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**'TOUR OF THE DECADE'?  
NEW ZEALAND-SOUTH AFRICAN RUGBY  
RELATIONS 1985 - 1986**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in History at Massey University**

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## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, there existed worldwide pressure upon the South African Government to abolish its controversial policy of apartheid. Sporting boycotts, which excluded South African teams from the Olympic Games and other sporting events were imposed on the Republic so long as they pursued the practice of racial segregation between whites and non-whites. Such boycotts were seen as an effective way of forcing the leaders of South Africa's Afrikaner National Party to repeal its harsh apartheid laws. New Zealand's close sporting relations with South Africa throughout the apartheid period, with rugby union in particular, made the issue of sporting sanctions a sensitive subject for many New Zealanders. Many believed the result of sporting boycotts towards South Africa was the denial of an inherent right to play and watch one of the toughest sporting contests in the world - a rugby test between the New Zealand All Blacks and the South African Springboks.

For decades New Zealanders and white South Africans have shared an obsession with the game of rugby union unmatched anywhere else in the world, perhaps with the exception of the fanatical Welsh rugby supporter. However, what is without doubt is the enmity between the two countries when their respective national teams meet on the rugby field. Since the first South African tour of New Zealand in 1921, test series between the All Blacks and Springboks have been tense, tightly fought contests. Until 1997, the home team had never been beaten in a series. It is for this reason that New Zealanders looked upon test matches against the Springboks as the ultimate challenge. Unfortunately, as will be discussed latter in this thesis, the visit by the 1981 Springboks to New Zealand caused severe social disruption and disaffection as the issue of race relations surpassed matters on the rugby field.

Despite the controversial Springbok tour of New Zealand in 1981, the New Zealand Rugby Football Union (NZRFU) accepted an invitation from the South African Rugby Board (SARB) to tour the Republic in 1985. After a case brought by Auckland lawyers claiming to be 'true' rugby people, the High Court of New Zealand, upheld an application for an interim injunction which stopped the tour on the eve of the players departure. Subsequently, the tour was abandoned by the NZRFU. However, a loophole in the ruling enabled the players as 'individuals' to undertake a private tour under the guise of the Cavaliers in 1986. The tour polarised the country. They were supported by some for standing up for their rights as 'individuals'. Others condemned them for playing without the sanction of the NZRFU. Some people saw them as rugby mercenaries motivated by the rumoured monetary rewards of touring South Africa.

The abandoned 1985 All Black tour to South Africa and the subsequent tour by the Cavaliers had enormous ramifications for the game of rugby football in New Zealand. On the field, it provided the catalyst for the All Blacks success in the inaugural Rugby World Cup in 1987. This was achieved through the NZRFU's decision to suspend the Cavaliers for two international matches before becoming eligible for selection for the All Blacks again. The search for suitable replacements for the two-test series against the Australians, which followed the Rugby Union's decision, resulted in the advancement of back-up players into first choice players. This undoubtedly sharpened performances when the Cavaliers returned from their suspension and ensured fierce competition for spots in New Zealand's World Cup squad. For a number of the players, the two-test stand-down saw a premature end to their All Black careers.

Off the field, it shook the establishment and administration of the game to the core. It also further isolated the SARB from the international rugby community. Politically, the Cavaliers tour demonstrated the ongoing gulf between New

Zealand's two dominant political parties. David Lange's Labour Government was fervently opposed to rugby contact with South Africa, while the National Party Opposition held the view that while it regretted the players decision to tour, it respected the right of individual New Zealanders to travel and play sport without intimidation. Without doubt, the cancellation of the 1985 tour and the rebel tour of 1986 represented one of the most significant moments in the history of rugby football.

This thesis will address an aspect of New Zealand's history that has until now been neglected. While others have touched on the subject of the cancelled All Black tour of 1985 and the Cavaliers tour that followed, no individual has brought it all together and made it the focal point of an historical enquiry. Secondly, it will make a contribution to the historical understanding of the tumultuous relationship between New Zealand and South African rugby in the mid-1980s.

This thesis will endeavour to answer a number of questions. Firstly, why did the NZRFU abandon the 1985 All Black tour to South Africa? How important were factors such as Parliament's opposition to the tour, international condemnation from international sporting bodies, opposition from anti-tour groups within New Zealand, the legal challenge or maybe the potential backlash against rugby, in prompting the NZRFU's decision to call off the tour. Was it was the refusal of the Auckland and North Harbour Rugby Unions to support the tour that forced the NZRFU to overturn its decision? This thesis will argue that it was not one, but all these factors which caused the cancellation of the tour.

Secondly, this thesis will examine why there was an unsanctioned tour of South Africa in 1986. What motivated the players to risk a lifetime ban from the game or from All Black selection for the sake of an unofficial series against the

Springboks? Was it a desire to right the perceived injustices committed in 1985 when the All Blacks tour was stopped? For some of the players, a tour of South Africa was seen as the pinnacle of achievement for any All Black. In the absence of a world cup, such a tour decided who were the true world champions of rugby football. Others would have seen a tour of South Africa as an ideal way of ending their All Black careers. Perhaps some players saw such a tour as an opportunity to thumb their noses at the politicians and lawyers who tried to obstruct their individual freedoms and democratic rights. Over the years speculation has been rife that it was money which lured New Zealand's rugby heroes to tour South Africa. This thesis will attempt to answer whether large cash payments were indeed offered to players to ignore the wishes of the NZRFU and tour the Republic as rugby rebels.

This thesis has drawn on a number of sources, both primary and secondary. My main documentary source has been the records of anti-tour organisation HART (Halt All Racist Tours) Aotearoa, located in the Alexander Turnbull Library. The contents of the HART collection include papers relating to campaigns, tours, and conferences. It also includes organisational material including correspondence with government, rugby players and sponsors, minutes, financial reports, publications, media releases and newspaper clippings.

The New Zealand Rugby Museum in Palmerston North, was another substantial source of information. The museum's extensive collection of weekly rugby publication *Rugby News*, gave me an insight into the New Zealand rugby fraternity's attitude toward sporting contacts with South Africa. A video archive, also located in the rugby museum, featuring television news bulletins for the period 1985 to 1986, and transcripts of interviews with several key figures in the events described, including Ces Blazey and David Lange, provided important information.

The Rugby Union was contacted with a view to gaining access to their files, however this proved to be unsuccessful.

Newspapers were useful in providing a day-to-day account of the events. The *Dominion*, *Evening Post*, *New Zealand Herald*, and the now defunct, *Auckland Star*, were those most widely consulted.

Interviews were, I hoped, going to be a valuable source of information. Unfortunately this was not to be. Most of those approached failed to respond to my enquires or proved to busy to assist, so only one interview was conducted. Patrick Finnigan's openness and frankness provided a valuable insight into why he set about challenging the proposed All Black tour to South Africa in 1985.

In a country as rugby-mad as ours, there has, of course, been a number of autobiographies and biographies written by and about ex-All Blacks. These have proven to be extremely illuminating. Most useful was former All Black great, Andy Haden's book, *Lock, Stock'n Barrel*.

The *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* were helpful in giving me a sense of the various political arguments for-and-against-sporting contacts with South Africa. The *New Zealand Law Reports* enabled me to achieve a clear understanding of the legal action brought against the NZRFU by Auckland lawyers, Patrick Finnigan and Phillip.

In addition to the primary sources I have mentioned, several books written by academics and journalists have provided excellent secondary material. In particular, *Human Rights and Sporting Contacts - New Zealand Attitudes to Race Relations in South Africa 1921-1994*, written by Malcolm Templeton, enhanced my understanding of the complex tensions between the NZRFU and

its supporters, the politicians, the anti-apartheid movement and finally, general public.

This thesis has been divided into six chapters. Chapter one will provide an account of the controversies that dogged New Zealand's rugby relationship with South Africa rugby between 1900 and 1984. This will achieve two things. Firstly, provide a background to what is arguably New Zealand's longest and most bitter sporting controversy - the issue of sporting contacts with South Africa. Secondly, it will provide a context with which the events of 1985-1986 occurred.

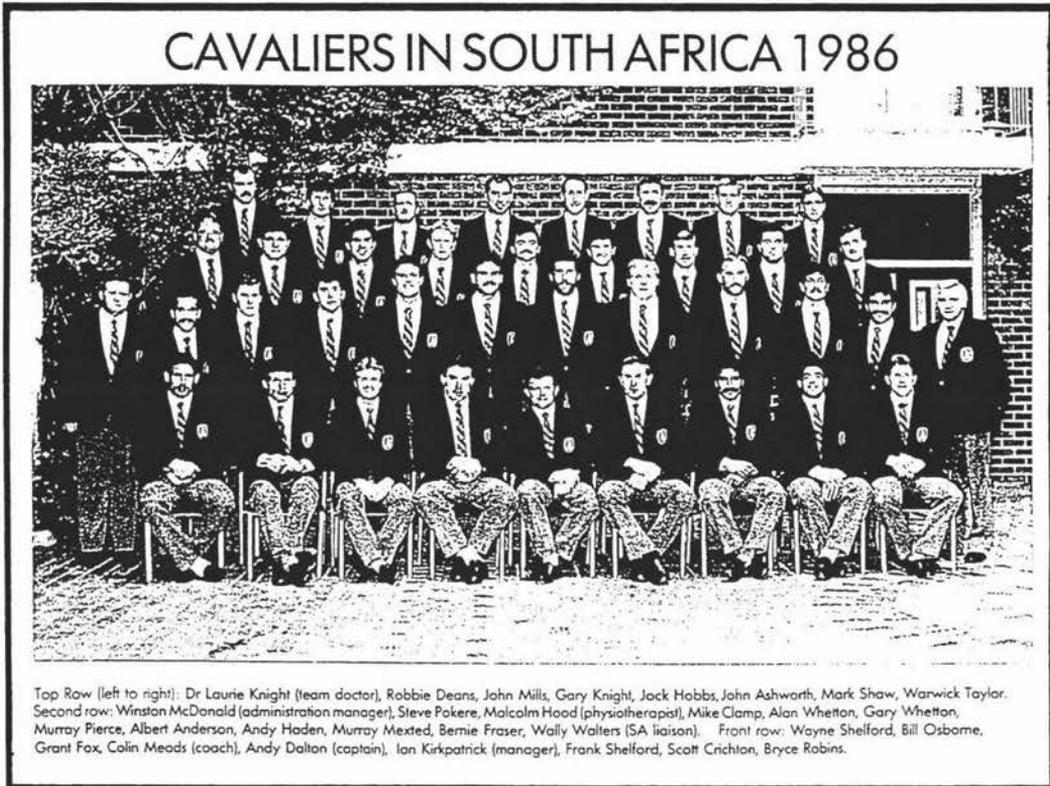
'The tour that almost was,' the proposed All Black tour to South Africa in 1985 is the focus of chapter two.<sup>1</sup> Like chapter one, it will provide a chronological account of the events surrounding the SARB's invitation to the NZRFU to send a team to South Africa. It will identify the arguments for-and-against touring the Republic and analyse the reaction to the NZRFU's decision to accept the SARB's decision.

Chapter three will discuss the legal battles that led to the cancellation of the 1985 All Black tour to South Africa. It will also examine the reaction to the cancellation from the players, protestors, politicians and media.

The fourth chapter will provide a history of the Cavaliers, a team that included twenty-eight of the All Blacks who had been scheduled to tour South Africa the previous year. It will discuss will the players motives in touring. Why did they ignore the wishes of the Rugby Union, Parliament, and approximately half the New Zealand population?

The fifth chapter will examine the immediate consequences of the Cavaliers tour on the players involved. A final chapter will discuss the impact of the

cancelled 1985 tour on rugby more generally. It will discuss rugby's relationship with the Government following the Cavaliers tour that followed and identify the beneficial and detrimental effects the tour had on New Zealand and international rugby.



**Fig 1: The Cavaliers.** Doug Laing, *Cavaliers in South Africa 1986*, Auckland: South Seas Visuals, 1986, p. 6.