

# NZ's first Olympic century

(MCH, 2)

During the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics New Zealand's 1000th Olympian stepped up to compete (if we include those who have appeared at the Winter Games since 1952). The 182-strong team selected for Beijing was the largest New Zealand has ever sent to the Olympics.



The 1908 Olympics

This is a far cry from the London Games in 1908, when the first three New Zealand Olympians competed as part of an 'Australasian' team. Harry Kerr from Taranaki won New Zealand's first medal with a bronze in the 3500-metres walk. Four years later, at Stockholm, New Zealand swimmer Malcolm Champion won gold as part of the Australasian 4 x 200-metre relay team, while Anthony Wilding, a winner of four consecutive men's singles titles at Wimbledon, claimed bronze in the tennis singles.

New Zealand has earned a reputation for punching above its weight at the Games. In 1984, at Los Angeles, New Zealand finished eighth on the medal table with 11, including a staggering eight golds. This was three more than Great Britain and – more importantly for many Kiwis – twice the tally of our former Olympic team-mates, Australia.



Violet Walrond

The first official New Zealand team in 1920 set the pattern. There were only four athletes in the team but each performed strongly. Darcy Hadfield kicked off New Zealand's fine rowing tradition with bronze in the single sculls, while 15-year-old swimmer Violet Walrond, our first female Olympian, finished fifth in the 100-m freestyle final.

New Zealand's first individual gold medal winner, Ted Morgan, literally punched above his weight when he triumphed at Amsterdam in 1928. A relative unknown before the Games, Morgan had to overcome a step up to the welterweight class (because he had put on weight during the long voyage from New Zealand) and a dislocated knuckle to claim gold.

## Winter silver

In 1992 New Zealand's Annelise Coberger became the first person from the Southern Hemisphere to win a medal at the Winter Olympics, when she took silver in the slalom at Albertville in France. It remains this country's only Winter Games medal.

Only two competitors have represented New Zealand at both Summer and Winter Olympics: Madonna Harris (cross-country skiing and cycling) and Chris Nicholson (speed skating and cycling).

In the century to 2008 (including Beijing), New Zealanders have won 90 Olympic medals – 37 gold, 16 silver and 37 bronze – including one (silver) at the Winter Games. Runners like Jack Lovelock, Peter Snell and John Walker have cemented their places not only New Zealand's sporting history but in the Olympic story. Others achieved their own personal podium finishes simply by getting to the Games.

New Zealand women have won gold six times over the past 100 years. Yvette Williams was the first, winning the long jump at Helsinki in 1952. It would be another 40 years before windsurfer Barbara Kendall followed suit at Barcelona. At Athens in 2004 Sarah Ulmer was victorious in the 3000-m individual pursuit cycling. Rowing twins Georgina and Caroline Evers-Swindell won the double sculls at both Athens (2004) and Beijing (2008), while Valerie Vili claimed gold in the shot put at Beijing.

New Zealand enjoyed its most successful era at the Olympics from 1984 (Los Angeles) to 1992 (Barcelona), winning a total of 34 medals (including 12 golds) at three Games. In terms of medals, the 2008 Beijing Games were our most successful since

1992, with three golds, one silver and five bronzes; the five medals won on 16 August was the most this country has ever earned in a single day at the Olympics.

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MCH 2008



Peter Snell at the  
Rome Olympics

As an island nation, it is perhaps not surprising that New Zealand has done well in water events: 21 of our 37 golds have been won in or on the water; sailors have won seven, rowers six and canoeists five. Peter Snell is perhaps our most famous Olympian, with three golds in the glamour middle-distance track events. But canoeist Ian Ferguson has been our most successful competitor – in a career spanning five Olympiads between 1976 and 1992, he won four gold medals and one silver.

New Zealand's early Olympians had to overcome high costs and long distances to participate at the Games. The 1920 team took nine weeks to get to Antwerp, and Violet Walrond's father accompanied her as a chaperone. The team going to Beijing flew there in 13 hours. These modern Olympians are backed by a vast team of support staff, with doctors, physiotherapists, dieticians, chefs, managers and officials attempting to meet their every need (there is even be a barista). Interior designers helped create a home away from home for the New Zealand athletes at Beijing's Olympic Village. Every possible angle, it seems, has been covered to assist the athletes in their quest to go '*Faster, Higher, Stronger*'.

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