



Te Puni Kōkiri
REALISING MĀORI POTENTIAL

Te Māori i Te Whutupōro *Māori in Rugby*



KEY FACTS

- In 2004 there were 26,269 registered Māori rugby players in New Zealand, 20 percent of all players.
- Of the 160 registered professional rugby players in New Zealand, 54 (34%) are of Māori descent.
- Māori have the highest conversion rate from amateur to professional rugby of any demographic group within New Zealand rugby.
- The New Zealand Māori rugby team has won 22 of its 26 games played between 1994 and 2004, including victories over England, Argentina, Scotland and Fiji.

Rugby is the national sport of New Zealand and has been a part of our national culture since the 19th century. Māori have been avid players of rugby since its introduction in 1870. This fact sheet provides some key information regarding Māori in rugby and has been produced to coincide with the British and Irish Lions tour of New Zealand in 2005.

HISTORICAL

The first game of rugby played in New Zealand took place on 14 May 1870 between Nelson College and Nelson Football Club.²

In 1882 the first rugby team from overseas visited New Zealand when New South Wales toured both North and South Islands late in the season. In 1884, a New Zealand team, wearing blue jerseys with a gold fern, returned the visit, after winning all its matches in New South Wales.

In 1888-89 the New Zealand Native Team³ became the first team from New Zealand to visit Britain when it undertook the longest ever rugby tour. The team played 107 games across Britain, Australia and New Zealand during a tour that lasted 14 months. This tour was four years before the formation of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union (NZRFU which is now the NZRU).

Throughout the last century Māori rugby has been developed and administered by a Māori rugby board as part of the NZRU.



Figure 1: New Zealand Maori rugby logo¹

MĀORI RUGBY GREATS

Māori players easily rank amongst some of the best to have played the game. George Nepia is considered by many, especially in Europe, to be one of the greatest rugby players of all time. Nepia was part of the 1924-25 "Invincibles" team that won every single game on its European/Canadian tour.

The first ever New Zealand rugby captain was Thomas Rangiwhia Ellison on the 1893 tour of Australia. Ellison introduced the haka to rugby, created the prototype of the All Blacks jersey and was a key thinker behind the style of New Zealand rugby.

Sid Going, Tane Norton, Waka Nathan, Wayne "Buck" Shelford, Carlos Spencer and Taine Randell are just a handful of the many Māori rugby players who have become household names.

PROVINCIAL

In 2004 there were 129,253 registered rugby players in New Zealand. Of these 26,269 (20%)⁴ were Māori.⁵

A major stocktake of the current state of Māori rugby at the provincial level was conducted in 2002 by the NZRU. The stocktake involved interviews with nearly all provincial union CEOs, some chairmen and other representatives from provincial Māori committees. The findings of this stocktake were used in the development of the Strategic Plan for Māori Rugby 2005.

Under each province is a Māori committee which administers Māori rugby in that province.⁶

In some provinces, tribal (iwi and hapū) based rugby competitions are thriving outside of the NZRU. One example is in Taranaki, where tribal affiliation determines which team or area a player can represent.





The success of the East Coast Rugby Union in the NPC⁷ second division has shown how iwi (in this case Ngāti Porou) and provincial rugby can work together.

The rugby team is heavily influenced by the iwi and vice versa, with each contributing to the development of the other.

PROFESSIONAL

Currently there are 160 registered professional players under contract to the NZRU. 54 of these players are of Māori descent (34%).

From a general population base of 15 percent, Māori comprise at least 21 percent of the New Zealand total player base and 34 percent of professional rugby players. This represents the highest conversion rate from amateur to professional rugby of any demographic group within New Zealand rugby.⁸

TABLE 1: REGISTERED PLAYERS IN 2004

	All Players	Professional Players
Total number	129,253	160
Number of Māori	26,269	54
Māori as % of total	20.3%	33.8%

Source: NZRU Strategic Plan for Māori Rugby 2005

INTERNATIONAL

Over the years there have been many Māori players who have represented New Zealand as All Blacks. Recent All Blacks of Māori descent include Piri Weepu, Rico Gear, Marty Holah, Jono Gibbes, Luke McAllister, Leon MacDonald and Carlos Spencer.

The New Zealand women's team, the Black Ferns, has won the last two Women's Rugby World Cups. The captain of both these squads was Dr. Farah Palmer from Ngāti Māhuta. The squads have always contained many Māori players. In 2002, nine of the 26 team members were Māori, in the 2005 team there were eight. Māori are also part of the management of the team.

In recent years Rugby Sevens has taken off in popularity and the New Zealand team is the current World Sevens champion as well as the Commonwealth Games champion. Māori have been strongly represented in the squad since its inception with players such as: Dallas Seymour, Liam Messam, Tamati Ellison and Eric Rush.

NEW ZEALAND MĀORI

The New Zealand Māori representative rugby team has a proud history both on and off the rugby field. The team has lost only four of its 26 games (winning percentage of 85%) played between 1994 and 2004. These games include victories over England, Argentina, Scotland and Fiji. In contrast the All Blacks won 76 percent of their matches in the same period.⁹

The Māori team continued their winning form in 2004 beating England in extra time in the final of the Churchill Cup in Canada.

Since it was given official status in 1910, the New Zealand Māori squad has produced some of the rugby world's most outstanding athletes, including: fullback George Nepia who played 46 games for the All Blacks from 1924-1930; halfback Sid Going, who played 86 matches for his country; and former All Black captain Tane Norton, who represented New Zealand in 61 games, including 27 tests, and who was until recently the President of the New Zealand Rugby Union.

In 2005 the New Zealand Māori played, and won, against the British and Irish Lions (Hamilton, June 11, 2005), 19-13. Captaining the squad was Waikato's Jono Gibbes. The squad included eight newcomers to the New Zealand Māori team¹⁰ and twelve players who also played for the All Blacks.

Te Puni Kōkiri would like to acknowledge the New Zealand Rugby Union for much of the information in this fact sheet.

FOOTNOTES 1 © New Zealand Rugby Union 2005 2 Source: The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand Rugby, 1981. 3 The precursor to the New Zealand Māori squad. 4 This value may actually be higher due to coding and survey errors. 5 Note: There are no statistics on Māori women's participation in rugby below international level. However it is generally agreed that Māori women form a significant proportion of players. 6 Some provinces administer Māori rugby directly, with the Māori committee taking a more advisory role. 7 National Provincial Championship. 8 Source: NZRU Strategic Plan for Māori Rugby 2005. 9 This includes international matches and Rugby World Cup games only. 10 To be eligible for selection to the New Zealand Māori team a player must be able to establish his iwi and whakapapa.

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