

Ironwoman of ore track drives rugby success



PAM CASELLAS

It would be enough of a feat that, at the age of just 26, Rebecca Tavo is one of only three women to drive iron ore trains for BHP Billiton in the Pilbara and the first to be trained by the company.

The elite trio are qualified to control, single-handedly and for 12-hour shifts, the massive trains which stretch to 350 wagons, nine locomotives, 50,000 tonnes of ore and worth too many millions for most of us to contemplate.

But that isn't enough for Tavo. Not by a long kick into touch.

She was also a member of the Australian women's rugby sevens team which won the recent inaugural World Cup in Dubai, defeating tournament favourites England with a try in extra time. Today, she will again don the green-and-gold to represent Australia in this weekend's Hong Kong Sevens tournament.

Oh, and she's also played touch rugby for Australia.

The logistical difficulties are obvious: the Australian team trains on the east coast and she works a fly-in, fly-out two-week roster in the Pilbara. Yet she has managed to do more than make the team — she was one of the stars of the World Cup win, sending her workmates and her extended family in Port Hedland into unbridled joy.

During her working weeks, home is Redmont, halfway between Port Hedland and Newman. There's not a gym in sight and the best hope for chin-ups is a fortuitously located bar in the cabin of the train.

There's nothing so simple as a

training run in the cool of the evening or early morning either. Tavo's shifts rotate, so she has found herself running in the afternoon, once in 49C heat, or at 2am, when she hopes that a startled snake does not become an unwanted training partner.

She follows a strict training plan devised by her coaches, perhaps 10km runs or sprint sessions when a tournament is close. Yep, Tavo says, even when it's really hot. But she's a Port Hedland girl, born and bred, and they breed them tough up there.

"It was a bit disappointing that it wasn't all that hot in Dubai," she says, contemplating her great advantage over the English roses.

Tavo has four brothers, all of whom, and her now-retired father, work with BHP Billiton. The family backyard was a place of ferocious

competition but she was touched that her toughest, blokiest brother was observed to shed a tear at his sister's success, amid what was a raucous family celebration in front of the television.

Her dad, Lance, is a proud Rotuman, from a tiny volcanic island north of Fiji, and her mother Carol — who shared the joy in Dubai — is Australian.

Tavo spent five years as a boarder at Penrhos College before heading to Brisbane, where she now has a home. But the

Pilbara called and she joined her dad on a track maintenance gang.

One of her workmates reports with glee how delighted passing train drivers were to discover that one of the dust-begrimed gangers was, on closer scrutiny, a most attractive young woman.

"But then I thought it was time to grow up and get a real job," Tavo says, and she applied — with 800 others — for one of six traineeships as a train driver. With one other female, she spent three months in the classroom, then after a period with a mentor, took her place, alone, in the cabin.

It's not a lonely life, Tavo says, though she thinks she is a solitary soul. There's always something to see out the window — kangaroos, cows, emus and once, wild donkeys — and plenty of time to dream of more rugby glory.



ANTIQUE & COLLECTORS AUCTION

SOME 800 LOTS MASSIVE CLEARANCE
CLOSING DOWN

SCURR'S ANTIQUES WAREHOUSE & THE PRIVATE COLLECTION OF MILANKA SCURR

SUNDAY 5 APRIL 10AM

241 BEECHBORO ROAD NORTH, EMBLETON
(Off intersection of Broun Ave & Beechboro Road)

This 1000 square metre warehouse is full to the rafters & must be cleared for settlement.
Hundreds of quality items never offered - shipped from all over the world - All Items Must Be Sold

STRICT VIEWING TIMES:

FRI 3 APRIL 11AM - 7PM SAT 4 APRIL 11AM - 4PM
SUNDAY FROM 8AM

ITEMS OF INTEREST INCLUDE:

A Fine & Fantastic Collection of Antique Furniture including Bookcases, armoires, beds, occasional furniture, chairs, clocks, cast iron decorative items, gilt mirrors, collectable china etc, workshop items.

DON'T MISS THIS FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITY TO BUY QUALITY IMPORTED ANTIQUES BELOW COST FROM PERTH'S LEADING ANTIQUE DEALER

VERY FEW RESERVES

Mat Donnelly 0408 881 722 Stuart Scurr 0418 944 684
Paul Sara 0409 820 055

Please note: 13.75% Buyers Premium inc. GST applies
Photos & Catalogues available on line
www.donellyauctions.com.au