

# Special Olympics New Zealand

2011 World Summer Game  
Newsletter update March



## Greece – here we come

Special Olympics New Zealand is delighted to be sending a delegation of more than 50 athletes, coaches and volunteers to Athens, Greece for the World Summer Games in June.

Led by Head of Delegation Rob Torrance, and ably supported by Special Olympics New Zealand's Events Manager Sue Kysow and the various coaches and volunteers, the athletes will depart New Zealand on 14 June, arriving in Athens ahead of the opening ceremony on 25 June.

The trip has involved two years of planning with the initial quota request going forward to Special Olympics, Inc back in May 2009. The various clubs around the country were then asked to nominate athletes to represent New Zealand on the world stage. Final selections were made at a training camp held on Labour Weekend last year in Christchurch.

Since their selection the athletes have fundraised for the trip and have started rigorous training schedules to prepare for the Games. For some this has involved increasing their weekly training days, changing their diet and training with different coaches and new team members.

Over the next four months we'll be taking a closer look at the World Summer Games; exploring what's in store for the athletes; examining the Games preparation; and talking to the athletes attending to get their impressions about the trip. You'll also be able to follow our athletes' journeys at the Games through our website – [www.specialolympics.org.nz](http://www.specialolympics.org.nz). Finally, in July, we'll release a special newsletter reviewing the Games and our athletes' successes.

## Let the Games begin!

## What sports are represented?

Up to 7,500 athletes from 185 countries are expected to compete at the World Summer Games. Overall, 22 Olympic-type sports will be played – from aquatics through to volleyball. New Zealand's Special Olympics athletes are competing in:

- Aquatics (6 athletes, 5 non-travelling reserves)
- Athletics (6 athletes)
- Basketball (10 athletes)
- Bowling (7 athletes, 3 non-travelling reserves)
- Equestrian (2 athletes, 1 non-travelling reserve)
- Golf (1 athlete)
- Powerlifting (3 athletes).

## The road to Athens

The World Summer Games delegation's journey begins on 13 June with a dinner in Auckland. It will be the first time the delegation has been together since the selection camp last year. The next day the group will depart Auckland for Athens – a long trip that will be broken up by stops in Sydney and Dubai along the way.

Once in Greece, the team will head to a sports facility in Loutraki – a resort town that Rob Torrance describes as "Hanmer Springs by the beach" 100 kilometres west of Athens. Over the next four days they'll have a chance to acclimatise to the heat (>35°C) and time zone (12 hours behind New Zealand) and get in some sports practice.

They'll then leave the mainland and sail to Rhodes – an island steeped in Grecian history 11 hours away. Here the team will join athletes from other countries including Ireland, the US and Japan to get a taste of Greek culture...and more training.

Then it's back to Athens where the team will set up its base at the Special Olympics Village – located at Aghios Andreas at the east end of Athens. From the Opening Ceremony on 25 June it's 'game time' for the athletes and their coaches with non-stop sports action and fun until the Closing Ceremony on 4 July.

On 5 July the delegation will head home – stopping in Dubai for two nights to give them a chance to catch their breath and get some (no doubt longed-for) sleep.

In the words of Special Olympics powerlifter Leigh Donald, "It is going to be one big trip!" ■

## Leigh looks to snatch and grab glory

Special Olympics Manawatu powerlifter Leigh Donald can hardly contain her excitement about heading to the World Summer Games.

"It is going to be an awesome trip," she says. "Everyone is so proud of me. My mum was rapt when I told her I was going and told all our family. I am so excited. I've worked so hard for this."

Indeed, Leigh has been training solidly with Coach Maryanne Poole three times a week in Palmerston North to get 'match-fit' for the Games. In addition, she has had extra training with Head Coach Nigel Burgess and her World Summer Games teammates Dominic Crowe (Special Olympics Southland) and Clayton Marr (Special Olympics Nelson).

"I'm the only woman going to the Games [in powerlifting] – it's just me and the boys. We did a lot of fitness training at the training camp in Christchurch [held on Labour weekend last year]. It was so much fun. [On one day] We were supposed to walk for 12 minutes except I jogged it."

As well as stepping up her training programme, Leigh has also had to make sacrifices in her bid for World Games glory – including cutting her beloved "chippies" out of her diet.



"I'm trying to do what I need to do – I've cut right down on chippies and lollies. I've lost three kilos since the training camp and am on track to get to my goal weight before we go."

But Leigh may make an allowance in her diet for the delicious Greek cuisine coming her way.

"Nigel took us to a Greek restaurant while we were at the training camp last year. I liked the food a lot. I had four lamb chops – four! I wasn't expecting that many; and the couscous underneath was really good."

Above all, Leigh is looking forward to the social aspect of the trip.

"I'm really looking forward to meeting athletes from the different countries," she says.

"I'm anticipating a bit of homesickness – but doesn't everyone when they are away from home? Everyone going is so supportive. Rob [Torrance] is really cool and the other coaches and Sue [Kysow] look after us so well. It is going to be one big trip." ■

## Driving for gold

Special Olympics Tauranga golfer Nigel Old is preparing for the trip of a lifetime. When he started playing golf as part of Special Olympics New Zealand's school programme eight years ago he had no idea he would one day be playing at the World Summer Games in Greece.

Nigel is the only New Zealand golfer going to Athens – a position he says makes him "a little bit nervous."

By all accounts though, he needn't be. He's an expert golfer and has been busy practicing his putting, chipping and

driving skills in preparation for the Games. His Head Coach, Margaret Baker, is in regular contact with him, from her base in the Hawkes Bay, providing advice on technique, diet and fitness. She is familiar with his game and the two will get together in person at least once more before they take off to Athens in June.

In comparison to the other sports on offer, golf is a relative newcomer to the Special Olympics World Summer Games, featuring for the first time as an official sport at the 1999 Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA Games.

The 2011 World Summer Games golf course is located in Glyfada on the coast south

of Athens. Nigel and Margaret will stay in accommodation within Glyfada and Nigel will have a local caddy during the competition rounds.

"We'll be away from the Olympic Village, which is a shame but it will be great to get to know the other golfers from around the world. Plus we'll be going to Loutraki and Rhodes with the others," says Margaret (who stepped into the position following the recent death of former Coach Brian Telfer).

Nigel says he is looking forward to meeting new people – both athletes from New Zealand and those from overseas.

"I'll try my best to win and [am looking forward] to coming home with medals," he says. ■

