

Life's no beach for emerging volleyballers

by Jared Savage

Volleyball conjures up images of surf, summer, bikinis and barbecues. But reaching the top of such a popular international sport is not as easy as a day at the beach.

Hamish Wright has already made the transition from the sand to the hard court, representing New Zealand in volleyball at secondary school and junior level, and has targeted higher honours as the next step in his career.

The Tauranga 20-year-old is the youngest player in the New Zealand Institute of Sport (NZIS) volleyball team and studies engineering full-time at the University of Canterbury.

In addition to attending class, completing assignments and studying for exams, Wright trains for two hours every Wednesday and Thursday, and plays for his NZIS team in the Canterbury club competition every Monday.

Despite standing 195cm tall and tipping the scales at just under 100kg, Wright believes it is in the gym where his game can be improved.

"My main strength is understanding the game - how to score points rather than smashing it as hard as possible.

"But to push for national selection I'm going to have to improve my explosive power and jumping ability."

However, Wright says juggling full-

time study and representative sport can be difficult at times, especially financially.

"NZIS pays for our uniforms, track-suits, tournament entry fees and that's all. It's pretty tough paying tournament travel and accommodation costs on a student loan. I reckon each trip costs me a couple of hundred dollars."

Mark Doyle, Wright's NZIS coach, is also the former national men's team coach. He says sponsorship doesn't get any easier for New Zealand international players.

"Basically there's no funding for players. An international competition plus training camps and trials is bloody expensive.

"I used to tell players to budget for \$6000 on top of their club commitments, says Doyle.

"We don't get access to physiotherapy and psychology sessions, or access to proper training facilities. Little things, but little things that improve your performance."

Doyle says these "little things" aren't available to volleyball players because they are not recognised as priority by the New Zealand Academy of Sport, the governing body of New Zealand sports that decides how government funding is divided up among different sports.

Although volleyball does not boast the playing numbers of soccer, it is the

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EXPLOSIVE POWER: Hamish Wright prepares for national volleyball trials in his Christchurch kitchen.

largest global sport in the world, with over 217 countries registered to the Federation of International Volleyball.

Therefore, gold medal performances are unlikely to be achieved by New Zealand's amateur teams competing against the 60 countries with full-time professional players.

"Well, it's a catch-22 situation isn't it?" Doyle says.

"Volleyball won't get recognition and funding until we produce a world beating team. But that won't happen until we get appropriate funding.

"However, the New Zealand men's team are ranked about 40th internationally, which is pretty good."

Another worrying aspect for the future of the sport is the dramatic decrease in the number of volleyball players from secondary school level to competitive club competition.

A 1999 survey showed 11,000 secondary school students played volleyball, but only 2000 players were affiliated to senior clubs.

Doyle says this is a problem that won't disappear unless volleyball becomes professional.

"Volleyball is seen as a brilliant second sport in college, to play in summer to keep fit.

"But once they leave school they discard volleyball to concentrate on

their rugby or netball because of a possible career."

Although Wright played with several talented players at school, he is the only member of the Tauranga Boys' College team (placed third in the 2000 National Secondary Schools' Championship) to continue playing volleyball.

"A few of them don't play sport at all and a couple have stopped to train for rugby and they're doing really well.

"I just want to concentrate on my volleyball and show the selectors that although I may not be ready right now [for the New Zealand team], I will be in a few years."

Tall Blacks inspire AUT basketball academy

by Sara Williams

Fuelled by the success of the Tall Blacks and the introduction of the New Zealand Breakers into the Australian Basketball League, plans are now underway to establish a basketball academy at AUT.

University staff are putting together a proposal to establish the academy with the aid of the North Harbour Basketball Association.

Sam Luteru, the coach for several AUT basketball teams playing in the North Harbour winter league, says an academy would strengthen the basketball programme already in place at AUT.

"It would help us to incubate players within an academic set-up."

The academy would have the potential to benefit basketball as a whole, not just AUT and North Harbour basketball teams, says Mr Luteru, who helped introduce basketball to AUT.

Initial responses to the proposal have been positive, he says.

AUT's sport and recreation co-ordinator Bruce Meyer says the academy would provide quality athletes with quality education.

Students involved in the academy will be able to study subjects such as biomechanics, and learn how to deal with the media.

Dianne Kahura, who is involved in the sports scholarship schemes at AUT, says the academy would be a way for basketball players to continue with the sport after secondary school.

"It would be a stepping stone from the secondary level to the premier



REACH FOR THE TOP: AUT hopes a new basketball academy will help players excel

league."

One of the goals for the basketball academy would be to eventually develop a basketball competition at tertiary level.

There are also plans to make a number of basketball scholarships available for potential players and coaches.

About 120 AUT students currently play or show interest in basketball — and that does not take into account students currently playing in premier teams.

A good number of students are playing basketball in various premier leagues and have National Basketball

League experience, Kahura says.

Four basketball teams from AUT travelled to Palmerston North at Easter this year for the annual University Games challenge and two brought back medals.

The women's A team came away with a gold, and the men's A team with a silver.

There are several basketball academies already established in New Zealand at tertiary institutions and secondary schools.

Luteru says there has been some initial consultation with these academies as to how programmes are organised.

As the plans for a basketball academy are only in the early stages, Kahura says the team involved in the discussions is unsure whether the academy will mean students will complete a basketball course with specified papers or let them undertake any AUT course.

"We have to remember AUT's main objectives are involved with education."

Luteru says students involved with basketball at AUT have been extremely supportive of the proposal for an academy.

"A basketball academy would be excellent for AUT, especially if a tertiary league is established," says AUT basketball player Anoushka Ruedi-Klaus.

AUT is the only tertiary institution in Auckland with teams playing in the North Harbour basketball league, she says.

The basketball academy should be up and running at AUT next year, if Sam Luteru gets his wish.

Wellington wins bid for mountain running champs

by Gordon Gillan

Arthur Klap has returned home from the United States, ready for the next stage of planning, after winning the vote for Wellington to stage the world mountain running championships in 2005.

Wellington's Mt Victoria course beat England's bid by 19 votes to 6. New Zealand will stage the event for the first time after unsuccessfully bidding in 1995 and 1997.

Klap says his organising committee has learnt much from the previous bids and realised the importance of attracting a worldwide field.

"We are subsidising travel expenses for European athletes and now have to ensure that funding is in place."

The Wellington City Council, Sport and Recreation New Zealand and the NZ Community Trust are the three key backers behind the event, with the balance covered by Sports Impact and two individuals.

"Our focus now is to get the event financially secure with the next priorities to increase the number of participants from our neighbours in Asia-Pacific and to have more trials on the course," says Klap.

Mountain running is unusual in that the world championships are run

over an uphill course one year and then over an up-and-down course the next.

The women's world champion, Wellington athlete Melissa Moon, prefers the up-and-down events (shown by her wins in Alaska this year and in Italy in 2001).

She will be a strong favourite in her hometown.

Three-time men's world champion and fellow Wellingtonian Jonathan Wyatt prefers the uphill event, although it is hoped he will still participate.

Klap confirms competitors are likely to have two official opportunities to train on the course — at the Wellington championships next year and the New Zealand championships in 2005.

Bringing the world championship to New Zealand is another milestone for Klap, who has also organised a junior snowboard event, a mountain bike race and a world aquathlon competition.

He is currently working on December's world triathlon championships, which will take place in Queenstown.



Arthur Klap