

TANGAROA: ROBERT NOPERA

Known as Chubb

Born: 6 February 1963, Levin, New Zealand

Married: 10 April 1993, Havelock North, New Zealand

To: Jacqui Tatu (8 February 1963 - present)

Honours

Two-time NZ Male Softballer of the year, 1986 and 1987

**Named in International Softball Congress First Team All-World
in 3 successive seasons, 1989, 1990 & 1991,
and 5 times altogether**

**World Series Champion with New Zealand Black Sox
as a player, 1996**

**3 times World Series Champion with New Zealand Black Sox
as a pitching coach, 2000, 2004 & 2013**

Inducted into New Zealand Softball Hall of Fame, 2004

Member of New Zealand Order of Merit, 2005

Inducted into International Softball Hall of Fame, 2011

Inducted into Hawkes Bay Sports Hall of Fame

Two-time Ngati Kahungunu Sportsperson of the Year

Chubb's parents were:

William Hori Tangaroa (b. Dannevirke 30 Oct 1934 – d. Levin 8 Jan 1996)

and

Maxine (nee Tatana) (b. Te Puke 14 Feb 1942 – present, living in Hastings, aged 79).

He has two brothers

William (1961 – aged 60)

Mac (1965 – aged 56)

They both live in Australia.

Chubb & Jacqui have six children:

Paretona	(aged 36)	
Michal	(aged 35)	
CJ	(aged 31)	(as in 2021)
Isaiah	(aged 26)	
Ihaka	(aged 21)	
Nopera	(aged 16)	

Chubb was born into a family who lived in Meadowvale Drive, Levin. During his childhood, there were only fields between their place and Levin East, the primary school Chubb would go to. Wide open spaces for hitting a ball about.

Chubb was the middle of three boys - William was older and Mac younger. As we all know, there is an unfair division of labour when siblings are left to take care of it themselves, and there was no exception among the Tangaroa boys. William had first choice, and was the batter. Mac, being youngest, naturally was dispatched to run the field, and Chubb was the unchallenged pitcher. Perhaps he was already ill-disposed to taking a role that involved running! As far back as a 3-year-old he remembers being called nothing but Chubb – he had been a chubby baby and the name, and build, stayed with him. That seems to be how it all began.

Even after Waiopahu College was built between their home and the primary school when Chubb was 10, there were still playing fields there for the boys to practise their skills on. They were a sporty family. Father Bill (Wiremu) played rugby and basketball. He also coached mum Maxine's softball team in the local Kotuku club. Maxine was a Horowhenua rep in both softball and netball. She's Ngati Raukawa/Ngati Toa.

As a one-man labouring contractor, Bill also laid out a fair share of the channel and curbing and concrete footpaths along the streets of the developing town in the 1960s, installing the timber boxing, mixing and spreading the concrete by hand.

In his teens, Chubb went on to Waiopahu College, making the First XV as a loose forward. But softball was his focus. By age 14 he was representing Horowhenua at the national interprovincial tournament, understudy to the district's no 1 pitcher, Kevin Matakatea, who was his first softball idol.

On leaving college, in 1980, Chubb was urged to look further afield to develop a career. He moved to Christchurch where he enrolled in the Maori Trade Training Programme and learned the skills of painting and paper-hanging. He joined Papanui, Western Suburbs and then Burnside softball clubs and became a Canterbury rep. He was also selected into the New Zealand B team for an internal tour in 1982.

By this time, he had already begun what would become an annual pattern of flying to the USA to play the northern summer season before returning to

continue his rise through the softball ranks in New Zealand's southern hemisphere season.

He played for several clubs in the US's International Softball Congress across 13 seasons. Five times he was named in the ISC's All World First Team – including three years in succession, 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Back home, he had narrowly missed selection for the 1984 Black Sox side that won the world title. That team was captained by another of Chubb's pitching idols, the great Kevin Herlihy of Wellington. At this stage, Chubb admits he was seen as having lots of potential, but was a bit lazy. Inspired by the likes of Herlihy, he began believing himself to be a true professional rather than an amateur, and the improvements in his game were soon tangible. By 1986 he was a guaranteed selection in the Black Sox as a member of a very strong pitching group.

In 1987, Chubb played in Saskatchewan, Canada, where the world championships would be held the following year. Before that tournament, though, he spent another season back in New Zealand, enduring among his best and worst experiences in the game.

He was living in Levin again, plying his trade with the Ministry of Works in building maintenance at Ohakea Air Force base and its nearby houses in Bulls. This led him to joining the Celtex softball club in Palmerston North. Under coach Wayne Lamb, a former Black Sox, Celtex won the 2nd Division Nationals in Invercargill that year, beating Auckland United twice en route to the title. Their promotion to the top division for 1988 would be short-lived though. It was discovered Celtex had fielded an ineligible player. His transfer from another Palmerston club had been illegally back-dated. Stripped of their Division Two title, their elevation to the top tier was denied.

Deeply disappointed, Chubb intended transferring to a Wellington club for the '88 season but in the end was signed on by Auckland Marist. This was world championship year again, in Saskatchewan, and another blow to morale here when New Zealand were beaten 4-2 in the final by the United States, a team they had beaten twice in earlier rounds.

Four years later it was a similar story. Again through to the world final, against Canada in Manila, the Black Sox squandered a lead to lose 5-3. "I still have nightmares about that one", says Chubb. "There was a lack of communication. We were maybe thinking about winning Sports Foundation funding for NZ world champions ahead of just winning the tournament. It made for a tough four years, waiting for the next world championship."

Chubb contemplated retirement, but then his dad died and he felt he really wanted to throw everything into winning a world title for him. And so it came to pass. New Zealand were unstoppable in Midland, Michigan in 1996, unbeaten throughout the tournament with Chubb a member of a potent pitching line-up.

During these years he continued with his club career in the United States. Playing for the Guanella Brothers in Santa Rosa, Northern California, he won

national title honours in 1991. This success was repeated in 1994 and 1995 pitching for Illinois club Decatur.

Then it all came to a grinding halt. In 1999, he began suffering from arrhythmia, an irregular heartbeat, during the American season. After returning to New Zealand he had three strokes and was hospitalised for four weeks. Having put so much strain on his body over two decades, retirement from playing was inevitable.

But coaching wasn't ruled out. The next year, 2000, Chubb was recruited as the Black Sox pitching coach for the world championships in South Africa, where they again triumphed, and in this role, he shared in two further world titles in 2004 (Christchurch) and 2013 (North Harbour).

During the long convalescence from his heart complaint, Chubb considered his future beyond softball and determined he wouldn't be one to spend the rest of his life on sickness benefit. Once well, he learned *te reo* and secured a teacher's aid post at a bilingual school, Pakipaki, in Havelock North. By 2005 he had his primary teaching certificate and these days is Head of Physical Education at Te Kura Kaupapa Maori O Ngati Kahungunu ki Heretaunga near Hastings.

With wife Jacqui he has lived in Havelock North for 30 years. He has had his own pitching and catching academy in Hastings for the last four years. Athletes from as far as Tairāwhiti come every two weeks to train in how to pitch and catch. At present two players from the academy are in the Junior White Sox and Junior Black Sox.

Of Chubb and Jacqui's six children, daughters Pare and Michal, and son Isaiah have played softball at representative level. Michal has pitched for the White Sox, the New Zealand women's team. The Tangaroa name lives on in softball.

Away from the diamond, in his leisure time, Chubb plays a range of other sports, particularly golf, bowls, tennis, and badminton.

Ref: '*100 Maori Sports Heroes*', Joseph Romanos, Trio Books, 2012