

# A History of the 1905 All Black Rugby Tour of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales

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Rugby was introduced to New Zealand in the 1870s. Since the 1880s the sport has occupied a central role in New Zealand's popular culture and in male national identity. This has been most clearly manifested in the success of the national team, the All Blacks, whose first tour of Britain was in 1905.

The tour occurred at a time when many believed the virility and strength of the British, particularly English, male were in rapid decline. The disastrous events during the South African War, in which it took over 400,000 British and Imperial troops over two and a half years to defeat 40,000 Afrikaners, led many observers in Britain to conclude that the prolonged conflict resulted from the physical deterioration of British men. Many analysts were also quick to point out that the troops showing greatest success against the Afrikaners were the contingents from Australia and New Zealand. They believed that life on the frontier in these societies kept men active and virile.

The 1905 All Black tour to Great Britain captured the imagination of both the British and New Zealand public. The level of success achieved by the All Blacks was unprecedented. They outscored the English sides they played by 801 to 22, and their only loss of the tour was a narrow one to Wales near the end of their program.

Response to the tour by press, politicians and the public was swift. Stories circulated throughout the British newspapers on the superior physical and mental characteristics of the New Zealanders. Advertisements placed near match reports capitalized on the popularity of the All Blacks, by emphasizing the "manliness" of certain products. Finally, advertisements placed in newspapers by the New Zealand government promoted tourism and immigration to New Zealand, the "home of the New Zealand football team".

New Zealand Prime Minister Richard Seddon wasted no time in exploiting the success of the All Blacks. He rewarded the team by allowing them to return home via the United States at the expense of the New Zealand government. Furthermore, he arranged to have match reports sent to New Zealand as official government messages. He was on hand when the team departed from Wellington, and when they returned to Auckland. Crowds at these gatherings were reported to be on a par with those welcoming home the soldiers returning from the South African War in 1902. Seddon recognized the central position Rugby occupied in New Zealand society. One newspaper labelled him the "Minister of Football" in addition to his many other titles.

This paper investigates responses to the success of the All Black tour in terms of the creation and definition of a male identity, not only in New Zealand, but also in Great Britain. The tour was also significant in resurrecting rugby in England, as matches played by the New Zealanders attracted record crowds. I examine how the tour was used by capitalists and politicians for profit as an early example of the power of sports in modern society. I also argue that previous works which have examined the 1905 tour in the wider context of the development of a New Zealand national identity, particularly those by Jock Phillips (1984, 1987), have given a distorted view by reading a mythologized version of rugby back onto past events. While Phillips and others, such as Keith Sinclair and Scott Crawford, have argued that the 1905 All Black rugby tour of the British Isles is the place to begin the search for how rugby became so pervasive in New Zealand's national identity, no one has published a detailed, analytical study of the tour.