

# Visa Rugby Legend

## Zinzan Brooke



Zinzan Brooke is credited with being one of the greatest players ever to grace the field, and to many, he is the world's best-ever Number 8. His excellent all-round abilities – combining the attributes of a backline player with the strength and agility of a forward, coupled with his competitive approach – meant Zinzan became an icon of world rugby. One infamous play demonstrated Zinzan's exceptional talents: during the Rugby World Cup 1995 semi-final against England, he calmly kicked a 40 metre drop goal. The sheer audacity and ability to achieve such a feat emphasised his outstanding skills.

Zinzan made his debut for New Zealand (All Blacks) in 1987, as part of the All Black team that won the inaugural Rugby World Cup. He would go on to represent New Zealand at the next two Rugby World Cups, 1991 and 1995, the All Blacks never finishing outside the top three. Zinzan made a try-scoring debut against Argentina at the Rugby World Cup 1987 as the All Blacks overpowered Argentina 46-15. That would be the first of Zinzan's 41 tries for New Zealand; the seventeen he scored in All Black tests were a world record for a forward. Overall, he played 100 games for the All Blacks of which 58 were tests, and won the New Zealand sportsman of the year for his performances with the All Blacks

In 1990, Zinzan moved to his favoured position of No 8 – a position from which he would come to the fore as one of the world's leading players. He was named All Black player of the year in 1994 and his standout performances in the following years helped the All Blacks complete a series of victories, including reclaiming the Bledisloe Cup from Australia in 1995 and achieving an historic series win in South Africa in 1996; Zinzan kicking a drop goal to seal the fate of the Springboks.

Zinzan won his 58th and final All Black cap in 1997 against England at Twickenham, with the game ending in a 26-all draw. He retired from the international game as one of rugby's most influential players, helping to set the benchmarks required of players in the newly emerging professional era. Zinzan's unique combination of strength, skill, tactical awareness and ability to control a game set him apart and All Black coach John Hart remarked upon Zinzan's retirement, "There will never be another player like him."

Zinzan played for New Zealand provincial side Auckland and later captained Auckland Blues to the inaugural Super 12 title in 1996 and the successful defence of the title in 1997. In 1997 Zinzan signed for English Premiership side Harlequins and retired from professional rugby three years later. He continues to play amateur rugby for English side Windsor, and is currently working as a media commentator and writes a column for BBC Online.

