



**“I AM WORLD
PREPARED”**

VERENIKI DUARARA

MY JOURNEY IN AUSTRALIA

Hey everyone, I am sure lots of you guys know me very well, but you might not know about my story or my journey here in Australia....So I decided this morning to share with you guys a little bit about my country, where I come from in Fiji, how I got here, my passion for rugby and my hopes and goals in the future.

To those of you who still don't know me, my name is Vereniki Duarara, and I'm sure lots of you guys just called me Nicky which is absolutely fine with me. I was born in 2003.

I grew up in a very small village called Serea, one and a half hours drive to the capital of Fiji which is Suva. I grew up with my two lovely brothers. Growing up in the village is not that easy, it's tough, hard and painful, but I'm lucky that I was born into it.

I come from a very big christian family. I have two brothers, no sister but my extended family is probably half the village.

I remember back in 2015, I was on my bed at 3.30 Sunday morning, I heard dad was knocking at my room. I got up and checked the time, and it's only 3.30 in the morning. I asked dad 'what do you want dad?' He replied to me and said come on quick you have 20 minutes before the game starts .

I asked him what game, and he said 'bro rugby world cup quarter final son " England vs Australia or the Wallabies. While the game was starting I asked dad if I can ask him one more question. Dad said,

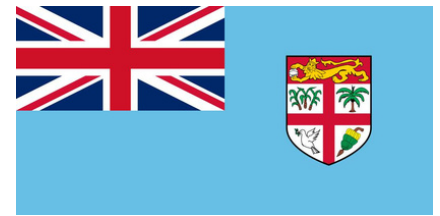
"Go ahead son."

"Who we should go for?" I asked. Dad looked at me and said, "WALLABIES all the way son." So we went for the Wallabies. That day, Dad was sitting in front of the telly jumping and screaming as loud as he could. It would have been the worst day ever for my family if England had beaten Australia, but that day Australia beat England in that quarter final. Dad was overjoyed that morning.

After that game on that Sunday morning, I started to say to myself that I really really want to play for Australia or the Wallabies.

In 2017 one Wednesday afternoon, I was playing rugby with the boys in the school yard. My present Aussie family was in Fiji for holidays, but we hadn't met yet and didn't know each other. Gus was on the sideline watching me playing. I was dancing, tackling and running around like a wild dog haha We had a 30 minute water break and one of the boys came over and asked me to go over and meet Gus .





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I went over. I was so scared and nervous because I often stayed in the village and also I hadn't met that kind of person before. The first thing he did was greet me with the word 'bula', and I'm sure that's the only Fijian words he can say. I shook his hand and he started to speak to me, but while Gus was talking to me, I was completely lost and didn't even understand any words at all. I started to put my head down, and I was lucky that day because I had my principal standing next to me. He was the one to translate the words in Fijian to me.

Before I went back to finish my training, Gus called my name one more time, and he asked me one question, "Nicky do you want to come over to Australia?" At the same time my principal looked at me and translated into Fijian, before my principal finished his sentence I shouted loudly, "YES SIR I WANT TO."

One of the funniest and crazy things ever is that my Aussie parents have never met my Fijian parents. There was no time that day, because my Dad was in the paddocks so he was too busy farming and by the way my dad is a Farmer.

There were lots of arrangements made, and then on 14th of Feb 2018, one of the most memorable days of my life, because this was the day I left my family, friends and my village. It was the most sad and emotional day ever, in my whole family and my community as well. "You gonna do what you love".

On my way to the Airport I was so scared because I hadn't been to the Airport before, hadn't seen the airport before, hadn't been on a plane before. Inside the plane, I was asked to sit next to the window. By the time the pilots asked to put the seatbelts on I just stared at everyone, I had no idea what to do, so that day there was an American family sitting next to me on that plane.

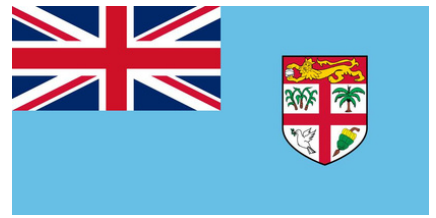
I couldn't really ask them how to put a seatbelt on, because I didn't know how to speak English. Instead of asking them a question, I just sat down quietly and copied what everyone else did inside the plane. I arrived in Sydney, and I flew from Sydney to Perth to meet my new family. 4 days later I started school. I went to Aranmore Catholic College, I reckon one of the best rugby schools in Western Australia. Rugby over there was one of the main sports in schools. First two weeks of school, I was a little bit lonely, I had no friends and knew no one. I did cry sometimes and I was homesick sometimes but I understood the weight of this opportunity: It's either I take the risks or lose the chance.

I remember my first day at school during recess and lunch. I took my lunch and went straight to the toilets, sitting down and crying but like I said "things get worse first before it gets better." But it did get better. I just kept learning, kept moving forward. Even though English is my second language, I kept speaking no matter if it was wrong or right. The good thing is that we learn new things every day.

Rugby over there was very different to Fiji. Aranmore has good facilities and a very experienced rugby coach. I had my early rugby trials later that year at Aranmore school and I made the first 15 school team. After that I also made the under 15 Western Force team. I had training on one Wednesday afternoon, 3 weeks before I was due to fly up to Victoria to represent the state, but unfortunately on that afternoon, I could not join the team anymore, as I dislocated my shoulder that day after training.

It was the worst feeling ever, but I never gave up on my training. I told myself that I had missed that opportunity. I was really upset when the physio said I have to rest my shoulder for two months. In those two months, I never stopped going to the gym, I kept going to the gym to build my shoulders.





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After two months I healed from my injury, I got invited to train with the under 17 Western Force Team Sevens. I was only 15 and the youngest player ever to represent the Western Force Team. We flew over to Brisbane and competed against the other states.

Then at the end of the 2017, my Australian parents decided to move back to Coffs Harbour, because they used to live here, and also my two little sisters Heidi and Zanna were born here.

I started at BDC in year 10. I was a little bit scared and nervous at the same time, but lucky I already knew some of the boys and family here and that made it easier when I started here at BDC. Now I have lots of friends or brothers and sisters here at BDC and I actually love this school.

In my first year at NSW, I made the NSW rugby country team and I also made the NSW GEN BLUE or the NSW Waratahs Young Generation. SORRY MR DOYLE I KNOW YOU'RE A QUEENSLAND SUPPORTER;;; HAHHA.

When I made these two teams, my Aussie dad had to drive me down every weekend to Sydney and back 6 hours each way just for training, or sometimes I just asked him if I could catch the train. I had to catch the train early in the morning - 10 hours trip. I never missed any training session, with the boys, even though I lived here in Coffs. These are some of the hard things I faced in my rugby journey, and also some of them you have to get through if you want to achieve your goals or to become a professional rugby player. We went over to Canberra to compete with the other states. We won two games and we lost two.

My goal at the moment is that I want to represent Australia one day, even though I'm Fijian. Not only that, I also want to become a professional rugby player... And I know that I also have to have other skills in life, and I'm doing my apprenticeship at the moment and I'm learning lots of useful building skills.

If any of you guys listening right now, want to take something out from my story today, there are two main things about my story:

- Consider carefully the weight of opportunities we get in life,
- Take every chance you get in life because some things only come around once.

Thank you, God bless and Ni sa Moce.

