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The Southland Times
Unwind



DAVID SCHWIMMER
 ... hopes to 'educate' D4



A battle with words



Speculation: John Mayer's latest CD, *Battle Studies*, has some speculating on its subject and lyrics. Photo: REUTERS

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It's not the drinking but how we're drinking



MATE
 Mark Wilson

WHO remembers watching their old man sip on a beer after a hard morning of lawn mowing or sharing a brew with the lads after a hunt? You used to watch in awe until you finally graduated to getting a sip of this mythical beverage – it tasted a little weird at the time but it made you feel like a grown up.

Twelve years old in your stubbies, top off on the back lawn covered in grass clippings getting a sip of the dregs of a can of Speight's, warm though it was, you wouldn't complain, just smile back and enjoy being a Kiwi male, albeit a fledgling one.

As the years went by you decided that a sip wasn't quite enough and after watching the oldies having what seemed to be the time of their lives at 40ths and the like, you followed in their footsteps and got a bunch of your very mature 14-year-old mates together and tried to steal a brew from the beer fridge.

That is about where the innocence was lost – from there what had been simple adolescent bliss became the gauntlet that most young Kiwi males must pass on their rite of passage to manhood; you had embarked on the journey of binge drinking.

Keg parties in woolsheds, king of the ring milk bottle skulling competitions and drinking games. Endless options to consume as much alcohol as possible and prove to the lads you were a hard man. What started with smiles often ended in tears but for every negative connotation that comes with this sort of activity, for every gory media headline about drink driving, undy 500 riots and assaults there is also a side rarely seen to this debate.

Friendships are forged; triumphs on the sports fields are celebrated, memories are made. These, although often hazy, last a life time.

I still fondly remember some of the more legendary sessions that I had to endure and I'm not ashamed to say some of these were quite recent.

Many of the biggest boozers I knew through school and university are some of the most successful and hard working contributors to society. Yes, they have probably used their diversion and had the odd incident but all in good fun.

Like anything, however, there are a few drop-kicks who ruin it not only for their mates but now it looks like for all of us.

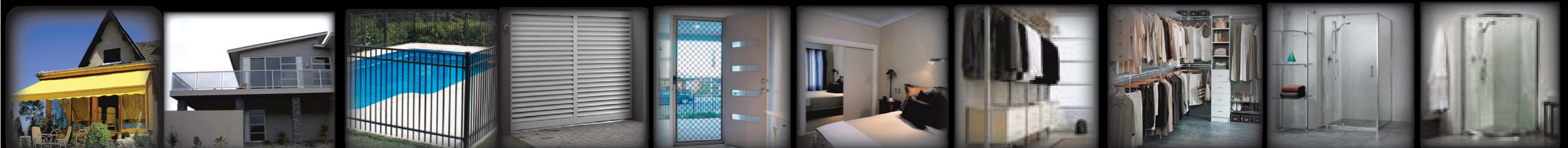
It's a fact we can't deny: alcohol is ingrained in our culture. For some it's a passage to manhood or a badge of valour – for others it's the final nail in the coffin of a turbulent youth.

However good or bad, it is something to most people and that's why it captures our attention like nothing else.

New Zealand's often excessive and unruly drinking habits are not always ideal or positive but they are just that, habits that will take a long time to break.

Next week's column looks at what has been and is being done to try and reform Kiwi drinkers and its effect on someone who actually enjoys the odd drink.

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