

# UNLOCKING FITNESS

## WITH WALLABY LEGEND JOHN EALES

By Imogen A. Rose

John Eales is Australia's most successful Wallaby captain. He shone in an exciting rugby era when Australia was a dominant force. During this time Eales helped Australia become the first country to win the Rugby World Cup – twice! He led four Bledisloe Cup wins, two Tri Nations wins and a series win against the British and Irish Lions. In terms of fitness, Eales was always well and truly a class above.

Since retirement from professional Rugby in 2001 Eales has maintained a determined commitment to remain fit and healthy. Indeed he describes health as “a form of freedom” – that’s a powerful concept. It’s also a strong ideological motivator. To be fit, strong and healthy enables one to participate more fully in all aspects of life. As Virgil said, “The greatest wealth is health”.

When you belong to an elite team like the Wallabies your health and fitness are heavily monitored, in fact, *managed*. It’s a necessarily exclusive environment wherein expert coaches and health professionals determine and provide for the needs of players. The focus is on optimising player performance through comprehensive health management. But when a player retires the focus shifts dramatically. According to Eales one moves from an environment where 90 per cent of your fitness is controlled to one in which the onus falls entirely upon the individual.



Photo: Getty Images

As a Wallaby the weekly training schedule was structured to prepare for the weekend game, factoring in the need for recovery and training sessions of deliberately varied intensity and focus.

### John's typical Wallaby training:

**MONDAY:** AM – Light gym session and perhaps a specialist tscrum or lineout session; PM – team training

**TUESDAY:** AM – Gym and potential specialist forward/back session; PM – heavier contact team training session in afternoon. (Fitness component sometimes included in AM or PM session.)

**WEDNESDAY:** Heaviest contact team training session

**THURSDAY:** Rugby-free day

**FRIDAY:** Light ‘captain’s run’ session (the captain runs the training session with no input from coach) – this is a more mental than a physical session.

**SATURDAY:** Game

**SUNDAY:** Recovery session, often in pool

Eales concedes there are always challenges. These days the challenge is finding the time. He advises that sometimes you just need to accept that time *will* be an issue, but to remember that even a 15-minute workout is better than nothing. Research published in *The Lancet* indicates that even a bare minimum of 15 minutes exercise a day could boost life expectancy by three years and cut death risk by 14 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to Eales's passion for exercise, his love for music is also strong. It was this passion for music that inspired him to invent a fitness tool called SongFit. Recognising there “was nothing out there that combined good music with a good fitness program”, Eales set about creating this simple but clever concept. Certainly, there is increasing research highlighting the symbiotic relationship of music and athletic performance.<sup>2</sup>

There's a romantic tendency to imagine that individuals like Eales are somehow immune to the normal challenges faced by most people. Yet Eales readily acknowledges that we all need to be conscious of our individual needs and to tailor our fitness regime accordingly. This includes an awareness of nutritional requirements. It's always about that

### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Wam, C.P., Pui Man Wai, J., Kuang Tai, M. et al., ‘Minimum amount of physical activity for reduced mortality and extended life expectancy: a prospective cohort study’ *The Lancet*, Vol. 378, Iss. 9798 (October 2011), pp. 1244-1253.

<sup>2</sup> Karageorghis, C.I. and Priest, D.L., ‘Music in the exercise domain: a review and synthesis (Part I)’, *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Vol. 5, Iss. 1, (2012) pp. 44-66.

Moreover, the preparation included psychological as well as physical components.

Today Eales is a successful, multifaceted corporate professional, husband and

father. He maintains good fitness through 3-4 weekly sessions of cardio and strength training. He also utilises the advantages of high-intensity training.

### John typical current training:

• 3-4 sessions per week incorporating weights and aerobic; for example, rowing machine or spin cycle.

“I might choose six exercises each of which I do for 45 seconds with a 15 second recovery before I move onto the next exercise. At the end of all six exercises I will do a 2.5-minute session on the rowing machine followed by a 60-second break before I repeat the whole process either another two, three or four times.”

“This works well with one or two training partners as the exercises neatly break up into two sections of three exercises with a similar time frame on the rower.”

balance between input and output. As a Wallaby, the challenge for Eales was to ensure he ate enough to fuel his body. Today the challenge is about making sure he doesn't eat too much. He enjoys good food, but tries to make healthier choices. Diet and exercise can “trade off each other a bit” but essentially it's about “making good choices”.

But what about injury and recovery? Given that Eales overcame serious injury to the same shoulder on two separate occasions – injuries that left him on the sidelines for 12 months and six months in 1993 and 1999 – his advice is sage.

Twelve months is a long time away from the game for any professional athlete. Such a challenge could even end a sports star's career, yet Eales recovered with gusto each time. In fact, in 1999 he returned to lead the Wallabies to World Cup victory.

“The hardest thing coming back from injury is when you have to do nothing and there's almost always a balance between letting time do its work and actively repairing injury,” Eales says. “The best advice I can give to anyone is you can't rush it – there are some things you can't rush and, therefore, to look to go forward in other ways through that period of time.”

### IMOGEN A. ROSE

Imogen is a writer based in Brisbane. She writes mainly for film and TV, including her forthcoming psychological-thriller, feature film, “A Gun For Soldier”. She is also a health, travel and lifestyle writer with a strong interest in fitness. Her website is [www.rosemedia.com.au](http://www.rosemedia.com.au)



For Eales this meant stepping back, *watching* the game, and trying to “think differently about the game as I was watching it”. It was a method and change of perspective he found extremely useful.

One finds a refreshing honesty to Eales as he notes the importance of a balanced approach to fitness, yet acknowledges that to achieve great things, true balance is often conceded.

“To be a high achiever in anything, you're not going to be totally balanced,” Eales says. “For most people, their lives are perpetually out of balance or just teetering in between their commitments. Everyone is compromising something.”

The important thing is to identify what you are “consciously compromising” and “unconsciously compromising”. By taking the time to reflect it becomes possible to compensate in different ways that can ultimately improve your life and perhaps create even greater success.

Amidst all of Eales's success, there is something decidedly down-to-earth about him. He embodies the notion that however high we may rise, it's the substance of a person that defines real value. **UFM**