



The Short family – Thomas, Errol and Gary, Karen and Joe

work to support the family. But, no matter how long you play, the enjoyment of playing rugby never leaves you and winning is always the icing on the cake,” Earl says. Gary and brother Lex were right beside Errol as little fellas, watching “footie” games.

“The senior clubrooms used to be where the Scout Hall is now. I see kids playing now, just like I did, pretending they’re senior players. They grow up in the clubrooms, just like we did. I coached when I finished playing and it’s rewarding to see the same passion carry on through the young boys. There are people who have made a huge contribution to the club, like Pat Goscomb. He’s been there about as long as I can remember, in just about all roles, Gary says. “The game is very different now. In our day, we had a couple of All Blacks in our side, John Spiers and Rod Ketels, but good players weren’t taken out before the end of the season to attend big games. They played tests on Saturdays and club games with us on Sundays. We would work up to 7 days a week, but still turn around and play rugby. At one stage, this town sustained five rugby teams. Pukekohe has been successful so long, the keen edge is there to keep up the standard. I think the game is a lot harder now, the rules make a difference.”

Ask 12 year old Jo Short why he chose rugby as a sport, and he is quick to affirm that he was given the choice and wasn’t pushed into it. “Dad asked me if I wanted to play rugby or soccer, and I thought ‘that’s an easy one.’ I was five at the time.” Jo plays multiple sports at zone level and according to his mum, will ‘put his hand up’ to have a go at everything. He plays hockey, soccer, cricket, touch, golf, basketball and 5th grade open Junior Boys with Pukekohe Rugby Club. The youngest Short is keen to follow in the sizeable rugby boots of big brother Thomas.

At 21, Thomas has already chalked up an impressive list of achievements, including three seasons with Counties Academy, trialling for the NZU19s and being part of the Premier Championship team that beat Karaka 9-6 last year. He has received his Club blazer, awarded to those who play 35 Premier games, an honour already achieved by dad Gary and Uncle Lex. This 106kg front row forward knows what it’s like being a big guy playing well out of his age group. At 14, he was playing in the U17s and at 13 was asked to play for Pukekohe High School First XV.

Encouraged to attain a career as well as play rugby, Thomas recently completed his apprenticeship as a builder, but still kept up 10 training

runs a week. He is now free to consider his options – and top of the list is an offer to join a rugby club in Manchester, coached by ex-Pukekohe rugby player David Wood.

“I’ll go wherever it takes me,” says Thomas. “Anything that happens with the game is a bonus.”

The women of the family, mum Karen and daughter Arna (23) may not have played rugby, but it’s a huge part of their lives. Arna is an all-round athlete, who, according to Gary, “knows more than most about rugby.” She was a member of the NZ Rowing Academy and holds New Zealand rowing titles. She also plays soccer and plays and coaches netball.

Karen is the daughter of Peter Massey, a Life Member of PRC. She and Gary arranged their wedding day around the rugby season and the couple were Thomas’ first rugby coaches. Like many rugby mums, she has been right in there, helping out in the club, serving on the junior boys committee. Getting the boys to practise was always shared between her and Gary. The family have a tight routine on Saturdays, watching Jo play in the morning, Arna play netball at midday while Thomas takes to the field in the afternoon.

“I’m a nurse and have pharmaceutical experience, so ‘mum’ and my first aid box are where the boys turn if they are injured,” she says. “It’s a last resort for them to go to the doctor.

“Gary and I are really proud of our family. They’ve excelled in what they’re doing and they focus on winning. It may be PC to play just to have fun, but the Shorts’ criteria is also to play to win and always give it their best. It’s fantastic for their time management and every day they’re doing something physical. There is a great social side to the game, you meet a lot of good people who become lifelong friends and get to know the kids’ friends and their families.”

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