

Mates cross the sporting divide

When Kalkani Pehi started at Brisbane's St Joseph's Nudgee College on an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship three years ago, he met mentor David Hamon – who he has since converted to Rugby union

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Role models: BP Australia's David Hamon with St Joseph's Nudgee College's Kalkani Pehi.

IT'S A REAL EASY RELATIONSHIP. I DON'T SEE HIM AS A MENTOR, I JUST SEE HIM AS ANOTHER MATE OF MINE

Picture: Ric Frearson

DAVID HAMON, 45

I'm a retail area manager for BP. I'm initially from Sydney but I've lived in Brisbane 19 years. I'm a widower, with one daughter Taylor, 14. My wife Loanne died 14 years ago this June. She was diagnosed with melanoma, and passed away shortly after my daughter was born. She was only 35 at the time.

Growing up, it was pretty tough because my mum (Robyn Hamon) was a sole parent, bringing myself and my sister (Kim) up.

Basically when I completed my high school certificate, I needed to make some money and try to support the family.

I was fortunate enough that I had adults in my life that I could look up to for career aspiration and guidance. They were gung-ho, really get into it, make some money and make something of yourself.

Initially, I went into the old Grace Brothers' appliance department and stayed there for about two years, then moved into a more sales-oriented role for the family. Then I got poached by another company, then got poached back again by the family, and poached again by the company I initially left them for. I've basically been with BP now for 23 years.

BP were involved in the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation program and my line manager at the time said 'I think you would be really good at this'. Initially it was a bit nerve-racking because you think, well, what am I going to find in common with this guy? Kal is very sports-oriented whereas I'm not. I'm more of a social person.

The relationship has just built up over time. He's firmly into mateship, which is really good because when we meet – normally sessions go for half-an-hour or an hour, but we can sit and talk for up to three hours. I can talk under water!

Kal's got me convinced that rugby is not such a bad game. I played league growing up. I've been to a couple of matches since, so that's

PARALLEL LIVES

KALKANI PEHI, 17

I'm originally from Bundaberg but I live in Nhulunbuy on the Northern Territory's Gove Peninsula. I'm half Aboriginal and half Maori. My mum Amanda is from the Dribbilinbunda people, and my dad Robert the Pehi-Naha people, of New Zealand.

I've got an older sister Aroha, 18, who lives in Nhulunbuy, and a younger brother Kirra, 14, who lives in Bundaberg, with family.

I play rugby sevens. I play wing, basically anywhere in the backs. I just love the contact of the sport. I'm one of the senior players up there (in Nhulunbuy), and I coach. They look up to you, so it's great.

I was coming down (to Brisbane) for sports, for rugby. I found out about Nudgee (St Joseph's College) through a mate that came here. When my mate, Wilson Lee, came back for one of the holidays he told me Nudgee was really great at rugby, so I decided I wanted to go there. I got a scholarship. I'm in the (school) squad now. Wilson graduated last year.

I'm in grade 12 but I haven't really decided what I want to do next year. I'm still thinking. Uni's in there but I don't know when to go. I might take a year off or a half-year off. I just want to work. Get some work experience.

I signed up for the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation Pathways program in Grade 10. I just thought why not?

I like it. It's good to have a role model who you can look up to.

When I first met David, we had some things in common, which was good.

Then he told me he didn't know much about rugby, so then I've had to get him into rugby. That was good.

We see each other at least twice a term or so, whenever we can.

Basically, we chat. We just talk and we always go over time. We always talk about everything. It's not all serious, we joke and that.

David's not very sports-minded. He told me he wasn't that good when he was young. He's come to a few games of mine. He's not converted yet, but he's getting there.

It's a real easy relationship.

I don't see him as a mentor, I just see him as another mate of mine.

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good. But I think, in some respects he's given me confidence in my ability to help others. That it doesn't matter what age you are, you can act as a sounding board or life model to anybody.

I love his confidence. He's a mad sportsman and would love to play professionally but he's got a back-up plan and he's thinking about the future. He's not the type of kid to sit back and say, 'oh, I'll just take one day at a time'. He's actually thinking about where he wants to be, and he's excited about where he's headed.

We've made a commitment to each other, even at the end of the program at the end of this year, that we will remain the same as we are now, as mates. That's the key. For me and for Kal, it just doesn't stop here. It's ongoing.