

College Sport

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SHOOTING STAR

McLean puts QMC on national stage

PHILLIP ROLLO

Grace McLean would have probably laughed in disbelief had you told her back in year nine that by the time she finished up at Queen Margaret College she would have not only gone to the New Zealand secondary schools netball championships but that she would have played her way into the tournament team too.

But that is exactly what happened last week.

"I thought they wouldn't look that far down the teams for the selection and I didn't think, because I did my own stats, that I had my best week of shooting. To finish my school year like that, I couldn't think of more," McLean said of the "shock" at being named among the tournament's top performers.

The 17-year-old student was the co-captain and starting goal shoot in the Queen Margaret team that contested the New Zealand secondary schools netball championships in Rotorua.

They finished 14th, which on the face of it is a solid but not spectacular result.

But considering it was the first time in the school's history that they had ever qualified for the event, just being there was an achievement in itself.

McLean, who was the star of the team, said competing on the national stage was the perfect way to end her time at the school, now looking ahead to studying architecture at Victoria University in 2018.

She recalled her first selection in the team, as a year nine student. It was in that year that qualifying for nationals was first spoken about as the school's long-term goal.

Under the guidance of Frances Solia, who is also coach of the Samoa national team, Queen Margaret finished fourth in the lower North Island tournament to book their place at nationals.

It was pouring with rain in their quarterfinal against Samuel Marsden Collegiate School, and they won the game by 30 goals.

"It had been the build up of like

"In year nine we never really thought that it would be a possibility to end our time with school netball by going to nationals."

Grace McLean

five years of hard work. In year nine we never really thought that it would be a possibility to end our time with school netball by going to nationals.

"It was pretty awesome for the team to do that for the first time in the history of our school. It was pretty cool watching how we moved up progressively through the years.

"If I was to tell myself in year nine that this would happen, I just wouldn't have believed it in all

honesty," she said.

McLean, who stands at 183m, is a multi-talented athlete. Tennis had long been her main passion, winning nationals titles and earlier dreaming of going to the United States on scholarship. She also represented her school in cross country, basketball, volleyball, and is involved in dragon boat racing too.

However, due to her ongoing success in netball, now in the frame for selection in the Central team for the upcoming Beko Netball League, the sport has become priority No 1 and rightly so.

"Last year the coach really pushed netball for me and I trialed for reps and that's when I realised that I loved all my other sports too much to fully dedicate myself to tennis," she said.

"I think the cross training helped netball in particular but I think I found out that I really value the team culture, especially with the older people who have achieved what you want to do in the near future that keeps me going."



Grace McLean was named in the tournament team at the secondary school championships.

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