



## **2009 AMI Auckland Referee of the Year**

Receiving the AMI Referee of the Year award in September completed both a highly satisfying, yet frustrating, 2009 for Ben Skeen.

After a busy start to the year in the role of TMO and Assistant Referee during the Rebel Sport Super 14, Ben followed that up with some quality club fixtures, a test match between Nuie and the Cook Islands, a Ranfurly Shield challenge and four Air NZ Cup games.

It was only the injury he picked up while refereeing the Northland v Otago match that put a downer on the season.

The AMI award is chosen after collating the opinions of club coaches and captains throughout the Auckland club Premier season and the recognition by the people that play the game is something that Ben is extremely proud of.

Starting Premier rugby as a raw 20-year-old Ben says his first years of officiating in the top grade were “all about performing with the goal of being accepted as a competent referee.”

Added to this was his aim on being respected as a “consistent, accurate referee who the players would want to see appointed to their testing local derbies which had ‘high stakes’.”

As with most young referees interacting with adults in trying to adjudicate on acceptable versus unacceptable practices on the field before players took matters into their own hands, was not always easy. Through this, though, has seen Ben grow as a person and he adds that whatever you do on the field brings you down to earth when you have 2500 Auckland Grammar students reminding you of your mistakes on Monday morning.

Ben teaches history at Auckland Grammar and also has the overall responsibility for the student leadership programmes within the college.

He has also recently been appointed master in charge of rugby at AGS which makes for a busy and varied lifestyle.

Ben acknowledges the support and encouragement he gets from the senior staff at Auckland Grammar and points out that Headmaster John Morris has “been nothing short of outstanding.”

As with all of us fitness is a key area of our chosen vocation and Ben says his training sessions are split between the bike, gym, pool and runs through the Auckland Domain. Running with a group of students two mornings a week also requires him to be up front and train at a good pace in order “not to be shown up by the pupils”.

Ben advocates, though, that cross training in the pool and on the bike in the gym are the best forms of daily exercise to keep a strong level of cardiovascular fitness.

So what does the 2010 season entail for Ben Skeen?

Apart from the obvious priority of trying to fully recover from the nagging knee injury that he picked up during his Air NZ Cup game he looks forward to hopefully being involved again in the TMO and AR role within the Super 14 and moreover is looking forward to this season’s Air NZ Cup which will hopefully “present another opportunity to solidify a position as a capable referee who is able to consistently perform on a high performance stage.”

