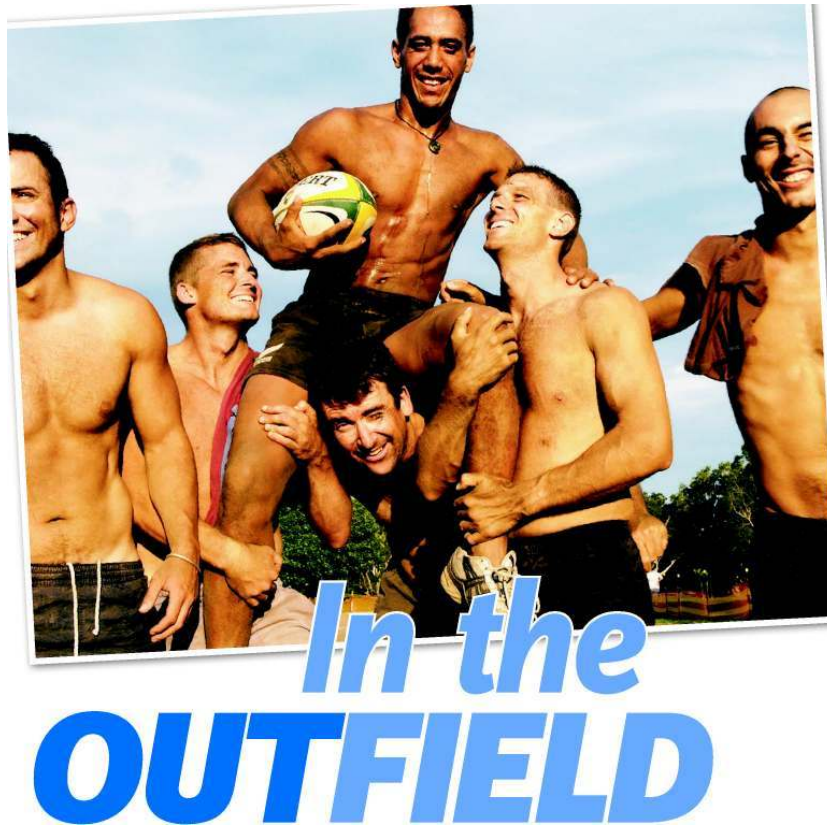




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In the week of the 2008 Bledisloe Cup, a documentary covers the battle between two gay rugby union teams for the 2006 Bingham Cup in New York City, writes **Ron Cerabona**.

On the fateful day of September 11, 2001, gay rugby union player Mark Bingham was one of the passengers who bravely stormed the cockpit of United Flight 93 in an attempt to prevent the hijackers from turning the aeroplane into a terrorist weapon.

The following year, his memory was honoured by the American rugby union club San Francisco Fog, which launched a biennial tournament called the Bingham Cup. The Bingham Cup is contested every two years within the International Gay Rugby Association & Board.

By 2006, the number of teams competing for the non-professional title had grown from eight to 30. *Walk Like a Man*, directed and produced by Patricia Zagarella and Jim Morgison, is about the Bingham Cup and in particular the 2006 season, which ultimately saw sentimental favourites San Francisco Fog compete against the Sydney Convicts in the final.

Zagarella, an Australian living in New York, says she was introduced to the idea of the Bingham Cup before the 2004 season through a friend, Matt, who was a member of the Convicts.

"I thought he was crazy to join a rugby team," she said, "because it's a full-on sport. Anybody who plays rugby is a bit crazy to put themselves in that situation."

Zagarella had always thought of rugby as just a sport, but she became intrigued after listening to her friend talk of his dedication, and finding out more about the background to the Cup and the passion it engendered. She did some research about the Bingham Cup and decided to make a documentary about it, focusing on the eight weeks leading up to the Cup and profiling some of the players on each team for human interest angles.

"The Mark Bingham story brought it to another level. As for the gay angle, it wasn't until I started talking to people about I was doing and they found it funny it gave it some momentum."

As the Cup drew nearer, the training sessions became more intense, although all the men were fitting them in between their regular jobs. Zagarella had decided from the start to focus on the Convicts and Fog, and admits she got lucky that they both ended up in the final. "It was a total

fluke – that was luck. It was a lucky day for us all, I couldn't have scripted it better. It just panned out perfectly."

Not that the documentary was just about the game. Everybody had a personal story to tell, including Andrew "Fuzzy" Purchas, the former Fog member who moved to Sydney and in 2003 became the founder and president of the Convicts.

Zagarella says she wasn't a rugby union fan going in ("I grew up watching rugby league") but she now appreciates the differences in the games and the strategy.

The film is narrated by former Australian rugby league international-turned-actor Ian Roberts, the first Australian footballer to "come out", and Zagarella, says Roberts, was "all over it – he loved the concept and related to the title. He got it ... he was totally supportive of the mission of the film".

With any luck, hopes Zagarella, her documentary *Walk Like a Man* will challenge audience perceptions and stereotypes about what it means to be gay.

■ *Walk Like a Man*, SBS, Tuesday at 7.30pm