

## **Élite Pacific Male Rugby Players' Perceptions and Experiences of Professional Rugby**

“For most Pacific Island people, sport is not just a recreational activity, it is a passion. Commitment to team sports is as absolute as it is to Sunday worship.”<sup>1</sup>

### **INTRODUCTION**

This article explores the participation motivations of élite Pacific male rugby players. Since the introduction of professional rugby in 1995, increasingly Pacific Island men and, particularly Sāmoan men, have viewed rugby as a site where they can achieve success and monetary reward, especially in New Zealand. This article outlines why Pacific Island men who play rugby in New Zealand, are motivated to play. While there is considerable research in sport psychology on motivation, and some on the motivation of élite athletes, there appears to be no research on the participation motivation of élite Pacific sportspeople. Sport participation research has been dominated by Western theories and models and has predominantly focused on North American athletes. There is no research that has incorporated a theory or model that encompasses those cultural values significant to Pacific peoples.<sup>2</sup> Through ethnographic research, involving in-depth interviews with élite Sāmoan sportsmen, this article begins to identify the specific cultural factors that motivate a disproportionate number of Pacific Island men, in New Zealand at least, to play sports. The article is based on the assumption that different cultures have variant versions of success and failure; different values, motivations, histories, and attitudes.

Sport is a pervasive cultural practice in New Zealand Pacific communities. Pacific peoples actively participate in New Zealand sports, especially within those sports introduced previously to their homelands. Although Pacific people form approximately six percent of the New Zealand population, they contribute significantly more than that to New Zealand national sports teams. Currently, three of New Zealand's most successful and popular sports-franchises are disproportionately populated by Pacific Island players. This is the case for The Auckland Blues,<sup>3</sup> New Zealand Vodafone Warriors (the only team outside Australia competing in their National Rugby League competition), and the All Blacks (the NZ Rugby National team). In 2005, Pacific

Island players made up forty percent of the All Blacks, fifty-four percent of the Blues and fifty-three percent of the Vodafone Warriors. The Pacific Island population made up only six-and-a-half percent of the total population in New Zealand. This phenomenon has, in a recent Television New Zealand documentary, come to be known as the 'browning of New Zealand rugby.'

However, New Zealand is not the only country to have an influx of talented Pacific Island players. Australia has numerous Pacific Island players in all levels of teams, including its national team, the Wallabies, and it was recently reported that forty-two Pacific Island players from Fiji, Tonga and Sāmoa will play in the French top two divisions, with as many as seventy Pacific Island players participating in the lower divisions.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding the culture of Pacific sports people and what motivates them to achieve or succeed is one of the new challenges facing coaches, sport managers, sport administrators, sport psychologists, physical educators, trainers, and others who work in the sport industry in New Zealand. This research focuses on the sport participation motivation of New Zealand-based Sāmoan élite sportsmen. Within the current study, I concentrate on only one of the many New Zealand-based Pacific communities to avoid homogenising New Zealand-based Pacific cultures as mono-cultural.

## BACKGROUND

Sport participation motivation generally refers to the reasons why an individual becomes involved in sport, why they continue to participate, and why individuals desist. Much of the research into participation motivation has examined youth and recreational adult populations.<sup>5</sup> Few studies have looked at participation motivation for élite athletes,<sup>6</sup> probably because élite athletes' motivation to participate is generally not thought of as a problem in need of resolution. There is a particular lack of research into the reasons why ethnic minority groups such as Pacific Islanders are especially motivated to play élite sport. Yet, the participation motivations of various cultures need to be recognised if players from various ethnic backgrounds are to be understood and are to perform to their potential.

In the motivation and sport literature there seems to be a complete disregard for the concept that different cultures may have different motives for participating in élite sport. While there is considerable research in sport participation motivation, the focus on élite sports performance and participation motivation is minimal and the integration of ethnicity as an independent variable into this literature is non-existent. Accordingly, there is no research data on the participation motivation of Pacific peoples in New Zealand sport. The concentration on North American sports people in the literature hides a dearth of information about participation motivation in cultures outside of North America. The literature tends to homogenise all cultures in this regard, and typifies a mono-cultural approach to research.

Information on the participation motivations of people from minority cultures could prove highly valuable to coaches. Anecdotally, influential coaches have suggested that the ability to motivate people from different cultures requires differences in coaching style. For instance, Dale Aitken, the highly successful coach of a New Zealand Rugby Club, Ponsonby (a predominantly Pacific Island player-based club) suggests:

Generally the approach to coaching a white player and a brown player is different – especially when it comes to motivating them...With the Sāmoans [sic] especially, manaʻ in front of the group seems to be a little more important...Really it's just a matter of time, letting them get to know you and trust you...once you have that then you can begin to be a little direct.<sup>8</sup>

Obviously, segments of Western motivation theories are applicable to Pacific sports people, yet from a Pacific person's perspective, there is no one theory that could even approach fitting a Pacific world-view, let alone a Sāmoan world view. Sāmoan identity encompasses culture, language, church, extended family, village structure and hero worship (admiration from family, village, church group and ethnic group). Sāmoan communities rely on family solidarity and traditional hierarchical structures. For Sāmoan people, their culture, extended family and their faith are their backbone of support.

Being Sāmoan has different meanings for different people. As I will discuss further below, it is important for instance, to distinguish between native-born Sāmoan and New Zealand born-Sāmoan. Yet, for many, Sāmoan identity is based on fa`aSāmoa (see below), God and `āiga (extended family). The bedrock of Sāmoan identity is a commitment to the fa`aSāmoa, which is a portrayal of a unique relationship between Sāmoans and God that has also been described as Sāmoan customs and tradition. Essentially, it is the Sāmoan way of doing things.<sup>9</sup> Many Sāmoan possess a common identity through the conscious and deliberate transmission of traditional values and hierarchical aspects of their culture's social structure. The concept of social stratification or hierarchy are of great significance to Sāmoan, and encompass status, prestige, honour, and their associated behaviours – fa`aaloalo (respect) and usita`i (obedience). Social honour is based upon social distinctions (age and sex) and codified rankings, while prestige results from the evaluation of level of achievement gained through effort and merit.<sup>10</sup> Graeme Lay described the extended family (the `āiga in Sāmoan) as the most powerful and resilient force in Polynesian society.<sup>11</sup> For Sāmoan people, members of an `āiga inherit an identity from birth. Learning appropriate behaviours is of primary concern to the `āiga because failure to understand these social mores implies that one does not know who one is and will, consequently, bring shame on the family.<sup>12</sup>

Many Sāmoan expect their people to achieve, not for personal gain but in order to glorify God, and for the good name of their `āiga and Sāmoa.<sup>13</sup> A person that works for personal gain is often described as fia Pālagi (wanting to be white). Accumulated material wealth is used for community-related obligations and commitments. This obligation or duty to the `āiga is referred to as le tautua (loyalty). Members of the `āiga pool resources in order to ensure the well-being of other members of their community who may be unemployed, low on material resources, or sick. Thus, when Sāmoan who practice these traditions are employed, they do not work for themselves alone, but for others in their `āiga: "One cannot drink long from the riches of one's labour without feeling the parched poverty of one's family, wherever they are! To do so is to deny one's identity and attendant rights and obligations."<sup>14</sup>

When combining the literatures from sport motivation and cultural understandings of Pacific peoples, it becomes clear that cultural understandings would enhance understandings of

participation motivation. Yet, to date, the sport participation motivation literature merely reflects mono-cultural understandings. A similar charge could be levelled at the pedagogical styles of many elite coaches. Previous coach of the New Zealand Warriors (a Rugby League team that plays in the Australian National Rugby League competition) John Monie, for example, failed to motivate Pacific Island players, seemingly because he did not attune himself with their culture. For instance, when Monie publicly criticised a Sāmoan player, he did not realise that the shame was not only felt by the player but also by his family and friends<sup>15</sup> and his aim of motivating the player went awry, as did his ability to motivate the New Zealand Warriors to any semblance of their potential. The aim of the present study therefore, is, firstly, to review the personal experiences of participants that led them to become professional rugby players. The second aim is to examine the influence and motivation of fa`aSāmoa on the participants' drive to be successful professional rugby players.

## METHOD

### Pacific Research Ethics

There were complexities involved in designing and creating an appropriate framework for this research because of the limitations and inappropriateness of applying Western theories and methodologies to the world-views of the Sāmoan participants and a Tongan researcher. (I am a native-born Tongan who has resided in New Zealand since 1985.) An appropriate method was one that demonstrated cultural sensitivity to fa`aSāmoa and anga fakaTonga (the Tongan way of doing things according to Tongan custom and tradition); and to the Sāmoan cultural protocols of āva (respect and honour), fa`aaloalo and alofa (to treat with compassion and love)<sup>16</sup>, faka'apa'apa (Tongan for respect and honour)<sup>17</sup>, toka'i (Tongan for reverence and to show the correct respectful behaviour) and 'ofa (Tongan for love, affection and concern), while still meeting Western educational conventions..

Also, when researching in a `āiga context, the success of the process is highly dependent upon the consultation and guidance of an elder. In this research the participants consulted their `āiga, who then gave them their blessings and permission to participate. In addition, the participants looked to the researcher, as a Pacific academic, for guidance. Because I held the ta`okete (elder brother) role, I was conscious of not stifling the roles of the participants as tehina (younger brother). Every effort was made to ensure that the participants were not fakamā (hesitant) to respond or participate because of their lower status. It was important to allow the participants to speak freely and drive the research. Of significance were the issues discussed amongst the participants and their `āiga, which included cultural factors. A number of other research principles adapted from Saisoa`a and premised on fa`aSāmoa were also followed.<sup>18</sup> Fa`aSāmoa became the cornerstone of the research process, in order to prioritise the cultural needs of the participants.

As stated above, the focus on Sāmoan players avoided homogenisation; and it is important to realise that, although Pacific cultures share commonalties, it would be hegemonic to homogenise Pacific peoples' experiences. It was also necessary to acknowledge the diversity of the Sāmoan

culture and, in particular, the distinction between Niu Sila (New Zealand-born) Sāmoan and Indigenous Sāmoan, as this specific distinction is probably crucial to understanding variations in the participation motivations of different participants.

## Interviews

The present research involved interviewing three Sāmoan men, aged between twenty and twenty-five, who were current professional rugby players in New Zealand. Two of the participants were New Zealand-born Sāmoan and one was an Indigenous Sāmoan who now lived in New Zealand (an All Black at the time of data collection). Two of the participants were contracted to play Super 12<sup>19</sup> and NPC<sup>20</sup>, while one participant was contracted at the regional development squad level.

This research undertook a narrative-enquiry approach, specifically a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews-as-conversations. Such an epistemology was chosen because it allows for alternative ways of thinking.<sup>21</sup> That is, I believed it would better enable different worldviews to be communicated (as opposed to structured qualitative methods).<sup>22</sup> In-depth interviewing also allowed the research, to some degree, to devolve power to the participants. This is crucial within an Indigenous context because many Indigenous communities now believe Western researchers have misused their research power to misrepresent and misappropriate Indigenous knowledge.<sup>23</sup> For this research to proceed appropriately, it was an imperative to abandon the desire to control:

The research participants were to be heard not only as authorities on their own experiences, feelings and observations, but also as authorities on procedures involved in analytical address to their accounts and the reporting of the results.<sup>24</sup>

In the in-depth interviews, each participant was asked a series of broad questions relating to their experiences that varied from person to person based on a semi-structured methodology<sup>25</sup>. The transcribed interviews were sent to the participants, which allowed for further consultation, elaboration upon the developing themes and any appropriate amendments. Following the completion of the research, in accordance with Pacific Island protocol, a me'a alofa or me'a'ofa (gift) was given to each participant.

## RESULTS

Important themes emerged from this research around family and education, religion and participation motivation. This quote from Participant C encapsulates that:

For me it wasn't that I needed to be a good rugby player so I can get this and that, or these benefits, it was just like it was God's plan. He made me the person I am and the rugby player I am. It is hard for me to deny the role God plays. God is first in my life, then my family, me being Sāmoan, then me as a rugby player and ultimately hopefully in the future an All Black.

## Family and Education

The participants' families played a fundamental role in all areas of their lives. Participant A was raised in an `āiga context where he had access to and a sense of pride in Sāmoan culture and language:

Being brought up around my `āiga and the Sāmoan way, I am very proud of my culture. I am in cultural groups and stuff now off the rugby field...I talk Sāmoan and English at home. This reminds me of who I am and where I come from. It keeps me real.

The educational success of Participant A provided him with other avenues should his rugby career be curtailed. However, at first he felt lost because he was the only Sāmoan at a school where most of the other boys came from privileged professional backgrounds:

I was the only Sāmoan there, they were all white guys and that and I was a bit scared, but I just gutted it out. It was totally different from what I thought then. I went in there thinking one thing but changed it all in one year. They were good guys...they are academically really motivated. Obviously, their parents are all doctors and lawyers or property managers.

Participant A also believed that his high school merely gave him the rugby scholarship so that he would play rugby for their school as opposed to providing him with a better education. Accordingly, Participant A was initially labelled as a rugby player who would not achieve in other areas of life. Despite this, he managed to also succeed academically.

Their son's education was Participant B's parents' first priority; therefore they didn't consider his rugby very important. Participant B's father especially was not keen on his son pursuing a rugby career, viewing academics as more important. When Participant B was selected to play at the international level, however, his father's attitude changed.

When I tell them about my rugby they are not really interested until they realised that in 200? [year concealed to protect identity], I made the New Zealand team and that was like a big thing making the New Zealand team. All of a sudden, [my father] just changes his whole view about it, you know like, and then he started having these questions, all these contracts coming in, and he was involved in it, and then all of a sudden, his whole view of things started to change and start supporting me with something that I am good at.

Participant B has a family willing to make sacrifices on his behalf; in return he must demonstrate respect and be thankful for their support. Participant B outlines the importance of family support,

I just happen to be a Sāmoan and I come from a supportive and proud Sāmoan family and like I have the talent. I have got to make sure that I use that talent and I don't let them down... I think that being a PI [Pacific Islander], it doesn't matter

what you do whether it was rugby, school or whatever you will always try to be the best at it because the fame that comes with it is not only for yourself but it reflects on the whole family and their sacrifice and hard work to get you to be where you are, not only that it gives you and your family respect not only in the Island but in New Zealand as well.

While attending secondary school, the greatest challenge for Participant B was to juggle both his schoolwork and rugby commitments. Consequently he learnt the valuable skills of time-management, setting achievable goals (for example, to graduate from university) and dreaming (for example, to be selected for the All Blacks, which finally happened late in 200?).

Participant C's family had an enormous influence on his life, especially his uncle, aunt and cousin. They believed in his ability to be both a scholar and rugby player.

My family had an enormous impact on my life and my rugby career. They were quite strict on me with my schooling and made sure that I got a good education and wasn't spending too much time with my rugby. They always tried to make sure that I got a good balance between the two. I was having the enjoyment of playing rugby and doing my schoolwork. Throughout my rugby years, my parents, friends and family have guided me. They have taught me that rugby is not everything, and the only thing in life and it shouldn't be my one focus. I have come to understand the importance of a good education and a good career.

The choice of primary school and secondary school was influenced by Participant C's Catholic faith, the school's academic merit and reputation, and the fact that all his family had attended such schools:

I think the school that I went to, they were more focused on education. I just happened to make the representative age group team, that was it really. I didn't go to that school because of rugby. I went to that school because of my family, and the people I knew that were going there, who were also my friends.

However, Participant C also experienced racism and stereotyping from his school teachers. Some teachers suggested he would end up only playing rugby and not advancing further than year eleven. People struggled to accept that he had both rugby skills and academic prowess, but like Participant B, Participant C has been successful both academically and in sport.

My school experiences were filled with labels and stereotypes that were used to refer to my academic ability and my playing rugby. I have learnt to have a thick skin and have managed to be successful.

## Religion

Participant B acknowledged the influence of church and family in his life and the importance of respecting those two factors in his rugby career as well. These factors were constant reminders

of his identity and culture, and he attributed his success in life and rugby to God. He believed that God and his family have guided his rugby career and his life decisions:

my background like always involving God in my life and I believe he has given me the talent to play rugby and also a way to reach other people and things like that so like in a way of doing that I keep the motivation up.

Participant C was raised and still is a practising Catholic. He holds God responsible for his life, and especially for his ability to play rugby. According to him, his success as a professional rugby player was part of God's plan for him:

For me it wasn't that I needed to be a good rugby player so I can get this and that, or these benefits, it was just like it was God's plan. He made me the person I am and the rugby player I am. It's hard for me to deny the role God plays. God is first in my life, then my family, me being Sāmoan, then me as a rugby player and ultimately, hopefully in the future, an All Black.

### Participation motivation

Goal-setting helped Participant A plan for the future, to focus, and to deal with challenges in his rugby career. He suggested that mental, physical and personal application was integral to facing challenges in rugby:

I think everyone's goals are to be an All Black and to play international rugby. The problem is, they don't look at the little things, you know. To get to the big stuff you have to do the little steps, take little steps at a time, and that's one thing that I thought I had to work on is my little goals, just stuff like turning up to training early, like discipline, and having the right attitude, honesty, just encouraging yourself. The only person to motivate yourself is yourself, no one is going to tell me to go out and run like six in the morning you had to get yourself out of bed. Just got to, it's just about personal awareness and that you just have to really push yourself.

For Participant A, failure meant learning from one's mistakes and making sure that the mistake did not re-occur. Ultimately, Participant A wanted to be selected for the All Blacks. He believed that by ensuring he set challenging but realistic goals, training hard, having discipline, and maintaining the right attitude and honesty, he gave himself the best possible chance of achieving his goals:

Everyone trains because there's no perfect player, and you've always got competition, which is not a bad thing. It makes you push yourself mentally, physically and personally to get you to know that you have worked hard for it. It's not just given to you on a plate...The hard work is what brings the outcome. The more you put in the more you get out of it.

For Participant B, playing professional rugby had been a childhood dream and goal. He praised and admired Michael Jones<sup>26</sup> because he was such a positive role model for him. He viewed him as the best open-side flanker in the world and respected his determination not to play rugby on Sundays because of his religious beliefs.

[I admire] Michael Jones because he was a Christian...he played hard on the field but fair and he was never in trouble outside the field and also he had an education. He lived by his faith even though there were heaps of temptations, for him to stand up for what he believed in, it was so amazing. I believe his faith helped him a lot because he took rugby to a different level.

Va'ainga Tuigamala<sup>27</sup> and Michael Jones had the most influence on Participant C, who wanted to be just like both of them in every regard: being a top-level rugby player, a good Christian, and a model Sāmoan son.

## DISCUSSION

### Defining participation motivation from a Pacific Island perspective

Whilst the present research is limited to only three in-depth interviews, it demonstrates that the participation motivations of these three Pacific players are at variance with the participation motivations typically reported within the North American literature. Exploring the generalisability of these findings will be important to help enhance the pedagogical styles of coaches within New Zealand. This research demonstrates that far more research is needed around the world regarding the participation motivations of minority cultures. Coaches and sport administrators must realise that 'one shoe does not fit all', especially with regard to ethnicity. The findings suggest that if coaches are to optimise player performance, they will need to modify their teaching behaviours based on understandings of their players' ethnicities. This is not to say, however, that coaches should generalise about one ethnic group. But certainly, basic understandings of a player's culture may give coaches insight for optimising their performance. The present research found that for these elite Sāmoan athletes, their participation motivation was influenced by a number of common factors, broadly classified into dimensions of family, education and religion.

### Family and Education

The needs and aspirations of Pacific peoples have not changed since the 1950s when large groups of Pacific migrants began coming to New Zealand. That is, Pacific parents still want to provide opportunities for their children to succeed. Pacific identity differs from identity in Western societies. When Sāmoan first meet each other, they try to determine whether they are connected through blood or by village. Often, direct references are made to one's parents, grandparents or great-grandparents and other relations, (i.e., their `āiga). The individual is no longer just an individual; he or she is a member of an `āiga, a church and a nation. From a Pacific perspective, self-worth and status cannot be evaluated individually. Hence, the participants in

my research measured their success, self-worth and participation motivation in terms of the `āiga collective self.

All the participants viewed their achievements and failures as family property; and the individual's success was a direct reflection of the support received from their `āiga. As Participant A suggested: "I try very hard not to disappoint them because it might bring shame not only to me but my whole family". For Pacific Island peoples, family provides a powerful incentive to succeed, and an overwhelming responsibility to shoulder. Participants believed they achieved larger goals by setting and achieving smaller goals. And to achieve these smaller goals they needed their families. Another significant part of 'dreaming', and ultimately participation motivation, was the participants' desire to rise above the lower-class labouring stereotypes that had limited their forefathers. Many of the participants' elders had been employed in low-paying factory jobs, and few people of their cultural background had been in high-paying professions, apart from athletes. Being a professional rugby player was one means of creating a dream out of their economic predicaments: "Being paid to play [rugby] offers one of the few avenues of escape from the economic rigours of working class life."<sup>28</sup>

Intrinsic motivation has been defined as a desire to engage in an activity for no apparent external rewards. In competitive sport situations intrinsic motivation is a product of competency, self-determination and feelings of self-worth. While external motivation through economic reward is obvious from the statement provided above, the 'dreaming' motivations described above also fall under internal motivation because the players were searching for the capability to be self-determining. That is, in a society which still holds racist notions regarding its Pacific Island neighbours, these players wished to achieve the respect and self-determining life of players such as Michael Jones, and also wanted to discard the 'lower-class labourer' tag so often ignorantly bestowed upon Pacific people.

The participants' intrinsic motivation was influenced by their extrinsic motivation, for example, if the external reward was monetary, the reward actually stemmed from reciprocal internal motivations, that is, to repay their families. For players to receive support from their families it is important they reciprocate. It is common for a person's first wage-packet to be given to the parents and for regular contributions to maintenance to be made thenceforth, even to the extent of paying off mortgages. As Auckland barrister, law and sports management consultant, and Tonga community leader Kahungunu Barron Afeaki writes: "The first thing most Polynesian sports stars do is usually pay their parents' mortgage and help put their families and relatives through school."<sup>29</sup>

The desire to give something back to parents stems from a Pacific Island cultural tradition of inter-generational reciprocity. For many Pacific Island players, their parents endured significant sacrifices to put their children in positions where they could succeed, including immigration. With this in mind, some players feel obliged to reciprocate support. In this study, all of the participants' desire to reciprocate increased their determination to succeed. The player's success was another way of rewarding their families. One participant stated:

I think that being a PI, it doesn't matter what you do whether it was rugby, school or whatever, you will always try to be the best at it because the fame that comes

with it is not only for yourself but it reflects on the whole family and their sacrifice and hard work to get you to be where you are, not only that it gives you and your family respect not only in the Island but in New Zealand as well. (Participant B)

As stated above, coaches and sport administrators should take note of the failed ex-New Zealand Warrior rugby league coach John Monie, whose inability to motivate Pacific Island players and ultimate failure and dismissal as coach was widely reported to be related to his inability to culturally understand his Pacific Island players. As the current All Blacks coach Graham Henry said: "What motivates Pacific Islanders is quite often different to what motivates a Pakeha boy. They are brought up differently. But perhaps the difference today is not as great as it was 15 years ago. The education system is changing."<sup>30</sup> While public criticism for instance may have been a successful motivator for other players, for the Pacific Island player in question it only served to decrease his participation motivation because of the cultural shame it brought onto his family and relatives. This research also suggests that coaches and sport administrators should involve the players' families within the sporting context as much as possible, and make allowances for things such as regular visits home for Pacific Island players contracted to franchises away from their family. Based on notions of reciprocity, sport administrators especially, should develop methods of involving Pacific Island players' families within their franchises by having, for instance, family days that, to some extent, re-pay the families for their support.

Early in their rugby careers, a significant degree of the participants' participation motivation came from the prestige or honour of playing for certain school teams, such as the top team of one of the best rugby schools. "Wesley College was a big rugby school, so motivation comes from the reputation of being in the first fifteen and playing in one of the best teams in New Zealand..."(Participant B). Yet, such a participation motivation often conflicted with their family's educational hopes:

They were quite strict on me with my schooling and made sure that I got a good education and wasn't spending too much time with my rugby...They have taught me that rugby is not everything, and the only thing in life and it shouldn't be my one focus. I have come to understand the importance of a good education and a good career. (Participant B)

The family of Participant B initially attempted to discourage his involvement in sport in the hope of encouraging him academically. For all of the participants and their families it was highly desirable for them to achieve a balance between academic and sporting goals, especially because sport is a high-risk career. From the families' perspective "educational success is a significant priority...despite racial, gender and class barriers."<sup>31</sup>

New Zealand high schools that scout and attempt to attract young Pacific Island boys, often from poorer schools, should be aware that often families will only support such ventures if there is an equally acceptable degree of educational incentive, which has not always been the case. Participants A and C both suggested that their schools only gave them credit for their involvement in sports and not for their academic abilities. Indeed, it often appears that high schools stereotype Pacific Island boys imported from other areas as "rugby players" and, thus, not

suiting to academic pursuits. Concurrent educational standards should be an essential component of school strategies to scout Pacific Island players from other areas. In the professional arena, many elite rugby franchises do encourage players to pursue education, sometimes helping the individual to join a tertiary course, paying their fees, monitoring their progress, and teaching them coping strategies for juggling the competing demands of rugby and education. However, many do not. From high school and into the professional arena there is a danger, therefore, of young Pacific men limiting their opportunities to success within the sporting domain in attempts to 'make it' as sports stars. This is a dream that only very few hopefuls will ever fulfil. Consequently, it is heartening that all of the present participants had the foresight and family support to realise the importance of paralleling their sporting aspirations with a good education. It is recommended that sporting franchises have some degree of accountability for the futures of their players post-sport by, for instance, providing pathways into tertiary education. The New Zealand Rugby Union could institutionalise educational stipulations on players entering into their academy system, especially for players who can be as young as fourteen.

## Religion

Since Michael Jones<sup>132</sup> refusal to play for the All Blacks on Sundays because of his religious beliefs, it has become commonly understood that religion plays a significant part in the structure and determination of Pacific Island culture. The importance of religion to many Pacific peoples points to the lack of external motivations to play rugby and the high degree of internal motivation. Participant C, for example, asserts that: "For me it wasn't that I needed to be a good rugby player so I can get this and that, or these benefits, it was just like it was God's plan," while participant B says: "[God] has given me the talent to play rugby and also a way to reach other people... [this] keep[s] the motivation up." Again, coaches and administrators should take heed of the importance of religion in defining the intrinsic motivation of many Pacific Island players, and, therefore, accommodate these needs by providing room for various community groups to be involved within the sporting context.

## CONCLUSION

The present research has focused on providing information and discussion surrounding the sport participation motivation of Pacific peoples; specifically three New Zealand-based elite Sāmoan rugby players. While useful, the Western research on participation motivation can be perceived as mono-cultural. The present research asserts that different cultures have variant versions of success and failure, different values, motivations, histories, and attitudes. The main aim of this research, therefore, was to suggest that because Pacific Island culture differs significantly from other cultures, in general, Pacific players are motivated to play and to perform for different reasons. In the globalised world of sport, understanding the cultures of various sports people is just one of the new challenges facing coaches and management. In the New Zealand context, the importance of family, religion and education to Pacific Island culture was evident in the participation motivation of this study's participants. Probably the most significant factor

that coaches, management and administration should be cognisant of is that the participation motivation and performance levels of Pacific players largely revolve around their families and communities. If a player's family is content with their son's or daughter's sporting environment then this will be reflected in the player's increased desire to participate and to perform.

- 1 Graeme Lay, *Pacific New Zealand* (Auckland: David Ling Publishing, 1996), 99.
- 2 "Pacific peoples" is the official term used by the New Zealand Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and the State sector to describe Pacific Islanders who reside in New Zealand. The term "Pacific Islander" is a blanket term used in metropolitan countries like New Zealand to identify people from a number of different Pacific Island countries (and their New Zealand-born descendants). Its use conceals the historical, political and cultural uniqueness of each Pacific Island society. For the purpose of this research it refers to people of Pacific descent who identify with their nations of origin, for example, the Cook Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Fiji, Niue and Sāmoa, to name only the largest groups. This definition includes those who were born in the Pacific Islands as well as those born in New Zealand.
- 3 This is one of the five New Zealand Rugby Super 14 franchises competing in the Super 14 competition which include teams from Australia (four teams), South Africa (five teams) and New Zealand (five teams).
- 4 "Pacific players set to dominate 2006-2007 French rugby season", PACNEWS Aug 9, 2006, 17: 30. Retrieved 3 Sept 2006 from [http://www.pinanius.com/news/publish/article\\_4321.shtml](http://www.pinanius.com/news/publish/article_4321.shtml)
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- 26 Michael Jones is described by many of his famous predecessors and contemporaries as one of the great New Zealand All Blacks (open-side flanker).
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- 30 Graham Henry, cited in Campbell Burnes, "Nesian Angels", *Spasifik Magazine*, September/October 2004: 23.
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- 32 A committed Christian and model for many Sāmoan and New Zealanders, Michael Jones' refusal to play rugby on Sundays was a testimony to his commitment to his Christian faith.

**Matani Schaaf** is completing his doctorate at Te Tumu, School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. His research focuses on the motivation of élite sportsmen.