



The start of scrum thing big



KIT GALER
 remotely
 controlled

These rugby teams are rough and tough. They'll knock you flat if you get in the way. Oh, they're also gay

Inspirational:
 Annah-Ruth Dominis, the only female member of the San Francisco Fog gay rugby union team.

IT'S MAYBE not that unusual these days for celebrating teammates to give each other a quick peck on the cheek after a vital goal or try.

But these two are doing it in someone's house. The celebration is because they love each other and they don't seem in any particular hurry to stop.

"Well, I had to bind on to the side of the scrum," says one, explaining how they clicked. "So, I guess it was inevitable."

Yes, the team that plays together stays together, certainly when that team is the Sydney Convicts, one of the world's top gay rugby union sides.

Tonight's SBS documentary *Walk Like A Man* is both moving and marvelously funny as it follows the fortunes of the Convicts and their bid to wrest the 2006 Bingham Cup from the San Francisco Fog gay aggro machine in New York City.

The Bingham Cup was launched in 2002 in honour of Mark Bingham, a 195cm gay rugby player with the Fog. He was one of the men who stormed the cockpit of hijacked United Airlines Flight 93 on September 11, 2001, forcing it to crash in open country near Pittsburgh.

Does the idea of gay rugby sound funny? It certainly doesn't look it, not the way the players from the Harbour City and the City by the Bay are preparing for a tournament in which they are expected to meet in the final. And the rugby philosophy is exactly the same for gays as it is for straights.

"It doesn't matter about your sexuality," former Wallabies forward Peter FitzSimons says. "You like running into people? Great."

The teams' progress is charted by retired rugby league star Ian Roberts, who came out in 1995 — "the hardest, toughest bastard who ever pulled on a pair of boots", FitzSimons says approvingly.

Hopefully, Roberts has mellowed after 10 years away from league because it has



to be said that whatever off-field skills he has acquired since giving the game away, narration is not foremost among them.

No matter, the players are the stars and they tell us all we need to know. Andrew Sullivan is a San Francisco architect who plays on the wing for the Fog and he explains just what it means to them to have this fiercely competitive and aggressive team sport as an outlet.

“As gay men you kind of shy away from physical conflict,” he says, “but the friendships I have derived from this are truly unbelievable. It is a bond I’ve never experienced before.”

The Fog even have a lesbian in their team, Annah-Ruth Dominis, and Sullivan is impressed with her ability.

“Annah’s tougher than me, but I’ve got a better ass,” he says with a wry grin.

Inevitably there are *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* moments. Such as when the Convicts are in New York and we get a glimpse of a member of the team earnestly trying to explain rugby union to a woman who is painting his toenails.

We see the Sydney players holding a fundraiser to help pay for their trip to the US, which involves men in “Rugger Bugger” singlets and a fair amount of choreographed dancing.

The Fog take a more direct approach to fund their journey, auctioning their players to the highest bidders.

Walk Like a Man is inspirational stuff. You’ll see more skill in the Bledisloe Cup, but you won’t see any greater commitment.

See > Walk Like a Man, SBS, tonight, 7.30pm.