

Lynn Avon eye fourth title



LYNN AVON: Ria Percival challenges for the ball.

PHOTO: NZ HERALD

by Michelle Whiteford

New Zealand's premier women's soccer team, Lynn Avon United, aim to create history on Sunday when they take on Eastern Suburbs in the final of the Uncle Toby's knock-out cup.

The win would make them the first club ever to win four straight titles, surpassing arch-rivals Three Kings, who won three titles in a row from 1997-1999.

A victory would taste so much sweeter this year after the team, who were regarded as the top women's club

in the country, were written off by their rivals at the beginning of the season.

Earlier this year New Zealand Soccer pulled all national squad members from their clubs and formed an elite training squad.

This cost Lynn Avon six players, including current New Zealand captain Hayley Moorwood.

Player/coach Jill Gilmore and her husband Dene recall the remarks made about their side.

"At the start of the season we got written off," Dene says.

"We wouldn't win the league.

We wouldn't retain the trophy."

Jill Gilmore says: "We played a pre-season tournament against a couple of the other teams who were both contenders and they both beat us. You could see the little smiles on their faces going, 'yep, Lynn Avon won't compete this year'."

This season the team have not only retained their Northern Premier League title for the sixth consecutive year but they

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have also remained unbeaten.

According to Gilmore the league has been the most competitive for many years.

"We had it

won with three games to go. Last week was the last game of the season for everyone else and it was only that week that they knew who finished second through fifth," she says.

"That's how tight it has been below us."

Both coaches admit that a strong team spirit has been a key factor in their success.

With the New Zealand players eligible for the Uncle Toby's cup campaign, the younger players have used the Northern Premier League to step up and make their mark on the game.

Younger players have taken over from players lost to the New Zealand squad.

Rebecca Parkinson has been in the team for a few years and has performed well, says Dene Gilmore.

"Ria Percival is in her first year. She was in our side last year but this is her first full year and she's only 15 years old," he says.

Which is why the girls have found it tough when the New Zealand players have come back into the club teams for the cup matches.

"These girls are gutted not to be playing and it's hard when the New Zealand girls come back and they're put on the sideline to accommodate them," Jill Gilmore says.

"But there is a team spirit there; they just want the team to win."

Going into the final, the Lynn Avon side are obvious favourites. They have already beaten Eastern Suburbs in both league matches this season and the team's gutsy and confident attitude is displayed by both coaches.

"I think we go into games expecting to win. We know we're going to win and if we go in with that attitude and play with that attitude, that's important," says Dene Gilmore.

Kiwi takes on top Argentinian cricket job

by Anne Marthe Bjoernulf

A 29-year-old Kiwi flies to Buenos Aires next month for the experience of a lifetime, coaching Argentina's national cricket team.

Hamish Barton will be the second New Zealander to coach Argentina.

The Argentinian Cricket Board noticed Barton when he was travelling through South America last year and offered him the national coaching job.

But it was not until a year later that he accepted the offer.

"I was just at the right place at the right time," says Barton.

He will be based 40 minutes outside Buenos Aires at Hurlingham Cricket Club. "I have a contract for a year at the moment, but hopefully I will stay longer," he says.

Barton thinks the language barrier will be one of the biggest challenges and is doing a Spanish course at Auckland University.

"I don't know if all the players can speak English," he says.

Barton is also aware of the cultural differences and that South Americans are more affectionate than Kiwis. He is prepared to be open-minded and accept that they show their emotions.

"Maybe they perform better if they are allowed to show their feelings," he says. Barton grew up playing cricket on a farm in Gisborne.

"I used to play in our backyard with my two little brothers," he says.

His father used to play first class cricket in Northern Districts and Otago and passed the game on to his son.

Barton played three seasons for the Auckland under-19s. By 1997, he was training at the NZ Cricket Academy in Christchurch, where he played with Daniel Vettori, Jacob Oram and Craig Cumming.

His next move was to Christchurch in 1998, to play for Canterbury and attend university.

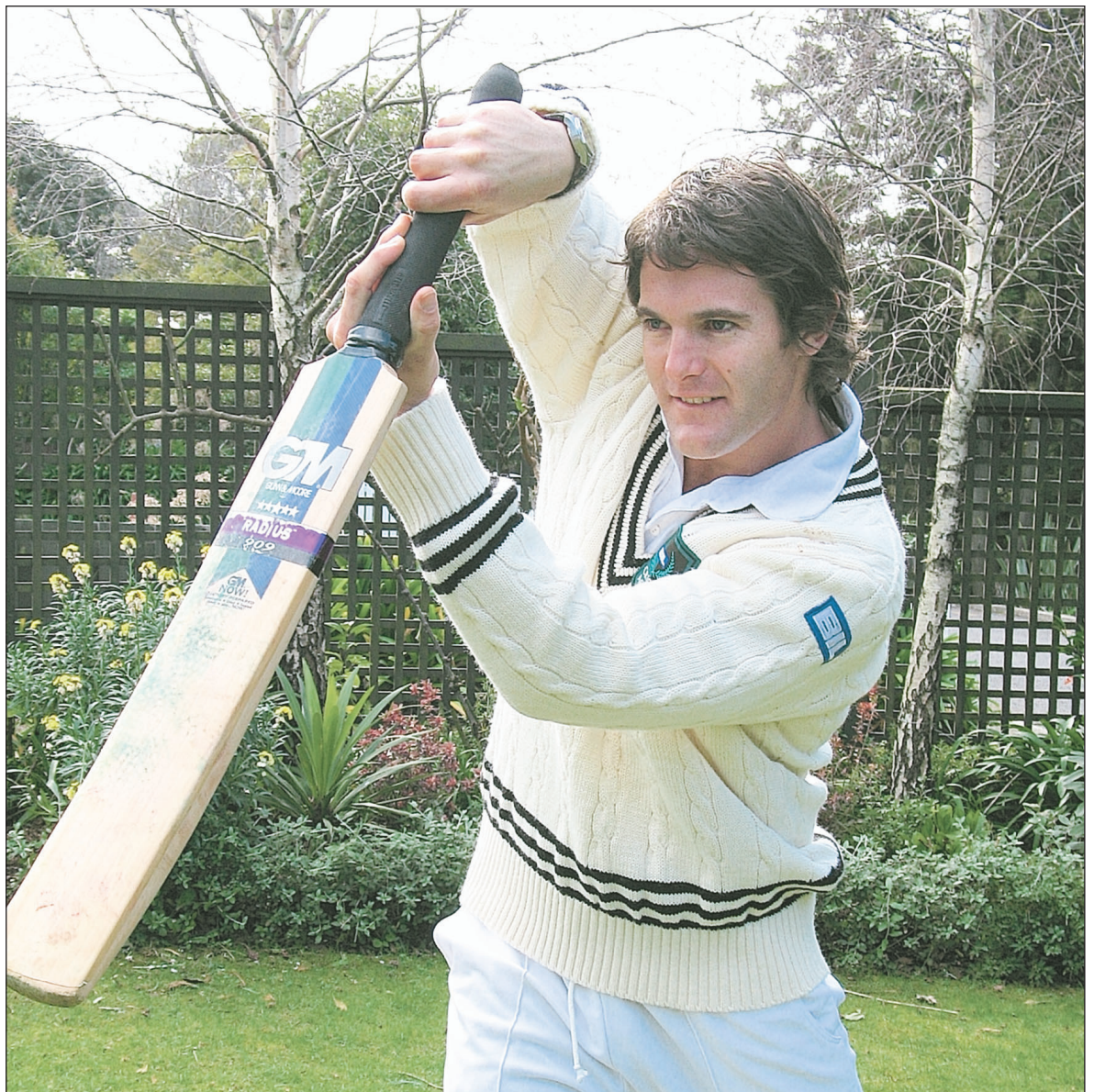
Four years later, Barton attained a recreation and management degree at Canterbury University. He then moved to Auckland and worked for Sport Auckland.

His cricket career was put aside for a while until his latest opportunity. Barton's expectations are high for the upcoming year.

The first big challenge in Argentina will be a qualifying tournament in June 2006 against the Bahamas, Belize, Surinam, Turkey and Panama. Victory qualifies them for another tournament in September 2006.

Barton has started to prepare for his new role and is excited about meeting his new team. He will fly to Buenos Aires on October 10.

"It's an opportunity of a lifetime. I'm pretty stoked," he says.



NEW CHALLENGE: Hamish Barton - off to Argentina.

PHOTO: ANNE MARTHE BJOERNULF