

“How do you see our organisation currently, and are we moving in the right direction?”

This is a big question and I do not feel qualified to give an all-encompassing answer, however, having been a member of the New Zealand Team since 2011 and having just coached our national team at the 2023 ITF World Championships in Finland, I feel I can answer this question through the lens of High Performance. I will detail how we compare to the rest of the world at the highest level of competition past and present, the challenges we face currently, and how to set us up for better success in the future.

Part One: New Zealand at the World Championships

New Zealand has a long history of participating in World Championships events dating back to the tournament in Malaysia in 1994. We quickly became one of the major players in terms of medal tally, finishing fifth overall at the Junior World Championships in Puerto Rico in 2002 and third overall at the Senior World Championships in Poland in 2003. In the ensuing 20 years, New Zealand had not placed outside of the top five.

Below are the New Zealand medal tallies and overall rankings from 2002 - 2019:

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Ranking
2019	6	6	10	3
2017	8	6	13	2
2015	14	8	13	1
2013	8	7	11	3
2011	20	12	10	1
2009	13	10	9	2
2007	7	9	9	3
2006	3	4	10	4
2005	2	2	4	4
2004	3	2	8	3
2003	3	1	3	3
2002	3	2	4	5

We saw this trend change in 2023, where we finished seventh overall for Juniors and twelfth overall for seniors. In terms of overall medal tally, we finished with three golds, two silvers, and five bronzes. The competition was run slightly differently this year, with the overall tallies being separated into Pre-Junior, Junior, and Senior categories, where previously, they had all been combined. With that in mind, our medal tallies looked like this:

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Ranking
Senior	1	2	1	12
Junior	2	0	4	7
Pre-Junior	-	-	-	-

NB: The Pre-Junior category (12-14 years old) was new for this World Championships and, while we had athletes competing, we did not win any medals and were therefore unranked.

This is significantly lower than where we had previously ranked. I have made some comparisons between New Zealand's medal tallies and how we compared to the top three countries for both Senior and Junior categories.

Seniors:

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Ranking	No. of competitors:
Norway	5	4	6	1	33
Ireland	5	4	2	2	20
Romania	3	3	2	3	22
New Zealand	1	2	1	12	16

Juniors:

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Ranking	No. of competitors:
Argentina	7	2	10	1	35
Ukraine	4	0	4	2	20
Romania	3	10	4	3	19
New Zealand	2	0	4	7	13

This shows that we had fewer athletes than the top ranked nations, however it is not simply a "numbers game". The standard of the athletes also plays a part. The following two tables demonstrate that the top ranking countries also had a higher medal percentage to the number of entries.

Seniors:

	No. of Entries	Total Medals Won	% of Medals Won to Entries
Norway	52	15	28.8%

Ireland	26	11	42.3%
Romania	37	8	21.6%
New Zealand	30	4	13.3%

Juniors:

	No. of Entries	Total Medals Won	% of Medals Won to Entries
Argentina	58	19	32.8%
Ukraine	40	8	20.0%
Romania	38	17	44.7%
New Zealand	21	6	28.6%

NB: I have used the number of entries for this data, rather than the number of athletes, as some athletes may be entered in multiple events.

Through these statistics, the biggest conclusion that we can draw is that New Zealand is no longer at the top of the international scene.

There were a few mitigating circumstances with the New Zealand Team this year that we must take into consideration:

International experience - Our team this year was very young and inexperienced at the highest level. Of our 35 athletes, 25 were first time members of the New Zealand Team. Additionally, one athlete had not been in the team in 20 years, and another was previously selected but was unable to compete due to injury, so competing at a World Championships for the first time. Of the 10 returning athletes, only five had medalled at previous World Championships.

Opportunity for international competition - Due to COVID-19, this year was the first year that we have been able to take a team away to an international event since the World Championships in Germany in 2019. Even local and national competition was disrupted during that time so it is understandable that our results would reflect that, to a certain extent. Other countries also experienced this disruption, however, due to New Zealand being so far away from Europe or the Americas, countries on those continents were able to get back to competing internationally much quicker.

Part Two: Our Challenges

If New Zealand is ever to return to the international success we have achieved in the past, we must address some of the key challenges:

Lack of high level competition - In New Zealand, we have a lack of competition, particularly for those who would like to compete at World Championships. Our current competition landscape looks like this:

- World Championships (every two years)
- World Cup (every two years)
- Oceanias (dormant since 2016)
- Nationals (annually)
- Star Series (three times per year)
- Regionals (annually)
- Local Tournaments (sporadic)

Outside of our Nationals, there is very limited opportunity for current and prospective New Zealand Team athletes to compete at the highest level. Star Series tournaments tend not to be well attended by black belts, and regional and local tournaments usually have geographic limitations. This effectively means that most athletes only get the opportunity to compete at a high level tournament once per year, which is not sufficient.

Lack of competition for New Zealand Team spots - At World Championships events, we are allowed to select two athletes per division. At this last team selection, we selected athletes across 43 divisions. Of those 43 divisions, there were only 11 where athletes were not selected due to competition for those spots. This is an extremely poor position to be in from both an athlete and coaching standpoint. It does not incentivise athletes to work hard for their spots, knowing they must prove themselves better than their competition. As a coach, I am forced to make selections based on whether a competitor is going to be safe competing at an international level, rather than which of these athletes is most likely to be a medalist.

Lack of a rolling High Performance programme - Currently, there is very minimal continuation from one World Championships campaign to another. For as long as I have been involved with the team, the campaigns tend to run as follows:

1. The World Championships conclude and the team disperses.
2. Some of the team along with some non-team members compete at World Cup the following year although this is not organised on a national level.
3. Shortly after World Cup, coaches and managers call for expressions of interest for those wishing to trial for the New Zealand Team.
4. New Zealand Team selections are held and a new team is chosen.
5. The New Zealand Team trains for the next 6-9 months.
6. World Championships are held.
7. Repeat.

This cycle does not suggest an environment where athletes can grow and improve across multiple campaigns nor does it encourage athletes to come back for following campaigns, outside of their own desires to compete at World Championships again. This cycle made our organisation especially vulnerable to the disruptions that COVID-19 caused. The only sense of continuation that this cycle offers is limited to the athletes who come back after recent

involvement in the team. Because of the four year break between 2019 and 2023, any sense of possible continuation was gone.

Part Three: Setting the Stage for Future Success

To help set the stage for future success on the international stage, I have two proposals; one to address the lack of high level competition in New Zealand, and one to address the absence of competition for New Zealand Team spots and opportunity for a rolling High Performance programme.

Proposal one: To have more competitions, with at least one national level competition per quarter.

This gives athletes more exposure to the competition environment and with quarterly national-level tournaments, encourages consistent training, as opposed to peaks and troughs of the current landscape. This does not mean that we need to have four nationals per year, in fact we can repurpose the current Star Series tournaments to cater for the higher level athletes as well as those who already enter these tournaments.

NB: To address the lack of high level competition issue, ideally we need more international tournament exposure however, due to our geographic location, this is extremely difficult. We can, however, make some adjustments to improve the competition scene in New Zealand.

Proposal two: To change our current High Performance Programme structure to better cater for talent development, encourage more competition, and lift our overall competition standard.

The way I see this working is to move to a three-tiered funnel structure. At the widest point is the club level, this can then feed into the Talent Development Squad, which would, in turn, feed into the New Zealand Team. I have outlined some more details about both the Talent Development Squad and New Zealand Team below:

Talent Development Squad

- Prospective athletes must apply and be selected for the Talent Development Squad.
- Athletes must have the permission and support of their club instructor.
- Talent Development Squad trains weekly in regional hubs.
- National trainings once per quarter during years where there are no World Championships.
- Blue belts and above.
- Feeds into NZ Team.
- Coaches can be rotational and a mixture of high level coaches and past or present NZ Team Members.
- Coaches can tap into the coach development tools and use these trainings as a development pathway to help improve their coaching skills.
- Purely competition focused.

- Can compete up to World Cup level.

New Zealand Team

- Athletes are selected by New Zealand Coaches from the Talent Development Squad.
- Competes at World Championships Level.
- Trains weekly in regional hubs with Talent Development Squad.
- National trainings once a month during years where there is a World Championships.
- Trainings are run by New Zealand Team Coaches.
- After each World Championships, athletes move from New Zealand Team members back to the Talent Development Squad.

The biggest challenge to implementing this type of structure is how to attract the right people - athletes, coaches, and managers.

To do this, we need to remove some of the barriers that we currently have. This can be done in the following ways:

- Hall hire and training expenses for regional hubs and national training camps must be paid for by ITKD. This could be partly funded by charging an annual fee to members of the Talent Development Squad.
- All coaches and managers must have their travel, accommodation, and food paid for by ITKD during camps and international travel.
- Funding for 2 coaches and 2 managers for World Cup.
- Coaches and managers should be paid for their time. This can be a flat rate agreed at the start of the campaign.
- Coaches and managers should be offered a personal development pathway to improve their skills.
- We need a visible marketing campaign to encourage people into the Talent Development Squad.
- We need full support across ITKD to help nurture this programme.

Once we implement these suggestions, then comes the question of how to fund this structure. I have run some basic calculations on how much this kind of structure would cost and how we could increase revenue.

Costs for training hall hire and national training camps for Talent Development Squad:

		Frequency	Cost p/a
Weekly Hall Hire	\$400 per session	Weekly (assume 45 x per year)	\$18,000
	<i>\$80 per hub per session - Assumes 5 hubs</i>		
Team Camps	\$3250 per camp	Quarterly	\$13,000
<i>Camp Hall Hire</i>	<i>\$800+GST per weekend (discounted rate)</i>		

<i>Camp Food</i>	<i>\$650 per camp</i>		
<i>Truck hire for equipment transport</i>	<i>\$300 per camp</i>		
<i>Coach Flights</i>	<i>\$1000 per camp</i>		
<i>Coach accommodation</i>	<i>\$400 per camp</i>		
<i>Camp Misc.</i>	<i>\$100 per camp</i>		
		Total p/a:	\$31,000

Possible increased revenue streams:

			Revenue:
Talent Development Membership	If we charge \$100 p/a	Target 60 athletes nationwide	\$6,000
	If we charge \$250 p/a	Target 60 athletes nationwide	\$15,000
Increased Membership Renewal	\$20 increase p/a	2800 members nationally	\$56,000
	\$30 increase p/a	2800 members nationally	\$84,000

To return to the original question, from a High Performance perspective, New Zealand is not the major player internationally that we once were, and we need to make changes to enable us to get back to that position. We need to address the challenges we have where we lack high level competition and competition for New Zealand Team spots, and the need for a rolling High Performance programme. If we adjust our competition landscape and develop a High Performance programme that develops talent and encourages long-term engagement, we will be in a much better position than we are currently.