

College Sport

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She's raising the bar

SOUMYA BHAMIDIPATI

When she isn't busy breaking New Zealand weightlifting records, Sacred Heart College student Piper Gwyn is inspiring other young girls.

Gwyn, 16 of Lower Hutt, recently returned from the Youth World Weightlifting Championships in Bangkok, where she placed 17th.

While in Bangkok, Gwyn also broke the current New Zealand record for the clean and jerk by lifting 87kg, while weighing in at only 67kg herself - 2kg less than the maximum weight for her category.

Gwyn sometimes found it more nerve-racking to compete at club competitions, she said.

"I had no expectations [at the world championships] because it's such an amazing feeling to even be there ... the adrenalin rush, it's definitely something else."

This adrenalin rush was what drove her to continue even when training was difficult.

Being a female weightlifter was sometimes challenging as most girls her age were aiming to be thin rather than muscular.

"For a long time, and I still do sometimes, struggle with [the idea of] girls with muscles," Gwyn said.

She was the only female weightlifter at her club when she



Piper Gwyn SOUMYA BHAMIDIPATI

began lifting two years ago at Upper Hutt Crossfit.

"We could just kind of see that I could lift quite well. I started doing it more and got better at it. I love the whole feeling I get when I achieve a goal or get a lift I've been working on."

She said there were many more girls involved in the sport now than when she started. She hoped other girls would be inspired by her success to pursue their own passions, regardless of their physical appearance.

"I like that being a young girl, being strong ... it's becoming more acceptable for girls to be more muscular and strong."

"If my body has to look like this to lift the weight it does then that's just something you have to sacrifice, but it's worth it," she said.

Gwyn hoped she would one day be able to represent New Zealand at the Commonwealth Games.

Talented St Mary's pair provide a guiding hand

DANE AMBLER

A pair of talented St Mary's year-12 netballers are courting success.

Wing-defence Renee Savai'inaea, 17, and centre Ainsleyana Puleiata, 17, were essential ingredients in St Mary's 21-14 win over Wellington East Girls' at the College Sport Wellington Paul Cameron Cup Premier Netball tournament last week.

Their St Mary's team has excelled in recent years and is the only secondary school team playing in the Wellington Premier 1 grade.

Coach Ngarama Milner-Olsen, a former Central Pulse player, said the girls brought guidance to the young St Mary's team.

"They add huge value to our team, especially in terms of leadership and the other girls all aspire to be in their position."

Both were in the New Zealand under-21 netball side which played in the International School Girls competition in Auckland last season and were part of the Central side in the Beko netball league, a stepping-stone to the ANZ Premiership.

Last year, they were selected as members of the 2016/2017 Pathway to Podium (P2P) squad, which is aimed at assisting them in pursuing a career in professional sport.

Puleiata went to Fiji with the New Zealand U21 team for the International Youth Netball Series in Suva in January and also made the New Zealand secondary schools' side.



Left: Renee Savai'inaea, left, and Ainsleyana Puleiata. Right: Savai'inaea looks for a pass at the CSW netball tournament.

Milner-Olsen said drive and natural ability was the reason for their success.

"I think they're hungry to learn, they are really coachable and they gel really well together. It comes down to them wanting to succeed and their hunger to learn."

Savai'inaea said her teammates and the coaching staff created a positive environment on and off the court.

"There's a team culture and all the girls gel from playing other

sports together. Our coaches have shown great sacrifice and having Nga as our coach for a second year really helped us," she said.

Puleiata agreed the team environment was important.

"I just like the team spirit. In netball you win by playing well as a team together, it's not about individuals."

The pair's sporting achievements don't end at netball. Both were members of the St Mary's sevens side which won the Sanix World Rugby Youth Tournament



PHOTOS: DANE AMBLER AND MASANORI UDAGAWA

in Japan in April.

Savai'inaea is juggling representative basketball, rugby and netball, but has not lost her enjoyment of the competitiveness and pressures she faces.

"Having fun is my main goal. I love the physicality of netball, meeting new people and using the skills from netball in other sports."

Both are hoping for New Zealand U21 re-selection, and to make the Pulse and the Silver Ferns.

The toughest task may be balancing multiple sports at a com-

petitive level.

St Mary's year-13 student Lyric Faleafaga had to make a sacrifice, leaving the St Mary's netball side to focus on rugby. She is now travelling with the New Zealand Black Ferns sevens side.

"They're so talented in both codes and hopefully the future will pick their path," Milner-Olsen said. "We've seen people playing at professional level cross-coding, so I don't think you can cancel out the possibility they could do well in both codes."

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