

RUGBY AND THE WORLD CUP

5 X 1 HOUR HD international co-production.



# THE WEIGHT OF THE NATION

The unique story of New Zealand and  
The Rugby World Cup



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In 2011 one of the greatest shows on earth returns Down Under. Since its modest beginnings in New Zealand in 1987 the Rugby World Cup has become a sporting extravaganza and is now the third largest sporting event on the planet.



## SERIES CONCEPT

This documentary is one of a five part series focusing on the five global heavyweights in the game: New Zealand, England, France, South Africa and Australia. Each episode is produced to stand alone while still being part of a greater global story of rugby and its importance in various cultures around the world. Filmed in HD, it will embrace all the action on and off the pitch from the last seven tournaments, combining IMG archive of the greatest games with unique insights from interviews with the world's greatest players. But more than just a series of sports highlights, this series will tell the gripping tale of the glory and despair, the intrigue and politics behind the games themselves, and the social and cultural influences that have changed the world of modern rugby forever.

## PROGRAMME CONCEPT

The All Blacks are globally acknowledged as the world's greatest rugby team. But when it comes to the World Cup the world's greatest underachievers, winning only once in seven attempts.

We tell the story of the inaugural World Cup triumph on home soil in 1987, when the Men in Black healed the wounds of the disastrous Springbok Tour of 1981 and reunited Kiwis with their national game.

The programme will trace the influence of Maori and Polynesian players, showing how the cultural melting pot of New Zealand rugby has forged a new image for the game.

We will look at what professionalism has done for grass-roots rugby, and show how more than in any other country, the game remains an integral part of the nation's identity.

# THE WEIGHT OF THE NATION

Since the 1880's, when New Zealand rugby teams first travelled abroad, beating the best the rest of the world had to offer, the All Blacks have given New Zealand a means to express itself on the world stage. Together with men like Sir Edmund Hillary, Sir Peter Blake, and Corporal Willie Apiata they provide this tiny nation at the bottom of the world with powerful symbols of endeavour, success, and world-class excellence.

The inaugural Rugby World Cup, the tournament won by the All Blacks only once, stands out in New Zealand history. Rugby had been at the centre of some of the ugliest civil tensions in New Zealand's history. The wounds caused by the 1981 Springbok tour were only just healing when the 1987 World Cup started, but the All Blacks' victory helped reconcile the public with their national sport.

The All Blacks of 1987 knew the image of the game had suffered and they went out of their way to bring the game back into a positive light. The haka, which previous to this World Cup had not been part of pre-match ritual, was re-invented and re-introduced by Buck Shelford. He educated his team about its importance and it has since become a powerful symbol of national pride.

23 years since that first event, the Rugby World Cup has gone from being a tentative, shoestring-budget affair, to a multi-million dollar bonanza and the third biggest event in world sports.

In that same time-frame the game of rugby has turned professional, bringing profound change in its wake. The All Black players have gone from being strictly amateurs to highly paid professionals, while in a reflection of the world around them, their team has been transformed into a global brand. No longer do they skip training to help with the lambing on the family farm, no longer do they race back from a test match to play for their club on Sunday; in fact many of them never even play for their clubs.

Things have changed dramatically on the wider New Zealand landscape too; changes which are reflected in the men who make up the current All Black team. In 1987 for instance, the winning All Black team featured only three 'non-whites': Buck Shelford (Maori), Michael Jones and Joe Stanley (Samoans). Leading into the 2011 World Cup, the balance has changed. The ethnic mix of the All Blacks today reflects the changing population of New Zealand, and in recent years the All Black management has moved to embrace the new multi-cultural make-up of the team.

As we move through the World Cup years, we use rugby and its four-yearly competition to look at the changes occurring around us. The players, their culture, their aspirations, their perspective on life and how they are perceived by others, throw a different light on the evolution of New Zealand society. The sport of rugby, with its mix of physical robustness, individual skill and collective team spirit, is uniquely linked to the New Zealand psyche.

In New Zealand rugby still stands above other sports such as rugby league and football in the national consciousness, for all those sports' recent successes. Sonny Bill Williams' profile as an All Black is far greater than it would ever have been in League, and the power of the oval ball and how it impacts on our sense of self remains deeply ingrained in us all. As social commentator Tahu Potiki recently wrote "Football may be on the rise but no one seriously expected us to win the Fifa World Cup, the stock market didn't go down, and the nation didn't hold it against the players.

The Rugby World Cup is coming to New Zealand. Reflecting the importance of New Zealand in the world of rugby and rugby's importance to New Zealanders, our former Prime Minister Helen Clark took the floor in support of our bid alongside Tana Umaga to sway the International Rugby Board for what may be the last time. As 2011 draws closer the All Blacks remain the team the rest of the world want to beat. For Kiwis, the Men In Black once again carry the weight of the nation.

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