

Top NZ kiteboarder breaks neck

by Kate Palmer

Current New Zealand kiteboarding champion Gavin Broadbent is slowly recovering from a neck injury sustained when he was dumped head-first onto a sandbar while wave riding at Muriwai Beach.

The result for Broadbent, 39, was a fractured vertebrae which has left him in a neck brace for the last six weeks.

He says the sport is potentially dangerous but usually only for beginners.

"Auckland's a really gusty place and you have to have a good knowledge of winds and tides.

"Most of the problems happen when someone is launching from the land onto the water. There's the potential to crash into solid objects. Solid objects are bad."

Kite-boarding aka wave riding is an extreme sport. Riders are attached by harness to a kite spanning several metres and use a combination of wind and waves to surf, jump and fly across the water. A board, smaller than a standard surf board, is used with or without footholds.

Broadbent says this is his first serious kite-boarding injury.



GAVIN BROADBENT

Lee McClelland who runs Anabatic Kite-boarding in Orewa has been on the competition circuit with Broadbent for three years.

"That might have been his first injury but it wasn't his first near-death experience. I spent 15 years paragliding and he's way more extreme in his stunts than we ever were."

Broadbent has a 25-year history of competitive water sports. He began waterskiing competitively in the 1980s and was national champion seven times.

While competing in Florida with the New Zealand waterskiing team, he was introduced to wakeboarding, going on to become reigning national champion throughout the 1990s.

"It was way more fun than waterskiing and not as structured. I'd done everything I wanted to do in waterskiing and it was getting harder and harder to stay at the top."

In 1999, Broadbent starred in the Audi campaign which showed him wakeboarding behind a car.

"That was great fun to do. We spent 10 days filming behind the car at Bethells Beach and another couple shooting stills for the billboard campaign.

"It was quite cool when my mates phoned me from London saying they'd just seen me on a giant billboard."

He says he hadn't done much boarding behind cars.

For the last four years Broadbent has focused exclusively on kite-boarding.

"It's a really addictive sport, probably because Auckland winds are so fickle. If you could go kiting every day then it wouldn't be as addictive."

McClelland describes Broadbent as a brilliant rider who made a big impact when he



IN ACTION: Gavin Broadbent before his accident.

took up the sport.

"He brought his wakeboarding skills to kiting and completely transformed it.

"The sheer brilliance of his kiting is phenomenal. In action you'd think he was insane but you have to realise he takes calculated risks based on his wakeboarding experience.

"All the newbies want to kite like Gavin but they just don't have that skill level."

Broadbent spends his days in a suit working as a property valuer but never misses the opportunity to go kiting.

"If I've got an hour between appointments I'll shoot off to a beach and have a quick kite. If I feel like competing I'll take a week off and head to Australia. There aren't many jobs that flexible."

He says New Zealand lags one or two years behind the rest of the world but the sport is slowly growing in popularity here.

"It started off four years ago with a hardcore group of five

guys.

"Recently there's been a real youth movement with a lot of surfers and snowboarders taking it up."

"That might have been his first injury but it wasn't his first near death experience."

The current world champion is only 18 years old and younger kiteboarders are joining the competition.

Broadbent says he chafes at having to compete in the veteran class but accepts the realities of growing older.

"They can push their bodies hard and take the punishment where us older guys tend to suffer more," he says.

McClelland says kiteboarding

is more a lifestyle than a sport.

"Kiting guys are pretty laid back and just doing the sport for themselves. Most of them have come from other competitive sports and enjoy the adrenaline of kiting.

"You don't kite for fame but to know how it feels when you're flying across the water.

"Of course the moment someone gets a camera out the action really hots up. I call it Kodak courage."

Rather than looking for a new extreme sport, Broadbent says he's happy experimenting with kite-boarding as long as his body lasts the distance.

"There's so many different things going on. The difference in winds and the whole wave thing means there is always something new to try.

"Sometimes it can be more like surfing especially when you surf on a standard board and use a kite. You don't do jumps and it's more like skateboarding. That's fun."

Boccia Olympian heading to Athens

by Owen Hembry

Auckland Ross Flood will represent New Zealand at the 2004 Athens Paralympics in a sport he can play from his wheelchair. But he won't be sitting back.

Boccia is a cross between indoor bowls and petanque and is designed primarily for people with moderate to severe disabilities such as cerebral palsy and spina bifida.

Boccia players compete as individuals, in pairs, or in teams of three.

To keep the contests even,

players are matched together by the severity of their disability.

Flood came across the game by chance in 1996 when exercising in a gym run by the Cerebral Palsy Society.

"One day the instructors shoved this funny shaped ball into my hand and told me to throw. A month or so later I was in Aussie with the pioneer NZ boccia team."

This was the beginning of a journey that has seen him represent New Zealand at tournaments held in New York, Argentina, Sydney, Portugal and now Athens.

Flood, currently ranked 14th in the world, says a professional attitude is essential for those playing at the highest levels of the game.

"You've got to have dedication, hard work, commitment, and a calm head."

New Zealand will face the best in the world with a team of six players competing in the Athens Paralympics starting this week.

With boccia played in more than 30 countries, Flood says just getting to the Paralympics has been an achievement.

Preparation has been intensive.

"This year boccia has taken over my life. I train on a daily basis, either individually or with the team," he says.

A new Pukekohe boccia facility, acclimatisation training from the Academy of Sport and dedicated coaching aim to improve New Zealand's fourth place at Sydney.

Assistant team coach Kerry Stead has been working with Flood in training camps leading up to the games.

"It's been going very well. He's a lot better prepared than at Sydney. He's on form which is great," says Stead.



PARALYMPIAN: Ross Flood.

Although the New Zealand Athens team is smaller than Sydney in 2000, 62 athletes compared to 74, Stead says preparation, expectations and team spirit will match the able-bodied team.

"It's going to be a fabulous event. We're going to try to replicate what they've got out there," she says.

South Auckland Boccia Association co-founder Flood says his proudest moment to date was to represent New Zealand at the 2000 Sydney Paralympics.

During a breath-taking opening ceremony a huge cheer went up for the group of wheelchair-bound New Zealand athletes as they performed the haka.

"It was amazing — 100,000 people all looking and cheering for you," Flood says.

He was stunned by the support the athletes received in Australia, particularly at the stadium where the boccia tournament was held.

"The venues were packed, with queues for miles. I spent 15 minutes after the game signing autographs!" Flood says.

It is hard to imagine Athens being able to top Sydney, he says, but with the start of the competition beginning this week, the reality is starting to hit home.

"It's just sinking in now. I'm participating in Athens — the birth place of the Olympics. Where Socrates and Aristotle walked. Wow!"

The South Auckland Boccia Association caters for all levels of ability and has attracted more than 30 players and volunteers since opening in 1996.

Messages of support for the New Zealand Paralympics team in Athens can be sent to: nzparalympians@yahoo.co.nz



BOCCIA: NZ boccia team play Great Britain at the 2003 world cup.