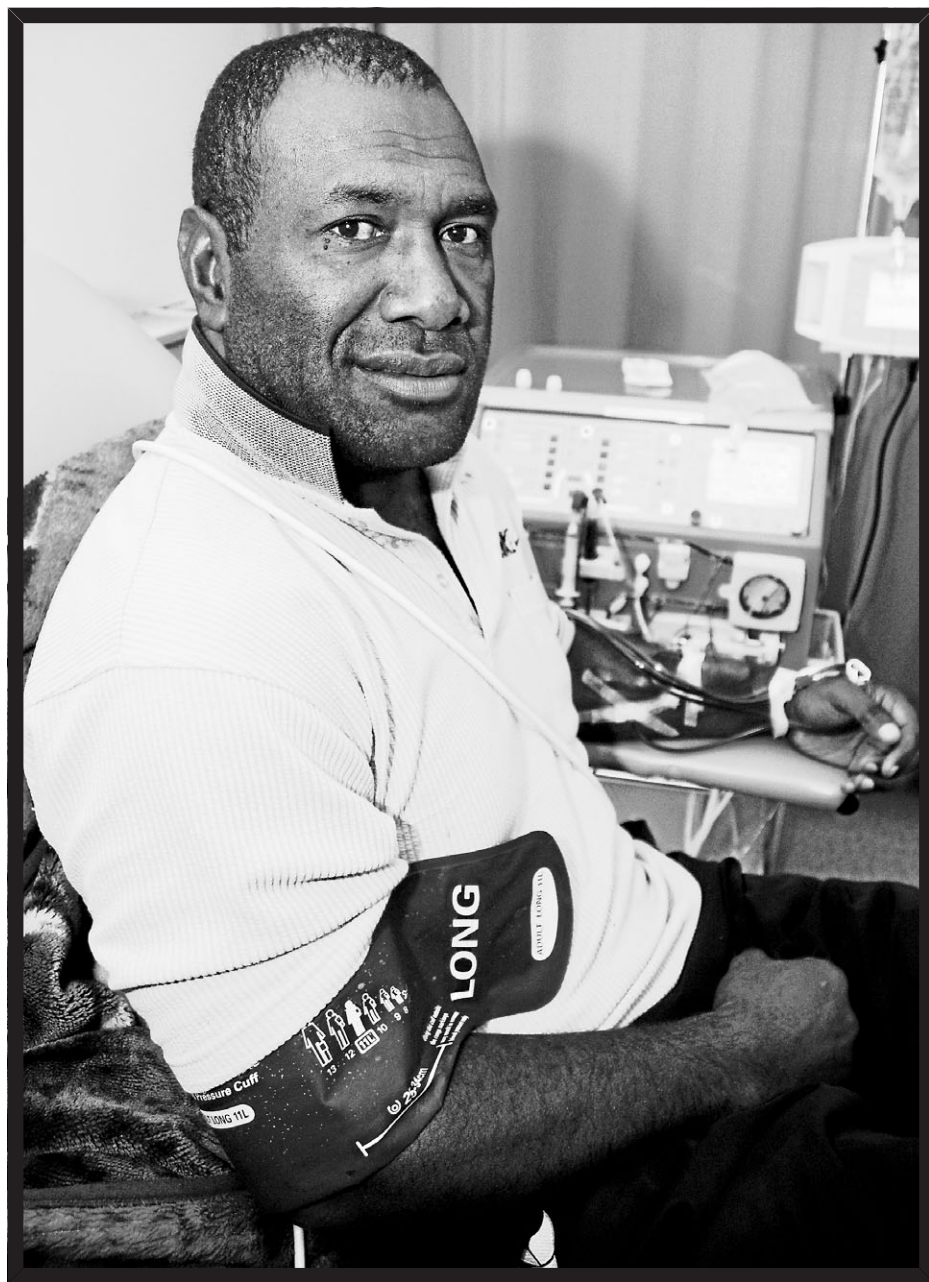


FORMER ALL BLACKS FLIER HELD BACK BY ILLNESS

Joeli puts hopes in higher power



TREATMENT TIME: Joeli Vidiri gets kidney dialysis treatment.

THEY were two of New Zealand's most explosive try-scoring wings – then illness stopped both All Blacks in their tracks and all but ended their rugby playing careers.

But for the most high-profile of the pair, try-scoring juggernaut Jonah Lomu, life has moved on thanks to a kidney donated to him by friend Grant Kereama.

For the other – two-test All Black and Commonwealth Games sevens gold medallist Joeli Vidiri, life continues to stand still.

The kidney illness that paralysed both men's international careers continues to have a stranglehold on Vidiri's life and he remains anchored to a kidney dialysis machine – not the sport that made him a star.

Vidiri – who was diagnosed with nephritis, a disease affecting the kidney's blood filters in 2001 – this week spoke out about the illness to raise awareness for the Auckland Kidney Society.

Before being diagnosed Vidiri, who was a try-scoring machine for Counties-Manukau and the Blues, had become breathless and sore before and after training.

Vidiri found his diagnosis devastating. One moment the 35-year-old was a super-fit All Black, the next he was being hospitalised and required blood cleansing dialysis treatment.

"I was frustrated," Vidiri told *Sunday News*.

"I was on the verge of going to France. I was looking forward to having another good year with the All Blacks."

That frustration saw Vidiri, in the early days of his illness, skip the odd dialysis session which left him bloated and coughing up blood.

Vidiri, who has battled the illness for seven years, said he only accepted the cruel card he had been dealt four years ago.

"I started to realise I had to move on, I had to do this thing, I had to accept it," he said.

"I was very fortunate I had family back here who were very supportive, who helped me a lot and where understanding about what I was going through."

Vidiri also found faith, which he credits with helping him reach peace with the disease.

In a twist of fate fellow wing Lomu ended up in the same dialysis unit as Vidiri at

By **TAMMY BUCKLEY**

Manukau superclinic in 2003 after initially being diagnosed in 1996.

But unlike Lomu, Vidiri is still waiting on the kidney transplant that would end his thrice-weekly, five-hour dialysis sessions.

In 2004 radio presenter Grant Kereama donated one of his kidneys to Lomu, which momentarily kick-started his rugby career again.

In June 2005 Lomu led a team against former England captain and hard man Martin Johnston's invitational XV in a short-lived rugby comeback.

Vidiri, a father of two, has been offered kidneys from family members but has turned them down because they are living in Fiji.

He told *Sunday News* he was "happy" for Lomu and had now left his transplant chances in God's hands.

"At the moment I'm going on what the Almighty has prepared for me.

"He's the one that's performing miracles and can give me a new life, a new kidney."

In the meantime Vidiri is getting on with life and is back enjoying the game that is "my life" as a coach at Pukekohe Rugby Club and coach of the Counties sevens team.

Vidiri said he took on the coaching roles to give back to the game and community that he loves so much.

Speaking out about his condition was his way of giving back to the Kidney Society, whose week-long fundraising appeal ends today.

"They've done a lot for me," Vidiri said.

"The Kidney Society helps people like me and my fellow patients. If we have problems or need someone to talk to, we call them. They help us do ordinary things like everyone else even though we need dialysis."

The Kidney Society supports 1300 clients in Auckland and Northland to get on with life by offering services such as home visits and phone support, information and educational events and a community dialysis house for people to dialysis independently away from a hospital environment.

■ **To donate to the Kidney Society Auckland Annual Appeal visit www.kidneysociety.co.nz or you can make a \$20 donation by calling 0900 KIDNEY (0900 543639).**

Wot a lot of fun Oscar winner Richard Taylor's having

A NEW Kiwi-made children's television programme created by five-time Oscar winner Richard Taylor has already been sold to the UK and Thailand.

Produced by Pukeko Pictures and made at Taylor's special-effects studio Weta Workshop in Wellington, the WotWots will screen for the first time on New Zealand television next week.

Taylor says he's excited about introducing its digitally animated stars Dottywot and Spottywot to a young preschool audience.

"Children are a very demanding market and they deserve to have quality entertainment."

The WotWots are aliens who, having travelled to earth in their spacecraft, end up exploring the zoo and making discoveries about the animals in it.

Taylor said it was important to bring New Zealand content to children's programming. "We have to represent our own country, people and aspirations."

Two and a half years in the making, the first 52-programme season had been filmed at

By **KAREN ARNOLD**

Wellington and Auckland Zoos, with a trip to Melbourne zoo to capture animals not found here.

Taylor said the WotWots had already been well received by the children of the Weta Workshop team.

And it was one of his first projects his own youngsters could enjoy, given the sometimes very adult content on the *Lord of The Rings* and *King Kong*. "It's so rewarding to know they enjoy something you have made."

Pukeko Pictures is a new children's television venture for Taylor, his partner Tania Rodger and internationally acclaimed author, illustrator and children's television creator/producer, Martin Baynton.

There will be an official launch and celebration of the WotWots at Wellington Zoo next Sunday before the first episode is screened on Monday March 23 at 8.50am on TV2.



WETA WINNER: Richard Taylor, a giraffe and his WotWots.