

Roy Williams tells his tale

Roy Williams is the only New Zealander to win a Commonwealth Games gold medal in the demanding decathlon. His triumph came in the steamy heat of Kingston, Jamaica, in 1966. He retells the story of his win and his life story in *Sports Crazy – a Lifetime in Kiwi Sport*.

Williams relates how his own successful career was inspired by his sister Yvette, the first New Zealand woman to win an Olympic gold medal in any sport. Yvette had a phenomenal sporting career. In addition to winning the 1952 Olympic long jump gold medal in Helsinki, she won four Commonwealth Games gold medals - two in the long jump and one each in the shot and discus. She was voted New Zealand Sportsman of the Year (now the Supreme Halberg Award) in 1950 and 1952, is an Honoured Member of the New Zealand Sports Hall of Fame and, at the Halberg Awards in 2000, was named the outstanding New Zealand sportsperson of the decade (1950 to 1959). That same year, Yvette was also named Otago Sportsperson of the 20th Century.

“I was 18 when Yvette won the Olympic long jump gold medal in 1952,” Williams says in his book. “I played rugby and cricket for most of my school life and had only just started training seriously for athletics. I was a late developer without an overabundance of natural sporting talent. At age 19, I competed in my first decathlon and finished second. And there were only two of us in it! I scored a miserable 3908 points – pathetic – a 15-year-old could have done better.

“So the following year I tried the 440yd hurdles, and just made the Otago team for the New Zealand championships in Hamilton. I finished a distant last. I was just coming over the final hurdle, 45 yards back when the winner crossed the finishing line.

“By now I was having serious doubts if I would ever make it as an athlete and thought about going back to rugby and cricket. But I decided to stick to athletics. Yvette was headline news at the time and I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life known only as Yvette’s little brother. That’s what drove me to train as hard as I did.”

Williams trained on average three hours a day, six days a week, 50 weeks a year for 14 years, an estimated 12,000 hours, before winning his decathlon gold medal in Jamaica in 1966. He held the Commonwealth decathlon record for 10 years, from 1960 to 1970, the New Zealand record for 27 years and won a record 11 New Zealand decathlon titles.

The careers of both brother and sister are covered in detail in Williams’ autobiography.

After retiring from international athletics in 1970, Roy began coaching a group of young athletes in Auckland. For the next 30 years he devoted his life to passing on his knowledge and expertise to teenage athletes from the Waitakere City (formerly Waitemata) Athletic Club. The athletes he developed won 28 New Zealand titles, broke 17 New Zealand records and represented New Zealand at world championships and Commonwealth Games.

Williams says that coaching his young athletes gave him more enjoyment, satisfaction and pride than anything he accomplished during his 15 year international career.

Williams worked as a sports journalist for the *Auckland Star* for 25 years and covered four Olympic Games, five Commonwealth Games and All Black tours to England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, France, Italy and Australia plus the 1987 World Cup.

In 2002, Williams was made a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to sport and the community. In 2007 he was named Waitakere City's Coach of the Year (all sports) and honoured with a Waitakere City Lifetime Coaching Award.

In a foreword, Williams' long time friend and fellow Commonwealth Games gold medallist Les Mills writes: "This book is a great read, a must for all sports fans. Roy's journey takes us through sport's strictly amateur times to the fully fledged professional era and details the part he played in the development of sport in New Zealand. The pages tell of bitter disappointments and joy, of struggle and failure, and of his remarkable achievements. He fought for many years, not only for himself but on behalf of others. This book will form part of our sporting folklore – of a lifestyle that has largely disappeared and an era that will never be replicated."

- *Sports Crazy – a Lifetime in Kiwi Sport* is on sale at all major bookstores.