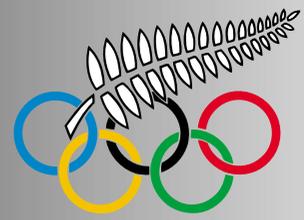


# PAMELA BELL



OLYMPIC MUSEUM  
New Zealand Olympic Committee



## SKIING AT RUAPEHU

"I started [skiing] when I was 6 years old. We faithfully went to Mount Ruapehu most weekends between when I was 6 and about 17. It was our family kind of

'thing' that we did all together. My brother and I were part of the Turoa Race Academy, so we were there every weekend and also during our school holidays. The mountain was probably more of a home than anywhere else to us.

There was one coach in particular that really treated us like human beings, his name was Guy Paulson. He took a group of young people through the Turoa Alpine Ski Club (Inc.) to Japan, and I was lucky to go twice, when I was 13 and 14.

We went to Nagano, and we were billeted by families. It was a great experience to go into another culture and to see what the level of sport was like over there.

That daily coaching and emphasis on technique, that foundation was laid when I was a young teenager. When I was 17 I started travelling to Canada on my own, skiing initially, but snowboarding within a little while of arriving. I started snowboarding for fun. I'd never been incredibly competitive at sport.

In my first snowboard competition I went down to Queenstown, the nationals were at Cardrona, and I was lucky – I won an event. I started just thinking about all the possibilities and found it quite hard to finish university that year. I left after my second year of architecture, going overseas, not really knowing what would happen but knowing that I had to snowboard full-time and find out what I could possibly do with it. From the competitions in Canada, and then coming back to New Zealand plus doing other nationals here, it grew into training with the Canadian snowboard national team in Whistler [British Columbia, Canada] on a regular basis."

## QUALIFYING FOR NAGANO

"The build up to the Olympics was 13 months of qualification points, which involved two seasons of World Cup competition. I was able to train, race, and travel with the Canadian national team until about 6 or 8 months out from the Olympics and then they said no, we'll just have Canadians, and they cut their team right back. I was suddenly left out in the cold without a coach, having to train on my own, travel on my own, and compete on my own on an international circuit. That was definitely the most difficult time of my life ever. I knew I just had to keep going, because I was just trying to qualify.

## SELECTION FOR THE NEW ZEALAND TEAM

When I was told that I hadn't made it, I felt personally disappointed because it had been my focus, but I didn't feel it was unfounded because I could see all these other people that had missed out. I remember one night thinking, I haven't called home for a long time. It was about midnight and I drove off to a phone box, [in the] pitch black and stood on the snow, I had to keep moving my feet because my sneakers would stick to the ground, and called my mum. She was frantic! "oh, I've been trying to find you for two days, oh, you've made the Olympics", I was just absolutely shocked. That was great, and she explained the mistake, that they'd just counted 12 months, not 13 months.

For me, to qualify was a personal win. That was my big, big battle, especially being the lone ranger doing the world cup tour. It gave me a whole lot of renewed energy, I unpacked my snowboard and I had a week to get ready. I was snowboarding really well, and I was just filled with this amazing feeling that I was worth it.

## XVIII OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES NAGANO, JAPAN, 1998

### In The Spirit of Friendship, Unity and Fair Play

Arriving at the Olympic village, meeting the New Zealand athletes, and for us to have team uniforms, it was kind of my dream come true. That was really great, and to me that was a huge part of the Olympic experience, to have those team mates and to be able to support them at their events. They were great people, and for as low as I'd felt that season, to talk to those people and to hear their personal struggles - that gave me renewed enthusiasm, just to keep going. The big thing for me was really making good friends with the New Zealand team, and just to make sure that things went as smoothly as they could for everyone.

I felt obviously very proud to be making sure that New Zealand was represented at the first time that snowboarding was at the Olympics.

The Opening Ceremony experience blew me away, walking around and having 50,000 people there, and to look up and see them clapping and cheering for you, that's the part that really felt very special.

### Be The Best You Can Be In The Olympic Spirit

When I got to the start of my Olympic event I wasn't nervous. I'd been through the whole event in my head so many times, that I didn't feel nervous, and that was a huge bonus, because it just carried on and felt like a normal World Cup event.

My riding was going well, and I was riding a lot better in the 13 gates that I did complete, than in probably any of the World Cups I'd had that season, and to hit a patch of ice in those conditions where you couldn't see anything, was unfortunate.

I felt a lot of pride even when I came out of the course in my event. When I got to the bottom of the snowboarding giant slalom course, there were several banners supporting me, saying, go Pamela, and that kind of thing. That was a great feeling, that made me just feel that you're really not alone. That was the biggest heartbreak too actually, the fact that you know that you've got a lot of support behind you.

That made it quite hard for me because that was the first time I'd come out of a course, fallen during a race, at an international level. So to come out at the Olympics was quite heartbreaking, especially because I knew it was possibly the only time that New Zealand was watching an international level snowboarder from their own country. I was experiencing kind of a mixed feeling of being happy inside because I knew I'd done the best turns that I could have done beforehand.

### The Olympic Games Brings People Together

I think in terms of cultural experiences it was more personal interactions that mattered more at the Games rather than large organised events. If you just went for a walk to get out of the Village or went for a run, there were all these people standing at their gates, right on the footpath, holding out little presents and wanting you to sign things.

### Being A Positive Role Model

I decided because I'd had to learn so many things on my own it would be a great shame if I just stopped and they were forgotten, because I'd come about them in quite a painful way. So I started the New Zealand Snowboard Academy.

We started with camps in the school holidays and weekend camps, the idea was to try and give a little insight into what an athlete was about. Each year I realise the kids have a much better attitude towards being coached and learning, and that's really fantastic to watch.

I think the overwhelming effect of going to an Olympics is that it gives a similar kind of mental boost as a degree or good marks at school. It just makes you feel a little bit stronger inside; it just makes you quietly feel that you're able to cope in most situations. The best thing about the Olympics is definitely that belief in yourself.

## MESSAGE TO YOUTH

Really dream a goal, really visualise it, really make it something that you think about. See yourself achieving it and achieving it quite clearly, and then hold on to that idea. Don't let anything make you lose sight of that image because there's lots of distractions and lots of people who don't see that image, don't believe in you, so you've got to really over compensate for that. Hold on to that image of yourself achieving your dream goal really tightly, and then just make it happen, which is the hard part."

Pamela Bell – Olympian

XVIII Olympic Winter Games, Nagano, Japan 7 –22 February 1998  
Snowboarding: Ladies' Giant Slalom, did not finish (1st run)



◀ Pamela Bell (right front) with her mother, Robyn Bell (rear), and brother James Bell (left front), at Whakapapa, Mt. Ruapehu, 1978.  
Photo: Private Collection



◀ Pamela Bell (aged 6) at the Turoa ski field, Mt. Ruapehu, 1978.  
Photo: Private Collection



▲ New Zealand athletes, XVIII Olympic Winter Games, Nagano, Japan, 1998  
Left to right: Pamela Bell (snowboarding), Peter Henry (bobsleigh), Kylie Gill (freestyle skiing) and Angela Paul (luge) before the Opening Ceremony of the XVIII Olympic Winter Games at Nagano, Japan, 7 February 1998.  
Photo: Olympic Museum, Wellington Collection



▲ XVIII Olympic Winter Games, Nagano, Japan, 1998  
Pamela Bell on a training run at the Olympic snowboarding (giant slalom) venue at Mt. Yakebitai, Shiga Kogen, Nagano, Japan, February 1998.  
Photo: Reuters



▲ Olly Brunton (second from left), Pamela Bell (third from left) and the Hata family of Nagano. (Pamela's host family from a Turoa Alpine Ski Club trip to Japan in 1985).  
Photo: Private Collection



◀ XVIII Olympic Winter Games, Nagano, Japan, 22 February 1998.  
Some of the New Zealand team at the Closing Ceremony. Left to right: Olly Brunton (snowboarding coach), Mike Hooper (team manager), Dr. Mark Taylor (team doctor), Kylie Gill (freestyle skiing), Richard Ussher (freestyle skiing), Alan Henderson (bobsleigh), Ross Dominikovich (bobsleigh coach).  
Photo: Private Collection