

When rugby isn't the winner on the day



Jonathan Dow

"Teen rugby match abandoned after ref attacked." "Eleven-year-old banned after double attack." "Rugby player who punched referee sentenced."

The headlines don't make good reading.

Sport is meant to be good for you, to build character. The strongest of heart

rise to the top, as we saw last month in Athens.

Citius, altius, fortius. Swifter, higher, stronger.

Rugby players of all ages assaulting referees hints that playing sport does not always develop good character.

War is no longer honourable so the sports field, away from the harsh reality of life, is regarded as the next best place to develop character.

One of the "harsh realities" of life is that violence is unacceptable.

It is not surprising that this has become blurred on the rugby field for we know that rugby is a tough game.

Someone once said that to play rugby is to consent to be assaulted.

Depending on your definition of assault, this could be true. But at no stage does the referee agree to run this risk.

In the past, sports organisations have been criticised for handing down token punishments to violent offenders to appease the public.



EYES ON THE BALL: Sport the way it should be.

And the courts have been reluctant to prosecute people for what happens on the sports field. But when referees are the target the law should be enforced.

In August a Napier man who attacked a referee in a club rugby match received a life ban from rugby, an assault conviction and 200 hours community service.

This is how it should be.

An automatic life ban from playing and an assault prosecution would make it clear the ref is not to be touched.

The 11-year-old boy who attacked a referee is another case. The Whangarei

boy was punished with a year-long ban from rugby and ordered to attend anger management and referees' activities.

That this happened at all is a tragedy. Punishment and rehabilitation will hopefully help him, but the adults involved in schoolboy rugby need to look at the environment they are creating.

The law, like politics, has not been welcome on the rugby field.

Rugby is, after all, only a game.

But anyone who assaults a referee is no longer a sportsperson and should be punished accordingly.

Community spirit is what we would like



Grace Edwards

The recent flooding in the Bay of Plenty gave many shining examples of this rural community spirit.

In July the *New Zealand Herald* told the story of Larry Dixon of Whakatane and his friend Joy Hastie, who showed the best sort of neighbourly kindness.

Dixon's Ratima Place house was spared from the floodwaters but many of his neighbours' homes were badly damaged.

While they were cleaning up the aftermath, Dixon cooked meals and made coffee for them.

He collected their mail, opened and closed windows, and kept an eye on vacant homes.

Hastie washed 17 loads of dirty clothes to make sure local children had something to wear for school.

This scene of communities rallying around neighbours in need was repeated throughout the Bay of Plenty as 210 families had their homes declared uninhabitable.

There are certainly communities in Auckland where people would not hesitate to help their neighbours in this way.

But as the "disillusioned Howick resident" said, there are some communities in Auckland that have community spirit and some that do not.

One organisation that works to bring neighbours together is Neighbourhood Support.

It works closely with police and other organisations in the community to increase safety by establishing Neighbourhood Support Groups.

Neighbourhood Week, from Saturday October 30, is promoted as an opportunity to get to know those in your neighbourhood by holding street barbecues, sports games or morning teas.

My neighbours recently held our first street barbecue in five years.

We were able to talk babies with two expectant parents about to have their first child and find out what all the neighbours did for a living.

Once you get to know your neighbours the barriers break down and life is breathed into the community spirit.

A month on from my street's barbecue a blue balloon appeared on the letterbox of the expectant parents.

It was tied there to let all the neighbours know — it's a boy!

Woken in the early hours of the morning by "popping" sounds, the woman searched her house and discovered a fire in a kitchen cupboard.

It was soon out of control. She quickly called 111, grabbed a dressing gown and ran out of the house.

Standing alone, barefoot on the cold concrete driveway, she watched her house burn.

After what seemed like an eternity, three fire engines arrived to fight the fire.

The scene was chaotic with flashing lights, idling engines, loud fire-fighters battling the blaze while exploding sounds came from the house as the fire consumed walls and ceilings.

This would be enough to wake most neighbours — but apparently not in this deep-sleeping street.

Not a single neighbour came out of their home to see if the woman was all right.

The "disillusioned Howick resident" said in her letter to the editor in her local paper:

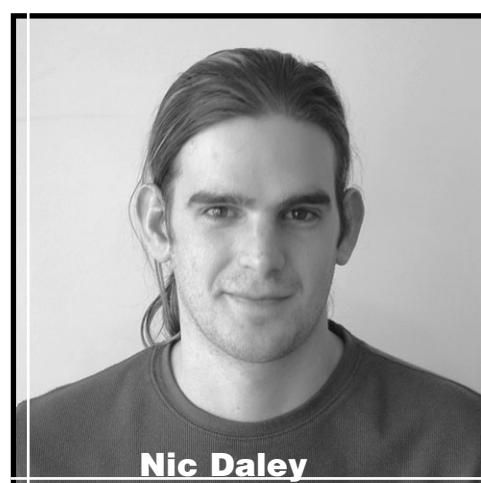
"I know there are pockets around Auckland that have a good community spirit. I just feel sad I am not living in one of them."

Is this really the state of our community spirit?

Aucklanders may live in a big city but surely most of us would help a neighbour whose house was burning down.

Yet it seems that it is the rural communities that constantly set the example of good community spirit, while urban ones are an embarrassment.

The decline of today's man as we know him



Nic Daley

The other day I realised I was a shadow of my former masculine self.

Rolling out of bed and blindly ambling towards the bathroom, I looked at myself in the mirror.

I was about to shave my face, eyebrows, nose and chest before spending some 30 minutes choosing which garments to parade myself in that day.

Suddenly John Tamihere's uplifting words of male pride and responsibility flickered through my brain like a fluorescent light trying to turn on. And it did flick on.

Spurred on by Tamihere's call to arms, I ran to my bedroom, unsheathed my pen and prepared for a battle of words (being the red-blooded male that I am).

Realising that writing was probably not the best way to assert my masculinity, I prepared myself for a more physical affirmation.

Rugby. I would bathe myself in a river of mud and grass, lose 9-6 without scoring a try in a game where rugby was the winner on the day, come inside and eat steak before settling down to a game of poker with the dog.

I could then proclaim loudly from my castle that I truly was a hot-blooded heterosexual man.

I was going to do this, until I realised I had an excellent book to read.

I stopped.

What had I become? To choose a book over mud and cards is to choose the ballet over a Ranfurly Shield clash.

I was an example of the collapse of the archetypal male.

This disintegration has been occurring,

somewhat unnoticed, for many years now.

Indeed the traditional hunter gatherers have become hunters of tradition who gather not very much at all.

Traditions such as the hairy chest, unplucked eyebrows and rugged voices have been stalked and replaced by waxed torsos, delicately crafted eyebrows that look like they have just been planted and pruned and voices as refined as a whisper on the breeze.

The causes of this terrible affliction are obvious upon closer inspection.

Men are too concerned about whether to be metrosexual, heterosexual or homosexual, and end up in a state that's not very sexual at all.

Programmes such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* turn men choosing clothes into boys choosing GI Joes.

The traditional "how much does it cost and can we go home once I've bought it?" has become: Will that shirt match my pants? Will those pants match my shoes? Will that jacket match my underwear?

Any number of ludicrous permutations and combinations are tested to achieve a maximum level of sexuality.

Men who just want to be men struggle when there are some men who want to be women.

There has to be doubt as to the make-up of today's man. There has to be doubt about today's man wearing make-up.

Tamihere is right. It's time men stood up and were counted. Oh, but when you stand, make sure you're wearing that green shirt — it looks really good with those pants.



Got a 'Big Mouth'?

Send your letters to the editor at
Te Waha Nui:
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