

ACROSS THE
TASMAN
BRETT MCKAY



THE LONG KISS GOODBYE

Our Australian correspondent comes over all sentimental - at least we think so. It's hard to deduce much about the mood of someone sealed in a Driza-Bone and shrouded by a cork-festooned hat.

So, this is it? After not-quite two years of reporting in from this side of the ditch for you lovely people over there, the SKY Sport stable doors have been flung open and I'm being ushered out to pasture.

It honestly seems like last week that I first appeared on this page, leaning on my old cricket bat with my shiny shoes and nursing the old rugby ball that still resides on the couch in my office. It had already been through a lot before debuting in a Kiwi magazine, that old ball, and it has done all right since too.

What started out as some Twitter banter between "Sumo" Stevenson and myself years ago became a job offer made via the same stream.

In those two years I've taken credit for Team USA's America's Cup win, told you lot to get your hands off Crowded House, looked positively underdressed next to Andrew Voss's impressive suit and tie combo, lamented the role of Cricket Australia in the hijack of the ICC and made Homer Simpson references.

I've rejoiced that we've finally got a domestic rugby comp to mimic your ITM Cup, I've tried to make sense of the new 18-team Super Rugby format (I'm still trying, for the record), and basked in the glory of beating both St Kitts and Nevis at the Commonwealth Games.

I've worried about pink cricket balls, worried about our test team's inability to play spin, rejoiced in the Waratahs, lamented the Wallabies, mourned Phillip Hughes and Richie Benaud, plotted generational change in the Australian cricket team and detailed why I think



Left-footed Jonny Wilkinson breaks Aussie hearts with a right-foot drop goal to win the 2003 Rugby World Cup.

a kid on a quad bike will one day kill me while I'm on sideline rugby commentary duty.

All from the platform of page 63.

One thing I have learned in not just my two years with *The Magazine*, but in my broader time covering trans-Tasman sport, is that we are very similar in the way we ride the ups and downs of our teams. And there is a healthy level of respect for the achievements of the respective sportspeople across the ditch, a respect that probably runs deeper than any trumped-up rivalry.

When the All Blacks knocked the Wallabies out of the 2011 Rugby World Cup, there was a solid wave of Australian support thrown behind the black jersey. Much of that was because we'd rather go down to the eventual winners, but there was also a memory of what we went through as a nation in 2003. Hosting a final on

home soil is tough work, and we certainly don't recommend losing it. (I'm sure watching Jonny Wilkinson's right-footed drop goal will stop hurting one day. Surely.)

Earlier this year, that same respect translated into huge support from within Australia as the Black Caps charged through to the Cricket World Cup final. It was tangible. And it carried through the final, too, where you couldn't find too many of us on this side who still wouldn't have been happy if the Australians hadn't triumphed.

The news that our two nations will kick off day/night test cricket this coming summer is significant, and the respect and goodwill, and even the rivalry, was unashamedly referenced at the announcement, where it was also revealed that we'll play six three-match Chappell-Hadlee Trophy ODI series over the next four years. It should never have been allowed to stop.

And one of these days - and you can mark my words, my Kiwi friends - we will win the Bledisloe back. The law of averages still counts for something! Maybe the evident changing of the All Blacks guard in 2016 will be our chance.

Our rugby league rivalry, of course, is alive and well, and our netball girls are starting to rival the football boys for intensity and physicality. So much for a non-contact sport. And of course, we love it.

So, as I bid farewell to you wonderful readers of this column and this outstanding publication, I can't finish without a string of thank yous. They go to Wendy and the hard-working editing team for making sense of my monthly ramblings, to Jacqui and the accounting team for paying for them, and to the whole design team for always finding just the right image to go with my words.

And of course, my humble thanks to Sumo, for the opportunity. It has been an honour and privilege, and I'm so glad we finally got to have that beer not too long ago. It has been a blast; I hope we can do it again soon.

Finally, thanks, New Zealand, for allowing my little bit of Australia to follow your TV guide every month. ☺