



BIG BOYS DON'T CRY

The Sydney Convicts define blood, sweat and queers, writes David Knox.

Mark Bingham, as we know too well, died in Flight 93. He was instrumental in thwarting the 9/11 terrorists intent on crashing a hijacked plane into Washington DC. At only 31 he was a keen rugby player and a member of the gay rugby union team, San Francisco Fog.

In 2002 a tournament was established in his honour, The Bingham Cup. As his mother observes, it was significant that two rugby players, a quarterback and basketball player brought down the plane. "They used the skills they learned in the field of competition," she said.

Eight teams competed for the title, which has since been held every two years in London (2004), New York (2006) and last month in Dublin. This documentary focuses on the Fog and Sydney Convicts as they competed for the 2006 Cup.

Two themes characterise the teams on either side of the Pacific. One is that gay athletes, frequently derided by homophobic sportsmen as somehow less masculine, can muck in and give as good as they get. There are no apologies as bones are broken and bodies are bowled over.

The other is a sense of belonging and how team spirit builds self-esteem amongst dispa-

rate men. Convicts winger Luke Carpenter says he had mistrusted men since he was abused as a teenager. One man met his partner while taking one for the team and another was motivated to come out to his father. The Fog even has a gay woman on its team.

There are some inspiring scenes here brimming with affirmation, guts and glory. You'll see practice matches, fundraisers, including a (pixellated) strip in a Sydney bar, and a joyous shot of some Convicts kicking a footy across the traffic on a New York street. Oi, oi, oi!

Loosely narrating the story is Ian Roberts, whose vanguard step of coming out at the top of his game is unmatched in Australia. Here his delivery style needs a little more direction and, particularly, clarity. Similarly, there are some audio inconsistencies in the film's on-field video grabs. But these are small quibbles; this is, after all, a feelgood tale.

Booming to 32 teams from the UK, Canada, France (and we all know about THAT team), the Bingham looks set for a glorious future in memory of a fallen hero. It's surely only a matter of time before Sydney is host. Go Convicts.

Walk Like a Man airs 7:30pm Tuesday on SBS.

