



Rodney Hide and Sara Chatwin

Celebrate the Small Sportsman!

2007 was the 'Annus Horribilis' for New Zealand sport and New Zealand sports people and fans. Our rugby boys were taken out in extraordinary fashion during the World Cup, as were our netballers who had us teetering on the edge of our chairs up until the 11th hour only to dash our hopes of success in the last few seconds.....and the Americas cup.....let's not go there, even though it is a psychologist's job to see the cup as 'half full' (not that we have any cups to compare fullness and emptiness with). However, I will allow myself to bathe in the glory of the Louis Vuitton Cup, which unquestionably 'overflowed' for New Zealand.

Yet as we launch into 2008, a little more gingerly than we did at this time last year, we do need to re-focus on all that is good in New Zealand sport today and celebrate our successes. Over the past few weeks and months we have been riding the sporting roller-coaster. We have been marvelling at Valerie Villi's strength and ability to pull out winning form. Yet we have been plummeted to the depths of despair as we read about cricket greats like Lou Vincent struggling with depression, coupled with the defections of several other A-listers to the Indian Rebel league and we fell even further as revelations of the late night/early morning antics of newcomer, Jessie Ryder, came to our attention, leaving us in no doubt at all that alcohol and sport continue to be diametrically opposed.

In addition to all the fuss on (and off!) the cricket pitch, the row-off between Mahe Drysdale and Rob Waddell was the 'bitter-sweet' side of sport that we love and hate at the same time. With two great athletes competing, it became more a matter of 'who to choose' when all of a sudden God, the gods or fate (depending on your religious or spiritual inclination) made the decision that Rowing New Zealand looked like it would bungle, when Rob went down with a 'dicky ticker'..... I CAN'T

TAKE ANYMORE. Even a psychologist needs time out from drama of this magnitude.....

But perhaps amidst all the repositioning of New Zealand Sporting pride, we should take 'baby steps' to try and get back on top once again. What better place to start our comeback than by celebrating the success of the little guy. We need to read more stories that see an individual overcoming adversity, through sport and fitness, to become the 'better person'! Sport in New Zealand is not only for the hardened followers of Sport Unleashed. Nor do we all have to be national or international sports stars to gain the respect of sports fans across the land. In fact, sometimes tales of the small guy/gal are more heartening and easier to relate to than the above mentioned dramas that have unfolded over the last year.

One such story is that of Rodney Hide. The once bolshy politician who turned 'sensitive new age' dancer and fitness buff! Not only has he lost over 40 kg, effectively making him much less of a man than before, but he has also found new joy in SPORT. With harbour swims and Queenstown bike treks under his belt (black belt that is), Rodney has become a 'one man' sporting machine. What is more heartening is that Rodney embodies that stock, standard Kiwi attitude of "kiwis can do anything" and perhaps that is what we need to keep in mind as the year unfolds before us.

So in the words of another sporting great, Captain (Sir) Sean Fitzpatrick, "full credit to them".....to the small guy and our Rodney is getting smaller by the day....thanks to sport! ■

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