

Diving for the top

ANNA JENSEN - The Dominion Post | Wednesday, 05 December 2007

Steven Zhu has his sights set on young Wellington divers taking centre stage at the 2012 Olympics.

Yesterday marked the official launch of Wellington High Performance Aquatics at Wellington Regional Aquatic Centre in Kilbirnie, which aims to lift the standard of water-based athletes.

The initial focus is on the diving squad, with Zhu recruited to guide the current crop of youngsters to an international standard.

After coaching the national squads in China, New Zealand and Australia, Zhu described the Wellington setup as fantastic.

"We are focused on the next four years, on the 2012 Olympics and the 2010 Commonwealth Games," he said. "They are definitely good enough to get there. We are writing the programmes for each diver and we also increase their education so each diver can understand high performance."

The new regime has brought a lift in commitment from each diver. Alice Wylie-van Eerd said they were now training seven days a week, sometimes twice a day.

The 17-year-old, part of the six-member high-performance squad training under Zhu, said: "It's harder definitely but if you want it you have to really go for it and take all the opportunities."

Qualifying for next year's Fina world junior championships is Wylie-van Eerd's first goal, along with teammates Lexi Mills and Ollie Armstrong-Scott.

WHPA is also working with Ponoke rugby club and has set up dry land facilities to help perfect their art before they hit the water, which Zhu said was crucial to help the divers succeed.

In time, it is planned for WHPA to extend to other aquatic disciplines such as waterpolo, swimming, surf lifesaving and synchronised swimming.

Director Luvaine McDonald said the idea had been hatched during the Commonwealth Games last year and she believed it had the potential to create world champions from the region.

WHPA is also looking to bring international competition to Wellington and hopes to host the inaugural Pacific Rim Junior Championships in 2009.



CRAIG SIMCOX

FALLING STARS: High-performance coach Steven Zhu has great hopes for his young proteges, including Alice Wylie-van Eerd, who is about to hit the water.