
DAVID POCOCK

NOT YOUR TYPICAL FOOTBALLER

TONI KRASICKI FINDS GREAT DEPTH IN ONE OF RUGBY'S RISING STARS.

Soon after this issue hits the stands, Australia's mighty Wallabies will be ready and raring to go for the 2011 Rugby World Cup, which gets underway in New Zealand on 9 September. With the Wallabies amongst the favourites to win the Web Ellis trophy, Wallaby flanker David Pocock will have a pivotal role in giving 'go-forward' to the Wallaby pack. But David's uncanny abilities on the field are only a fraction of what makes this man tick.

When we meet, David is quite subdued. The likely reason perhaps is a combination of an early Sunday morning start and the adrenalin induced lack of sleep after last night's match when the Western Force went head-to-head with the Waratahs. However, being the professional that he is, it doesn't take long before he opens up about his passions – rugby, community development, and life inequities.

First slipping on a gold jersey for the Wallabies in Hong Kong in 2008, David continued to make his mark when he took to the field during the



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2009 Tri-Nations Series. 2010 saw him secure the number 7 jersey and he has continued to go from strength to strength as a key player for the Wallabies.

‘After George Smith retired, I guess I was really nervous. George is a legendary number 7 and there’s also a lot of responsibility that comes with playing for the Wallabies. But I use it [nervousness/responsibility] to motivate me, to become better and become an important part of the team.’

Still in the early stages of a successful rugby career, the 22-year-old ended 2010 on a high and took home the 2010 John Eales Medal, Australia’s Choice 2010 Wallaby of the year and the Rugby Union Players Association Medal of Excellence; an impressive record when you consider that David and his family only migrated from their farm in Zimbabwe to Brisbane in 2002.

It didn’t take long for David to decide that he wanted to give rugby a shot. ‘It was

probably in Year 10 when I got really serious about training, diet and the rest of it, and decided that it was definitely something that I wanted to do.’

Well, the decision certainly paid off and in 2005, while David was still in his final year at Anglican Church Grammar School in Brisbane, the Western Force selectors came knocking on his door. He took up his post and made the move to Perth and this is where this 18-year-old’s Super Rugby debut was made.

So what is the secret to his success? ‘It’s all about enjoying it! Enjoying the journey, including all the hard work, having fun with the guys you’re training with and trying not to compete against yourself all of the time. And although part of professional sport is about putting expectations on yourself to perform at a certain level, I think the big thing for me is not letting my mates down.’

‘GROWING UP ON THE FARM, DAD HELPED PEOPLE AND WE ALWAYS HAD PEOPLE LIVING IN OUR HOUSE WHO NEEDED A PLACE.’



THE IDEALIST

David Pocock is reputed for his ethical actions, such as choosing only fair trade coffee or covering the logos on his sports shoes. Whatever his actions, the message is loud and clear: he feels passionate about the exploitation of certain people. David believes that 'as people living in Australia, we have so much wealth and opportunity. We also have the power to change things and really our lifestyles are pretty much off the back of many millions of people who live in poverty – the clothes we wear and a lot of stuff we eat. The big thing for me is to ask more questions about our lifestyles and where the stuff actually comes from, what goes in to making it etcetera, because companies are so good at trying to cover things up.' Unsurprisingly, last year David became an ambassador for Gideon Shoes, an Australian company producing handcrafted and anti-sweatshop sneakers.

**'I DO KNOW A LOT OF THE PLAYERS
AND I THINK THAT'S ONE OF THE
GREAT THINGS ABOUT THE SPORT.
IT'S ABOUT MEETING DIFFERENT
PEOPLE AND GETTING TO KNOW THEM,
NOT JUST THE COMPETITOR,
BUT HANGING OUT WITH THE GUYS
AND HAVING A GOOD TIME.'**

THE CIVIL LIBERTARIAN

In light of his past experiences in Zimbabwe, it is hardly surprising that David Pocock has strong beliefs when it comes to the rights of minorities in our society. What sets him apart from most of us, however, is that his actions continually prove the strength of his convictions.

Both he and his wife Emma are advocates for gay marriage and on a recent trip to Melbourne attended a gay rights rally. 'After talking to people who just wanted to marry and have the same rights as other people, we decided against a marriage according to the government'. As a result they opted to have a civil ceremony without registering their union, highlighting the inequalities and discrimination that they see in the current laws.

'I find it quite sad how, with all the support for gay marriage there is in the community, the government is still against it. It's a very touchy subject particularly for groups like the Australian Christian Lobby. I consider myself someone who follows Jesus and in my understanding He was always for the oppressed and all people who are marginalised.'

'We have quite a few gay friends, so we decided that we wouldn't get legally married. We just had the service, a wedding ceremony then that was pretty much it, we didn't sign anything. I don't see why gay people shouldn't be able to marry whoever they want to.'

“I REMEMBER BEING AT PRIMARY SCHOOL

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THE HUMANITARIAN

Upholding his commitment and compassion to help those less fortunate, in 2009 David teamed up with pal Luke O’Keefe to develop a charity Eightytwenty Vision. The organisation’s purpose is to provide the Nkayi community in Zimbabwe with the necessary skills for self-sustainability and to improve their standard of living.

‘I went back to Zimbabwe in 2007 and had a look around, met a lot of people and worked on a heap of different projects. I went back in 2008 and again in 2009 when we started to put the project together.’

Health, women and children’s rights, food security and education are the key areas that the charity is working on improving. ‘The project focuses on real bottom-up community development, trying to give people the skills, whether it be farming or education, so they’ll be able to look after themselves and not need any handouts’.

The charity is a labour of love, and he admits it has been pretty hard work in setting up. He’s thankful to Luke, with his not-for-profit organisation background and passion for the project, and the support from Perth’s rugby

community. It’s not just the Perth sporting community that is standing behind the rugby star though. In April the Waratahs went up against the Western Force in a charity game, which raised \$30,000 for the organisation and a fundraising dinner was held coinciding with the Wallabies versus All Blacks game in Brisbane in August.

There is no doubt that all the hard work was worth it. ‘Seeing the difference after just renovating the rural clinic; they had 18 births in a full year, then after the renovations they had 17 births in the first month!’

He is still far off from hanging up his boots, but when that day comes it is community development work that attracts him. ‘It’s something I’d love to do either over here or in Africa. There’s a lot of need in Africa, but there’s also a lot of need over here.’

2011’s World Cup is a first for David; ‘It’s pretty exciting but there’s just so much work to do before then, I just have to get out there and train well.’ Don’t forget to support the Wallabies as they take on the world this month.



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