

Fitzpatrick embraces private equity plan

Rugby Paul Cully

Sean Fitzpatrick arrived back in New Zealand in early November and is great to see him back in his UK base, where he has carved out a rewarding professional life following his playing days.

He will return north when the time is right, but he loves New Zealand. The Kiwi summer and beaches have helped, but he also loves the passionate discourse about the game he adores. When he heard New Zealanders fretting about the All Blacks upon his return, he revelled in the fact they cared so much.

Now, there's another debate to be had. Silver Lake's offer to acquire a 15 per cent of New Zealand Rugby is not just a financial debate, it's an emotional one.

Fitzpatrick himself remains heavily invested in the black jersey, and what it represents. But he is unequivocal about NZ Rugby's plan: it needs to be done.

"If it's done the right way, and we've seen that with other sports that private equity has got into, it's been successful," Fitzpatrick said. "It's about us accepting change. Covid has accelerated that, without question, especially in the northern hemisphere, because it's not sustainable what we do at the moment."



"To stay at the top of our game, to be world leaders in what we do, we've got to think a bit differently."

Sean Fitzpatrick

Fitzpatrick's view has been sharpened by his own experience of the business of rugby. He has been on the board of Harlequins since 2008 and last year took up a board role at Scarlets. He has seen first-hand how rugby's model is flawed.

In a way, that's no surprise. Rugby is still relatively young as a professional game. Its development has

been ad hoc and 25 years after its birth it still doesn't have clear windows for the club game and test rugby to both succeed.

Fitzpatrick has thought long and hard about rugby's direction and sees a game that has never fully escaped the amateur era – and an All Blacks brand that hasn't realised its true worth.

"I love the game," he says. "We've got the most amazing products but we don't know how to monetise it, in the right way."

"We need professional people being involved. I love the old school values and long may that continue, but we need seriously professional people running our sport, who know how to monetise it."

"We've got the greatest brand in world sport [the All Blacks], and we've done a phenomenal job to survive but to stay at the top of our game, to be world leaders in what we do, we've got to think a bit differently."

"And that's what I like about Silver Lake."

"I don't know how the deal is

structured, but I know what they've been involved in before and they've made it a success."

"You look at the Manchester Uniteds of the world, the Liverpools, that's where we should be reaching. With this investment and people thinking differently, it's got to be good."

The 57-year-old isn't naive. He understands that the concept of foreign investment of the scale Silver Lake is proposing – \$465 million – will cause some consternation in the rugby heartlands.

Still, he believes change is constant, and fondly recalls his own All Blacks days – and how his late father Brian was "horrified" by one change

to the All Blacks' kit.

"I was there when we changed the logo on the All Blacks jersey," he says. "That was major, to go from just a silver fern. I played my first test in the first game after it changed and didn't feel like a proper All Black."

"Then adidas came along and put adidas on the jersey... we had to discuss that at the All Blacks captain's meeting."

"And then my father, he was horrified when they changed the All Blacks socks from two stripes to three stripes. He was horrified."

"But if change is explained clearly, it can only be good if we've got the right people running the game."

TV series to honour 30 years of Māori greats

Awards Tony Smith

The best Māori sportsperson of the past 30 years will be crowned at a novel ceremony next week in an event organisers believe will honour the vision of Māori Sports Awards founder Albie Pryor.

Pryor – a former Māori All Black – founded Te Tohu Taakaro o Aotearoa Trust which set up the first Māori Sports Awards in 1991.

He died in 2000, and the organiser mantle has been held by Māori Tennis Association president Dick Garratt for the past 18 years.

Some of New Zealand's greatest sporting stars – including six-time winner Lisa Carrington (a double Olympic canoeing champion), US Open golf winner Michael Campbell and Rugby World Cup winners Piri Weepu and Portia Woodman – have won the supreme Māori Sports Person of the Year award.

Award winners have traditionally been honoured at a glittering ceremony, but Garratt said they had to take a more innovative approach this year due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on international sport in 2020.

After consulting with television creative Te Arahi Maipi from Mahi Tahī Media, the trust "decided to have a virtual show", Garratt said.

The three Māori Sports Awards 30 in 30 shows will air at 7.30pm next Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and will be played on Sky from 8.30pm.

A judging panel has selected the top 30 who will feature in a countdown culminating with the crowning of the era's top Māori sportsperson on the third and final show.

The winner will be presented with the Rongomaraeroa trophy named in memory of Pryor.

Maipi was pleased to be able to produce a series depicting the depth of Māori sporting achievement.

"The Māori Sports Awards have always been about providing a platform to showcase and celebrate the special sporting talent that comes out of te iwi Māori," Maipi said. "This series does the same, it's not so much about the



Albie Pryor



Michael Campbell



Noeline Taurua

Superstar canoeist Lisa Carrington has dominated the Māori Sports Awards, winning the supreme prize six times, more than any other person.

countdown but more about highlighting the amazing wāhine toa and tāne toa who have achieved greatness and inspired generations."

Pryor (Ngāti Awa/Ngāti Rangitihī/Ngāti Tuhoe), who hailed from Te Teko near Whakatāne, was a schoolboy rugby star and swimming and athletics champion. The tough loose forward became a provincial rugby standout for Auckland in the 1950s, was a Māori All Black from 1952-1960, and an All Black triallist in 1956, the year of the Springboks tour to New Zealand.

A butcher by trade, Pryor became a successful rugby coach, administrator and avid golfer, and was imbued with a strong desire to see Māori sportspeople get more recognition from the media and general public.

Garratt said the Māori Sports

At a glance

Māori sports awards 30 in 30: Screening next Tuesday (February 9), Wednesday (February 10) and Thursday (February 11) at 7.30pm on Māori Television with replays at 8.30pm each night on Sky Sport 1.

Panel discussion after each episode on Māori Television's Facebook page.

Awards had grown hugely since the original show in 1991, when then Silver Ferns netball captain Waimarama Taumaunu (Ngāti Porou/Ngāi Tahu was the overall Māori Sports Personality of the Year winner.

Back then, "we may have had one or two world champions, and the odd Olympian", Garratt recalled. These days, he says "nominees include

Olympians, Olympic champions, numerous individual and team world champions, athletes from 40 sports representing 20 iwi, and [over the years], we've had nearly 20 winners with New Zealand royal honours".

An eclectic array of sports have featured on the honours list in the various categories, from mainstream sports such as rugby, netball and cricket to wood chopping and wool classing.

Diversity was also important from the outset with prizes for leading athletes with disabilities awarded annually since 1991, while Peter Martin – a field athlete who won four Paralympic Games, including two at – was the overall winner in 2004.

The supreme honour has gone to wāhine athletes on 14 occasions with

the winners including Taumaunu, powerlifter Cathy Millen, former Black Ferns rugby captain Farah Palmer, squash star Leilani Joyce, netballer Temepara Clark, Woodman and Carrington (the first, and only, athlete to win two years in a row, a feat she has achieved three times), and champion netball coach Dame Noeline Taurua, who shared the supreme award with Carrington in 2019.

In keeping with the importance of whānau, the event also produced a father-and-son winner in 2014 – world champion woodchopper Jason Wynyard and his basketball prodigy son, Tai.

Jason Wynyard has also won the Māori Team of the Year title, in 2011, with his wife Karmyn for their Jack n' Jill sawing success on the world circuit.

Multisport

McCaw enters coastal race

All Blacks legend Richie McCaw will compete in his fourth Coast to Coast race across the South Island from next Friday. The former All Blacks captain will run, bike separately, and paddle together with team-mate and long-time friend Rob Nichol, the New Zealand Rugby Players' Association boss, in the great endurance race. The pair, who are among 76 teams in the tandem section, will start at Kumara Beach on the West Coast before battling through 243km to New Brighton beach on the east coast on Saturday.



Football

Chelsea rise, Spurs falter

Chelsea's revival under new manager Thomas Tuchel continued as Jorginho's penalty sealed a 1-0 win at Tottenham, handing Jose Mourinho's side a third consecutive English Premier League loss yesterday. Tottenham's poor form was punctuated by the way Eric Dier recklessly tripped Timo Werner to concede the penalty, which Jorginho converted in the 24th minute.

While Chelsea's pursuit of the Champions League places was given a lift, Tottenham are slipping away from the top four. Tuchel is unbeaten in three matches since taking over, with two wins and a draw moving Chelsea up to sixth. Tottenham are three points adrift in eighth place.

Golf

Flying Fox starts well

Ryan Fox has made an excellent start on the latest leg of the European Tour after finishing the opening round of the Saudi International tied fourth, four shots behind the clubhouse leader yesterday. The Kiwi golfer shot up the leaderboard after six birdies from the eighth to 17th hole and carded a five-under round of 65 on the first day of the event in Saudi Arabia.

England's David Horsey leads on nine-under. Fellow Kiwi Danny Lee had a difficult first day at the Phoenix Open in Scottsdale, United States. Lee finished 11 shots behind the two clubhouse leaders, Americans Matthew NeSmith and Mark Hubbard, after shooting a three-over par 74.

Olympics

Games boss apologises

Yoshiro Mori, the head of the Tokyo Olympics organising committee, has apologised for saying women talk too much during meetings but said he had not considered resigning despite a public furor. In a news conference on Thursday, the 83-year-old spoke of his "remorse" for his remarks, and said he took them back. But he showed no obvious signs of regret, and smiled on several occasions. Mori, a former Japanese prime minister with a record of offensive remarks, was reported as saying that women have an "annoying" tendency to make meetings run unnecessarily long, offering it as justification for the lack of female representation on the Japanese Olympic Committee (JOC) board.

Rugby league

Sam Burgess guilty

Former South Sydney NRL captain Sam Burgess has been found guilty of intimidating his then-wife's father, former mining lobbyist Mitchell Hooke. Burgess will appeal the guilty verdict, he said outside court. Magistrate Robert Rabbidge yesterday found Burgess had intimidated Hooke at his father-in-law's Glenquarry property in October 2019, with the intention of causing him physical and mental harm. Burgess was convicted and given a two-year community correction order. The 32-year-old yelled "F... you, I'm going to get you" 20 centimetres from Hooke's face during an explosive-riddled rage, sparked when he was asked to leave Hooke's Southern Highlands property in October 2019.

Cricket

Scorchers reach final

Big Bash League powerhouses Perth Scorchers and Sydney Sixers will meet in tonight's Sydney Cricket Ground final after Liam Livingstone lit up a lopsided semifinal in Canberra on Thursday. The Scorchers and Sixers have dominated the BBL since clashing in its inaugural final, grabbing a combined five of nine possible titles. The Scorchers crushed Brisbane Heat by 49 runs in a rain-affected contest. Livingstone whacked 77 off 39 deliveries, helping rocket Perth to 189-1 from 18.1 overs.

Sportsword No 40

Across

1 All Black lock 1970s nicknamed "Pole" (7)

4 NZ paceman 1990s-turned globetrotting commentator (5)

6 Coached 1970 All Blacks to South Africa (10)

9 Sports playing outfit (3)

11 Auckland Test opener 2016-2020 (5)

12 Former Romanian tennis ace nicknamed "Nasty" (7)

13 Former Wallabies captain, Rocky – (5)

16 NZ paceman made Test debut in same match as Kane Williamson v India 2010 (7)

20 Pakistan cricket's Middle East "home", abbrev (3)

22 British and Irish Lions coach to NZ 2017 (7)

23 All Black wing juggernaut emerged 1990s (4)

25 Champion White Ferns allrounder, Sophie – (6)

26 Top-order Black Caps batsman 2010, Peter – (6)

28 Four-gold East German swimmer 1976 Montreal Olympics, Kornelia – (5)

29 Waikato All Black winger 1969-73 (7)

Down

1 Figured epic 1986 Cox Plate finish, Our – Star (8)

3 Kiwi world heavyweight boxing title challenger 2000 (3)

3 Black Caps player/selector, – Larsen (5)

4 New Zealand's first America's Cup skipper (7)

5 Kiwi Wimbledon men's singles finalist 1983 (5)

7 Hawke's Bay All Black centre 1963-70 (5)

8 Rugby league comp, abbrev (3)

9 Athletics' Sportswoman of the Year 2005, – McIlroy (4)

10 International contest (4)

14 – backs (7)

15 Australian rugby league great, – Meninga (3)

17 Tiger Woods' first name (7)

18 Springboks captain 1937 NZ tour, Philip – (3)

19 Former Black Caps opener, – McIntosh (3)

21 Wallabies' 1999 World Cup-winning captain (5)

22 Canterbury winger figured 1987 World Cup (5)

24 First Kiwi to win Olympic cycling gold medal (5)

27 First name Tom Latham's international cricket-playing dad (3)

Solution No 39

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12 injuries in 3 years for Nix newbie

Football Phillip Rollo

Wellington Phoenix defender Joshua Laws has put a horror run with injuries behind him to become a regular starter in his first season in the A-League.

But there was a time when the Australian under-23 international could not even step on to the training pitch without being struck down, suffering 12 separate injuries during a luckless three-year period at German club Fortuna Dusseldorf.

"I did nine ankle ligament tears in the period of 2½ years, I broke my arm twice, I did my MCL in my knee," Laws said.

"I wasn't even looking far forward. It was just a case of can I manage to stay fit for a period of three months?"

The 22-year-old said his rotten run with injuries had already made him think about life after football. He is set to begin an architecture course in the coming weeks and said it was important to have a back-up plan.

"If I wasn't doing anything on the side I probably would be a little hesitant. But the fact that I've got a course... it just gives you a second leg to stand on if something goes wrong. It's also a good distraction away from the pitch."

Born in Scotland but raised in Australia, Laws has taken a unique path to the Phoenix, playing largely under the radar in Germany for Fortuna Dusseldorf II – the club's reserve team.



Joshua Laws has been a regular at the back for the Wellington Phoenix this season.

image or very savvy with that side of sport. I was just keeping my head down, enjoying my time over there and the fact I was still involved in the national team had always given me the option to come back, I just wasn't really looking to."

While you might naturally think Laws was motivated to break into the first team at Fortuna Dusseldorf during his spell there, he said his main concern was simply staying fit after being set back by constant injuries.

"The last few years I was there, as much as I would love to say my focus was to try and push into the first team, for me it actually wasn't even that," he said.

"I wasn't able to think about anything but rehab and trying to keep the ankles OK. That changed in the end when I decided to have surgery on both ankles, and since then it's been a lot better and I haven't had any issues."

"But the last three years there it was a difficult time. I wasn't focused on much else other than getting fit."

Laws has started every game for the Phoenix this season, after being brought in to replace departed captain Steven Taylor at centre-back. Although he has primarily played as a defensive midfielder throughout his career, he said he was just glad to be injury free and playing on a regular basis again.

"The last time I played eight games in a row [including pre-season] was probably back in 2018, maybe even 2017. It's been a very long time."

"Definitely too long," he said.