

League faces booze crisis

By Brenton Vannisselroy

Excessive drinking has sunk a number of rugby league careers this season, while landing many other players in hot water with their National Rugby League clubs.

The 21st annual player's poll in *Rugby League Week* magazine, released in June, found that most NRL footballers admitted to binge drinking.

More than 60 per cent of the 100 players surveyed said there was a culture of binge drinking in the NRL.

"We can't go to the pub throughout the week. We get one night to hit the grog and we make the most of it," one player told *RLW*.

At the start of this month the Warriors sacked talented lock forward Sione Faumuina from the club for his latest alcohol-related incident.

This was the club's second sacking this season, after debutant winger Misi Taulapapa was shown the door earlier this year for his drunken behaviour.

Kiwi league manager Pat Carthy said in the past five years in his position, he had not had any problems with alcohol.

"We haven't had any issues at all over my time," Carthy said.

He said there were consequences for drunkenness, but he had not been forced to punish any players.

Carthy emphasized everyone was entitled to have a drink and they should be allowed to "let their hair down" every once in a while.

But New Zealand Rugby League's provincial amateur Bartercard Cup competition commissioner Kevin Bailey, said the recent trend of alcohol-related incidents are focussed almost entirely within the professional game.

"We haven't had any complaints over five years with the Bartercard Cup," Bailey said.

He said most players in New Zealand were Polynesian and therefore didn't drink.

Radio Sport producer and league commentator Dale Budge said drinking has always been present in New Zealand sport and particularly in rugby league.

Budge said that it has become more of an issue today, because there was more publicity for the game.

Budge said it was important for older players to look after new players and help them get used to the realities of professional sport.

"The onus really has to come back on to the professional organisations," Budge said.

He toured with the Kiwis on their successful tour of Britain last year and he witnessed no problems with alcohol.

He said any drinking was in private, to minimise the risks of any incidents taking place.

No mountain high enough

By Sarah Menzies

A growing number of Aucklanders are hurling themselves on bikes down steep hills and dodging trees in the name of fun.

According to a Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC) report prepared in 2001, one million people, or a quarter of the population, are involved in cycling.

There are 250,000 bikes imported into New Zealand each year and 85 per cent of these have off-road capabilities.

Dave Gabbitas, communications manager of the Auckland Mountain Bike Club, said mountain biking has grown because so many people can participate.

"The entire family can take part. It's not just the kids playing and the parents watching," he says. "You can have a fairly easy trail and experienced riders can still get a buzz from it."

Mountain biking is also a great way to see New Zealand. There are trails all over the country and many of them have spectacular views.

He also thinks it's following trends elsewhere in the world.

Tony Afendoulis, managing director of Bikeparks, the company which runs the Woodhill mountain bike park, has figures to prove the growth of the sport in Auckland.

He says the number of riders registered has grown from a couple of hundred to around 2000.

There are also casual riders, which means the park attracts around 3000 riders a week.

"More people have realised it's not a hard-core sport. It's a fun way to get exercise."

Robyn Williams, 21, has been mountain biking for six months. She started after hearing a friend rave about the sport. "I decided to give it a go and it went from there," she says.

"I love it. I feel so much happier with myself because I'm fitter. I like that it's quite unpredictable – when you're doing tracks you don't know how they're going to turn out and that's exciting. It's the whole adrenaline thing."

Duncan Gardiner, 29, started mountain biking 12 years ago after a turn on his brother's bike got him addicted to the sport. "I like the fitness, the scenery, and the adrenaline rush of riding," he says. "I also like hanging out with other people who ride."



PHOTO: GRAEME TWOSE

BUMP AND GRIND: Mountain Biking is growing in popularity among both novices and professionals such as Rosara Joseph, Commonwealth Games silver medalist, seen here competing at the World Championships in Rotorua last August.

Alcohol-related incidents in the NRL over the last two years

Dane Tilse – February 2005

Twelve Newcastle Knights players were fined after a drunken rampage in Bathurst. Prop Dane Tilse (20) was sacked after a female university student (19) made a formal complaint about indecent assault.

The club was fined over \$100,000 by the NRL.

Michael Crocker – March 2005

The Sydney Roosters fined second-rower Michael Crocker \$10,000 for his role in a fight with police at a venue the Roosters are banned from attending. Crocker also attempted to break the infamous David Boon record of 52 cans of beer on a flight to England, but the Melbourne Storm recruit fell well short at 36.

Sonny Bill Williams – August 2005

Bulldogs player Sonny Bill Williams was charged with drink driving and fined \$10,000 by his club.

Craig Gower – January 2006

Penrith Panthers halfback Craig Gower was fined \$100,000 and stripped of the club captaincy following several alcohol-fuelled incidents at a charity golf day. Gower also ran around the resort naked and crashed a golf cart.

Reni Maitua – April 2006

Bulldogs player Reni Maitua was charged for drunk driving after he was found to be three times over the limit following a drinking session with team-mates. He was fined \$15,000 by his club.

Tevita Latu – May 2006

The Cronulla Sharks sacked hooker Tevita Latu after the former Warrior punched a 19-year-old woman in the face following a night out drinking. Latu was arrested and later sentenced to 200 hours community service.

Nathan Cayless – May 2006

Following a night drinking with team-mate Nathan Hindmarsh, Parramatta Eels skipper Nathan Cayless smashed a security camera after the pair was denied entry into an area of Sydney's Star City Casino.

Tim Smith – May & June 2006

Halfback Tim Smith was fined \$1000 by the Parramatta Eels after he had a fight with Australia cricketer Michael Clarke.

Smith and fellow player Mark Riddell were also fined \$5000 after Smith turned up late to a training session and Riddell failed to show up after a night spent drinking. It led to coach Brian Smith quitting the club.

Jarryd Hayne – June 2006

Teenage winger Jarryd Hayne was another Parramatta player to land himself in trouble in June after biting a woman on the arm in a nightclub while intoxicated. The Eels fined the NRL rookie of the year \$1000.

Sione Faumuina – August 2006

The New Zealand Warriors terminated the contract of lock forward Sione Faumuina's contract for the latest of a spate of alcohol-related incidents.

Faumuina had got himself in trouble with alcohol earlier in his career after punching a former NZ Sevens rugby star in 2004. He was also fined following an alcohol-related incident at Awen Guttenbeil's testimonial lunch.

Neville Costigan – August 2006

Brisbane Broncos utility Neville Costigan had his contract terminated by the club following a drink-driving charge.