

# On a wing and a prayer



We're a funny lot in New Zealand.....we love our sport, boy do we love our sport! You can get jobs, money, celebrity status. . . even Queens honours, for doing little more than kicking a rugby ball round a perfectly manicured paddock these days.

**Y**et when all is said and done, even though we, as a nation, define ourselves by our 'indomitable Kiwi' sports achievements, we tend to expect them as a matter of course, not so much as a result of hard work, clear planning and consistent financial support. As the Beijing Games approach, we have the usual amount of enthusiasm from children, families, schools and some other random groups who will fire up the 'tele' in anticipation of all the events, some of which just may include a Kiwi. Yet there are still the same amount of 'naysayer, slagers, tall-poppy-knockers' that jump head first into the media-driven frenzy of athlete denigration. To see this phenomenon, which I must say is very evident in New Zealand and not so common overseas, is to witness a group of Great Whites

feasting on a helpless baby seal! For it is FACT that even though we love our sports and sporting heroes and we love languishing in their successes even more.....we do 'sod all' to get them to the point where they are fit to compete in the international arena!

Admittedly, there are organisations like SPARC that have some great initiatives in place for athlete education. However, there is still a lack of resources, people and access for youth athletes and up-and-coming sports stars. There are so many tales of New Zealand athletes turning up to events, literally on a 'wing and prayer' with airfares paid by mum and dad, clothes, provided as a one-off by an especially nice sports brand, and lots of hope! We hear about big sponsorship packages, for teams and individuals who have penetrated the national sports psyche, or just hung around long

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enough and achieved enough so that people have to take notice! But what of the up-and-comers.....who takes care of them???

The Peter Snell Institute has received a lot of recognition lately for their identification and support of Valerie Vili, who is one of New Zealand's best medal chances in Beijing. The Institute is also a great example of hard working people trying to provide a spring board to youth sports and junior athletes who may be the sporting icons of New Zealand's future.

The CEO of the Peter Snell Institute, Ken Lynch, never tires of going into schools to test and seek out the up and coming sports talent. But trying to excite potential sponsors about financially supporting these kids is another story! Ken's colleagues, Karen Dickinson (Nutritionist) and Grant Hodder often have to multitask due to funding shortages. This sees Karen often acting as a 'camp counselor', and Grant interfacing with media requests!

Despite an astounding record of achievement the Institute still struggles to keep the wolf from the 'proverbial' door. For example, at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, 19 of those that represented New Zealand had received support from the Team at

Peter Snell. Nick Willis (Athletics,) Tim Gudsell and Peter Latham (cycling), Melissa Ingram and Lauren Boyle (swimming) and Valerie Vili were supported by Peter Snell Institute and were medal winners.

As Beijing beckons, there are 15 athletes that have come through the Institute ranks to go to be part of the next sporting mecca!

**They are:**

- Nick Willis
- Valerie Vili
- James Dolphin
- Marina Erakovic
- Nathan Cohen
- Emma Twigg
- Corney Swanepoel
- Lauren Boyle
- Melissa Ingram
- Sarah Walker
- Tom Ashley
- Peter Burling
- Carl Evans
- Jo Aleh
- Sam Bewley

With a record like this surely we in New Zealand will stand up, man up and support the people that support the athletes that 'DO US PROUD!' ■