

**McBeth: NZ diving in a rut**

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By John McBeth

Diving in this country receives very little publicity, mainly because nothing has happened in the sport for several years.

That is about to change with the launch of High Performance Aquatics in Wellington this week.

To say nothing newsworthy has occurred, in this very demanding but visually appealing sport, is not quite accurate.



In 2002, a young Wellington diver Kaitlyn White burst onto the international scene by winning the World Junior platform title.

It was a very impressive effort from the youngster, because Europeans, Americans and of course Chinese divers have dominated this sport, so for a Kiwi to capture this title was significant.

Sadly, Kaitlyn White retired prematurely at the age of sixteen. Why? Well the main reason was the departure of the elite coach Steven Zhu.

White had shifted to Auckland to train under the expert guidance of the outstanding mentor and responded superbly to his tuition. So too did some others.

But Zhu, having declined many overtures from Australia, finally accepted an offer from the Institute in Perth and, reluctantly, packed his bags and went.

He was extremely disappointed to leave New Zealand. In an interview prior to the Manchester Commonwealth Games in 2002, he informed me that his ambition was to live here and develop some of our young diving talent to the extent that they would win medals at the Melbourne Games four years later.

He left before he could achieve that ambition, White retired and we had no divers in Melbourne. The sport was at an all-time low.

It is pointless here delving into the reasons Zhu was forced to leave New Zealand, but there are, or should be a few very embarrassed people who had an involvement in the sport back then.

When Steve Zhu was lost to New Zealand's elite and developing divers, the heart seemed to be ripped out of the sport. Recovery seemed a long way off.

Anyway, at the Kilbirnie Aquatic Centre in Wellington Steve Zhu has reappeared thanks to a sponsorship deal from Wellington International Airport, Wellington City Council and the personal involvement of Lloyd Morrison.

When Morrison, who is the CEO of Infratil-the main shareholder in Wellington International Airport, was alerted to the problems facing diving, he asked what could be done to help.

The result is that Steve Zhu is back and already a bunch of young divers are training harder and improving faster than at any time since he left.

Thank goodness Steven Zhu's absence was only temporary. Now he can return to that ambition of his- to produce Commonwealth Games medallists soon.

Knowing what he is capable of however makes me think he would never settle for medals at that level. It will be just a small step in his overall plan.

Source: ONE Sport