

Women fear World Cup beating

By Jessica Wauchop

The Rugby World Cup is an exciting time for fans – a time of cheering, drinking, laughing and, if New Zealand is unlucky, commiserating.

Yet anecdotal evidence shows that for women's refuges around the country, the rugby season is their busiest time, and advocates fear that this year will be no exception.

"When any high profile rugby game is played, our refuges have to deal with a significant rise in domestic violence," says New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse outreach co-ordinator and researcher Sheryl Hann.

During the 2003 Rugby World Cup, after the All Blacks' loss in the semi-finals against Australia, Women's Refuge released a statement which reported an increased demand for its services around New Zealand.

"Unfortunately we do not have

any quantitative research, but our advocates see it, they notice what is happening," says Hann.

"Refuge workers have found it gets busier during big games and it applies to the World Cup – they are big games."

Senior lecturer at the University of Waikato Richard Pringle has researched the influence of rugby on how men understand violence and masculinity, and agrees with Hann.

"This has been studied overseas and they found an association between All Black games and domestic violence," he says.

"Fans are fuelled by the excitement and alcohol, and there seems to be some sort of link between them and violence."

The trend is nothing new. Women's Refuge identified it as far back as the Springbok Tour in

1981.

An attitude that places a rugby hero on a pedestal is partly to blame, says Hann.

She believes that, while rugby is not the sole cause of domestic violence, a community

attitude that surrounds rugby needs to be examined.

"Rugby is a violent game. There is a definite link between violence at home and violence in the community – rugby is in the community. Violence in rugby is encouraged. It is legitimised to an extent, because violence between players suggests they're just taking the game seriously."

"I personally believe there is a particular link with New Zealand masculinity and what it means to be a male in New Zealand and in rugby," says Hann.

Hann is not the only one to

find fault with the rugby mentality – Dr Pringle discovered a similar relation while researching.

"People who play rugby get encouraged to tackle hard, use their body as a weapon and at times the line is blurred between doing it on the rugby field and doing in a different social context," he says.

"We hear of it happening, of rugby players being involved in domestic violence disputes."

The most recent example was in April this year when All Black Sitiveni Sivivatu pleaded guilty to assaulting his wife.

Sivivatu was discharged without conviction. However a name suppression order was lifted, leaving the rugby star open to public scrutiny.

Information recently released by the New Zealand Rugby Union says an internal inquiry was conducted and the All Black was found guilty of serious misconduct.

Sivivatu received a formal warning and agreed to on-going counselling.

"The formal warning puts him on notice that we take the matter very seriously. Clearly, we are very concerned when incidents such as these occur, which is why we have processes in place to deal with them," says New Zealand Rugby Union chief executive Steve Tew.

"It was good to name and shame [Sivivatu] but there have been at least two other high-profile All Blacks that have retained name suppression.

"Courts can't change attitudes but the rugby board could," says Hann.

However the news is not all bad for rugby fans, as Dr Pringle emphasises that his findings are not universal.

"I am not suggesting that rugby always leads to bad behaviour. There are those who play rugby, are upset by this and try to keep away from the violence."

"A lot of people play rugby from all different capacities of life, but there is a definite and interesting link between rugby and violence."

30 years on – still no disc golf course

By Charlotte Coyle

Auckland's Frisbee golfers say they are "completely fed-up" with the Auckland City Council which has for 30 years failed to establish a permanent disc golf course in the city.

Although there is a course on Waiheke Island, a founder of the New Zealand Disc Golf Association, Bob Gentil, says the sport would have a greater chance to catch on if Aucklanders had a more accessible permanent course.

"I've just been getting nowhere with the council. We are totally frustrated," he says.

The council's sport and recreation advisor Ken Maplesden says the council is not against the idea of a course, but is yet to find a suitable park.

Disc golf, also known as Frisbee golf, was introduced in New Zealand in the 1970s and shares many features with regular golf.

The game is played in a field or park, but instead of a club and ball, disc golf uses a Frisbee. Instead of holes, it uses 18 high metal baskets, called pole-holes.

It is a series of these metal baskets that Gentil has been trying to establish in one of the city's parks.

Without a course, Auckland disc golfers use natural targets to aim for, such as a branch on a tree, rather than a pole-hole.

Simon Feasey, a professional player and last year's New Zealand disc golf champion, says without the baskets, it is like playing half a game.

"You wouldn't play golf without the holes, and it's the same with disc golf. You need the pole-holes."

Maplesden says parks like Monte Cecilia Park in Hillsborough or the One Tree Hill Domain aren't suitable because they are both heavily used, and One Tree Hill has significant cultural and archeological value.

"This is a site of rich cultural heritage. You can't just dig poles into the ground anywhere you like."

"All park activities have to be compatible with the number of people that use the parks."

Gentil says he believes people would not easily notice the baskets and a course would only benefit a park.

Maplesden says the council is prepared to look into the possibility of putting the course in another Auckland park. But Gentil says every time he proposes an alternative park, the council turns him down.



PHOTO: ANNA HARRISON

DANGEROUS WAVES: Rock fishermen risk their lives by not wearing a lifejacket.

Rockies risking lives for fish

By Anna Harrison

Rock fishermen are still not wearing flotation devices at West Coast beaches, and are putting their lives at risk.

"The majority just won't wear a lifejacket," says Teresa Stanley, of Watersafe Auckland.

The organisation is continuing its push for rock fishermen to use inflatable lifejackets.

Muriwai lifeguard Ashley Matuschka says public awareness of safety issues has risen but this has not extended to fishers wearing lifejackets.

"People seem to think they know better," he says.

A 2006 study at West Auckland beaches found 72 per cent of rock fishermen never wear lifejackets or flotation devices even though 71 per cent think that rock fishing would be much safer if they were worn.

Rock fishermen overestimate their own survival abilities and

safety knowledge, according to the study commissioned by Auckland Regional Council, Surf Life Saving Northern Region and Watersafe Auckland Limited.

Stanley says many fishermen "think their knowledge of the area will keep them safe", despite many of them having

"The majority just won't wear a lifejacket."

fished at that area fewer than five times.

Matuschka says many fishermen at Muriwai don't seem to consider the weather conditions or the surf.

"They head down to the rocks, not even checking the surf," he says.

As part of the study, safety advisors were appointed to directly target rock fishermen in raising safety awareness.

Four Chinese advisors were hired for the 2005-2006 summer, as well as two Koreans last summer, to talk with fishermen about safe rock fishing practices.

They covered popular fishing sites at Muriwai, Karekare, Piha and Whatipu.

Matuschka says there is no doubt the programme is raising awareness of water safety.

"But there are still people drowning along the West Coast," he says.

"There are still guys taking risks. They are super keen to get those fish."

The lifejackets Watersafe Auckland promotes are simple collar jackets which inflate in the water and cost \$100 to \$150.

"But it's a minimal price compared to a life," she says.

Stanley says lifejackets buy time for friends or family to get help if someone is swept off the rocks by a wave.

"They make it a rescue rather than a body search," she says.



PHOTO: CHARLOTTE COYLE

DISC GOLFERS: Making the most of Auckland's parks.