



Full

Ref keeps involved in sport

By AMY MCGILLIVRAY

Refereeing is not just for old washed-up players who didn't make the big time, according to one passionate young rugby ref.

"Everyone thinks of referees as old men with bald heads who are no good at rugby," Hamish Walker says.

The 25-year-old reckons that is far from the truth.

He was talked into being a whistle blower when Auckland Rugby referee manager Greg Watson pulled over to check on him after Walker had swerved to avoid a sheep in central Otago.

He followed up on the conversation when he moved to Auckland and has officiated matches for two seasons.

He played rugby until he was 21 but had to give it up after suffering two bad concussions.

"I got a bit down when the doctor told me to quit rugby," he says. "Refereeing keeps me involved in the game I love."

"I never got to be an All Black so I thought I might as well get involved in refereeing."

While Walker enjoys being part of the game he



Staying involved: Hamish Walker took up rugby refereeing two years ago and says it is a great way to stay part of the sport.

Photo: AMY MCGILLIVRAY

does get his share of abuse from players and supporters.

"I sort of take it on the chin and give it back to

them and have a laugh. You're always going to get it in refereeing. It's just part and parcel."

The accounting and

finance student has worked his way up to refereeing for the under-19 age group but says the highlight so far was officiating the under-16 school boys final last year.

He'd like to go further still.

"I want to reach my full potential. I'd love to referee premier rugby one day. That's the aim."

Watson says referee numbers have been increasing but not fast enough.

The Auckland Rugby Referees Association has just over 200 active referees but this doesn't cover all the games from under-13 level up.

"To fulfil all our needs we would need another 100 to 130 referees," he says.

He says it is a great way to keep fit and stay involved in the game without the injuries that come with playing.

"Refereeing is a sport within a sport," he says. "You make new friends, new contacts and learn a bit more about rugby."

■ The association is having an open day on Sunday from 9.30am to 11.30am at College Rifles Rugby Club, 33 Haast St, Remuera.