

## NZRU coy over All Blacks shirt sponsorship

How long will the All Blacks remain all black?

It's a question that could be answered as early as next month, with suggestions that insurance giant American International Group (AIG) could become a shirt sponsor in time for the inaugural Rugby Championship match between the All Blacks and Australia in Sydney on August 18.

The NZRU confirmed yesterday that it was "in discussions with several potential sponsors across a range of categories", but would not give any details.

However, Wellington rugby commentator Jed Thian said one of AIG's Asia Pacific executives had told him the NZRU was considering the AIG logo for a strip on the front of the All Blacks jersey, a spot that has always been advertisement-free.

Other rugby nations have sponsors' logos on the centre of their shirts, but the All Blacks have so far confined advertising to a small logo on the chest, or a larger one on training jerseys only.

The AIG logo held pride of place on the front of Manchester United's shirts from 2006-10, but it was a "sellout" for the All Blacks to follow suit, Thian said.

"The thing is that the rugby union is telling fans we're not going to sell the jersey. They are treating the rugby public like fools."

He understood the sponsorship would start with the four-nation Rugby Championship and be in place for the next five years, including the 2015 World Cup.

But the two organisations were only now starting to "talk dollars" after four months of negotiations. NZRU chief executive Steve Tew said the union could not discuss sponsorship details until both parties had reached an agreement.

"But let's be clear, adidas is our principal partner and that contract extends to 2019 and underpins rugby in this country."

Eugene Elisara, from Chartis Insurance in New Zealand – a division of AIG – would not comment on potential sponsorship deals, saying: "In the normal course of business we regularly consider opportunities to raise awareness of our brand and the unique strengths and range of insurance solutions our brand represents."

Veteran rugby broadcaster Keith Quinn said the move was "no biggie" and "this is the world we live in".



"I remember there was big concern when the All Blacks changed from two stripes to three on their socks in the mid-80s – since then there's been commercial endorsement."

But former All Black Chris Laidlaw said supporters would react badly to the move, in the same way they did when there was once talk of rebranding the team the Steinlager All Blacks.

### AD FEEDBACK

"I don't think the mood has changed that much, even though adidas effectively have their identity on the strip," he said.

"It's the one thing that is sacrosanct. It's a comedown to have an American insurance company on it."

He said the rugby union was cash-strapped and casting around for money.

Brand strategist Wayne Attwell, of Bold Horizon, said the central spot on the All Blacks' jersey would be worth tens of millions of dollars, but more money and energy had gone into establishing the pure All Black brand.

Adidas was aligned with that, but involving a company such as AIG "smacks of commercialism", would dilute the brand and might be financially detrimental in the long term.

"It would take away some of the magic of the All Blacks."

The team is seen as a global leader in successful branding, with American online forum Brandchannel.com saying the brand was as powerful and focused as the team.

## US BAILOUT KEPT AIG IN BUSINESS

AIG had to be bailed out by the United States Government in 2008, to the tune of more than US\$250 billion. It has since sold several subsidiaries and other assets to pay back the loans.

The company was the subject of negative feedback after it used some of the loan money to pay bonuses to employees.

AIG New Zealand joined many Asia-Pacific countries in rebranding as Chartis. Chartis New Zealand is owned by Chartis Singapore, owned by Chartis in New York, which is owned by AIG.

### What You Think Of The All Blacks' Jersey Possibly Having A Sponsorship Strip?

Garry Anderson, 43, software developer, Wainuiomata: "My preference would be not, because they represent New Zealand rather than a company. But it's probably inevitable given the lack of money around these days."

The Dominion Post asked people on the streets of Wellington what do they think of the All Blacks jersey possibly having a sponsorship strip.

Rolina Swaneveld, 17, student, Island Bay: "I suppose if they wanted to get more money they'd have a right to do it."

David Walker, 58, director, Auckland: "I would hate to see the jersey cheapened by advertising. I think it's an iconic jersey and it needs to be all black." It would change what made the All Blacks different from other teams.

Greg Carlyon, 45, consultant, Rangitikei: "Rugby is the thing that counts." Rugby was just a sport, but a commercial sport. It would not change his perception in the slightest "They are who they are."

Theresa Kerr, 56, matron, New Plymouth: "It could possibly be a shame, because they are truly New Zealand. They are unique and it might spoil it."

Brian Kirby, 44, sales rep, Auckland: "They are going to do it whether people want it or not." It was an inevitable step for professional sport.

"Unless they wear pink, I can't see it making a difference."

■ [www.stuff.co.nz](http://www.stuff.co.nz) – Friday July 6, 2012

**boldhorizon**  
MARKETING • DESIGN • WEB  
Freephone 0800 25 45 25

