

It's imperative that kids do have dreams. You need to be able to follow your dreams and do your very best to fulfil them.

Parents - provide the environment and opportunities for your kids to be able to give it their very best shot.

is identified as having real talent. The academy side here in Counties will be comprised of local players, but there could be some from out of the region as well, who will come and be part of that setup.

What happens at secondary school level?

It's not really until you get to secondary school level that there is a requirement for children to play for their school over their club. It's a way to strengthen the school competition in the region at present. Certainly in Auckland, at schools like Grammar or Kings, you get real exposure if you have ability. And certainly if you can play First XV for those schools, opportunities will transpire if you have true ability. It's something that we need to achieve down here. Presently, we have a school like Wesley College that dominates everything. In the days of St Stephens, they were probably one school that could foot it with Wesley. There has been a lot of work done at Manurewa and they're looking at providing an Academy system for the school. They have a very good system in place there now for bringing players through at a younger age, and tying them to the school. They will reap the rewards over the next two or three years and they may well be the first school to start to compete with Wesley again. If you go to Auckland, you will find a number of schools competing at that level. A lot of them on any Saturday can win their games.

What is the role of a rugby academy?

Academy is essentially for those who have just left school up to the age of 20 and they are kids who you would expect to go on and play for Counties at a later date. Individuals will be put into training programmes and monitored throughout the year. They will have some games over and above their own club games, where they will play against the likes of the Waikato and Auckland Academy sides. First and foremost, those in the Counties Academy are future Counties players, and most of those individuals are good enough to play Premier Club football, a year or two out of school. Whether they are to be considered to be All Blacks - there are a lot of bridges to cross before they get there. Part of that will be playing for the NPC side, or playing for Counties. Obviously, if they attain that level, they look to go on to the Super 14 level and probably look at the Chiefs.

The trick is to nurture and continue to develop the players, so that over the next few years, they become part of the full Counties squad.

What are some of the solutions to strengthening our local presence in regional rugby?

We have to remember there are a lot of kids within this area who will commute and go to Auckland schools and some of those are talented kids, but if we don't have the right mechanisms in place to protect them, they will be picked up in

