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New Zealand Olympic Ambassador

Sarah Ulmer

Olympian number:

743

Discipline:

Cycling – Track

Specialist event:

3000m individual pursuit (track)

Sarah Ulmer was born in Auckland in 1976. Sarah has always been a keen and talented athlete. She played all kinds of sport at school, including volleyball, squash, soccer, swimming, tennis, hockey and athletics, and in year 13 she was the school sports captain. When she was 16, a friend convinced her to try out for the school cycling team. She had used her bike for transport her whole life and competitive cycling was in her blood. Her father Gary held national titles in both road and track cycling, and her grandfather represented New Zealand in track cycling at the 1938 British Empire (Commonwealth) Games in Sydney. Sarah's grandfather died before she started cycling competitively, but her dad inspired and motivated her to believe in herself and in her ability.

Sarah continued the family tradition, qualifying for the 1993 World Youth Championships in Perth when she was in year 13. In 1994, she won two junior world titles in cycling events. The same year, at age 18, Sarah competed in her first Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada. She won a Silver Medal for the 3000m individual pursuit and was named New Zealand Sportswoman of the Year at the Halberg Awards.

Quick facts

Favourite food: Steak or lasagne

Favourite movie: Love French comedy movies with subtitles. Good way to learn French too...

Favourite music: Anything I can sing to! Which rules out rap, hip-hop and dance, and rules in all the old-fashioned stuff.

Childhood hero: Dame Susan Devoy

Current favourite athlete: Ryan Nelsen

Most rewarding moment in sport: Winning the 2004 Athens Olympic Games Gold Medal in the Individual Pursuit.

Talents other than sport: Not much! Learning French (though not particularly talented!)

Biggest injury: Hip joint injury

Biggest sacrifice: No sacrifices – everything's a choice!

Job outside sport: Small business owner, Mum.



**New Zealand
Olympic Education**

In 1996 she competed at her first Olympic Games, in Atlanta. Her time in the Individual Pursuit would have won her a Silver Medal in previous Games. However there was tough competition that year and Sarah was outperformed by a number of athletes, finishing in seventh place. She stepped up her game for the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur, winning her first Gold Medal.

At the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, Sarah came agonisingly close to a Bronze Medal, despite having had abdominal surgery just before the Games. She didn't tell anyone about the surgery until after she had competed, because she didn't want to make any excuses for her performance.

She recovered fully in time to win Gold at the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester. Her achievements in and contribution to cycling were recognised that year when she won the Lonsdale Cup, which is awarded to the New Zealand athlete or team who made the most outstanding contribution to Olympic or Commonwealth sport during the previous year.

2004 was a significant year for Sarah and for cycling in New Zealand – she won Gold at the Athens Olympic Games. She became the first New Zealander to win an Olympic Games Gold Medal in a cycling event, and she also set a new world record time. At the Halberg Awards that year, Sarah won the Supreme Award and her second New Zealand Sportswoman of the Year award. In 2005, she was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to cycling.

After these considerable achievements, Sarah retired from track racing. However, it wasn't long before she was back on her bike. A few months after she had retired, Sarah decided to try competitive road cycling. She won the Wellington round of the UCI Road World Cup series before competing at the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games, coming 17th. She had suffered from a recurring back injury before the event, but again refused to make excuses for her performance.

Sarah officially retired from competitive cycling in 2007, but continues to work as a mentor to other cyclists. She is now an ambassador for the New Zealand Cycle Trail project and a New Zealand Olympic Ambassador. She continues to cycle, although now mostly with her children, Lily and Emily.



Career highlights

- 2006** UCI Women's Road World Cup: Wellington (First)
- 2004** Athens Olympic Games: Individual pursuit (Gold)
- 2002** Manchester Commonwealth Games: Individual pursuit (Gold)
- 2000** Sydney Olympic Games: Individual pursuit (Fourth), Points race (Eighth)
- 1998** Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games: Individual pursuit (Gold)
- 1996** Atlanta Olympic Games: Individual pursuit (Seventh)
- 1994** Victoria Commonwealth Games: Individual pursuit (Silver)
- 1994** Junior world titles in individual pursuit and points race

Honours

- 2005** Inducted as a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) for services to cycling
- 2004** Supreme Award Winner, Halberg Awards
- 2004** New Zealand Sportswoman of the Year, Halberg Awards
- 2002** Winner of the Lonsdale Cup
- 1994** New Zealand Sportswoman of the Year, Halberg Awards

Links

Sarah Ulmer's Olympic Museum profile:
<http://imuseum.olympic.org.nz/museum/athlete/profile/20>

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Official Olympic Sport

Cycling

Men's cycling has been part of the Olympic Games since the first modern Games in 1896. The events have changed over the years, but there has always been some cycling. Women's road racing was introduced in 1984 and women's track cycling in 1988. The London 2012 Olympic Games were the first time men and women contested the same events in all cycling disciplines.

Important points

The different cycling events test different combinations of ability: strength, speed, endurance and tactical thinking.

Aerodynamics: Cyclists try to reduce the amount of drag they feel from the air, as this helps them move faster. They make themselves more aerodynamic by wearing specially designed light-weight racing suits and helmets, maintaining very little body fat, and often shaving their legs. Professional bicycles are often built of extremely light materials.

Position: When you ride closely behind another cyclist, you can ride in their slipstream and reduce the amount of pressure you feel from the air. This is called drafting. It means you don't have to pedal as hard, so you can save energy. In team events, team members often take turns at the front, giving the other members a chance to rest. In individual events, a common tactic is to try to force the other rider to ride ahead of you, so you can save energy for the final sprint.



The basics

There are four cycling disciplines in the Olympic Games:

- **BMX** (see separate summary).
- **Mountain biking** made its Olympic debut in 1996. The track runs over rough and hilly countryside. All riders start together and the first to complete a set number of laps of the track is the winner.
- **Road cycling** takes place outside, often on public roads. In the road racing event, all the riders start at the same time. The first rider to cross the line wins. The time trial event is about having the fastest time over a course. Riders start 90 seconds apart. In team events, each team has no more than five riders.
- **Track cycling** is contested on a velodrome. Velodrome tracks are a similar shape to running tracks, but the sides of velodrome tracks are sloped up from the centre. The slope is steep on the corners and less steep on the straights. Velodrome tracks are usually made of wood. There are several different types of team and individual track races. The aim of most of the races is to cross the finish line first or with the fastest time. The omnium event is the exception, as it includes several different races, with points being awarded for each race. The rider with the fewest points after all the races wins.

Olympic events

Men

- BMX racing
- Mountain bike cross country
- Road: Individual time trial (about 44km)
- Road: Road race (about 250km)
- Track: Sprint
- Track: Keirin
- Track: Omnium
- Track: Team Sprint
- Track: Team Pursuit

Women

- BMX racing
- Mountain bike cross country
- Road: Individual time trial (about 29km)
- Road: Road race (about 140km)
- Track: Sprint
- Track: Keirin
- Track: Omnium
- Track: Team Sprint
- Track: Team Pursuit

