

Sport

# Opener bags two tons for NZ

By Sarah Mason

When it comes to cricket, Aimee Mason is at the top of her game.

The 24-year-old New Zealand women's cricketer has just returned from a six-week tour of Australia and the UK, bagging two centuries and taking out the player of the series award.

Yet initially she had decided not to make herself available for the tour.

"There were a number of factors affecting my decision, the main one being unpaid leave from work.

"But at the end of the day the opportunity was just too good to give up and in hindsight it was the right choice."

Mason, a secondary school teacher from New Plymouth, says scoring her maiden international century in the stifling 30-degree heat in Darwin during the Rosebowl series against Australia was one of her career

highlights so far.

"I experienced a mixed bag of emotions - I was exhausted, happy, excited and relieved. To measure myself against the best bowlers in the world and come out on top is such a great feeling."

Mason scored 111 against England just weeks later, and in between posted another solid score of 81, also against the English.

The all-rounder, best known for her off-spin bowling and middle order batting, had the added task of opening the batting on tour due to the absence of a couple of players.

But as vice-captain and one of the side's more experienced players, she proved she could step up to the plate.

"We lost [wicket-keeper and opener] Rebecca Rolls at the end of last season so we needed someone to fill the gap. I was asked [by coach Steve Jenkin] so of course I welcomed the challenge.

"There was just that bit more

pressure further up the order I really felt the expectation to stay there and score runs."

The White Ferns played one Twenty20 match and five one-dayers against Australia in Darwin in the lead up to a seven-match Twenty20 and ODI series against the English.

Australia won the one-day series 4-1, while the Kiwis took the rain-affected series against England 3-2.

Despite her personal success, Mason says she still has a few things to work on in perfecting her game.

"I am an aggressive player, but sometimes your strengths can turn out to be your weaknesses too. I go out onto the field firing and get out early because of it."

When it comes to her future,

Mason, who captains the Central Hinds in the domestic women's league, says she plans on playing for a little while yet.

"My goal is to make it to and win the World Cup in 2009, so I'll stick around for that and then see what happens.

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She says in the winter she works on her fitness up to two hours every day, while in summer, cricket takes up between 20 and 30 hours every week.

"It's such a time-consuming and demanding sport, but for now I'm still enjoying it and I'm doing well."

She says everything that

comes with the sport makes it all worthwhile.

"I've had the opportunity to go to places that most people would dream of and where I perhaps wouldn't have usually gone, like India and South Africa."

In terms of cricketing equality with the men, Mason is certain this will never be achieved.

"Things are improving and women's cricket is becoming more recognised, but I can't see things getting dramatically better.

The amount of time and energy the girls can dedicate to cricket is restricted by jobs and uni. We have to squeeze it in really.

"Many people are not able to make it to the live games, so more coverage of women's cricket would give them the ability to make proper assumptions about the sport.

"But we'll never get the same coverage as the men, so at the end of the day you just keep playing so long as you enjoy it and can afford to do it."

## Uni tour marks comeback for NRL hopeful

By Pippa O'Rourke

A promising rugby league player is not letting his creaky knees hold him back anymore.

After two years of knee rehabilitation and watching from the sideline, University of Auckland student Craig Heslop, 21, has decided to give the sport he loves a second chance - even if it ruins his knees forever.

Heslop is one of 20 students from New Zealand universities selected to travel to Australia as part of the New Zealand Students Rugby League Team. The team left on September 23 and will play the Australian University Team and the New South Wales Student Team.

"I'm really looking forward to getting stuck into some Aussies," said Heslop, prior to the tour.

Malcolm Cherrie, chairman of the New Zealand Universities and Tertiary Students Rugby League Council and member of the selection committee, says Heslop was a standout player at this year's University Games.

"Craig had played five games in four days and was still playing as tough and hard at the end as he was at the beginning.

After being selected for the New Zealand Universities Team from the 126 players at the Uni games earlier this year, Heslop then trialled against 17 of the best players from the country's polytechnic institutions to make the New Zealand Student Team.

Cherrie is confident the New Zealand team will do well because this is the first time it has had students from polytechnics as well as universities.

"We've got the best of the best," he says, noting that one third of the team are Bartercard Cup players.

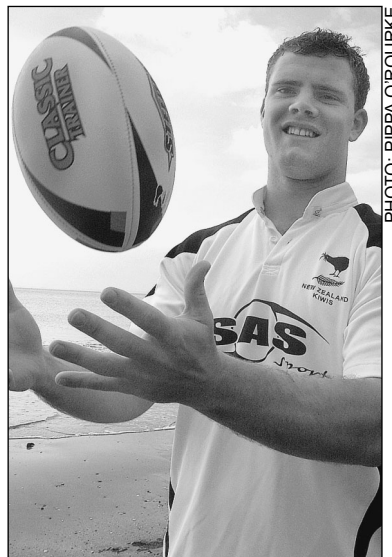
Since 2004 Heslop was making a name for himself in Australia playing for the Manly Sea Eagles and the Parramatta Eels clubs, but knee troubles forced him to give it all up.

Thinking a league playing career was over, he returned to his North Shore home and began a Bachelor of Physical Education and is now in his second year.

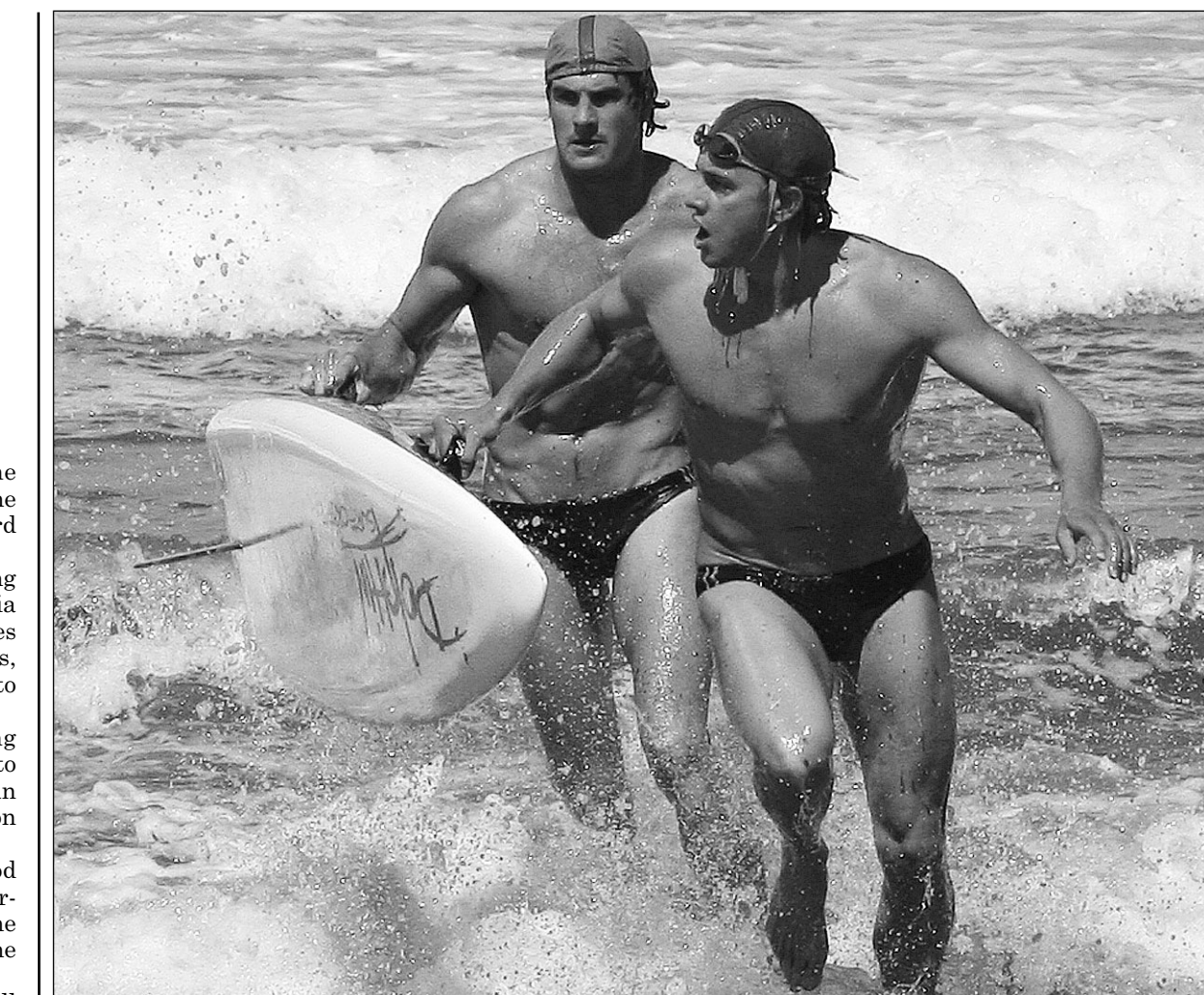
This month's trip is a good warm-up for Heslop, who is currently in negotiations with the Redcliff Dolphins, the Brisbane Broncos feeder club.

If all goes well, he says he will move to Australia in November.

"I'm excited about following my dream to eventually play in the NRL," he says.



CRAIG HESLOP



SURF'S UP: Michael Buck (front) and Kevin Morrison competing at this year's surf lifesaving nationals.

## AUT student makes a splash

By Emma Darwen

Although many university students complain about heavy workloads and suffering from stress, most cannot say they are as busy as Michael Buck.

The 23-year-old is making his mark on the competitive world of surf lifesaving while still managing to study for a Bachelor of Business at AUT University.

Buck, who currently trains 12 times a week as a member of the New Zealand high performance squad, admits that balancing university work and sport is difficult at times.

"I find the hardest part is fit-

ting my timetable around my training. I'm still at a stage where surf sports come first and uni is second, but I'm managing."

The North Shore lifeguard recently returned from the International Pool Challenge held in Sydney.

The New Zealand team of four men and four women beat Australia to take out the event.

It was the first of three international competitions Buck is competing in this year.

"I have the German Cup, another pool-based competition, coming up in November, and the International Challenge at Bondi in December," he says.

Buck, who was also named in

the New Zealand 2008 World Championships squad in March, says he is in good form and ready to take on the world's best.

"I'm feeling great. I'm still improving and posting personal bests every time I race," he says.

"My confidence levels also keep increasing which is important in terms of racing."

Buck says he will aim to compete at two more World Championships before redirecting his energy back to his studies.

"Sometimes I want to put the focus on finishing uni and starting full-time work, but when I'm competing, training and doing well I feel like I've got a lot more left in me, so who knows."

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