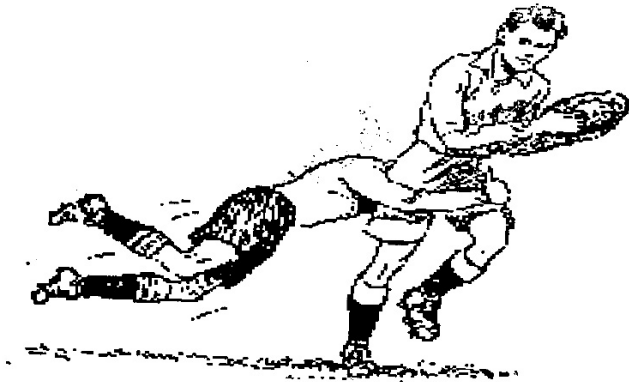


Sidelights

Rugby Poems



by Mark Pirie

Sidelights

Dedicated to my grandfather Tom Lawn:

Tom Lawn, my Grandpa, was a tall forward, a big man and well respected with a large number of friends. He played either as a wing-forward or as a loose forward probably in the middle- or back-row of the old 2-3-2 scrum formation as a support player and was active in loose rushes. A Canterbury Junior triallist in 1924, he represented Canterbury B in 1925, and played for the well-known Sydenham club in Christchurch 1919-24, Christchurch Technical Old Boys 1925, and the popular Auckland club College Rifles 1926-29. He later coached the forwards of the North Shore Seniors with All Black “Invincible” Bert Cooke in 1938. That same year he played for Auckland Coaches in their annual match against the Auckland Referees’ Association. From 1947-50 he was an elected Vice-President of Sydenham, where he had previously served as Club Captain in 1924 along with a stint on their committee 1922-23.

S i d e l i g h t s

Rugby poems

by Mark Pirie

*The Night Press
Wellington*

The Night Press

Flat 4C/19 Cottleville Terrace

Thorndon

Wellington 6011

Aotearoa / New Zealand

<http://broadsheetnz.wordpress.com>

First published 2013

ISBN 978-0-473-26483-3 (Print)

ISBN 978-0-473-27489-4 (Online)

Poems © Mark Pirie 2013

Cover printed letterpress at The Printing Works, Cobblestones Museum, Greytown

Headings typeset in Gill 14pt

Text typeset in Garamond 12pt

Sidelights

Blues v. Hurricanes, April 2013

(A spectator's notes)

Under lights, players seem brighter,
like fast moving trees; the packs
shove, push, show grunt.

Weepu is back to his best,
dashing, opening up spaces
closed just a second ago.

His former teammates
look for holes, mining the Blues'
well formed lines.

Players on both sides
give it all, two players
held up on the try line.

JK behind the gun,
has the Blues well-trained,
their back moves well executed.

Hammett's men look outgunned
dodging bullets;
Smith and Franks do their best,

but to no avail, Barrett
at full-back shows classy touches
but can't break through.

To the Blues the honours
in a fine match, Eden Park
rugby at its best.

JK = Sir John Kirwan

The Divided Country

Walking to the dairy
to buy milk is no easy
thing when you're in Dunedin.
Like this morning, I was
walking down Great King Street
when a car pulls up
and someone screams out the window,
"OTAGOOO!!"

I couldn't help myself. I yelled
back, "HURRICANES BEAT YOU, MAN!"
The guy was stunned. He hurled his can
at me, beer spraying
across the street. Then, he tore off
and I walked into the dairy. It seems
the Dunedin mornings
are the saddest. "Just wait," says
the girl at the counter, "for the rain!"

1999

At the Try Line

*For Brian Turner, after reading his collection,
"Inside Outside"*

I was thinking
how, in life, you're
either 'in' or 'out',
or, as you put it,
Inside Outside.

And it's best to be 'in'.

Music, art, literature, sport,
love, work, fashion, politics,
it's about success or failure,
riding them out, and as
Sean Fitzpatrick says,
"Winning matters."

At the try line, if you're
not in, you're out.

But you're really
Inside Outside
all along.

***The Waiting Game* ***

(For Chester Williams and others...)

“Listen, sport is sport. Where I was in South Africa, there were many great rural players who never made the National Team in Fonteyn and elsewhere. So of course we loved our rugby, we followed it closely, we Blacks played the game; it was apartheid, not rugby, that kept the players from being recognised. No, we didn’t dislike sport, we were a sporting nation, we followed the rugby, the tours, the great players, even though we remained outside, waiting for the day when we would at last play, be recognised, accepted, for the fine players we were...”

*Based on a Radio NZ interview with a Black South African player after apartheid.

Two Rugby Epigrams

Holy Holy Sport

at the end
of Rugby Street, Christchurch:

a bloody big
church.

School Days at Wellington College

Sitting on the terraces,
the wind chilling our ears,

watching the First XV
lose the match,

and hearing the Deputy Head
still screaming (from below),

“YOU AREN’T CHEERING ENOUGH!”

Four Poems on my Grandfather Tom Lawn

The Ball

“i remember kicking
this ball around the yard

it was a tan rugby ball

i would spend hours
running up and down
the yard chasing
this ball while
avoiding those ‘scary hairy’ spiders
and ‘blood suckers’

and then one day
i asked mum where the ball
had come from

and she said it was from
my Grandpa

and to this very day
i always remember that ball

as the only piece of evidence
that my Grandpa existed.”

***From Six Shots to Remember You:
For My Mother***

4
turning
on the tele

one afternoon
in Winter,

you cheering, all
fired up

for the Test,
just like your father

was when he
would take you to the stands

in Christchurch
& watch all the strong men

play. now, you repeating
the act, with me.

*how the generations
fade . . .*

The Memory

Mother, I thought of you this morning
out walking in Fendalton
where all the well-to-do gardens
spill their rich joy along the sidewalk.

And I pictured you inside
your family house, safe by your
father's side, a young child,
all set for Saturday's 'big test'.

And as I sat down by the Avon
I thought I could sense your father's
hands, reaching through the tips

of the willow trees and searching
numbly for a little boy left chasing
his rugby ball in the morning breeze.

***Playmakers* ***

My grandfather led forward rushes;
Me, I kicked a ball through defences
Looking for a striker or a winger.

My grandfather led forward rushes;
AB's at hand for exchanges.
He knew the hard law of the trenches.

My grandfather led forward rushes;
Me, I kicked a ball through defences.

* My grandfather, a tall forward, played for College Rifles (1927) with several All Blacks (Toby Sheen, Lance Johnson and Dick Fogarty) and the Maori All Black Wattie Barclay, and was a military cadet in WWI and a member of the Home Guard during WWII.
Richie McCaw describes forward play as the 'trench warfare' of modern rugby.

My Great Uncle

I never met or knew him
but recently I looked at an
old photo, and he was in it.

My Great Uncle by marriage
was Tim Harris, dairy farmer
and rugby player of Okaiawa.

Strong and fast he was,
effective in forward rushes.
He played with All Blacks

like Harold Masters and
Dick Fogarty. Once, his
Okaiawa team defeated

Dick's Hawera team; their
first defeat at home in years.
He married my Great Aunt.

Catholic, he was; Methodist,
she was, and the two
eloped causing family unrest.

All was to be forgiven,
but locals knew him best for
his feats on the rugby field.

He was a fine player
for Taranaki from 1922-23,
strong, active and fast.

The Wandering Bard

*i.m. Ernest L Eyre, poet and life member of
the North Shore Rugby Club*

Ernest L Eyre: a bard no-one sings,
A man who could spin it like the best;
His words dotted down between the sticks.

Ernest L Eyre: a bard no-one sings,
Knew the oval game of rugby best;
And wrote verse, thinking popular best.

Ernest L Eyre: a bard no-one sings,
A man who could spin it like the best.

Five All Blacks poems

Ode, in the Bellevue

The rain came finally
driving us from the field
but not before we'd
 been in grave danger

of collapsing on
a mud-rolled pitch that gave
little to the seamers,
 let alone the spinners.

I was happy enough, making
five not out with a square
drive that ran to the fence
 for four. Then,

later, it was time for the
'big show': *NZ versus Australia* –
the World Cup semi-final.
 After a few beers

at the clubrooms we sidled
down to the Bellevue
and watched it in the corner,
 a group of us cricketers

with an eye on the TAB,
and an eye on the beer.
By half-time, the eyes and mood
of the group were changing.

Only an hour before
we'd picked a 20 point win,
a cruise to the final, and
a showdown with either

England or France. But this
was not to be, as the Wallaby
defence held and repelled
the All Black attacks.

By the end most had
started to leave,
giving up completely,
knowing it'd be

another four years to wait
and a new team to build.
The few left, watched on, as eyes
sank to even lower levels,

like entering an abyss, similar I
thought to Dante's *Inferno*. It
was writ on my mind
as the final whistle blew.

Bellevue Hotel, Lower Hutt, 2003

Covered in Boks' Glory

Sam Cane went for the line;
the roar of the crowd above.
Aaron Smith had fed him quick
and hitting it at pace was Cane,
who was thumped to the ground as
he smashed through, dropping
his arm out, ball just making
the line. Walking back, blood
was dripping from his headgear;
his glory drove the night.

New Zealand v South Africa, 14 September 2013

Scrum-feed *

For Piri Weepu

Sonny Bill has his offload,
Nonu his speed and skills,
Smith his sharp running angles,
Kaino: his muscle, busting through.

But the man I look for
is Weepu. At scrum-time
when they engage and Piri
has the feed, a try he will make.

Kahui and Jane are fast cars,
McCaw rules the open side,
Thorn and Williams lock tight,
the Franks, Woodcock prop all night.

But the man I look for
is Weepu. When play's loose,
and Piri gathers the ball and looks
to kick, a try he will make.

Dagg has that yard of pace,
Carter's the maestro five-eighth,
Mealamu drives hard and low,
Read runs hard in the tackle.

But the man I look for
is Weepu. So, at the end,
with the game on the line, and Piri
has the feed, a try he will make.

*Published in *The Dominion Post* before the 2011 World Cup
semi-final with Australia

Kieran Read : Tape Man *

(Written after observing Kieran Read's tackle on Quade Cooper during the 2012 Bledisloe Cup Test, Eden Park, Auckland...)

No need to 'Bring back Buck',
Now Kieran's in the ruck.

Read gets there, hits em' hard;
No need to 'Bring back Buck'...

Read's our man; a taped up
Buck – rock solid at 8.

No need to 'Bring back Buck',
Now Kieran's in the ruck.

* Kieran Read's taped-up head brings back memories of former All Black Wayne 'Buck' Shelford famous for the 'Bring back Buck' signs over the past twenty or more years.

The Cup

McCaw lifts the Webb Ellis Cup;
Tired joy is on their faces:
It's a hard road to win the cup.

McCaw lifts the Webb Ellis Cup,
Captain Fantastic holds the cup;
The pain of winning leaves no traces.

McCaw lifts the Webb Ellis Cup;
Tired joy is on their faces.

*Rugby World Cup Final, Eden Park, Auckland,
23 October 2011: New Zealand 8 v. France 7*

Acknowledgements:

Some of these poems previously appeared in: *The Dominion Post*, *broadsheet*, *Valley Micropress*, *The Search* (ESAW, 2007), *Under Flagstaff: Dunedin Poetry* (University of Otago Press, 2004), *Gallery* (Salt, UK, 2003), *Reading the Will* (Sudden Valley Press, 2002), *Touchlines: An Anthology of Rugby Poetry* (NZ Sports Hall of Fame, 2013), *Dumber* (ESAW, 2003), *Giving Poetry a Bad Name* (ESAW, 2005), *Sounds of Sonnets* (HeadworX, 2006) and *Old Hat* (HeadworX, 2012).

About the Author

Mark Pirie is a Wellington-born poet, editor and publisher. Rugby runs in his family. As well as his grandfather and Great Uncle Tim Harris, his grandfather's brothers Charles and Bob both played rugby as did his grandfather's first cousin Jack Lamason, the New Zealand cricketer and Wellington rugby rep. Charles Lawn, a front row man and place kicker, was a Canterbury College rep 1919 and played senior club rugby for Christchurch 1917-18 and 'Varsity 1919. Bob Lawn, a middle-row forward, played for College Rifles in 1935 and while in the RNZAF represented Hobsonville airforce base at Athletic Park in 1938 v Wigram.

Mark's great great uncle Charles Toy was a Canterbury B rep in 1922 and his great grandfather Charles Henry Lawn played as a forward on the West Coast in the 1880s for Boatman's as did Charles Henry's brothers or cousins.

Besides his rugby interest, Mark has played football as a left-sided midfielder or defender for Wellington College and Victoria University and club cricket for Wellington Collegians and Hutt District, and is well-known for editing the cricket poetry anthology *A Tingling Catch* (HeadworX, 2010) and its offshoot cricket poetry blog Tingling Catch.

Website: www.markpirie.com