



## Will to Win

### *New Zealand netball greats on team culture and leadership*

LANA MCCARTHY WITH ANDY MARTIN AND GEOFF WATSON



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#### **NETBALL LEGENDS SPEAK ON RECORD ABOUT OUR MOST POPULAR WOMEN'S SPORT**

The Silver Ferns have often had a bad rap in the court of media opinion, with significant losses to the Australians and surprise defeats at international tournaments over the decades. At other times, they are world beaters at the top of their game. What does it take to make the magic work?

Canvassing legendary captains and coaches across the decades — from Lois Muir and Leigh Gibbs to Bernice Mene, Ruth Aitken and Casey Kopua — the authors of *Will to Win* evaluate the significance of team culture and leadership in New Zealand netball. The book also looks at the history of the game and includes comments from Farah Palmer on women in sport and leadership.

This is the first time the perspectives of those at the heart of netball have been the subject of serious analysis. Offering rare insights and revelations, *Will to Win* goes behind the scenes to evaluate the psychology of a women's high-performance team — from the early days of the sport, where training schedules, travel, gear and nutrition were ad hoc at best, through to today's highly-competitive, semi-professional environment, where sports science helps to drive the game.

Fostering the will to win in what has become an elite level sport for women, those interviewed for the book speak candidly about their experiences — career highs and lows, the impact of the Ferns' intense rivalry with Australia; personal and professional challenges; hard work and desire to win; struggle for recognition; complexities of combining motherhood with competition netball.

We hear how players and coaches coped with increasingly high-stakes international competitions, heart-breaking losses, vagaries of social media, struggles for sponsorship and media recognition. Throughout, those selected to wear the 'black dress' with the silver fern had to strive and adapt, while maintaining their core focus on teamwork, and the values of respect, pride and hard work.

*Will to Win* takes a long overdue deep-dive into the psyche of New Zealand's most popular team sport. Imparting wisdom about the significance of developing team culture and leadership in sport, business and life, it is also a practical guide that will inspire generations to come.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr Lana McCarthy** is a lecturer in teacher education at Charles Sturt University, Australia. She completed her doctoral thesis, 'Coaches, Captains and Constructing Culture: A Case Study of the Silver Ferns', at Massey University, Palmerston North, in 2019. She was formerly an assistant lecturer in the School of Sport, Exercise and Nutrition at Massey University.

**Dr Andy Martin** is a professor in the School of Sport, Exercise and Nutrition at Massey University, Palmerston North. He is the lead author of *Outdoor & Experiential Learning* (2004). He is also co-author of *Legends in Black* with Geoff Watson and Tom Johnson (2014). He holds professional coaching qualifications in football and tennis, and has been actively involved in coaching at both junior and senior level.

**Dr Geoff Watson** is a senior lecturer in the School of Humanities at Massey University, Palmerston North, where he teaches history. He is the principal author of *Seasons of Honour: A Centennial History of New Zealand Hockey 1902–2002* (2002) and *Sporting Foundations of New Zealand Indians: A Fifty-year History of the New Zealand Indian Sports Association* (2012). He co-authored *Sport and the New Zealanders: A history* (2018).

THE AUTHORS ARE AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW / BOOK EXTRACTS & IMAGES ARE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



### INTRODUCTION

#### Rivalry, resilience and redemption

The Silver Ferns are New Zealand's national netball team. The team name originates from the silver underside of the leaves on the tree fern *Cyathea dealbata*, an iconic symbol for many New Zealand sports teams. Historically, the Silver Ferns have been one of the top two national netball teams in the world. They have qualified to compete at every World Netball Championships (initially known as the World Tournament, now World Cup) since its inauguration in 1965, and at every Commonwealth Games since the inclusion of netball in 1998. They have won the World Championships five times (eight, 1976, 1981, 2002 and 2010) and won the World Games title in 1985 and 1989. They also won gold medals at the Commonwealth Games in 2006 and 2010.

However, the overall history of the fierce rivalry between the Australian Diamonds and the Silver Ferns has long favoured the Australians. At the end of the 2019 season, the Australians had won 96 of the 103 international matches between the two nations, with New Zealand winning 50 and two games being drawn (See Table 1). Many of Australia's wins in title duels against New Zealand have also been heartbreakingly close. On four occasions (1964, 1976, 1989 and 2010) Australia beat New Zealand by one goal. In 1969 the Silver Ferns were the in-form team going into the World Cup, and during the 'trial' match in Christchurch they took a six-goal lead heading into the final quarter. The Diamonds fought back, and with 22 seconds left on the clock the scores were tied. Donna Wilkins (née Luffhagen) had a shot to use for the Ferns and missed. Liz Ellis regained it, the ball flew down the court in typical Australian style, and Shanelle McMahon sank the pressure shot to win the cup for the Diamonds. For the Ferns, with victory snatched away in the final seconds against their

