

*Would you give up a chance
to pursue your lifelong dream
in order to serve a mission?*

By Elyse Alexandria Holmes



Time-Out for a MISSION

With sweat pouring down his face, Australian rugby star William Hopoate keeps his eye on the ball. His team, the Blues, representing New South Wales, is facing their rival, the Maroons from Queensland, in the biggest match of the year. After the first 20 minutes, Will's team is behind and has to catch up quickly. Will has a lot to prove because this is his first match with the team. He is also the youngest player on his team and the second-youngest player ever to play in the State of Origin series.

Will watches as the ball is passed to his teammate and then thrown toward him. He jumps up to catch it. Caught! With the ball in hand, Will sprints toward the goal line. With the defense right beside him, he hurtles down the field. Just a few more yards. At the very edge of the field, between landing the goal and going out of bounds, Will is nearly out of time. He pushes himself forward, leaps toward the goal with faith, and slams the ball on the ground. Everyone pauses for a moment. Did he make it? Then he hears the audience erupt into cheers!

Growing Up with Rugby

When Will was 4 years old, his parents enrolled him in the local rugby club. That may seem young, but even then Will loved “footy” (slang for “rugby”). By the time Will was 12, rugby had become more than a game for him and he was chosen to play on a junior league team. By age 16 he was playing for a junior professional league team.

In Australia, when players turn 20, they are old enough

to play professionally in an adult league. Even when Will was 18, offers came in left and right. He was a prime recruit. One team offered him a contract worth 1.5 million Australian dollars—an offer not made often to players his age. But that wasn't what Will saw in his immediate future. Will had decided to serve a mission.

Making the Mission Decision

When Will had to announce whether he was going to serve a mission or accept a rugby league contract, the decision was easy for him. “I set a mission in my mind and heart while I was in my youth, and I promised myself that I wouldn't let the worldly desires take over me,” he said.

The world may ask, What about the money? the contracts? getting to play rugby professionally—his lifelong dream? How would his life have been different had he accepted a professional contract? “It would have helped out my family financially. It would have set my future as well for the next few years,” he admitted.

So why didn't he accept the offer? “A mission is something the Lord requires of me, of young males in the Church,” he said. “It's a way to say thanks to the Lord for everything He has done for me in my 19 years here on earth. And at the end of the day, I don't think I would have been as happy if I had stayed. I made the choice to serve a mission because footy will always be there.”

Will's announcement confused and shocked many. In speaking of his nonmember friends, he said, “They don't understand the real reason I'm going; they just see me

walking away from the game for two years.” Will told them, “I’m teaching people about Jesus Christ and serving others. It’s something that I want to do.” After hearing Will’s explanation, his friends became more supportive.

Preparing to Serve

Will recognized that just wanting to serve a mission wasn’t enough. He knew it was important to prepare. One thing he did was go to teaching appointments with the full-time missionaries. “When the missionaries asked me to respond to questions, words seemed to come that I didn’t know could help the investigator understand a bit more,” he said. “And a few of the investigators they were teaching—whom I helped teach—have recently been baptized. It’s been a blessing for me to see that.”



Will is now serving in the Australia Brisbane Mission, but he didn’t leave rugby behind entirely. Even though he is not able to play, he serves as a missionary with the same fervor he has for rugby. Before his mission he said, “The same passion and motivation is there in playing rugby and serving the Lord. In sports you’ve got to work hard to find success. You can relate that to missionary work because I am working hard trying to find people who want to hear the gospel.”

Returning with Honor

Whenever a sports star leaves the scene for any amount of time, and especially for two years, people wonder, what will happen when he comes back? Will knows that by serving a mission, he could be giving up a lot, but he also knows he’s giving it up for something better. “I think it’s a great sacrifice, but it’s one that I’m willing to make,” he says. “Anything can happen, and two years is a fair break from the sport. Personally, I would like to come back and play footy.”

Even though playing rugby professionally has been his lifelong dream, Will recognizes the eternal blessings that come from serving a mission. “In rugby league, there’s always joy in winning and scoring, but that joy only lasts a few weeks or a few days. You can only cherish it for so long,” he explained. “Whereas a friend or investigator coming into the Church and seeing that the gospel can bless their lives forever can put a smile on your face forever.” ■

