



Straight between the posts, but otherwise gay

Walk Like a Man

7.30pm, SBS

GAY rugby. If that sounds like an oxymoron to you, then this excellent documentary will likely be an eye-opener.

Speaking of rugby league player Ian Roberts, who narrates *Walk Like a Man*, journalist and ex-Wallaby Peter FitzSimons says: "Ian was the toughest, hardest bastard who ever pulled on a boot. From the moment he said: 'I'm gay,' the voltage in the schoolyard of (the taunt) 'you're a pofter' went down."

FitzSimons also says: "It's great for rugby to demonstrate our inclusiveness. We don't care what your sexuality is, what your gender is, what your ability is, what your ethnicity is, what your religion is."

Well, to a point.

For most players here, until gay rugby, rugby wasn't inclusive at all.

Take Leandro Gonzales, a prop for one of two teams profiled, the San Francisco Fog. On a football scholarship to a respected US university, the obviously talented Gonzales was invited to play in a national all-star union. But he found the locker room homophobia and the subsequent sense of being deeply unwelcome "very tough".

Or Angus Donald, hooker for the Sydney Convicts, who was contacted by Sydney's Eastwood rugby club with an offer to play for the Colts.

"I remember thinking, 'I want to', but I didn't know if I could cope with living a lie any more," he says. "And it was easier just to turn my back on it. Going into these hyper-masculine arenas, you don't want to get caught out or found out."

Walk Like a Man features intimate profiles of two groups of aggressive rugby players of excellence on two



Sense of rejection: Some of the rugby players in *Walk Like a Man*

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continents who didn't fit into the game they loved.

But all that changed when the San Francisco Fog founded a biannual gay rugby competition called the Bingham Cup.

The idea resonated across the world and quickly grew to include teams in 30 countries.

The competition was formed to honour the memory of Mark Bingham, a gay man who had a lifelong passion for playing rugby.

Bingham died helping to bring down Flight 93 on 9/11, the hijacked plane that was on its way to take out Washington's Capitol dome.

We also hear from parents, some unconditionally loving, some certain their offspring are on the highway to hell. We hear, touchingly, of a straight man who honours his dead best mate, who was gay, by playing for him in the Sydney Convicts.

But ultimately we hear what matters most: the thud of boots on leather, the grunts of pain and the snarls of exertion as the San Francisco Fog and the Sydney Convicts face off for the Bingham Cup. And, for the record, gay rugby players sing victory songs just as horribly off-key as their straight counterparts.

Ian Cuthbertson