

Special Olympics New Zealand

2011 World Summer Game

Newsletter update July



Welcome home!

The Special Olympics New Zealand World Summer Games team has returned from Athens, Greece, victorious.

Armed with a record 34 medals and many more ribbons and personal bests, the team enjoyed a most successful trip full of fun, excitement, and challenges.

While political protests blighted Greece's capital over the Games period (and dominated the international media's attention), the New Zealand team was largely unaffected as it led its own (peaceful) charge in the various stadia.

Head of Delegation Rob Torrance says the team showed great determination, which, in turn, led to personal bests and medals.

"It's hard to win a medal at the World Games. They were matched against their peers and they had to be at their best to win anything. I was immensely proud to be a part of this team," says Rob.

"For a lot of the athletes it was a life changing event. The classic example was Sam Donaldson [Special Olympics Wanganui, Aquatics; the first medal winner of the entire Games]. He had hardly said boo to me in a year-and-a-half, but the first time I met him after he won his gold medal he had a huge smile on his face and he wouldn't stop talking. That sums it up for me."

A crowd of Special Olympics New Zealand staff, family members and supporters welcomed the team home in Auckland at a special homecoming celebration held at the Novotel Auckland Airport on Friday 8 July. It was a chance to share experiences and look at the wonderful photographs of the event before everyone headed back to their respective towns. ■

Our winners

All the New Zealand team members competed valiantly and we are so proud to have you all as athletes with Special Olympics New Zealand. Well done!

Please visit www.specialolympics.org.nz/worldsummergames for full results, athlete profiles and information on our medal winners. ■

Inaugural award

Congratulations to Eru Whakatihi (Special Olympics Horowhenua) who was awarded the inaugural Jill Vernon Trophy for Sportsmanship in Aquatics. He was presented with the award at the team's homecoming celebration in front of the 100-strong audience. The trophy honours the memory of Jill Vernon, one of our dedicated volunteer swimming officials who died earlier this year. It will be awarded at major aquatic events including National Games and World Games. ■

The Games by numbers

4: am—when the delegation went to bed after the opening ceremony.

34: the number of medals won by the New Zealand team.

0.26: seconds—the gap between first and last place in Kwame Williams-Accra (Special Olympics Wellington)'s 100m race. Kwame, who came in fifth, went on to flick his fingers to his teammates exemplifying how fast the race was run ("over in a flick of the fingers").

200: the number of international Healthy Athletes clinicians who volunteered at the Games including the Greek Minister for Health, doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, podiatrists, orthopods, ophthalmologists, dentists and nutritionists.

2: the number of athletes who were given new prescription glasses in the Opening Eyes screening. Others received sunglasses and reading glasses. All athletes were given toothbrushes and toothpaste; and a few were referred for specialist care on their return to New Zealand under the Healthy Athlete Programme.

7000: the number of athletes who competed at the Games overall.

25,000: the number of Greek and overseas volunteers who made the Games such a success. ■



Highlights

The opening ceremony: "It was incredible, like nothing else I've ever experienced in my life. I can't even describe it. I knew it was going to be something enthralling, but I didn't think it was going to be that big and grand a spectacle. The biggest highlight was walking into the stadium and being cheered to our seats by athletes from hundreds of countries. And when Stevie Wonder sang my favourite song, 'Superstition!'"
(Ryan Smith, Special Olympics Manawatu, Athletics)



Our team: "I am [a] volunteer from Greece and I want to thank you for the great participation of your wonderful team." (Xara Katsaouni, via Facebook).

Success: "I've been running since I was 12-years-old. I'm really proud to have achieved so much and I'm just pleased I was picked to be part of the team and pleased to have won a medal." (Hayley Long, Special Olympics Canterbury, Athletics).

Camaraderie: "I've won two gold medals but the most exciting thing for me isn't my own performances but watching other people in the team do well. It is great to see them with a big smile on their face and happy to be here. That is what the Special Olympics Summer Games are all about." (Teresa Nicol, Special Olympics North Harbour, Aquatics).

Just being there: "I'm incredibly lucky to be here. I can't get over the people in Christchurch who have helped me. We operate a trekking business out of Terrace Downs and the people there have been amazing helping me get out here." (Christchurch-based Lynda Barrington, mum to equestrian medallist Tom Sutton, whose friends shouted her the trip to Athens after the June earthquake).

Struck by gold: Athlete Andrew Oswin (Special Olympics Canterbury) won a gold medal in the shot put just two days after being overcome by heat stroke following the 4 x 100m relay. "It was my golden memory. I was over the moon at the medal ceremony. My mum was in the crowd supporting me and she was very happy and excited and proud," says Andrew.

Meeting 'royalty': Powerlifter Clayton Marr (Special Olympics Nelson) got close and personal with Special Olympics Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Dr Tim Shriver and his family. Clayton had earlier reduced his mum, Sophie, and grandfather, Maurie Hebbard, to tears after winning gold.

Birthday fun: Equestrian team member Devon Tretheway-Koppers (Special Olympics Waikato) enjoyed a birthday with a difference while in Rhodes. Unfortunately some kittens got into her birthday cake so she was presented with a special jacket in lieu of the sweet treat. Bowling coach Ian Baldwin also enjoyed his birthday away: "I'm having an exceptional birthday," he said on the day. "I'm getting more presents here than I would have done at home. Certainly more hugs and kisses."

Medal tribute: Early on in the competition golfer Nigel Old said he wanted to "play well for Brian [Telfer]; his former Head Coach who died in February. He played extraordinarily well, coming from six strokes behind to win gold!

In the running: Palmerston North's Inspector Mark Harrison was New Zealand's first Law Enforcement Torch Runner to participate in the Games. He went to 69 villages around Greece with the torch ahead of the opening ceremony (around five torch ceremonies a day!)

Final thoughts: "The team has done more than was expected of them. Every member is a proud ambassador for New Zealand." (Helen Johnson, Special Olympics Manawatu; Additional, Staff/Assistant Coach). ■



Thank you everyone

Thank you again to all our sponsors, supporters, and volunteers who made this trip possible. Forty-seven family members also travelled with the team to Athens and provided incredible support to the athletes and coaches. "They were very vocal at all events and were a welcome sight at every venue where our athletes were competing," says Sue Kysow, Events Manager.



Fulton Hogan CEO Bill Perry presents cheque to Andrew Oswin and Hayley Long.

Special thanks must also go to the Canterbury community. Despite challenges associated with the ongoing earthquakes, supporters rallied together to help fund the Special Olympics Canterbury team's trip. Fulton Hogan was particularly generous in its donation to the team.

A special thank you to Penny Towns who photographed the New Zealand team's journey (the images are amazing!) and journalist Robert Tighe who kept us informed with extensive updates on the team's whereabouts and activities and fielded media inquiries while abroad. ■

Facebook support

Those of us in New Zealand were more than 17,500 kilometres away from our team in Athens but thanks to Facebook we were able to participate in all the action. Special Olympics New Zealand's Facebook page was inundated with posts from family, friends and well-wishers; likewise the team provided valuable insights into their journeys, the results and all the wonderful photos. ■

Our sponsors

Finally, thank you again to all our amazing sponsors who helped make our trip to the World Summer Games possible.

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