



RUGBY

Rugby the afterlife explores the transition from playing career to a life after the final whistle blows. The book, which is framed against a changing landscape as rugby entered the professional era, presents the individual accounts of how 23 former all blacks players navigated this transition. The author, Wynne Gray, is an award winning sport journalist living in New Zealand. This stories in this book provide an insightful portrayal of what is invariably a challenging period in any athlete's life and will appeal to a broad readership, from sports enthusiasts and rugby fanatics through to those working in athlete support roles. Woven throughout the players' stories is a common tale of one of the unintended consequences of professionalism in sport: that having focused exclusively upon their careers athletes are often ill equipped for life after sport. Fortunately, this issue is now gaining attention within the world of sport and has received support from the European Commission (Sport Unit of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission, 2012). Universities are also responding to the needs of athletes through flexible provision and the creation of strategies to support elite athletes. Furthermore, *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* recently published a special edition devoted exclusively to dual career development and transition in sport (Stambulova and Wylleman, 2015) highlighting the prominence of the topic. However, all too often the athlete voice can become lost amongst the rhetoric and this is where the real strength of Gray's book lies, in the authenticity and honesty of the individual accounts.

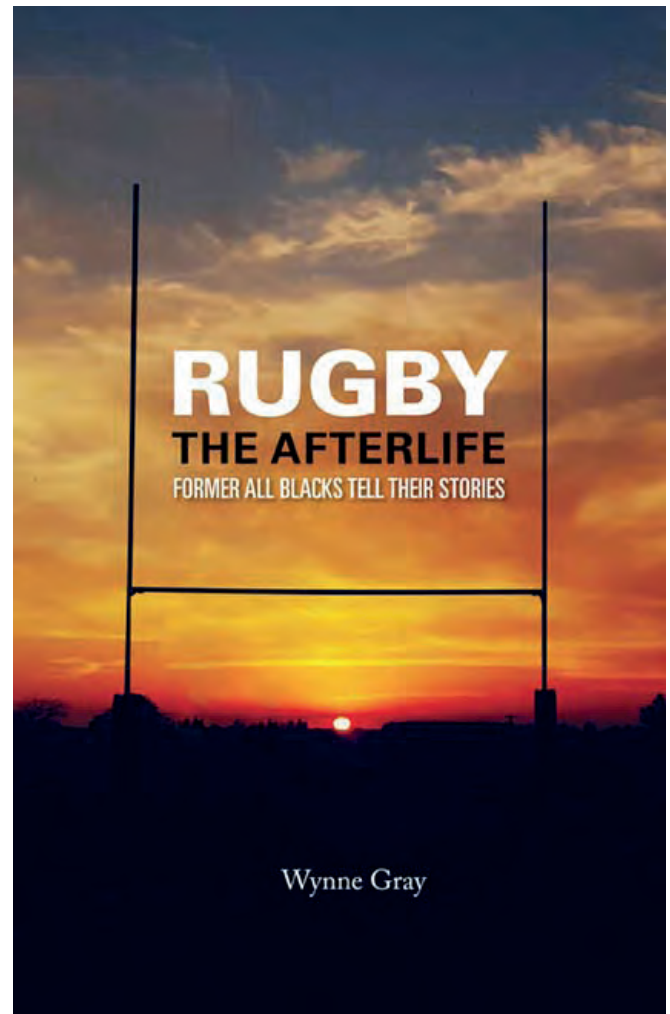
The book paints a largely positive picture, which may reflect the mindset of the former players or could equally be an artefact of self-selection bias; it arguably matters little. More significant is that the journey was rarely a straightforward one. The number and variety of careers described in the book is remarkable, with one former player trying their hand at nine different roles and another holding down four different jobs simultaneously. For some this was expected while for others the

reality of life after sport hit hard. Certainly, there are hints that things could easily have worked out less favourably lurking just below the surface. A number of common themes emerge throughout the book but the importance of planning, networking and education alongside the transferability of skills are perhaps the most prominent. The belief that many of the skills, experiences, and knowledge developed within elite sport translate directly into business and other professional roles has been reported previously (Debois, Ledon & Wylleman 2015, Tekavc, Wylleman & Erpič, 2015) but it is nonetheless encouraging to read the lived experience of this.

The book makes a welcome contribution to the field, reinforcing the importance of preparing athletes for life after sport and should be compulsory reading for all professional rugby players who would do well to heed the words contained in Blair Larsen's account, *"My advice to young guys would be to network while you can and while you are doing that find out what you might end up doing once the rugby days are done. If you don't have some form of qualification there are a million that you can get through the tertiary providers"*.

References

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Rugby: The afterlife
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