



GAME ON!

When rugby star David Pocock and his partner Emma decided to boycott marriage, it made headlines around the world. He talks to Matt Myers about marriage equality, charity work and bench-pressing.

DNA: Firstly, thank you for publicly supporting the fight for same-sex marriage. What makes you so passionate about this?

David Pocock: I think everyone should be allowed to love, regardless of their sexual orientation, especially in a society where the majority of Australians agree with equal rights. For the Australian government to use it as a political wedge, I just think it's ridiculous.

It's one thing to say you support same-sex marriage, but to have your wedding ceremony and not sign the legal documents is a very strong statement. Well, we have gay friends, but I think for us it's about putting action to what we believe in. It's one thing supporting equal rights and gay marriage, but to go ahead and enjoy the privileges that come with marriage when others can't ... to come out and say we support marriage equality but then not make a stand for it, just wouldn't be right.

You once said that you support gay marriage, not despite your faith in Jesus, but because of it?

That's correct. It's often such a touchy subject for Christians, but for me it's an issue of justice and love. I don't see how Christians can blame people for who they are. I just can't see a loving god being in any way homophobic. One of my heroes is Desmond Tutu who was Archbishop of Cape Town and a supporter of marriage equality and equal rights. Despite his Christian faith, he's a firm believer in equal rights for everyone. He has really encouraged me.

In 2009, you started the charity EightyTwenty Vision with your rugby mate Luke O'Keefe. How did that come about?

The biggest thing for me was growing up in Zimbabwe, and afterwards moving to Brisbane with my family in 2002, when I was 14. I guess seeing the way in which so much of the world lives, and given all the things that have happened politically and economically over the past 10 years, I wanted to give something back. I went over to Zimbabwe a couple of times with Luke, to see how we could get involved. We came across a community development project, where we did some work partnering with them. We saw a change and found we were bringing some hope to a lot of people over there.

Can you tell us about Heroes Boots?

Heroes Boots came from me playing

rugby and not agreeing with how most of the sporting equipment was manufactured. I wanted to find alternatives to the outsourced factories where workers often have very little access to form unions, and their working conditions are sub-standard. The goods that we all buy are massively inflated in price, and make the multinationals huge profits. So Heroes Boots is a bit of a working project, where we are trying to introduce products onto the market, which look after everyone in the production process. The idea is that everyone gets a fair slice of the pie!

Plenty of straight guys in the

have publicly come out. Do you think they are there, but in hiding?
I honestly don't know of any, but statistically there has to be some sportsmen who are. If that's the case, I find it very sad that they don't feel comfortable coming out, and I guess that's a reflection on our society. I think the views are changing though. In the teams that I've been involved in, the guys have always been respectful of others.

For those who don't understand rugby, can you describe your position as open side flanker?
[Laughs] I'll try! I'm basically on the side

There's much talk on the internet about the David Pocock bench press, which is where you lift 170kg? Can you explain?
Really? Well I've lifted that, but there's a guy in our team that does 200kg. I didn't realise it was being discussed like that. If that's the case, I'd better start working on my presses!

So is the bench press the secret to getting great pecs?
Well it obviously helps, but I think there are a lot of exercises you can do. Dumbbell flys are probably the most underrated exercise.

They sure work for you! You must realise that a lot of gay guys fancy you?
[Laughing] I don't mind too much. It's fine by me.

What is the campest song on your iPod?
The Origin Of Love by Hedwig And The Angry Inch. It's a pretty good song.

Who is your diva?

Santi White, who is also known as Santigold. I've been playing her album non stop. She's amazing and oozes attitude. I love her music. She also climbed Kilimanjaro!

Do you have gay mates?
Our housemates are a lesbian couple. Part of the reason we're so behind gay rights and equal rights in marriage is because we see their relationship, and how much good comes out of it, and how much they love each other. It baffles us how our love is somehow considered better or more legitimate because we're heterosexual.

If you were gay, who would you go for?
Brandon Flowers, front man for The Killers.

Last year you released your autobiography *Openside*. Will we see a sequel to that one day?

I'm not sure about that. It was my story so far and it dealt a lot with the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand. When I was first approached to do it, I wasn't too keen. But in the end I decided it could be good, and it did turn out to be quite enjoyable.

What's your fondest memory of being in the Wallabies?

Being in New Zealand and Brisbane and winning the Tri Nations was probably the highlight. The most enjoyable thing has been coming through the age groups in rugby and playing with guys who are now at a Wallaby level, who I had played with or against when I first arrived in Australia. I've got some really good mates that I've known since school and we now play against each other during the first half of the year, and then we play together with the Wallabies. It makes for a lot of good times.

So what do you wear under your footy shorts?

I usually just wear budgie smugglers. They're better because they have a drawstring and are a bit more comfortable, particularly when you sweat. Undies get a bit sticky!



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTY CASH



David in action (above) as a professional rugby player; and in Zimbabwe on a community development project.

entertainment industry are gay friendly, but often there is still a stigma on the footy field. Did you worry that by supporting gay people, you might cop some flack?

It was definitely something I had to think about. While the majority of sports people in Australia are okay with gay marriage, in the sports world there is still that masculinity, which is tough heterosexual, almost womanising. It's almost the status quo in sports and I think it's something that has to be challenged, and homophobia in general society has to stop.

Since Ian Roberts, not many footballers

of the scrum in a defence role. When we don't have the ball, I have to try and tackle people and steal the ball, and when I do have the ball it's a sort of a link between backs and forwards.

Have you ever dropped the soap in the showers?

[Laughs] Nah, there's usually no soap dispensers!

What about having your nuts grabbed and squeezed on the field?

I haven't actually, but at the Junior World Cup in 2008, there was a penalty because someone in the other team squirrel-gripped one of our blokes!

more For more on David's charities visit: davidpocock.com.au. You can also follow David on Twitter @pocockdavid