

Former All Black relishes life challenges after rugby

by Emma Lyons

It is a contradictory moment when a gigantic ex-All Black sits behind his tiny desk and says he was a very shy, passive child.

You certainly wouldn't know it now, as Alan Whetton is an articulate, charismatic man who describes himself as being a 'mover and shaker' on the dance floor.

Whetton has been in the public eye for well over two decades now, from playing rugby for Auckland then the All Blacks and now commentating for TV3.

His rugby career was long and fulfilling, with his brother, Gary Whetton, alongside him in the black jersey.

The Whetton brothers were the only twins to ever be in the All Blacks, and were part of many unforgettable All Black moments.

Alan Whetton's last All Black test was in October 1991, when he was 31 years old.

But he takes it all in his extremely large stride, saying life is full of opportunities and it comes down to which ones you choose.

Now Whetton is the general manager of Sportsbrand Media with fellow ex-All Black Andy Dalton.

"Being an All Black gave me a great opportunity to meet people and get my foot in the door.

"I've got where I am today with the help of those people."

The business runs and operates the big screens and signage at rugby games.

On the weekends you may hear Whetton's deep voice on TV3 commentating rugby games, from NPC to test matches.

Whetton started playing rugby at seven because "that's just what you did back then", at



STILL PLAYING: Alan Whetton is now working alongside Andy Dalton as general manager of Sportsbrand.

Tokoroa East Primary School.

He stuck at it and continued playing through his high school years at Auckland Boys Grammar School.

He played for the New Zealand Colts in 1980 and the Auckland Representative side in 1981. But during his first two years in the Auckland team he was only selected sporadically.

It was not until 1983 that he became a core player in the team.

In the same year Whetton was selected for the North Island side and also trialed for the All Blacks.

But it was not until 1984 that he made his debut as a reserve for two tests against France.

Rugby is in his bones, but it is certainly not the most impor-

tant thing in his life anymore.

His face lights up when he talks about his family, friends and especially his twin brother Gary Whetton.

Immediately you can tell that their relationship has that special bond only twins can claim.

It's easy to see similarities.

Both have extremely large frames, but Gary Whetton claims he was always bigger.

Alan Whetton jokingly rebuts, "that's because he was just fatter".

Times have changed since he played for the All Blacks, he says. The boys got up to far more shenanigans without getting in trouble for it.

"I'd like to think we got away with more back then, without the intrusion of television.

"We had a lot of fun on tour and I think it's a shame that maybe the boys now have to behave a little more."

There seems to be an unwritten rule when it comes to sharing some of those "naughtier" moments.

Right now Whetton is keeping busy with his family, work and rugby commentating.

But he is looking forward to travelling with his family and keeps a keen eye out for new opportunities.

"We need to be aware that even though we have ups and downs, be it sporting, financial or personal, we are still extremely lucky to have the opportunities that we have.

"I'll always be open to new things crossing my path."

Women's series back on course

by Fiona Peat

Auckland Harbour has become the headquarters of women's racing this summer after the start of the revamped Ponsonby Cruising Club women's sailing series.

Organiser Cornelia Luethi says the Ponsonby club wanted to reinvent the historic women's series this year.

The Femme Fitness spring and summer series were born from feedback about what women sailors wanted, such as a shorter series.

"We've given people what they want this year. Women want to sail but find it easier to commit to a couple of races because of things like family commitments," says Luethi.

Last Monday's race involved 22 boats in three divisions, a 50 per cent increase from last summer.

Although women have always been involved in Auckland's sailing scene, clubs have been struggling to get numbers at all levels.

The New Zealand Women's Keelboat Nationals have had to be cancelled the last few years because of the lack of boats.

"Sailing at all levels has been struggling to get women involved and there are a few gaps getting women into the sport at a high level. We decided to give this series a big push to get more women out there," says Luethi.

"I've been staggered at the amount of women out there that want to sail," she says.

The series is for any women, ranging from people that have never sailed before, to old hands who are keen to get back into it and helping move dinghy sailors into racing keeler boats.

Kiwis plan to rewrite history books

by Marvin France and Todd Hewitt

Rugby league historians will be busy tonight as the Kiwis try to shake another monkey off their back in their test against Australia at Ericsson Stadium.

New Zealand have not had back-to-back wins in the same year against the Kangaroos since 1953. They will not have a better chance than tonight with all the momentum on their side after last week's 38-28 boilover in Sydney.

Coach Brian McLennan is well aware of the Kiwis' position but is downplaying suggestions they are out to alter the record books.

"The main reason we want to win is because we are home. It's been years since we've won two in a row against Australia.

"We've been hurting for decades. People say watch out for a wounded Kangaroo, but what about a wounded Kiwi?"

The Kiwis achieved back-to-back wins over Australia in separate years when

they won the Super League test 30-12 in 1997, followed by the 22-16 Anzac Test victory a year later.

But they have not done this in the same year since 1953 when they smashed the Kangaroos 25-5 in Christchurch and won 12-11 in Wellington a week later.

In another piece of history, captain Ruben Wiki will equal Gary Freeman's record of 46 test caps for New Zealand, while Stacey Jones could possibly be playing his last game in a Kiwi jersey.

"It's an honour to get to 46," says Wiki. "A lot of legends are up there, like Gary Freeman, Mal Meninga [45], Garry Schofield, 46, and Steve Kearney [45], and it's great to be close to those guys, but I just want to do well for my country."

Jones has ruled himself out of the Tri-Nations tests against Great Britain but at training this week McLennan seemed confident the little general could be available for the final if the Kiwis qualify.

"We're still hopeful. He's really enjoying himself and that's number one. Let's hope things work out and he'll be able to play for us later on."

After perfect preparation for the first



OLD AND THE NEW: Manu Vatuvei (left) and Nigel Vagana square off at training.

test, life returned to normal for the injury-plagued Kiwis this week with the withdrawal of key players and the arrival of replacement Shontayne Hape from England.

The former Warrior arrived in New Zealand on Wednesday and is fresh from winning a Super League title with Bradford.

Hape replaces first test hero Clinton Toopi, who is out with a knee injury, at centre while Motu Tony comes into the side at hooker for the injured Lance Hohaia.

In a surprise move, McLennan has included Tony Puletua and Iafeta Paleaasina at the expense of Frank Pritchard and Nathan Cayless as he opts for a fresh approach.

"Tony and Iafeta had great games for New Zealand A last week, so they shouldn't have any trouble slotting straight into the team," says McLennan.

Puletua played his first game since April on the weekend but McLennan is adamant the second rower's fitness will hold up.

For the Kangaroos, interchange players Craig Gower and Andrew Ryan have been dropped for Trent Barrett and Mark O'Meley.

Matt Cooper also comes into the side in place of injured winger Timana Tahu.