

'A Tendency to Roughness':¹ Anti-Heroic Representations of New Zealand Rugby Football, 1890-1914

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Many members of the sporting public in New Zealand were convinced by 1908 that rugby in the Dominion had a 'darker' side. It is important to acknowledge that their suspicions appear partly justified, for the historical literature on New Zealand rugby during the years from 1890 to 1914 has tended to focus on the 'heroic' All Black team of 1905. The so-called 'Originals' have been portrayed as a magnificent band of athletic patriots. Ascetics all, they eschewed the pleasures of the flesh during the tour, remained always quiet and modest regarding their achievements and were devoted above all to physical fitness. Thus prepared, the All Blacks of 1905 swept their British opponents aside (the Welsh excepted) with dazzling displays of skill, and created a paradigm of manhood which was dominant in New Zealand society for the next 70 years.² Little effort has been made by historians to redress this imbalance.³ The perceived 'virtues' of the game have thus been emphasised, while its 'vices', such as they were, have been largely ignored. This article will discuss the preoccupation of New Zealand rugby critics with three principal 'evils' before 1914. These included gambling, particularly the presence of bookmakers at rugby, an alleged rise in rough play and a significant weakening of the amateur ethos which occasionally resulted in violations of the rules concerning professionalism.

Rugby Union football arrived in New Zealand directly from its heartland in the English public schools during the 1870s through the efforts of various former public school pupils. The best known of these 'old boys' were George Sale, Professor of Classics at the University of Otago, formerly of Rugby School and an early player of the game, and Charles Monro of Nelson. Something of an 'old-boy network' developed, formed largely of 'members of a wealthy elite', with sufficient leisure in which to arrange 'inter-regional' games. These matches proved crucial in popularising rugby throughout New Zealand.⁴

There were several reasons for this rapid and widespread acceptance of the game within the colony. Players required neither complex equipment nor ideal conditions underfoot in order to participate. Rugby also provided, in a colonial society almost devoid of 'long-established rituals', an excellent form of organised entertainment.⁵ Dunning and Sheard have also suggested that the roughness of rugby 'may have made it more appealing to groups among whom traditional concepts of masculinity continued to prevail'. Were this so, it would explain why rugby became firmly rooted in New Zealand, 'where the occupational base encouraged the retention of standards of masculinity in which physical toughness, strength and courage were emphasised'.⁶ By 1895 rugby football had become the 'national game' of the colony with its own organisational framework governed by the New Zealand Rugby Football Union (NZRFU).

From its inception, the NZRFU was an affiliate of the Rugby Football Union (RFU) in England, and as such was obliged to observe the laws of the game as determined by that body. The New Zealand Union was also expected to adhere, at least nominally, to the games ethic.⁷ This body of moral principles, codified during the 1880s by the English 'public school elite' which dominated the RFU from its foundation, was designed to instruct all participants on the value and conduct of sports. The central tenet was amateurism, which became the 'major organisational goal' of the English Union from 1895.⁸ Amateurism stipulated that football should be played solely for the pleasure it afforded. Excessive striving for victory introduced an unhealthy spirit of competition, transforming a character-building 'mock fight' into 'serious fighting'. Training and specialisation degraded sport to the level of work. The demeanour of players was expected to be characterised by 'self-restraint and... the masking of enthusiasm in victory and disappointment in defeat'. Violators of this rule were denounced as 'unsportsmanlike' and 'ungentlemanly'. Rugby was also to be distinguished by 'the norm of "fair play"... coupled with a stress on voluntary compliance with the rules and a chivalrous attitude of "friendly rivalry" towards opponents'. Adherence to these ideals by all participants would enable rugby to produce the maximum pleasure for the players.⁹

The games ethic also demanded that certain practices and attitudes should be shunned. For example, mass spectatorship allegedly resulted in the concentration of 'openly excited' proletarians, with a correlated growth in the incidence of drunkenness, swearing, gambling and violence.

Professionalism was another tendency to be feared and eliminated. Excessive competition brought unsportsmanlike, professional players into rugby, with a consequent upsurge in violence, foul play and cheating; professionals resorted to such tactics because their living depended on success at any cost.¹⁰

The Colonial Game

In that it was nominally bound by British precepts and practices, the colonial game remained superficially identical to the game played 'at Home'. However, it deviated in crucial ways from the rugby football which existed in Scotland, Ireland and South-east England, and resembled much more closely the code as it had developed in the West Country, Wales and the North of England. As it was in these last three regions, rugby in New Zealand was distinguished by both an 'ideally bourgeois' attitude towards money and a passionate will to win at almost any cost. The first of these characteristics ensured that rugby in the colony prospered financially and developed an extremely strong infrastructure, while the latter resulted in New Zealand becoming one of the leading rugby 'powers' in the Empire during the Edwardian era.

The heightened commercial awareness which existed at all levels of the game arose from two particular circumstances. New Zealand football depended for its survival on a steady flow of shillings through the gate. Moreover, once rugby had won the enthusiastic support of the middle classes during the 1890s, the administrative structure of the game was increasingly filled with men from middle-class backgrounds. There was, however, a sharp distinction between these men and the middle classes in the South of England among whom the ethos of amateurism had developed, and which controlled the RFU. Like the commercially-minded middle classes in the North of England who controlled the 'professional' Northern Rugby Football Union, those in New Zealand usually derived their class status from an involvement in commercial activity. This occurred more often after 1900, as New Zealand society became increasingly urbanised. These men were frequently involved in the management of small-scale enterprises which fostered a measure of common identity between employer and worker.¹¹

The predominance of such men throughout its administrative structure had a number of consequences for rugby in New Zealand. A potential social basis was thus created for the establishment of 'open' football

clubs, on the model of those existing in the North of England during the 1880s.¹² Secondly the colonial middle classes adopted a socially-inclusive attitude towards participation in rugby akin to that which existed among their counterparts in Wales.¹³ Finally, the merging of these two factors, and an awareness among officials of what participation meant to proletarian players in terms of lost wages, ensured the moderation of the amateur ethos. Solid evidence exists of such a relaxation. The Sydenham RFC, a working-class club in Christchurch, adopted the practice from 1901 of making a presentation to a player, thereby 'showing their appreciation of his good fellowship on the occasion of his... marriage'. Although the club sometimes contributed money toward the purchase of a gift, the presentation of useful and sometimes expensive items of furniture was more usual.¹⁴

Such benefactions were arguably a violation of the laws of the game relating to professionalism. Admittedly, the bodies controlling athletics, including the Amateur Athletic Association in Britain and the International Olympic Committee, endorsed the award of prizes to successful competitors. However, many of their counterparts in rugby, particularly the Scottish and English Unions, were opposed to a sportsman receiving any material reward for his success. For instance, when the Welsh Union (WFU) decided in 1897 to present Arthur Gould, the greatest player produced by Wales to that time and a Welsh national hero, with the deeds to his house, the English and the Scots declared him a professional. The WFU withdrew temporarily from the International Board, and played no more matches against Scotland until 1899.¹⁵ There is, in contrast, no evidence that either the Canterbury provincial or the national Unions ever raised any objection to the practices of the Sydenham RFC or any like them. The indication is, therefore, that even those administrators most loyal to the English Union were prepared to disregard conduct which might have aroused the suspicions of zealous amateurs at Home. It is even possible, as we shall see, that they were ready to extend this courtesy when generosity went beyond the bounds of the debatable into the realms of 'veiled professionalism'.

A widespread and passionate desire to win at almost any cost was the second characteristic which set rugby football in New Zealand apart from its Scots, Irish and southern English counterparts during this period. This competitive obsession was rooted in a phenomenon similar to that which distinguished the game in the North of England from the 1880s.

The inhabitants of many northern hamlets demanded, as an expression of civic pride, the conversion of their 'indigenous talent' into an 'enthusiastic machine' capable of 'tussling with the best' in English rugby.¹⁶ This attitude manifested itself clearly for the first time in New Zealand during the extensive unofficial tour of Australasia by a very strong British rugby team in 1888. Public opinion in Auckland loudly demanded the preparation of the strongest possible local team to defeat 'the most formidable fifteen' that had ever visited the province. The Auckland Union succumbed to the clamour, and the intensive training to which the local side was subjected stood them in good stead. The Britons suffered the heaviest defeat of their tour at the hands of the Aucklanders.¹⁷

The visit in 1904 of the first official British touring team revealed a latent tension within New Zealand rugby between the passionate will to win and the adherence of the game to the tenets of amateurism. Many in the colony demanded that the New Zealand Union assemble the local team selected for the sole Test match of the tour up to two weeks beforehand, for some rigorous training and hard preparatory matches? The Test was a matter of the utmost gravity. 'New Zealand football', wrote one journalist, 'will be judged in Britain on the result of the match. Excuses as regards want of opportunity to practice, and other side issues, will have no bearing on the position as seen through British glasses.'¹⁹ The refusal of the Management Committee of the national Union to accede to these demands provoked such an outcry that the Committee felt compelled to issue a 'manifesto' in defence of its position. Critics were informed condescendingly that the New Zealand side would require no more than four days' practice before the Test, for 'combination among players in the first flight is easily gained on the field'. The Committee also reminded its detractors that rugby football was 'but a pastime, a means of exercise and recreation, an amateur sport, not a profession'. Players could not absent themselves from paid employment for two weeks and remain amateurs."

Demands for the mobilisation of footballing talent in defence of communal prestige became a consistent theme, while civic pride evolved until it came to encompass a larger community – the entire colony. Rugby football, as Sinclair observed, came increasingly to be perceived as a vehicle for the expression of a growing New Zealand nationalism within the context of Empire, a function which it already performed in Wales, and which cricket performed in Australia.²¹ By 1906 the New Zealand representative team was regarded as the trustee of this burgeoning

national pride. The identification of the honour of the colony with the achievements of its finest athletes was aided by the actions of Premier Richard Seddon. A flagrant political opportunist²² and energetic 'booster' of New Zealand, Seddon publicly associated himself and the colony with the success of the All Black tour of Britain in 1905. Because of its importance in protecting the reputation of New Zealand, popular sentiment demanded thereafter that the national rugby team was to be maintained in prime working order. Even the formerly intractable New Zealand Union came tardily to this realisation²³ in the wake of the All Black tour which temporarily established New Zealand as the premier footballing 'power' of the Empire.²⁴ Through the accomplishments of the All Blacks, who 'in a very real sense were the ambassadors of the country, reflecting its value system',²⁵ large numbers of the males in New Zealand felt themselves to be part of 'a nation of footballers'.

It seemed to some, however, that the games ethic was gradually being abandoned in the quest for success. The tours of the New Zealand Native Team in 1888-89 and the All Blacks in 1905 convinced many critics in Britain, and some in New Zealand, that rugby in the colony was plagued by 'roughness', 'ill-discipline', 'cheating' and 'veiled professionalism'.²⁶ Manifestations within New Zealand of a growing discontent with the state of rugby football strengthened their convictions. Early in 1907 Albert Baskerville of Wellington organised a group of footballers dissatisfied with the 3s per day allowance for touring players, and the 'unexciting' nature of the amateur game, into the 'Professional' All Blacks to tour the Northern Union in Britain. The creation in the colony of the first openly professional rugby venture outside the Northern Union appeared to vindicate earlier suspicions of 'veiled professionalism'. Because they would introduce the 'Northern game' on their return, the 'Pro-Blacks' were widely perceived as a threat to the existence of the amateur code in 'Maoriland'. In March 1908 a faction in New Zealand rugby, led by the Otago Union, moved to protect amateur football by demanding changes to the rules which would permit an increase in players' allowances and the creation of a more open, exciting game for players and spectators. The militants among these 'sporting Nationalists' insisted that the New Zealand Union break with the RFU if that body failed to ratify the necessary alterations.²⁷ The English Union was already convinced in late 1907 that only prompt action could prevent the irreversible 'moral decay' of rugby in the Dominion? They therefore

organised the ill-starred tour of Australasia during 1908 by the immaculately 'amateur' Anglo-Welsh team, whose purpose was to provide an example which would 'guide' New Zealand rugby back from the brink of 'hell'.²⁹

Despite its enthusiastic acceptance by the middle classes and its evident importance to the national psyche, New Zealand rugby was by 1908 in the throes of a considerable bout of soul-searching. Many believed that the game exhibited a number of features which contemporary critics in the Dominion found distinctly unsavoury — gambling, rough play and 'veiled professionalism'. There are three possible explanations for what apparently became a widespread preoccupation with the 'darker side' of rugby. Firstly, it may simply have been a natural response to a series of genuine problems. Secondly, it could be interpreted as one manifestation of a more general campaign by 'moral' reformers to erase all traces of what Phillips has called the frontier male culture³⁰ from society and impose middle-class values in their stead. Finally, it is also possible that some localities did experience an upsurge in these perceived evils, and that middle-class reformers interpreted isolated instances of the same troubles in their own regions as evidence of a spreading moral contagion.

Gambling

Gambling was associated from the mid-nineteenth century with a wide range of sports in the United States, Australia and Great Britain, where it attracted increasing opposition from middle-class, evangelical Protestant groups between 1880 and 1914.³¹ Gambling was also considered pernicious by middle-class reformers in New Zealand because it attracted the 'parasitical' bookmaker to the terraces. The Gaming and Lotteries Act of 1881, which was passed in order to eliminate the tangible social nuisance posed by the public activities of those involved in gambling, nominally imposed considerable restraints on gambling and bookmaking. Gambling dens, lotteries offering cash prizes and public betting on sports events were forbidden, though the operation of totalisators by racing clubs was permitted and bookmaking as a vocation was untouched. The failure to suppress bookmakers, particularly when their activities became more 'brazen' during the 1890s, aroused 'a hornet's nest of middle-class discontent' which became an anti-gambling 'crusade' throughout the years to 1910.³²

A handful of organisations rapidly took the lead in this campaign, the

most prominent being the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. These 'hot' Protestants were instrumental in the formation of the Anti-Gambling Leagues, which attempted to galvanise public and political opposition to gambling. They also worked closely with the two most 'articulate anti-gambling advocates' in Parliament, the pious Liberals Harry Ell and Tommy Taylor who represented working-class electorates in Christchurch. Equally energetic were the women's organisations of the day, particularly the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The anti-gambling activists of the WCTU were convinced that many working-class women were the victims of drunken, brutal husbands who gambled away what money they earned on horses — or perhaps football — leaving their families impoverished. The movement against gambling was composed principally of middle-class people who were educated, articulate and committed. They were ideally equipped and placed within the social structure to press politicians, including those at the highest level, for a legislative onslaught against bookmakers and gambling. By late 1907 this influential coalition began to achieve results.³³

These campaigners expressed little direct concern over the activities of bookmakers at football grounds. Though relatively small in scale, gambling at rugby matches became detrimental when bookmakers accepted discrete wagers from participants in matches on which they were offering odds, or protected their profits by 'arranging' favourable results. Major scandals occasionally erupted as a consequence of these practices. During the match between Alhambra and Kaikorai in Dunedin in May 1891, newspaper reporters and spectators alike were initially mystified by 'the utter collapse of the Kaikorai team in the second spell'.³⁴ The doubts of many, however, were quickly banished. The answer, wrote one bemused observer, 'soon came from a group of men known as bookies, who were heard to freely state that the Kaikorai knew what they were doing, and that two or three of the men would make a pot of money over the result'.³⁵ Another commented that the spectators generally, and several members of the losing team, thought that 'the match had been "sold"'. The latter were particularly infuriated, declaring that they would not play again 'unless something was done to curb this underhand business'.³⁶ The *Otago Daily Times* suspected that, because these bookmakers had offered odds of up to ten to one on what had been the first game of the season, the match had indeed been 'fixed'.³⁷

Faced with such evidence, and under increasing public pressure, the

Otago Rugby Football Union conducted an inquiry into the affair, and more particularly into the actions of Patrick Keogh, the Kaikorai half-back. The case was perhaps subject to more intensive public scrutiny than usual, for Keogh was one of the most prominent footballers in the colony. Born in Birmingham, England, in about 1867, he had arrived in New Zealand while still a child. First selected to play for Otago in 1887, he soon established a reputation for brilliance which has lasted to this day. He had progressed to become the leading try scorer and 'star player' of the New Zealand Native team on its tour of Britain in 1888-89.³⁸ This marvellous career was, however, about to come to an abrupt end.

The Union showed itself prepared to inflict dire punishments on those involved in gambling on rugby matches. Keogh denied having placed a wager on the outcome of the match, but admitted having gambled on games during the previous season. The committee concluded that while the evidence placed before it did not prove that the game had been 'sold by certain players', it did show that 'betting among players does to some extent exist'. Three Kaikorai players were severely censured for 'concerning themselves in the investment of money for non players'. Having been found by the Union to have profited from rugby football through his gambling pursuits while a player, Keogh was suspended forthwith as a professional.³⁹ Though reinstated as an amateur in 1894, he never played again.

A scandal similar in nature to the Keogh affair rocked rugby in Auckland some years later. Following a game in July 1904 between the leading clubs City and Newton, during which 'a prominent player' from City was seen to perform far below his best, 'remarkable rumours' began to circulate. It transpired that one S George of the City Club had admitted receiving from A J Long of Newton a sum of money 'on condition that he did not use his best efforts in the field on behalf of the team he represented'.⁴⁰ 'Clearly', trumpeted the *New Zealand Herald*:

the primary cause of the whole trouble was gambling, and as betting on football appears to be on the increase, and ugly rumours are going the rounds to the effect that the case under notice is not the first case of 'squaring' that has occurred in Auckland, it is evident that strong and prompt measures will have to be taken to root out an evil which threatens the very existence of our national game.⁴¹

The Auckland Union suspended both players for ten years, and one G

Rutherford — presumably the bookmaker at whose behest the transaction had been initiated— was ordered off for life all the grounds under the control of the Union. The New Zealand Union confirmed these punishments, and extended the prohibition imposed on Rutherford to include all rugby grounds in New Zealand?

Incidents of this type were perhaps too few in number to have constituted a serious problem. Nevertheless, bookmakers seem occasionally to have been present at important rugby matches in the Dominion, accepting bets between 2s 6d and £50 at varying odds, on such fundamentals as which team would win or which player would score first.⁴³ Individuals also occasionally arranged wagers of considerable size between themselves. It was reported that, before the Test between the British and New Zealand sides in 1904, one local supporter wagered £400 on a win for New Zealand against £600 staked by 'an Englishman' on the contrary result. The match also appears to have stimulated a feverish outburst of other gambling activity in Wellington. The *New Zealand Herald* informed readers that the Britons 'are strong favourites, and the betting is 3 to 1 in their favour'.⁴⁴ The casual way in which newspaper reports referred to these activities suggests that many readers accepted gambling as a natural accompaniment to any significant game.

Others within the community, however, thought such open gambling before a Test was anything but 'natural', and were preparing to put an end to this and to all other gambling. In 1908, the Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Ward, succumbed to the increasing political pressure exerted by the anti-gambling lobby and championed the passage of the Gaming Act of 1908.⁴⁵ Although penalties for bookmaking at football matches were increased, gambling and bookmaking on the terraces remained a constant source of concern for some Unions. In April 1908, seventeen years after the Keogh affair, and on the eve of a match against the touring Anglo-Welsh side, the issue still caused the Otago Union considerable apprehension. The committee of the ORFU anxiously asked the Inspector of Police in Dunedin 'if he desires the assistance of the committee in carrying out the provisions of the law with respect to the prohibition of betting on sports grounds'. The Inspector responded, in a letter containing a hint of moral panic, that he would be very pleased to receive any assistance in stamping out this 'pernicious practice'. Both the uniformed and detective branches of the force, he wrote, had been instructed to give the matter 'special attention'.⁴⁶

The anti-gambling movement, dissatisfied with the restrictions placed

on bookmakers and the totalisator by the Gaming Act of 1908, clamoured throughout 1909 and 1910 for decisive legislation against all forms of gambling. Prime Minister Ward, aware that his Government faced a difficult election in 1911, again acceded to the demands of these middle-class moralists by ensuring the passage of the Gaming Act of 1910. Evidence suggests, however, that while the Act forced bookmakers from the terraces and streets, and reduced their number, many continued to operate by becoming more circumspect and going 'underground'.⁴⁷ Despite their 'victory' over gambling some middle-classes opinion makers remained dissatisfied with the state of the game, for they had eliminated only one of the 'tendencies towards degeneration which have made themselves apparent [in rugby] in recent years'.⁴⁸

'Rough Play'

'Rough play', as it was euphemistically known, was the second 'distasteful' feature constantly harped upon by Edwardian commentators. 'Full Back of the *Otago Witness*, observed that 'every referee and every spectator has a different idea of where the dividing line between hard play and rough play begins and no satisfactory guiding rule can be laid down'.⁴⁹ In fact, the available sources suggest that 'rough play' was considered to be the use of violence in word or deed in excess of what was permitted by an individual referee. Despite the lack of a satisfactory generic definition, a growing number of people appeared convinced by 1908 that rough and violent play were becoming an integral and unwanted part of New Zealand rugby.⁵⁰ The evidence produced by Oriard, regarding American College football involving teams of 'gentlemen's sons' from such institutions as Harvard, Princeton and Yale, suggests that America too was enduring an upsurge of violence far more serious than anything reported in New Zealand rugby.⁵¹

Calamitous occurrences in club matches in Wanganui and Wellington during June 1904 propelled the issue into the arena of public debate throughout New Zealand. Firstly, an 'extremely rough' match between the senior teams of the Kaierau and Pirates clubs in Wanganui on 4 June left seven players with injuries which required at least in-patient treatment at the local hospital. Ironically, while six out of the seven casualties were members of the Pirates team, 'most of their injuries were due to the vigorousness of their own players[!]'. The *Wanganui Herald* noted with disgust that 'the game partook more of the character of a prize fight than anything else', and that the display 'of bad feeling and "dirty" play was a

disgrace to Wanganui football'. This deplorable fracas, claimed the Christchurch *Star*, was but one of several such incidents which together indicated a growing and reprehensible trend towards savagery in the football of the Dominion.⁵²

The continuance of rugby as a pastime for respectable people was posited by commentators in some of the leading daily newspapers in New Zealand as hanging in the balance.⁵³ The editor of the Christchurch *Star* noted that during a recent match in Wellington the participants, urged on by 'raucous-voiced hoodlums' in the crowd, 'struck one another openly, and fought standing up and lying down'. Indeed, club rugby in Wellington and its environs was allegedly characterised by 'foul and brutal play which might be envied in a Sydney "push" gang'. Violence and 'filthy and disgusting language' were, it was claimed, becoming common in football in Canterbury and Otago. If left unchecked, particularly by the New Zealand Union, this malaise would cause football matches to 'degenerate into orgies for intractable hoodlums'.⁵⁴

The second serious incident occurred only two weeks after the affray in Wanganui, and seemed to substantiate the damning accusations levelled at club football in Wellington. Edgar Thompson died after receiving a kick in the head during a match in the capital. He had attempted to retrieve the ball from in front of a 'dribbling rush' mounted by opposing forwards. One of these players delivered the fatal blow, although curiously none of the witnesses could provide the authorities with the name of this player. The police seemed aware that this problem arose because the loyalty to the civil power of those involved in the incident was outweighed by their devotion to the footballing fraternity. A frustrated policeman admonished all players to remember 'that any act which caused death or serious injury came within the provisions of the Criminal Code... [and] it was not material to consider whether an act which caused death was or was not in accordance with the rules and practices of the game'.⁵⁵ The obvious unease of the constabulary notwithstanding, a verdict of accidental death was returned by the coroner.

Rugby football appears to have been remarkably free of serious misconduct during the 1905 season. Various sources indicate, however, that the years from 1906 to 1914 witnessed either a sustained rise in the incidence of rough play and violence, or, more probably, a greater readiness on the part of Unions to punish such offences. The Punishment Register of the ORFU reveals that during 1906 the Union cautioned or

suspended a total of 38 players for offences described variously as violent, rough or foul play, foul language or dissent.⁵⁶

A distinct reduction in the reported incidence of rough and foul play in Otago followed in 1907. Only six players received suspensions and eight were cautioned. However, other Unions, especially in the lower North Island, seem to have experienced a sudden upsurge in foul play of the utmost severity. Almost 30 players were suspended by the Auckland, Hawkes Bay, Taranaki, Wellington and other smaller Unions for periods ranging from two weeks to life, for engaging in various forms of violent misbehaviour. Even more disturbing was an apparent increase in threatening behaviour toward referees on the part of players. The Hawkes Bay Union, in particular, found it necessary to inflict draconian punishments following incidents of this nature, suspending one player for a year, another for two years and three more for life. The Wellington and Horowhenua Unions also experienced some difficulties in this regard, and the Buller Union suspended a player for life for 'striking a referee'.⁵⁷ One might speculate that this last variety of misconduct was an expression of the frustration felt by players at the standard of refereeing, which may have failed to improve with sufficient speed as the game became increasingly innovative and competitive. Whatever its origin, the consequences of such behaviour for rugby in New Zealand seemed certain to be disastrous.

Warnings began to be heard during 1907 that the rising tide of violence posed a serious threat to the survival of the game. One commentator insisted that, with 'professional football about to make a strong fight for a footing in the colony',⁵⁸ the amateur game 'must be absolutely clean... if it is to retain its ascendancy'. Those in control of rugby football had to recognise this and 'to deal with infringements in the most drastic manner'. Most provincial Unions responded, as has been shown, with harsh penalties for miscreants.⁵⁹ Some even began to wonder whether Unions should appoint vigilance committees in order to curb both foul play and misconduct by spectators. Unfortunately, if the catalogue of complaints heard during 1908 is any indication, none of these initiatives had any effect in eliminating excessive roughness from the New Zealand game.

Several explanations might be advanced to account for the ostensible upsurge in rough or foul play. The first and most straightforward is that the will to win was frequently present in excess. Certainly, the behaviour of the players in the Kaierau-Pirates match examined above becomes

comprehensible when examined in these terms. Unrestrained ardour in pursuit of victory also led to the employment, in both college football in the United States and rugby in New Zealand, of highly dubious tactics which resulted in an increased level of violence.⁶⁰ In New Zealand, the misuse by dishonest or insufficiently skilled practitioners of the position of wing-forward was at least partially responsible for any actual increase in the incidence of rough play and violence. Tom Ellison, probably 'the originator' of the wing-forward, certainly felt this to be the case. 'The wing-forwards of to-day', he wrote scathingly in 1902, 'are nothing more than aimless... jostlers who... seem to think that their duty is to do nothing but harass their opponents, and to play offside'.⁶¹ Ellison considered it inevitable that rough play would follow upon the actions of these 'blunderers'. Such an outcome certainly became more likely as rugby in the Dominion rapidly became more competitive. The extent to which the unsportsmanlike conduct of wing-forwards may have provoked these misdemeanours must, however, remain a matter for speculation.⁶²

Secondly, there may not have been any substantial increase in the frequency of rough or violent play throughout the period under discussion. The middle-class administrators of rugby may have created a contrary impression by redefining the bounds of acceptable behaviour on the field, and enforcing more strictly the rules relating to violent conduct. This hypothesis becomes entirely credible if the actions of those administrators are viewed as part of the wider effort by the middle classes to eradicate all facets of the frontier male culture. The drive for prohibition aimed to eliminate public drunkenness, the legislation against the bookmaker to remove the morally corrosive influence of gambling from the streets and terraces, and the actions of the Rugby Unions to eliminate violence.⁶³

Thirdly, the possibility exists that although some regions, such as Wanganui and Wellington, experienced a genuine and disturbing upsurge in rough and violent play, they were exceptional in this regard. Middle-class reformers, in the grip of a 'moral panic' and determined to eradicate all traces of the frontier male culture, perhaps interpreted individual instances of rough play in their own localities as evidence of a spreading moral infection. Nevertheless, it seems that, as a retired international player claimed in 1908, 'the game is rougher here than in Australia, and certainly infinitely rougher than in any part of the British Isles where [amateur] Rugby is played'.⁶⁴

'Veiled Professionalism'

The final 'unsavoury' feature of New Zealand rugby during this period was 'veiled professionalism'. This generally manifested itself as an attempt by a club to attract or retain the services of players either through covert payment for play or for broken time, or securing them paid employment. These practices clearly violated the laws of rugby relating to professionalism. Although specific cases of this phenomenon are naturally difficult to authenticate beyond doubt, sufficient evidence exists to arouse grave suspicions in particular instances.

Disputes occasionally flared between clubs and players over the covert payment of monies for 'broken time'. Such a disagreement raged during July and August 1908 between the committee of the Sydenham Club and one of its prominent players. J Howison, a regular member of the senior team and a Canterbury representative, peremptorily informed the committee that he refused to pay his dues. He would, however, 'settle as soon as the committee kept its word with regard to certain remuneration he was to receive for loss of work in connection with his playing'. The committee stood firm, and the Secretary somewhat self-righteously advised Howison that 'he knew of no such promise, nor could the club entertain any such action under the present rules of professionalism'. Howison also maintained his position, moving the committee to resolve that unless he met their demands within a week, he would be suspended indefinitely and that the Canterbury RFU would be so notified. When even this threat failed to move Howison, the committee wavered, announcing that it would 'give him the benefit of the doubt' in the matter, 'so that the club would not be inconvenienced'.⁶⁵

This decision was hardly surprising. Notifying the Canterbury Union of the threatened suspension might have generated awkward questions which would have elicited the guilt of both disputants in breaking the laws relating to professionalism. While the Union may have suspended Howison, it would almost certainly have inflicted the same punishment on the club. Although the prudence of the committee of the Sydenham Club prevented this unseemly incident from coming to the attention of higher authorities or the public, others were less discreet and less fortunate.

Some evidence indicates that veiled professionalism was almost an integral element of rugby football in certain parts of New Zealand. Disturbing allegations of rampant and deeply-rooted veiled professionalism within Wellington football surfaced during a furious

debate between delegates to the annual meeting of the Wellington RFU in April 1908. One delegate said that he preferred 'straight-out payments' to 'the practice followed by every club in Wellington of procuring employment for players'. Far more disconcerting were the accusations made by some delegates of active collusion by the Wellington Union in all manner of dubious practices. W Coffey claimed that the WRFU had 'been cognisant' of the breaches by the clubs under their jurisdiction of the rules against professionalism, yet had failed to act. The Union itself 'was guilty of professionalism every week', said J A Lynskey, having 'been paying money "under the rose" [sub rosa] for years'. Furthermore, said Coffey, it had acted to suppress a 'scandal arising out of an offer... to a well-known player' of £100 on condition that 'a certain match was lost'. The affair was 'hushed up', delegates were told, so as to 'save the player's feelings'.⁶⁶ Strangely, the officers of the Union made no immediate response to these shocking allegations.

'Dropkick', of the *Evening Post*, fully endorsed the charges made by Lynskey and Coffey, and added some of his own. The collection of 'weekly subscriptions' in order to support indigent players and ensure their appearance at matches each Saturday, he wrote, 'is another form of professionalism that is winked at'. The scribe confessed that he personally had been 'mulcted in an extra subscription of sixpence every week for the maintenance of a Wellington player who had no work (and probably didn't want any)'. However, this largesse, and that of the other subscribers, had proven misguided and taught them all a salutary lesson. The player in question, it transpired, decamped from Wellington 'fat with unearned increment, a few days before an extra important match'. Thereafter, 'this form of professionalism was less popular than it had been among the misguided enthusiasts'.⁶⁷ Such disillusionment was not universal, lamented 'Dropkick', for veiled professionalism was still rampant among the clubs, and, as the evidence has suggested, not just in Wellington.⁶⁸

The root of the problem, according to one commentator, lay in a fundamental contradiction within the game itself. Rugby football, he shrewdly observed, 'suffers from an enduring... "gate fever"; it is cursed with too much money, and is made of hybrid nature, by reason of the conflict between its wealth and its amateur rules'. As 'an exaggerated importance' came to be attached to the winning of trophies and other 'baubles', clubs felt compelled to use their wealth, derived from gate-money, to buy the services of skilled players. Fully aware that their

actions violated the rules regarding professionalism, the clubs resorted to making these purchases in a clandestine manner. Soon, because of the drive for success, this covert professionalism exercised 'an octopus grip' on many clubs.⁶⁹

The allegations made at the meeting of the Wellington Union in April 1908 were highly embarrassing for New Zealand rugby in general. Criticism was soon forthcoming, some of the loudest emanating from the Mother Country. 'And these', thundered the *Athletic News* in self-righteous indignation, 'are the sort of self-confessed wreckers of the laws of amateurism the English Rugby Union have sent out [the Anglo-Welsh team] to honour for Imperial reasons. Imperial fiddlesticks!'⁷⁰ This vitriolic evaluation must have seemed eminently justified to many observers. Here was evidence that every club in Wellington was, with the energetic support of the provincial body, actively circumventing the rules as to professionalism, and all under the nose of the national Union.

Conclusions

By 1908 little doubt existed in the minds of many in New Zealand that the national game had its 'darker' side. While domestic critics of rugby extolled the heroic traditions of the code, singling out the virtues of the hallowed All Blacks, they were also concerned with anti-heroic practices in the game: gambling and the influence of bookmakers, rough play and veiled professionalism. It is arguable that their representations of anti-heroic practices were distorted, the prevalence of each of these maladies being inflated by the moral panic of middle-class reformers determined to expunge every facet of male frontier culture from New Zealand society. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that many of the criticisms levelled against the game were at least partly justified. 'Bookies', though primarily found at racetracks, were an unwelcome and occasionally corrupting presence on many football grounds throughout New Zealand until 1910. The degree to which rugby was afflicted by an upsurge of rough play is difficult to establish. Nevertheless, the well-filled pages of the Punishment Register of the ORFU for the early years of this century suggest that the widespread concern over violence within the game was not entirely the result of a 'moral panic' among the middle classes. Likewise the incidence of veiled professionalism is by definition impossible to establish with any precision. However, the evidence provided by such sources as the Minute book of Sydenham RFC implies that clubs were

engaged in practices which violated the rules relating to professionalism. Thus there can be little doubt that rugby in New Zealand was afflicted to some extent during the period between 1890 and 1914 with 'a tendency to roughness'.

Heroic and anti-heroic representations of New Zealand rugby coexisted uneasily during the decades before World War I. The latter of these portrayals, while grounded on some empirical fact, was in large measure the product of a middle-class moral panic. It was perhaps borne of a fear of some middle-class opinion-makers that they were losing control of the national game and its supporting ideology.

NOTES:

- 1 *Lyttelton Times*, 27 July 1908.
- 2 J Nauright, 'Sport, Manhood and Empire: British Responses to the New Zealand Rugby Tour of 1905', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1991, pp. 239-55; J Nauright, 'Colonial Manhood and Imperial Race Virility: British Responses to Post Boer War Colonial Rugby Tours', in J Nauright and T Chandler, eds, *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*, Frank Cass, London, 1996, pp. 121-39; L E Richardson, 'Rugby, Race and Empire: The 1905 All Black Tour', *Historical News*, no. 47, Dec. 1983, pp. 1-6; J O C Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male*, Penguin (NZ), Auckland, 2nd ed., 1996, p. 111; K Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search for a National Identity*, Allen & Unwin (NZ) and Port Nicolson Press, Wellington, 1986, pp. 149, 151-2.
- 3 G Ryan, "'The Originals': The 1888-89 New Zealand Native Football Team in Britain, Australia and New Zealand', MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1992; G T Vincent, "'Practical Imperialism": The Anglo-Welsh Rugby Tour of New Zealand, 1908', MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1996, chs 4-5, 7-8.
- 4 Vincent, 'Practical Imperialism', pp. 88-9; A C Swan, *History of New Zealand Rugby Football 1870-1945*, A H and A W Reed, Wellington, 1948, pp. 8-26.
- 5 Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, p. 91.
- 6 E Dunning and K Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players: A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1979, p. 137.
- 7 J A Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal*, Viking Press, Harmondsworth, 1986.
- 8 Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, p. 169.
- 9 Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, pp. 154-63.
- 10 Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, pp. 154-63.
- 11 J Boyd and E Olssen, 'The Skilled Workers: Journeymen and Masters in Caversham, 1880-1914', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 22, no. 2, Oct. 1988, pp. 120-1; Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, p. 136; R H Chester, and N A C McMillan, *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand Rugby*, Moa Publications, Auckland, 1981, pp. 251, 254, 256, 260, 262; N Swindells, 'Social Aspects of Rugby Football in Manawatu from 1878 to 1910', BA Hons Essay, Massey University, 1978, pp. 34-6; Christchurch Press, 6 Mar. 1908; Sydenham RFC, Minutes, Sept. 1883-Apr. 1887.
- 12 Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, p. 141.
- 13 D Smith and G Williams, *Fields of Praise: The Official History of the Welsh Rugby Union, 1881-1987*, University of Wales Press, 1980, p. 66.
- 14 Sydenham RFC, Minutes, 25 Mar. 1901, 3 Mar. 1902, 28 Mar. 1904.

- 15 *The Auckland Rugby Football Union Annual*, ARFU, Auckland, 1899, p. 96; Smith and Williams, *Fields of Praise*, pp. 93-5, 109-11.
- 16 Dunning and Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, p. 148.
- 17 *New Zealand Herald*, 28 Apr. and 3 May 1888.
- 18 *New Zealand Herald*, 18 July 1904.
- 19 *Christchurch Star*, 1 July 1904.
- 20 *Lyttelton Times*, 27 July 1904.
- 21 Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart*, p. 143; G Williams, "'How Amateur Was My Valley': Professional Sport and National Identity in Wales, 1890-1914", *British Journal of Sports History*, vol. 2, no. 3, Dec. 1985, pp. 265-6; W F Mandle, 'Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 59, no. 4, Dec. 1973, pp. 225-46.
- 22 J Garner, *By His Own Merits: Sir John Hall — Pioneer, Pastoralist and Premier*, Dryden Press, Hororata, 1995, p. 259.
- 23 In June 1908, for example, the New Zealand side was assembled in Dunedin, the venue for the first Test against the Anglo-Welsh, five days before the match; *Otago Daily Times*, 2 June 1908.
- 24 The 'Springbokken' from South Africa proved themselves to be in the same class as the All Blacks during their tours of Britain in 1906-07 and 1912-13; J Nauright, 'Colonial Manhood and Imperial Race Virility'.
- 25 Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, p. 110.
- 26 G Ryan, 'The Originals', pp. 105-06, 110-12, 127-9; T N W Buchanan, "'Missionaries of Empire': The 1905 All Black Tour", MA research essay, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 1981, p. 14; Referee (Australia), 24 June 1908.
- 27 Otago Rugby Football Union, Minutes, 30 Mar. 1908; *Otago Daily Times*, 21 May 1908.
- 28 New Zealand became a self-governing Dominion within the British Empire on 26 Sept. 1907.
- 29 Vincent, 'Practical Imperialism'.
- 30 Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, p. 47.
- 31 R Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, OUP, Melbourne, 1995, ch. 3; J O'Hara, *A Mug's Game: A History of Gaming and Betting in Australia*, NSWUP, Sydney, 1988, chs 4 and 5; R Munting, *An Economic and Social History of Gambling in Britain and the USA*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996, pp. 25-6, 29-31.
- 32 D Grant, *On A Roll: A History of Gambling and Lotteries in New Zealand*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1994, pp. 52, 55, 61, 63, 68.
- 33 Grant, *On A Roll*, pp. 74-81; P Gibbons, 'The Climate of Opinion,' in G Rice. ed., *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, OUP, Auckland, 2nd ed., 1992, p. 313; E. Olssen, 'Towards a New Society', in Rice, *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, p. 269.
- 34 *Otago Daily Times*, 11 May 1891.
- 35 *Otago Daily Times*, 12 May 1891.
- 36 *Otago Daily Times*, 12 May 1891.
- 37 *Otago Daily Times*, 12 May 1891.
- 38 G Ryan, 'The Originals', p. 174.
- 39 Otago Rugby Football Union, Minutes, 3 June 1891.
- 40 *Christchurch Star*, 7 July 1904, 9 Sept. 1904.
- 41 *New Zealand Herald*, 16, July 1904.
- 42 Otago Rugby Football Union, Punishment Register 1904-54, 1904. The consequences of the intrusion by gambling into rugby football were particularly tragic in this instance, for a playing career of brilliant promise was thereby brought to an abrupt and premature end. A J 'Paddy' Long had appeared nine times for

- Auckland, and was an outstanding member of the New Zealand side which toured Australia in 1903. Further provincial, and probable international, honours awaited him in 1904, and he may have been in contention for a place in the All Black team to Britain in 1905; Auckland Rugby Football Union, *100 Years of Auckland Rugby: Official History of the Auckland Rugby Football Union Inc.*, ARFU, 1983, p. 312; Chester and McMillan, *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand Rugby*, p. 120.
- 43 *Otago Witness*, 10 Aug. 1904.
 - 44 *Lyttelton Times*, 13 and 15 Aug. 1904; *New Zealand Herald*, 9 Aug. 1904.
 - 45 Grant, *On A Roll*, pp. 83-6, 92; M Bassett, *Sir Joseph Ward: A Political Biography*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1985, p. 103.
 - 46 Otago Rugby Football Union, Minutes, 27 Apr. and 4 May 1908; *Otago Witness*, 13 May 1908.
 - 47 Phillips, *A Man's Country?*, p. 69; *Dominion*, 12 May 1911.
 - 48 *Otago Witness*, 10 Aug. 1904.
 - 49 *Otago Witness*, 12 Aug. 1908.
 - 50 Otago Rugby Football Union, Punishment Register, 1904-54, 1904-10.
 - 51 M Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1993.
 - 52 *Christchurch Star*, 6 and 11 June 1904.
 - 53 *Christchurch Star*, 6 June 1904.
 - 54 *Christchurch Star*, 11 June 1904.
 - 55 *Lyttelton Times*, 17 June 1904.
 - 56 Otago Rugby Football Union, Punishment Register, 1904-54, 1906.
 - 57 Otago Rugby Football Union, Punishment Register, 1904-54, 1907.
 - 58 The 'Professional' All Blacks were due to return from Britain early in 1908.
 - 59 *Christchurch Star*, 2 Sept. 1907; New Zealand Rugby Football Union, Minutes, 1 Aug. 1907.
 - 60 Oriard, *Reading Football*, pp. 32-3, 166-7.
 - 61 T Ellison, *The Art of Rugby Football: With Hints and instructions on Every Point of the Game*, Geodes and Blomfield Printers, Wellington, 1902, pp. 53-4.
 - 62 The inducement to roughness and violence offered by the 'blundering' wing-forward was not removed until the position was effectively outlawed by the International Board in 1932.
 - 63 *Christchurch Star*, 16 June 1904; *Lyttelton Times*, 6 June 1907.
 - 64 *Evening Post*, 25 July 1908.
 - 65 Sydenham RFC, Minutes, 27 July, 10, 17 and 24 Aug. 1908.
 - 66 *Evening Post*, 2 Apr. 1908.
 - 67 *Evening Post*, 4 Apr. 1908.
 - 68 *Evening Post*, 28 Mar. 1908.
 - 69 *Evening Post*, 28 Mar. 1908.
 - 70 *Otago Witness*, 22 July 1908.