

me, one of the biggest things learned from a team sport is that you can't just think selfishly of yourself. You've got other people to consider within the team and it becomes more evident the higher you go up in the scale of football that you're there, almost in a family situation. To achieve the very best, you need to be disciplined in not giving away foolish penalties. These disciplines, in my opinion, you can also translate into a working environment.

How important is winning?

I'm not a good loser, never have been, never will be. In this day and age in New Zealand, it seems that participation has become PC, without the need for kids to be winners or losers. In our days, if you didn't win, you came second and coming second wasn't good enough. For me, it's still in my psyche today. I can't play just to participate. Australians have the attitude throughout all levels of all sport that they are there to win and it's probably something we've lost a little bit, here in New Zealand. There are so many different theories on this. I think a lack of competitiveness could come back to the lack of male primary school teachers today. When I was a kid, we had a number of different male teachers involved with taking different rugby teams. We never competed to participate. We competed to win.

What would be your advice to parents at the junior rugby level to guiding their children in the game?

There are a lot of mums out there concerned about their young boys playing rugby. It's particularly important to get them involved as early as they can. Over those first couple of years, it's a form of touch rugby, it's not physical. The kids will progress through to tackle and the children will know after their first year of tackle if it's something they still want to be involved with. If they decide "this isn't quite for me," they can move on to play soccer, but the first few years of touch football will give them a feel for how the game's played without the physicality before they move onto tackle. Again, those kids in that first year may struggle with the concept for the best part of half a season, because kids don't want to get hurt. I think it's important that you have people who are involved with the coaching who have a reasonable understanding of the game, and who can help those young children overcome any fears they might have about making a tackle, and give them the confidence they need. If you can overcome fears and teach them very good techniques, they will find that they have absolutely nothing to worry about.

What can parents expect as part of their commitment?

One of the biggest issues that parents will face is that they are prepared to make the commitment, but may not have been involved before and for all their good intent, will find they cannot help. Counties have development officers who go around the schools throughout the year, running different training programmes, and it's advised to use those individuals



when you can, if you have shortfalls with coaches. That's what they're there for – phone the union and book some of their boys to run a training session with your teams – they're a resource there to be used.

Counties will also provide coaching courses to the clubs. From there, it's the parents who turn up every week on Saturdays and taxi children to away games who are the backbone of junior rugby. At 8 or 10 years of age, players train once a week, maybe for an hour and play on Saturday. At 9 or 10, this increases to two nights a week training when the children start playing tackle football. It's not uncommon to see the same parents involved again. A lot have a passion to do what they're doing, but there is a fair commitment when you consider Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays. Parents have to be involved in management and advising players where they're playing on Saturday and about cancellations, so there's a huge amount of commitment involved in supporting a rugby team. But the biggest advice I can offer parents is to get out there and support them. No excuses. They are only young once. Kids love to have their parents on the sideline, watching them. You must give them encouragement, constructive criticism and praise where they deserve it, Children's faces coming off, after doing well on the field, is something every parent should strive to see.

Where do young players go when they finish primary school?

Around 13 – 17 or 18, you can play schoolboy football or club football. First and foremost, try to play school football. If there's no team at the school, you can go to your local club and find a team there. Those with reasonable ability, when they get to 15, 16, 17, will try to play for their school's First XV and get more exposure playing at that level than they would at club football. Once you've finished school, you come back to club and look at playing either under 19s or 21s or Premiers. Those who leave school in the top echelon will become

