

# Hit the books if you want to be like Steven

LIAM HYSLOP

So you want to be the next Steven Adams? You better start studying early.

That was the message to come from the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) eligibility centre associate director Ashley Thornburg, who was in Wellington at the United States Universities Expo on Tuesday to advise potential student athletes on the requirements for studying and playing sports in the US.

The NCAA oversees top-level university sport in the United States, determining who is eligible to compete at that level.

Thornburg said assessing eligibility started earlier than most people thought.

"We will look at course work from the beginning of year nine.

"Obviously the focus is on what they do later in NCEA, but as early as possible we encourage them to excel in the classroom and pay particular attention to our eligibility requirements to make sure they are choosing the right classes and putting themselves in as much core courses to meet our standards.

"If a student athlete is serious about coming to the United States, we would ask them to register at the eligibility centre in year 10, year 11 is not too late, but the earlier we can do that the better off they'll be and when it comes time for a certification they'll be first in line."

Those requirements were part of the reason Adams was moved to Scots College in Wellington for his high school education.

Adams went on to earn a basketball scholarship at the Univer-



Oklahoma City Thunder centre Steven Adams got where he is today by studying hard at high school.

sity of Pittsburgh in 2012, before being drafted into the NBA by the Oklahoma City Thunder on a

multi-million dollar contract. He spent year 13 juggling homework with playing for the Welling-

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NCAA eligibility centre associate director Ashley Thornburg.

ton Saints in the National Basketball League, but missed a few games due to having too much schoolwork to do.

It's that sort of dedication to

education which was required to get into a top US university, Thornburg said.

"We would encourage student athletes to succeed in the classroom for their entire time at high school.

"It can be a lot easier to kind of take the brakes off in year 12 or 13 than try to make up for your deficiencies from early on in your time at high school."

One thing which had struck Thornburg during her time in New Zealand had been the unfamiliarity with the division system the NCAA uses.

They have three divisions they administer, with Division I, II and III. But a lot of New Zealanders did not know what this meant, she said.

"The divisions have nothing to do with the calibre of the school; we divide them up by the size of

the athletic department budget.

"Many of our division III schools are small, private, academically elite institutions. Division I schools are who you see on TV and they are the institutions whose culture really thrives around sport.

"Division I is most familiar to most students, but there are 460,000 student athletes across three divisions, so there is a tremendous amount of opportunity and we encourage students not to just focus on Division I."

Three per cent of the 11,000 international student athletes are Kiwis, with the roughly 330 students spread across a number of sports.

"We see a lot of women's rugby student athletes, swimmers, divers, golfers, a fair number of soccer and basketball players, water polo as well."



Queen Margaret College defender Orianne Macadre (left) fights for possession of the ball at the Federation Cup in North Harbour last week.

PHOTOS: CMGSPORT ACTION IMAGES

## Ali's words spur QMC on at Federation Cup

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Legendary boxer Muhammed Ali proved the inspiration for Queen Margaret College to punch well above their weight at the Federation Cup/Marie Fry Trophy hockey tournament.

The team came into the 32-team national secondary schools tournament at North Harbour as the lowest ranked team, but defied that assessment to qualify for the top-16 Federation Cup, eventually finishing 12th.

It was their first time in the competition, which they started well with a 2-0 win over Westlake Girls' High School.

They were locked at 1-1 in their second pool match against Auckland Diocesan, before a late goal saw them lose 2-1. But they won their final pool match against New Plymouth Girls' High School 3-1 to qualify for the top 16.

Their outstanding run ended when they lost 4-1 to Villa Maria College, but they can be consoled by the knowledge that the Christchurch school went on to win the title.

QMC coach Gail Donaldson said they used many of Ali's quotes and phrases as their motivator this year, which also saw them win the Wellington Premier 1 title.



Queen Margaret College goal keeper Claudia Adamson and Grace Bedell (black dress) make a save in front of goal at the Federation Cup.

"The theme was we were going to have a fight on our hands, we needed to step up and if we didn't believe in ourselves then who else does.

"One of Muhammed Ali's things was to believe you're the greatest, and if you're not, pretend.

"He's got some excellent phrases and one of the particular ones was champions are not built in gyms, it's about the belief you can win."

Donaldson said it had helped instil a winning culture not often seen in sports at the school.

"Some schools have a strong sporting pedigree, the players go

through the machine and say 'right, we're good, we believe, we're doing this, we've been champions and we've always been winners'.

"But to build that belief takes quite a lot more commitment from the girls and I think they learn more along the way."

Donaldson was impressed by the composure and ability the young team displayed during the tournament.

"I was so pleased with the team, we don't have a lot of hockey players at QMC, we've only really got two college teams. I only took away 14 players, it's a very long

week and the girls did exceptionally well."

The key to QMC's success had been keeping the team together over an extraordinary period of time, Donaldson said.

"Of the 14 I took away, I think nine of them I coached at primary school. It's a tight-knit bunch of girls that have come through, for some of them, over the course of eight years."

The result at Fed Cup was particularly encouraging considering the team will lose just one year 13 at the end of the year, albeit their captain Matisse Ululelata.

Perennial Wellington competition winners Wairarapa College and St Matthew's Collegiate School finished 14th and 22nd respectively at nationals.

Wellington Premier 1 runner up Samuel Marsden College will be joining the trio at the Federation Cup/Marie Fry tournament next year after winning the Jenny Hair Cup in Napier.

Two second half goals earned them a 2-0 win in the final against the King's College.

At the boys' Rankin Cup, Wairarapa College were seconds away from a national title, only to lose in heart-breaking circumstances.

Willis Taylor's second goal of the final against St Paul's Collegi-

ate had them up 3-2 with 2.51 left in the game. They held on until conceding a penalty corner with five seconds on the clock. With the final play of normal time, Reuben Andrews equalised for St Paul's.

The game went to golden goal extra time and Maks Wyndham-Smith delivered the winning strike in the last few seconds of 9 v 9 drop offs.

Wellington College finished sixth at this year's tournament, with St Pat's Silverstream 23rd and Scots College 27th.

Scots' placing means they are relegated from next year's Rankin Cup/India Shield tournament and will have to finish in the top two of a tier-three tournament to return to nationals.

That was exactly what Paraparaumu College did, winning the tier-three Johnson Cup in Dunedin. They beat Burnside High School in an extraordinary final, eventually prevailing 7-5.

Heretaunga College will also be in the Rankin Cup after remarkably coming second at the Founders Cup in Carterton.

The school came second in the Wellington Premier 2 competition this year, but made the final against Auckland's Rosmini College. They lost 10-0, but had already booked their spot at Rankin/India.

## St Mary's, SPT win AA basketball titles

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A look back at the winter tournament week for Wellington schools:

### Basketball

St Patrick's College, Town and St Mary's College won their respective zone three AA basketball tournaments at Arena Manawatu in Palmerston North.

Town, the Pohlen Cup champions, suffered an early setback when losing 83-70 to New Plymouth Boys' High School in pool play. They bounced back to score a 70-68 win over Palmerston North Boys' High School in the semifinals and setup a rematch with New Plymouth.

They were able to reverse the pool play result with an 84-73 win in the final and book their spot at nationals at the same venue in three weeks time.

Joining Town at nationals will be Hutt Valley High School and Scots College.

Scots finished fourth after losses to Palmerston North and New Plymouth in knockout play, while Hutt High were sixth.

Sharp Cup champions St Mary's produced an emphatic display in the girls' zone three competition, winning all their matches by double-digit margins, including a 72-61 win over New Plymouth Girls' High School in the final.

Hutt Valley High came third after losing to St Mary's 71-55 in the semifinal to book a spot at nationals, with Wellington Girls' the other team joining that pair there thanks to their sixth place finish.

### Rugby

The St Mary's first XV produced a great result at the top four nationals, beating defending champions Hamilton Girls' High School in the semifinals in Palmerston North last week.

The 22-17 win setup a final showdown with Southland Girls' High School on Sunday. The southerners capitalised on a strong first half performance to win the final 46-29.

Meanwhile, five Wellington players were selected to attend a New Zealand Secondary Schools boys' team camp. They were Xavia Numia (St Pat's Town), Naitoa Ah Kuoi (Wellington College), Billy Proctor (Town), Connor Garden-Bachop (Scots College) and Reece Plumtree (Wellington College).

### Netball

St Mary's also fell at the final hurdle of the Lower North Island Netball Championships.



St Patrick's College, Town, and St Mary's College celebrate their zone three AA basketball titles.

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