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## "A Different Light"

### **A Different Light – 5<sup>th</sup> August 2023 – “Basking from the sidelines in the sporting glory of my whanau”**

We've all gone sports mad lately! The All Blacks, the Silver Ferns in the Netball world championships and, of course, the Football Ferns, as football fever has gripped Aotearoa with the Fifa World Cup being co-hosted right here in our own back yard. Women's sports seem to have superseded men's in the national consciousness.

Personally, I have no sporting skills whatsoever. The nearest I got was in Intermediate school. My friends at the time included me in Padder Tennis and Four Square by creatively inventing rules that would give me a fair chance. That was when inclusive sports for disabled people was in its infancy. To fill the sporting void in my life ever since I have been basking in my whanau's radiant glory of sporting prowess.

Recently my niece, Hannah Wilkinson has become a household name. We all collectively roared in adulation as she belted the soccer ball into the back of the net at the opening match of the Fifa Women's World Cup against Norway. Hannah's intensity was contagious throughout the game. Even at the start of the match when the players were lining up in the stadium waiting to come out onto the field, the other players were smiling and laughing. But Hannah's face wore the expression of ferocious focus and determination. I remember when she played soccer on the beach at Matapouri when she was only 7 years old, she had the same expression.

My father was a competitive athlete. His sport was swimming. He was in the Olympic training squad for England but England's policy of drafting young men into Army training thwarted that. Even so his swimming successes elevated his career in the English Civil Service where they had inter-government department sporting competitions. His sporting achievements helped him to

secure a job with the Colonial Service as a District Officer for Education in Fiji. Hence my brothers and I were all born in Suva. His swimming ability was passed onto my brothers. One year at Whangarei Boys High School, Simon was the senior champion and Tim was the junior champion in swimming. I never achieved the knack of swimming despite my father giving me swimming lessons for countless hours. I never seemed to get the coordination to gain sufficient momentum in the water.

Whangarei has got a good collection of disabled sporting heroes. There is Cameron Leslie who has achieved Paralympic medal winning fame for swimming. Wally Noble with his stint in Tahiti as part of NZ's elite para waka ama team in the International Waka Ama Championships gained a bronze. An emerging star in the disabled sporting world is Troy Robertson. Like me he has Cerebral Palsy. He is in the top forty Boccia players worldwide. Boccia is an adaptive form of bowls or pétanque. He is focussed on representing New Zealand at the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris. To qualify for Paralympics, he has to be in two international competitions and come in the top eight which he is busy fund raising for.

Back to my whanau where we have our own emerging sporty star, my granddaughter Isla who is excelling in her netball team and this week she is competing in the Ruakaka Primary School cross country run where I am sure she will do very well. I would like to skite that she got her sporting skills from my side of the family, but my son-in-law Sharif puts paid to that theory. He is a talented league player who can probably take credit for Isla's one handed goal shooting technique currently which is being flourished each Saturday in Kensington.

For me, I am content to continue to bask in the sporting glory of my whanau from the side-lines or the Lazyboy.

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