisions from the nineteenth century. It provided a new level, a series of games that its promoters hoped would appeal beyond the traditional rugby supporter, and with that hope came all the show business and marketing paraphernalia such as night games, pop music, pre-match 'entertainment' and giant TV screens. Beneath the frippery there was serious business and no coach or player could ever have taken Super rugby less than seriously. The dynasty of success achieved in Christchurch by the Crusaders has been one of New Zealand sport's remarkable success stories; the success of New Zealand rugby has in large measure been founded on that. Auckland used to be seen as the real strength of New Zealand rugby, but that mantle was taken over by Christchurch, and while Auckland's population and ethnic mix grew, its relative rugby success went in the reverse direction to such an extent that the New Zealand union singled it out for remedial treatment.

Auckland is at the heart of another of rugby's distinctive features over the past 30 or so years – the so-called 'browning' of the game. Māori representation in the All Blacks historically has usually been around the same proportion as Māori of the population as a whole. But the vast increase in players of Pacific islands origin or ancestry altered the face of New Zealand rugby. Players of



Robin Brooke charges off for one of his two tries for the Auckland Blues against the Otago Highlanders in Dunedin in 1997. The Blues won 45-28. That's Brooke's New Zealand teammate, Josh Kronfeld, on the ground. Teams later dropped their provincial prefixes.

Samoan or Tongan or Fijian (and Tahitian and Niuean) background could be counted almost on one hand until the 1980s. Frequently, white players are now in the minority, and there are occasional stories that mothers won't allow their sons to play rugby because of the greater size and strength of early maturing players of South Pacific ethnicity (as there were too in the 1920s when Māori had a dominant period). All this led to frequent moans

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ISBN: 9781869408367

Published: 17 August 2015

