

# THE HOOPER

## HOUR OF

WITH THE RUGBY WORLD CUP LOOMING, MICHAEL HOOPER, ONE OF THE YOUNGEST MEN TO CAPTAIN THE WALLABIES, IS LEADING AUSTRALIA DOWN THE HOME STRETCH!

By Imogen Rose



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HE IS DEDICATED AND DETERMINED, FIT, FAST, AND SURPRISINGLY FUNNY. HE IS DRIVEN BY AN INNATE PASSION THAT MOTIVATES A DESIRE FOR CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT. AND IMPORTANTLY, HE'S PREPARED TO LEARN. HERE HOOPER HAPPILY SHARES HIS EXPERIENCE AND ADVICE REGARDING FITNESS.

**2014** was a big year for Michael Hooper. In June he became Australia's third youngest Wallaby captain. He also captained the NSW Waratahs (taking over from an injured Dave Dennis) to the 2014 Super Rugby title.

He is only 23, but he could just be our best weapon for the 2015 Rugby World Cup.

There is little question that the Wallabies have endured a fairly testing past 24 months. During this time, the Wallabies have had four captains and three coaches.

There are signs though, that the tide has turned. The ripples have settled. It's appropriate then that our current captain is a keen surfer who has the skill and character to ride the Wallaby wave to glory.

Michael Hooper has faced more challenges since assuming the leadership mantle than many captains face in a career. Yet he has maintained a strong sense of positivism within his command. Hooper is no choker. He can, and does, face the music.

He's also a good communicator. In fact, one could as easily be chatting to a friend as the Wallaby captain. Still, he tells it like it is. He's not interested in excuses or distractions, he knows he has a job to do and he just gets on with it. This means exercising the capacity to lead a talented team, including many older and more experienced players.

It also means ensuring he is at peak, physical performance. ▶

For Hooper, a typical mid-week training day would mean two on-field sessions and also some weight training, "In the morning, you would probably get out a good weights session, whether it be lower or upper body, you'd do a unit session with the forwards, working on line-out and scrum, and then during the afternoon is when you do all your team stuff."

Game day, generally a Saturday, is fairly relaxed, and Sunday is usually spent working on recovery.

Hooper is often recognised for his speed and strength, though he's quick to deflect praise. He readily concedes that his younger brother, Richard, a talented up-and-coming winger, is even faster.

Nor does Hooper consider himself strong. He is though; it's well known. I considered testing him with a sneaky punch, but quickly thought better of it.

In terms of improving strength, Hooper recommends variation and hard work. It's important to prevent boredom by "changing it up" and "getting excited about doing something different". Like anyone who does well in their chosen field, he stresses the value of dedication and commitment.

It's well recognised that strength training requires a compatible eating regime. Therefore, Hooper factors in his nutritional and energy needs. A typical training day would start with a generous serving of cereal and perhaps two or three poached eggs with shaved ham and baby spinach. Throughout the day, "if I was going to do weights I'd have a protein shake, a very low-carb one, like a WPI or Hydroxyburn".

Lunch might be a wrap with cold meat and salad. Dinner would typically include a piece of red meat, or fish, but would take into account the following day's schedule. For instance, if training is on the agenda in the morning, Hooper would include some carbs such as bread.

Still, Hooper is only human and I

was pleased to learn he shares my weakness for chocolate. Equally, he recognises the need for balance. If he does indulge in sweets, or perhaps a few beers, then the next day, "I'll compensate for it and I just won't have carbohydrates or much fat intake. I think I've found a pretty good balance now".

Interestingly, Hooper doesn't present any manic ambitious drive. He's someone who grew up in Manly, alongside great beaches. He embraced an active, healthy lifestyle of surfing, lifesaving and rugby. He is clearly a sporting natural. He possessed, and has

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retained, a seamless fusion of ability, passion and dedication. This would explain why rugby was never really a professional goal for Hooper, not until he "was actually living it". It's this genuine passion, more pure than political, that has enabled Hooper to assume the leadership at such an impressive age.

Hooper has scored some superb tries, emphasising his combination of skill, speed and the ability to read the play, though modesty prompts him to attribute such to, "Right place. Right time". Hooper believes "the more you play, the more games, the more situations you put yourself in on the field, the better you're going to be able to read the game. And I've been lucky that I've had a good succession of years now."

Hooper makes the point that in rugby, running is generally limited to short stretches of say 10-20 metres. Therefore, the aim is to maximise power and speed within

this context. Hooper's on-field performance has benefited from various glute activation techniques such as the single-leg barbell hip thrust.

As a Wallaby, the players are away from home for 140 days of the year, and then of course there's the Super Rugby. Such a lifestyle means missing out on many personal and familial activities. It is a sacrifice. But importantly, it's a sacrifice that Hooper is content with. He recognises the enormous opportunity and responsibility that not only comes with playing for one's country, but indeed,

the honour and reward of captaining one's team. It's a telling acknowledgement that reflects Hooper's strong leadership qualities.

Furthermore, he is aware of the significance of the Wallaby symbol and he is determined to reignite the strength of this symbol.

Hooper has proven unshakable during a remarkably tumultuous season. It takes courage, character and vision to retain one's focus and to hold a team together. The storm

seems to have passed for the Wallabies. And whilst it is difficult for outsiders to differentiate the froth from the waves, no one should mistake that Australia has a promising captain at the helm. Nor should one forget our fine rugby legacy, the glory days when Mark Loane, John Eales and George Gregan made their mark as captains, and as men. Hooper is at the beginning of his career. He has great shoes to fill. But, he has the will and the ability to become a great Australian captain.

Now, more than ever, is the time for rugby enthusiasts to support the Wallabies. It's also time for the current team to really show their form and define the future. No country has won the World Cup more than Australia and if we win next year it will be an unprecedented achievement. Who better to hold up the 2015 World Cup title than the man who withstood the storm! **MMH**

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