

Press Release
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Youngsters embrace athletics

Interest in athletics has soared amongst Southland youngsters following the introduction of a development officer, boding well for the future of the code.

Athletics Southland sports manager Lance Smith said the appointment of former sprint ace Lorne Singer to the role a few months ago was already having an impact.

“He has contributed significantly to the rise in interest and membership of primary school-aged children,” he said.

“The more we get involved at this age, the more members we’re going to have in a few years’ time when they are starting to aim for national titles.”

Singer, a former teacher, launched a pilot programme in Central Southland during term three and was now working with Northern and Eastern Southland schools during term four.

“The Winton club has almost been inundated with children ... normally they have 30-40 junior members but 128 turned up at their open day recently and they’re still fielding plenty of inquiries every week,” he said.

“It’s been going really well and the feedback from the children, parents and the community in general has been excellent.

“There is a huge amount of talent out there and it’s just untapped – most children don’t know how good they are or how good they can be so we have to give them the chance to discover that.”

Athletics provided an excellent base for future sporting endeavours.

“Its fundamental skills that will apply to almost every other sport so it’s vital to get a good grounding and ingrain those basics early,” Singer said.

Smith agreed: “Any children that can be taught to run faster, jump higher or be more agile, it’s certainly going to benefit them in other codes like netball or rugby,” he said.

The Invercargill Licensing Trust and the ILT Foundation recently approved funding of \$15,000 and \$63,000 respectively for Athletics Southland which would also benefit the organisation’s development squad members at the elite level.

“The squad is an integral part of our performance programme that enables Southland athletes to compete on an even keel with athletes from around the country,” Smith said.

Four members of the squad – Greer Alsop, Charlotte Muschamp, Todd Swanson and Rebecca Gibson – returned from the Oceania Championships in Cairns last month clutching medals.

“Southland athletes made up 10 percent of the New Zealand team so it would be great to keep providing that proportion of representation in the future – or even larger,” Smith said.

“Obviously one of our main objectives is to get more athletes into New Zealand teams.”

The athletics season officially started last week and Southland athletes were preparing for national fixtures at all levels, including the New Zealand Secondary School Championships in Hastings in December.

“That is the biggest athletics event on the calendar.”

ILT Foundation and Invercargill Licensing Trust chairman Alan Dennis said Southland had a proud history of competing in the athletics arena.

“It’s fantastic our budding stars are embracing the opportunities available at a young age and I’m sure their involvement will play an integral role in their future sporting aspirations,” he said.

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