

## BrightSign powers fully immersive New Zealand rugby experience

*What does it take to be an All Blacks rugby player?*

*How does it feel to step out in front of the cheering home crowd in Auckland's Eden Park and perform the haka?*

*How do you prepare for a game at this level?*

*How do you deal with the pressure as you stand ready to deliver a game-changing penalty kick?*

The new All Blacks Experience, arguably the world's most immersive sporting visitor experience, uses innovation and technology to provide a full sensory, interactive, and immersive experience that allows each and every follower of the game to answer these questions for themselves. Conceived by Ngai Tahu Tourism and New Zealand Rugby and overall concept designed by Workshop E, it offers a guided and interactive journey through the New Zealand rugby story, showcasing the All Blacks, the Black Ferns and the Maori All Blacks. The technical components of the Experience were implemented by Wellington-based company Toulouse - an AV, lighting and technology consultancy - focussed on museum exhibitions and themed environments, and powered by BrightSign players supplied by Midwich Australia.





### The concept

The All Blacks Experience takes the visitor through what it takes to shape, make and be an All Black, one of the most successful sports teams in the world. The Experience sits across one floor of approximately 1800 square meters, adjacent to a number of high-end hotels in Auckland's popular Sky City district.

The All Blacks Experience comprises 10 locations or 'zones' each with a unique set of hardware supporting the storytelling and drawing the visitor in to the experience of being an All Black, a Black Fern or a Maori All Black. Together, these zones immerse visitors in the history, culture and the people who have made the All Blacks, hearing directly from past and present legends of the game. Visitors get the opportunity to test out their rugby abilities with the chance to match their kicking, catching, line out and accuracy skills against New Zealand's best players in the "hands on" interactive zone. Through the use of innovation and technology, they receive insights and direction from coaches and players to understand what it's like to perform under pressure in a high-performance team. Finally, they are offered the chance to be a part of the iconic haka, but this is the haka as they've never seen it before. It's a four metre high screen experience that draws them in from the first moment, becoming fully part of the jaw dropping, knee trembling event.

This truly is a full sensory and interactive experience where the visitor will leave feeling like a valued member of the team.

### The goals

The All Blacks Experience was conceived from the first as a physically dark and minimalist environment, so the hardware needed to be housed discreetly but easily accessible for servicing. Sleek interactives were key to the overall aesthetic, visible installation components needed to be in line with this. One element which made this project exceptionally demanding, was the anticipated intensive level of use. Visitors are guided around the Experience by a well-trained, enthusiastic and highly knowledgeable host. Tours depart every 15 minutes, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week.



The hardware is used intensively so needed to be robust and very reliable. Failure is not an option. The players needed to deliver a wide range of content across the master control systems, synchronisation between edge blended and multi-channel audio playback as well as video – delivering content to small intimate screens, large interactive touch screens and huge projection screens.

### **The solution**

The variety of requirements provided an inherent challenge for Marc Simpson and the team from Toulouse. The unique needs of each zone required individualised solutions that had to be carefully worked through. There was no one size fits all for this project. For example, the Shaping Zone offers interactive games that demonstrate the psychology and emotional development stages of All Blacks training - presented on 26 individual touch screens that allow each tour participant to pitch their skills against the opposing team. At the other end of the scale, the Haka Zone presents a stadium pre-match playing on a 4m tall and 17m long blended projection screen, with sound belting out through 14,400 watts of amplification when the haka is performed. The Step-Up Zone presents a completely different challenge to both the visitor and the AV designers. Here a series of playing cages with 4 metre tall portrait projection screens are the game surface of choice as visitors compare their skills against the All Blacks themselves when they kick, pass and throw a rugby ball.

For Marc Simpson, Managing Director of Toulouse, there was only ever one player option in the frame: BrightSign. Marc said, “We selected BrightSign players for this new installation as we have a long history with the product. It is robust, flexible, responsive and easily adaptable to our needs. Given that we were installing during the pandemic making supply lines challenging, we needed a product that could guarantee availability and ease of use and reliability for the client. Toulouse uses BrightSign players extensively in installs because of their robust and solid proven track record. Delivery was within the installation timeline and the players worked across the range of platforms – from intimate to large-format projection.”





## The technology

The All Blacks Experience is powered by 36 BrightSign HD224 players and 30 HD1024 players supplied by Midwich. The players run screens varying in size from 32" Signage Screens to a 13m wide edge blended, curved, 3x projector screen.

Marc Simpson said, "We find these players extremely user-friendly to install and programme. They accommodate the client-provided media seamlessly. In addition to the delivery of content to the screens, they can perform many of the functions of a control system, eliminating the need for a separate set of hardware and reducing complexity."

Doors and lighting throughout the Experience are controlled by the guides using handheld remotes interfaced to the BrightSign players. The players coordinate the tours, forming the front end of a sequential queuing system warning guides if they are in danger of catching up with or conflicting with the experience of another tour. They also collect data from the RFID scanners that visitors use to swipe into games. The BrightSign players transmit data from the visitor's wristband to the ticketing server that stores the details and return a personalized greeting or other appropriate message to the screen. Marc Simpson added, "BrightSign offers us versatile platforms that provided robust and pivotable solutions allowing us to create unique pathways for each zone without compromise."



Security was central to the thinking of Toulouse. Marc Simpson explains, "The All Blacks Experience needs to be exactly the same for the millionth visitor as it was for the first visitor. Content is delivered over a ring-fenced Gigabit network within the All Blacks Experience. This is to avoid any unintentional changes or updates without care and consideration. As control over new content is critical to maintaining quality, we decided to not utilise an automated content management system. This gives us complete confidence that the Experience will power up every morning without fail, no screens of death, no updates, no issues."

## Results

Though the concept for the All Blacks Experience in its current form originated around 2018, much of the development work for the project took place in lockdown. Marc Simpson is justly proud that the Toulouse team delivered such a technically complex and demanding project on time and on budget, working largely in lockdown.

Marc Simpson concludes, “Toulouse integrated the players into the design to meet the technical needs of the Experience. We then installed the players onsite. We find these players extremely user-friendly to install and programme. They integrated with the client-provided media seamlessly.”

“Even though we opened during a global pandemic, the reaction we saw from visitors was everything we hoped for and more,” said Phil McGowan, General Manager of the All Blacks Experience. “Rugby fans emerge very emotional. The All Blacks Experience has performed flawlessly since opening. Blank screens or screens displaying incomplete content would destroy the magic and the atmosphere we have worked so hard to create. The technical installation conceived and executed by the Toulouse team based on BrightSign players has delivered fully.”

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