

# The women behind making rugby a good way of getting places

This week's Hurricanes Under-16 boys' rugby tournament has featured some key women behind the scenes.

**STEVE RENDLE** found out winning on the field isn't everything.

East Coast's Under-16 rugby team came a long way to Masterton to have 150 points scored against them in two games, with only 18 in their favour.

But that wasn't really the true measure of success for the trip to the Hurricanes Under-16 tournament.

Coming off the field at Rathkeale College on Tuesday after losing 68-6 to the Hawke's Bay Development team, they were greeted by the New Zealand Maori Under-18 team, and responded with a passionate and enthralling haka.

Under-18 coach Ngatai Walker, who has family links to the East Coast, said the aim was to show players a way forward.

"It's hard for them ... this is just a way to give back. Hopefully, one or two of them will be inspired to reach the Under-18s."

Even being at the event was a triumph, says manager Frankie Tihore. Her husband, David Newtown, coaches the team, as he does for the Under-13s and Under-14s, both of which Tihore also manages.

"It's the third year of this, working with the under 13s, 14s, and 16s ... it's seven months of rugby ... it rules my life and after that we go fishing," she laughs.

"I love it, we wouldn't be here if we didn't."

Based in Te Ararua, Tihore said team preparation was no easy feat.

"These kids, some of them are travelling an hour to get to training - we have such a big area that we can only train once a week."

Tihore says the management role is key when it comes to wrangling a bunch of boys this age - "You have got to have a woman around to make things run properly."

Yesterday, the team took time to visit and perform their haka for Epineha Ratapu, a survivor of 28th Maori Battalion, and they took with them a special gift.

"The caught an eel and they smoked it to give to him," Tihore said.

Her rugby connections are likely to continue for some time yet.

Her daughter, Jordyn Tihore, has made the Poverty Bay Under-18 team as a 13-year-old, and she's now living in Gisborne with former Black Fern Trish Hina, the rugby development officer for Poverty Bay in Gisborne.

"They just played the NZ Under-17 [sevens] team and lost



East Coast manager Frankie Tihore.

by one point," Tihore said.

"Women's rugby is going to be bigger than the men's - just watch this space."

Sharyn Adams is having a bit more on-field success managing the Wanganui team at the Hurricanes tournament. The team racked up 80 points over

East Coast and beat Horowhenua-Kapiti 36-17.

But again, results are not the primary drivers in being involved in the game.

Her son, Tyrees, earned a rugby scholarship to Feilding High School after his efforts at the tournament last year, and

Adams, an English teacher at Taihape Area School, wants more to have that chance.

"I just felt like my son was offered an opportunity that was so good for him ... but I thought what about the others?"

"I just want to create opportunities for kids



The East Coast Under-16 team performing their haka for NZ Maori Under-18 squad. PHOTOS/STEVE RENDLE



Wanganui manager Sharyn Adams.

**Kids should have the opportunity to play at the highest level they are capable of.**

- Sharyn Adams

from rural areas."

Taihape High School has 270 pupils, but they're aged from 5-18 which makes it difficult to put a team together at times.

But Adams is proud of progress that's been made.

"From last year, when there was a single rep from Taihape Area School, there are now

two in the Under-14 team, two were initially selected for the Under-16s, now one, and two in the Under-18 NZ Area School Barbarians. That's six kids exposed to the highest level of rugby from an area school.

"I feel so passionate about every one of them being able to play rugby at the best level

they can. Kids should have the opportunity to play at the highest level they are capable of."

She is also enthusiastic about the growth of women's rugby.

"We talk about equal opportunities in society - rugby is just a reflection of that."

A week away with a bunch of

teenage boys might sound like hard work, but Adams would disagree.

"Boys of this age are great to work with.

"But I didn't want to be a coach - my job is to work behind the scenes to make sure the infrastructure is there for them.

"It's about creating opportunities for kids in rural areas."

• *The Hurricanes Under-16 tournament concludes today at Masterton's Memorial Park and Marist grounds. Draw page 48.*