

Children latch on to Maori ball game once played by warriors

By KAY BLUNDELL - The Dominion Post

Last updated 05:00 11/05/2010



FAST AND FURIOUS: Atawhai Osborne, 12, plays ki-o-rahi at Whakatapuranga school, Otaki.

Photo by: PHIL REID/The Dominion Post

The children are learning a game their ancestors played, says Maori adviser Peter Woodman-Aldridge.

A Maori game dating back to the early 1800s, once used to train warriors, has been reintroduced on the Kapiti Coast.

Traditional game ki-o-rahi, using handwoven flax balls, predates European colonisation and is proving a huge success at Whakatapuranga school in Otaki, where Sport Wellington is reintroducing it to Maori children.

Te Aranui Doyle, 11, who along with two teams of players spent yesterday cutting flax and weaving it into balls before enjoying a fast and furious game, said it was cool.

"I am not a very fast runner. The best part is getting goals."

Sport Wellington's Kiwi Sport and Maori adviser, Peter Woodman-Aldridge, said participants were recommended by schools, health and youth providers, and Child, Youth and Family. The young people were taking enthusiastically to the game.

Describing ki-o-rahi as a cross between touch rugby, softball and dodgeball, Mr Woodman-Aldridge said it was originally used to train for battle. Its reintroduction was aimed at boosting children's confidence and improving fundamental skills, including hand-eye co-ordination.

"It was lost through colonisation. Profiling the game brings it back into the mainframe of sports. It is also, for this kura, about learning to play a game their ancestors played."

Picking the local flax, weaving it and using it as a ball also provided a valuable lesson, he said.

"It shows them you do not have to go out and buy stuff – all the equipment is on hand and free."

The game is also gaining traction in other parts of the country, mainly on the East Coast of the North Island, particularly in Gisborne and Northland. Reintroducing the traditional Maori game was aimed at getting it back into communities for Maori and Pakeha to enjoy.

Mr Woodman-Aldridge hoped it would become an inter-school mainstream sport alongside touch rugby, hockey and soccer.

KI-O-RAHI RULES

Features two teams of eight to nine players each.

The "taniwha" (serpent or beast) attacking team gains points by hitting a drum in the centre of the field with the ball.

The "kioma" (defending) team gains points by hitting posts around the outside of the field.

The game is played 10 minutes each side with each team swapping roles.

Players can range in age from preschoolers to adults and the game can be played contact or non-contact.