“I am Auckland born and bred. Recently I have been semi-living in the Waikato. I attended Diocesan School for Girls in Auckland. I played all sorts of sport when I was at school, I wasn’t a particularly studious character. I was the Sports Captain at school.

EARLY INSPIRATION

My granddad died before I started cycling. He competed in cycling at the 1936 Olympic Games, Sydney Australia. In 1938 he managed the New Zealand cycling team to the Games of the XVI Olympiad, Melbourne 1936. My dad held lots of records in New Zealand as a junior cyclist and competed for New Zealand just a couple of times as a senior. When he left school he started working in the building trade, then started cycling in his own time. I was 16 when I started cycling and I was inspired to start cycling by a friend of mine to take part in the sport. I listened on my other sports interests until I left school and then went hard with cycling.

All that time cycling was quite an unusual sport for women to be involved with. I just trained really hard and just the more I cycled the better I got, the better I got the more I liked it.

I was Sports Captain at school, I was a pretty useless Sports Captain. I hardly had any sports team, but I recall returning back home from the Junior World Track Championships – I had spent about 10 weeks away from school and on coming back there was a special presentation for me in the Assembly Hall.

EARLY ROLE MODELS

I went to the Junior World Track Championships, Delhi, India in 1994 (Gold Medal, Individual Pursuit and Points races) and as well, that same year, I went straight to the BC Cyrenseous Games, Victoria, Canada but that was just a huge step up from the junior level. I just remember seeing Anne Gnakey (swimming) walk into the track hall and people like Gary Anderson (cycling) who I’d completed projects on at school. Suddenly I was in the same lane as them, there was wind, it was so cool.

OLYMPIC IMPRESSIONS

It was definitely my dad who gave me the inspiration and motivation to believe in myself and that I could be selected to compete at the Games of the XXVI Olympiad, Atlanta 1996. I totally threw all my eggs into one basket and went overseas for four months before and put absolutely everything into one event and took part in the event. Suddenly I was in the same team as them, it was wicked, it was so cool.

There were no women administrators in the office of Cycling New Zealand, really very few women coaches, and just very few women participating, and as such, I don’t think there’s a bit of an old boys network in the current structure. Definitely!

I would like to try to help make a few changes once my competition days are over. As a result of our input a two-year ban was introduced by the IOC for first time offenders. The fact that it was organised for a start showed that the IOC do have a commitment to listening to athletes around the world. Athletics from all around the world were asked their opinion on the sanctions. I attended a forum regarding “Drug in Sport”. As aluminium we were asked whether or not a one-year ban was sufficient for those caught ‘doping’. As a result of our input a two-year ban was introduced by the IOC for first time offenders.

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PLAYING A LEADERSHIP ROLE THROUGH SPORT

In terms of the development of women in cycling in New Zealand, essentially there is none! That’s something I’d like to see changed. There’s not a clear pathway for a woman to get into the sport. Often a young woman comes into the sport and there is no direction for her as opposed to maybe the guys that have just a bit more of a defined pathway.

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THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

I represented the Oceania region at the inaugural International Olympic Committee (IOC) Athletes’ Forum in 2002 held in Lausanne, Switzerland.

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OLYMPIC GAMES PARTICIPATION

Games of the XXVI Olympiad, Atlanta 1996
Cycling – Track / Women’s 3000m Individual Pursuit, Placed 7th
Sarah was awarded an Olympic Diploma.

Games of the XXVII Olympiad, Sydney 2000
Cycling – Track / Women’s 500m Individual Pursuit, Placed 4th
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MESSAGE TO YOUTH

If you are a young woman playing sport and you choose to carry on with it, then give it a really good nudge; it can be a huge self-confidence booster for you. In terms of excelling, sport gives you extra self-confidence in yourself as a person and as a woman, which you might not ordinarily have had. Never think that you’re any different or think you’re behind the 8 ball just because you’re a girl.”

PRIDE IN THE SILVER FERN

In the Olympic Village most of the New Zealand team would gather in a common hub as to watch دوردوزه (boxing) on television. He was the first New Zealander to competes, and the New Zealand team didn’t really know each other at that time. Everyone was watching him on the live TV screen and the Olympic pool was just 50 metres from where the New Zealanders were situated. When he won the whole New Zealand team just exploded, total strangers, but we were all at just totally elated. Then we went outside and listened to the New Zealand National Anthem being played – God Defend New Zealand. Because the pool was so close, we could hear the announcer and the National Anthem – that was just awesome. It was such a cool way to kick-off the campaign.

GAMES OF THE XXVI OLYMPIAD, ATLANTA 1996

The Games of the XXVI Olympiad were totally different. Atlanta was huge, I remember the security in Atlanta was just phenomenal and in Sydney the security was tight, but it didn’t have the same sort of regimented approach that America took and Sydney was just fantastic. They were the friendly Games, absolutely. It was a cool event to be part of, absolutely awesome.

LEADERSHIP THROUGH SPORT

The longer that you’re in a sport the more you become aware of the things that are common concerns. The longer that I am in my sport the more I’ve encouraged to try and change some things or at least try and let people know that you can effect change through. You learn so much as you progress, and that’s the stuff that you want to try to give back to the youth coming into the sport.

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