

THE BRUISE BROTHERS

Fight the power: Sione Lauaki and Jerry Collins.

They were the All Blacks' 'Bruise Brothers' – rattling ribs on the field and tickling them off it. Firstly Jerry Collins, then Sione Lauaki, who replaced him off the bench, were the double-impact

No 6 nightmares the Lions had to confront in their first two Tests on the 2005 series. The pain continued in the third Test when Lauaki started at No 8 and Collins at No 6.

On the eve of the first British and Irish Lions tour to these shores since that series 12 years ago, companions and friends remember the two rugby giants taken far too young.

And there cannot be a tribute to the game they play in heaven without honouring the passing of another rugby icon who has been lost to us: the great Jonah Lomu. **LEE UMBERS** reports

He made our team **BELIEVE**

All Blacks assistant coach Ian Foster recalls Sione Lauaki as a wrecking ball of an attacking player with a big smile and a huge heart.

"I loved coaching him and really cared for him as a person," Foster says.

He first noticed the powerhouse loose forward when he was coaching Waikato in 2002/2003 and Lauaki was bending and breaking defensive lines for Auckland.

"You could see then he was having quite a big impact on the game. We'd taken over the Chiefs in 2004, we were looking around for a couple of players that could make an impact, particularly through their ball-carrying, and so he was a prime target."

Foster drafted Lauaki into the Chiefs

around Mills [Muliaina] and scored in the corner and we won a tight game.

"That little moment of his – the team grew a lot of belief and went on to make the play-offs for the first time."

That same year, Lauaki showcased his remarkable talents on the international stage. Playing for the Pacific Islanders, he scored Test tries against Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, all within 15 days – an unprecedented feat.

Foster says Lauaki's skill set was amazing for such a big man, 194cm and 115kg. "He was at his best when the ball was in his hands. He just liked to beat people, very competitive. He had a step but he [also] had an offload that was really, really dangerous.

"He wasn't your classic tackler. You look at Jerry Collins at the time, all his physicality went into his defence and the attacking side was probably the add-on. Sione was probably the other way around – he wanted the ball to play.

"He could hit but he was more of a smotherer. But once he got his hands on you, you were stuffed because he was strong enough to do what he needed to do."

Foster says coming on for Collins in the first two Lions Tests and then beside him for the third were "extremely proud moments" for Lauaki. Facing the two of them on the paddock would have been a formidable prospect.

"It was that stage where the All Black loose forwards were extremely physical. It was a tough pack."

Lauaki and Collins got on well, although each was aware of the other's power when they lined up on opposite sides of the field.

"It's like when you get two bulls in a paddock. They would circle around and be very wary of each other any time they played. I'm not sure that they

'Once he got his hands on you, you were stuffed because he was strong enough to do what he needed to do.'



Clean break: Sione Lauaki (from left) joins teammates Keven Mealamu, Mils Muliaina, Marty Holah and a red-shirted Sitiveni Sivivatu after the 38-19 win in the third Test at Eden Park gave the All Blacks a clean sweep of the 2005 series.

that first year and he was quick to make his presence felt in Super Rugby.

"We played the Blues, who'd always been the dominant brother for us, and in the last minute he stepped up as if he was going to have a drop kick, and then he threw a dummy and made a run, and then he swerved and ran



Making the play: Former Waikato coach Ian Foster maintains Sione Lauaki was always at his happiest on the field when 'the ball was in his hands' – while Jerry Collins, left, was 'all physicality in defence'.



Open spaces: No surprises to see Sione Lauaki leave Lions prop Steve Thompson in his wake in another of his stirring runs in 2005.

ended up tackling each other a lot – it was almost like they manoeuvred themselves into a safe zone against each other.”

While Lauaki was all storming purpose on the field, off it he was full of playfulness, Foster says.

“Sometimes he had to smile and have a joke to get himself out of being late or some sort of misdemeanour he might have done around the team. He was full of fun, full of laughter. [You] knew when he was in his happy space – he’d have a big smile, a twinkle in his eye and he’d be walking around trying to pull people’s pants down or whatever.”

When the Chiefs encouraged players to ride bicycles over the off-season summer months, Lauaki turned up to training in a miniature Chopper. “Because of the size of the bike and the size of Sione, it looked a little bit out of proportion.”

Foster attributes Lauaki with

helping add the hoodie to Hamilton fashionwear. “When he came down [from Auckland], he was a hoodie man and he always had those pants on with crutches down to your knees.”

Lauaki was involved in the founding of the Dox Brothers clothing range, which featured Polynesian patterns and raised funds for charity, Foster says. “I know he was very proud of that and proud that money went to help people, and that he was able to put a bit of his own style in.”

The word “dox” (brother) stems from the Tongan word “tokoua” (sibling). Lauaki, one of 10 siblings, was born in Tonga and came to New Zealand at eight. He was pictured in his All Blacks jersey and a Tongan flag behind him at his public funeral in Te Atatu, West Auckland, in February.

“He loved his heritage, and his family were everything to him,” Foster says. “He was consistently driving home to Auckland to see his parents. And his

sisters would come down [to Hamilton]. That was a side of Sione we saw.”

Foster was aware Lauaki had been struggling with his health but was still shocked when he learnt of his death this year. Lauaki, who had suffered renal failure, died on February 12, aged just 35.

Foster met with Lauaki’s family. “They explained to me about that last little time period, how he’d been fighting his illness. But also how he’d been really at peace with what was happening.

“And I’m massively proud to hear about what Sione did in the last few months of his life, how he loved his wife [Stephanie] and kids, and the legacy he’s left for them – I think that’s the most important thing of all.”

Foster treasures the time he had with Lauaki and misses him and “the man that he would have grown into [over] the next 20 years”.

“He lived a good life.”



Citizen of the WORLD

Men in black - and red: Jerry Collins surrounded by his Lions series-winning All Blacks in 2005.

Jerry Collins will forever be part of rugby legend as “The Terminator”, a devastating tackling machine who was one of the toughest-ever All Blacks forwards.

But Tim Castle, Collins’ manager, also remembers a “young man with a smile and a caring soul”.

The Wellington lawyer met the hulking loose forward when he represented him in front of the rugby judiciary over “a tackle that may have been a bit on the high side”.

“He made, of course, hundreds of bone-crunching tackles over his career,” Castle says. “But in the very early years, the position from which he began those big tackles was sometimes a little out of line and it meant many of them, by the time he effected them, were too high.”

“He was never called before the judiciary for fighting. It was a tackling technique issue.”

Changing that technique “so he began the tackle from a lower vantage point and therefore finished it lower”, meant more time on the paddock and coincided with Collins increasing his skill set, Castle says.

“He may have been regarded initially as a one-dimensional player, but he developed the ability to offload in a tackle out in the backline. He even developed the grubber kick and the pop pass – all without him losing that fearsome defensive pattern.”

Never was the latter more obvious than in the Grand Slam match against England after the Lions tour, Castle says.

“2005 was a very special year for Jerry. A Grand Slam in the same year as a Lions tour. And [Collins’ cousin] Tana Umaga captained the All Blacks.”

After a clean sweep against the Lions, the All Blacks had victories over Wales and Ireland, before lining



Jokermen: Jerry Collins (from left) with Hurricanes and All Blacks teammates Tana Umaga and Ma'a Nonu.

RIP: LEGACY OF THREE RUGBY HEROES

Sione Tu'itupu Lauaki

BORN: June 22, 1981, in Ha'apai, Tonga
POSITION: Flanker, No 8
ALL BLACKS DEBUT: June 10, 2005 v Fiji at Albany
LAST ALL BLACKS TEST: September 3, 2008 v Samoa at New Plymouth
ALL BLACKS CAPS: 17 (15 points)

2002-04: Auckland
2004: Pacific Islanders – 3 (15)
2004-10: Chiefs – 70 (70)
2005: Waikato – 22 caps (25 points)
2010-11: Clermont (France) – 51 (10)
2011-12: Bayonne (France) – 16 (5)

Jerry Collins

BORN: November 4, 1980, in Apia, Samoa
POSITION: Flanker, No 8
ALL BLACKS DEBUT: June 23, 2001 v Argentina at Christchurch
LAST ALL BLACKS TEST: October 6, 2007 v France at Cardiff
ALL BLACKS CAPS: 48 (including 3 as captain)

1999-2007: Wellington – 47 caps (55 points)
2001-2008: Hurricanes – 85 (27)
2008-2009: Toulon (France) – 22 (20)
2009-2011: Ospreys (Wales) – 56 (30)
2011-13: Yamaha Jubilo (Japan) – 11 (5)
2015: Narbonne (France) – 8 (15)

Jonah Tali Lomu

BORN: May 12, 1975, in Auckland, New Zealand
POSITION: Winger
ALL BLACKS DEBUT: June 26, 1994 v France at Christchurch
LAST ALL BLACKS TEST: November 23, 2002 v Wales at Cardiff
ALL BLACKS CAPS: 63 (185 points)

1994-1999: Counties Manukau – 28 caps (95 points)
1996-1998: Blues – 22 (65)
1999: Chiefs – 8 (10)
2000-2003: Wellington – 21 (65)
2000-2003: Hurricanes – 29 (55)
2005-2006: Cardiff Blues (Wales) – 10 (5)
2006: North Harbour – 3 (0)
2009-2010: Marseille (France) – 3 (0)



Forward thinking: Jerry Collins drags Lions halfback Dwayne Peel along for the ride in the second Test of 2005 in Wellington.

up against England at Twickenham. Down to 13 men at one stage late in the game, the New Zealand side was desperately defending a 23-19 lead.

"In the final 10 minutes, Jerry had to make around about 10 bone-crunching tackles to prevent England from crossing the line. It was an amazing defensive effort, of course, from the team, but it was a particularly standout effort in defence by Jerry."

Castle says Collins later related how all he could hear in that final spell was Umaga loudly urging him to "get up" after he made each of these tackles – one by one, "to get up again and make the next one".

The England attackers were held out, and the All Blacks beat Scotland a week later to secure the Grand Slam.

Also on the 2005 tour to the UK was Sione Lauaki, who played in the Tests against Ireland and Scotland – scoring a try in the Grand Slam-clinching win at Murrayfield.

Castle says Collins and Lauaki got on well. "Off the field, they had a sort of similar streak of playfulness. They would bring a smile to anyone's face, those two, operating in tandem. Just as much as they may bring a slight nervousness operating in tandem on the park!"

Collins had a colossal physical presence. Already 1.9m and 110kg as a teen, he had upper arms so big at

their peak they weren't far off those of a competitive Arnold Schwarzenegger in size.

Player of the tournament for the IRB World Junior Championship-winning New Zealand Under-19 team, he made his All Blacks debut at 20 and went on to play 48 Tests. He captained the side in three of those Tests. Collins was deeply honoured to be asked to lead the national side.

As fearsome as he was on the

field, off it Collins was a gentle, compassionate and generous person who shunned the limelight, Castle says. "He loved to get away from the big cities and to connect with people.

"He cared a lot for people."

He was quick to donate prized memorabilia to rugby clubs or players in need of support, and would happily make himself available for functions at clubs of all levels "without fuss or fanfare".

He once visited a Welsh village rugby club to watch their national side in action – and saw that the game was going to be viewed on a small television in the corner. So he called a taxi to take him to a department store and returned with a large, new state-of-the-art TV that he gifted to the club.

Collins had a quick wit and was a deep thinker, Castle says. "He had a remarkable intellect. He intellectualised issues far more, and to a greater depth, than many people would ever have

realised or given him credit for."

Born in Samoa and raised in Porirua, Collins was immensely proud of his heritage and his home city, Castle says. "He travelled the world with the All Blacks, he played in France; he spent time in Canada; he played in Wales; and played in Japan. He was a citizen of the world – but he was always a Porirua boy at heart."

Thousands turned out in a memorial walk on the streets of his city the day his coffin arrived back on New Zealand

All Collins could hear in that final spell was Umaga loudly urging him to 'get up' after he made each of these tackles – one by one, 'to get up again and make the next one'.

soil, and Porirua Park Stadium was subsequently renamed Jerry Collins Stadium.

A similar walk was held in the French centre of Narbonne, where Collins had been playing rugby in the 2015 season. The 34-year-old and his partner Alana Madill died in a car accident in France in June that year. Collins, in the back seat with their 10-week-old daughter Ayla, is believed to have shielded their baby from a fatal impact.

Ayla, injured in the accident, "is making remarkable progress with wonderful care from both the Madill family in Canada and from the Collins family in New Zealand", Castle says.

That Collins' last act should be a life-saving one showed a "key feature of his character . . . his immediate reaction to care for others, and protect others".

Castle says: "It was a privilege to have known and been a close friend of Jerry; and especially to have had his trust.

"Every now and then I have a slight expectation that he's going to give me a call or wander into the room. So that's really a level of disbelief that he's not around but it reflects, probably, how much delight I would have if he still was."

Collins was truly joyful with his young family, Castle says. "He adored Alana and little Ayla. [He was] very close, very warm as a partner and a father.

"That he had that peace and that happiness is a very positive thing, even though it was so short-lived."

The BIGGEST The FASTEST The STRONGEST

When Lions followers join New Zealand fans in nostalgic reminiscences of Jerry Collins and Sione Lauaki's extraordinary exploits, thoughts are sure to turn to another remarkable rugby figure taken too soon.

unstoppable on the football field. Lomu's international career may have been over by the time of the last Lions visit. But in 2002, the UK public voted his performance against England in the 1995 Rugby World Cup semifinal as No 19 in a list of 100 Greatest Sporting Moments. In the

through two decades of highs and lows was All Blacks-turned-Warriors doctor John Mayhew. They first met when Mayhew was the then-New Zealand Rugby Football Union's medical director in 1995.

Mayhew says Lomu was "the biggest, the fastest, the strongest in the [All Blacks] team, by a long measure".

"He obviously struggled with endurance training, the 3km run or the beep test - he wasn't that flash at it, and there was a very good medical reason for that: he was suffering from a low-grade renal failure and his haemoglobin was down."

But on form, he was a nightmare for rival defenders. "He could fend them off because he had long arms, he could run around them because he was fast enough, or he could just run straight through them. A fully fit Jonah would be the best athlete that I've seen, by a long way."

Lomu's speed and skill were matched by phenomenal strength, Mayhew says.

The All Blacks had gathered for a drink at the end of a training camp at Burnham Military Camp, Mayhew says, when "this huge army guy came out; he looked like a weightlifter".

first of his four tries in the match, he took a pass behind him, beat two defenders and after stumbling, ran over the top of fullback Mike Catt - propelling the 20-year-old of Tongan heritage straight into rugby folklore.

One of those closest to Lomu

Hello world: Jonah Lomu dots down for one of his four tries against England in that 1995 World Cup semifinal.



Jonah Tali Lomu was considered the game's first global superstar. The youngest-ever All Black at 19, the 196cm, 120kg colossus could run the 100m in around 11 seconds, and despite suffering from a kidney disorder, was, at his best, almost

"There was this big metallic object and he basically did a deadlift of it, and everyone clapped and thought it was great. They said if any of the All Blacks do that, it'll be free drinks all night.

"We looked at this thing and thought, 'Bigger that'. About 15 minutes [later], Jonah saunters up in his civvies and almost curled the thing, just lifted it off the ground ... without breaking stride.

"He was incredibly strong. He regularly could throw the rugby ball from halfway on a full field over the goal post."

Mayhew recalls unfortunate teammates being sent skywards at tackle bag practice, including powerhouse prop Craig Dowd.

"Dowdy is a big, strong guy and knew Jonah was coming ... and he [still] went head over heels."

Lomu didn't complain about the toll nephrotic syndrome took on him, Mayhew says, but was quick to support others battling ill-health.

"He'd be asked to go to a sick children's hospital, and would always front up. I'd say to him, 'Look Jonah, after an hour, I'll be the bad guy and I'll tell them I've got to go to somewhere else'. So it didn't embarrass him.

"I'd do that [and] he'd still stay on

for another two or three hours after that. He was legendary in helping people out."

The only time he saw Lomu lose his temper was when the avid music fan's song collection went missing in South Africa. "He blew a fuse."

Mayhew was driving on the Auckland motorway in November 2015 when he received a phone call from the ambulance service to say a patient of his had had a cardiac arrest - Jonah Lomu. "I went straight to his house."

Lomu was dead at 40. "I thought, this can't be true."

Mayhew, who had a defibrillator fitted after suffering a cardiac arrest himself in April last year, was shattered at the loss of his good friend and for Lomu's family, including his two young sons.

"He was a big part of my life for 20 years. He was a very good person.

"I saw him develop from a shy young boy ... to an articulate man. I think about him most days."

