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New Zealand Olympic Ambassador **Brooke Neal**

Olympian number:
1325

Discipline:
Hockey

Position:
Defender

Brooke was born in Whangarei in 1992. It was on the grass at Kensington Park in Whangarei that 3 year-old Brooke first picked up a hockey stick. Hockey was in the Neal family, older brother Shay played, Brooke's father coached many of her teams, and Brooke's mother was either manager or parent help at tournaments Brooke played in.

Brooke made her first representative team aged 10. She attended Whangarei Girls' High School and was part of a team containing future Black Sticks Charlotte and Samantha Harrison, Alana Millington, and Jasmine McQuinn. This team won the Federation Cup, the top secondary school competition in New Zealand.

In 2012 Brooke travelled to India to play for the New Zealand Under 21 team in a four nations tournament where they came 2nd to Germany. 2013 was to be a big year in Brooke's career however. In July she played for the Under 21s in the Junior World Cup held in Germany, and then later that year in October 2013 Brooke made her senior Black Sticks debut against Australia.

Quick facts

- Favourite food:** Wood fire pizza
- Favourite movie:** Richie McCaw's new movie Chasing Great
- Favourite music:** Anything from Ben Howard, Beyonce and Elton John
- Childhood hero:** My brother
- Current favourite athlete:** Roger Federer
- Most rewarding moment in sport:** Representing NZ at the Rio 2016 Olympics
- Talents other than hockey:** Dance, and doing really long hand stands!
- Biggest injury:** Teeth knocked out by a hockey ball, and Tendonopathy in my knee
- Biggest sacrifice:** No sacrifices, I choose to do it because I love it!
- Job outside sport:** Account Executive at a marketing agency
- Other fun facts:** My brother also came to the Rio Olympics, he plays for the Blacksticks mens team



Since her debut Brooke has become one of New Zealand's most effective defenders, and played her 96th game for New Zealand during the 2016 Rio Olympics. Brooke is a tall, skilful, and difficult player for opposition attackers to have to deal with, especially as some of Brooke's strengths are her agility and speed, as well as her long reach. Brooke also offers a good scoring option from penalty corners.

While her hockey career was flourishing, Brooke also knew that it was important to get academic qualifications. She was awarded the Waikato University Sir Edmund Hilary Scholarship, which sent her off to Hamilton in 2011 to study for a Bachelor of Communications degree. Since graduating Brooke has worked for a marketing company.

Although Brooke has become a critical part of the Black Sticks defensive line it hasn't all been plain sailing as she has been battling a knee injury since 2013. Recovery has been a crucial part in managing her career through this injury. The guideline that Brooke gives is that for every hour of training she completes, she does at least 30 minutes of stretching, foam rolling or trigger point massage. Brooke says her injury has made her look seriously at her priorities, and has helped her develop a very strong resilience and discipline.

An important figure throughout Brooke's hockey career has been her brother Shay, who was also in Rio as part of the New Zealand Mens' Hockey team. Brooke credits Shay with having a massive impact on her career. She says she's always looked to him for advice, and they always share information on the best ways to do things in their sport, and in everyday life as well. On a lighter note, Brooke reckons the reason she became a defender was because when they were little, Shay would dress her up in goalie gear and a helmet and whack tennis balls at her!

At the 2016 Rio Olympics the Womens' Black Sticks held high hopes for their first ever medal after beating arch-rivals Australia in the quarterfinals 4-2. Unfortunately they were beaten by a fired-up Great Britain in the semis and eventually finished 4th. Brooke says the Rio Games were life changing. She found it so inspiring to be amongst the world's best athletes and made her want to work even harder to bring home a medal from the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. It was also so awesome making so many friends amongst the whole New Zealand team.

Brooke was made an Olympic Ambassador after the 2016 Rio Olympics.



**New Zealand
Olympic Education**

Career highlights

- 2016 Rio Olympics - Fourth
- 2016 Australia series - Gold
- 2015 National Hockey League- MVP
- 2015 World League Finals - Silver
- 2013 New Zealand debut
- 2013 Junior World Cup

Links

Brooke Neal's website:
www.shayandbrooke.co.nz

Brooke Neal's Instagram:
[@brookeneal1](https://www.instagram.com/brookeneal1)

Brooke Neal's Facebook:
facebook.com/shayandbrooke

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