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New Zealand Olympic Ambassador

Sarah Cowley

Olympian number:
1134

Discipline:
Athletics

Specialist event:
High jump, Heptathlon

Sarah Cowley was born in 1984 in Rotorua. Born into an active family, Sarah and her brothers spent their childhood playing lots of sports – their parents encouraged them to try everything.

As a teenager, Sarah’s talent and passion for sports, especially netball, continued to grow. She was selected for the Bay of Plenty under-17 netball team. She also fell in love with athletics at high school, after one of her teachers invited her along to a training session. She remembers being embarrassed at her first secondary school competition because she didn’t clear any of the high jump bar heights. This did not put her off; in fact it convinced her to train harder. Her training and determination paid off – at her final secondary schools athletic championships, she won the high jump, long jump, and 100m hurdles. Her team also won the 4x100m relay. Sarah also achieved promising results at international competitions, with her teams coming ninth in the 4x100m relay at the Santiago World Junior Championships in 2000, and fifth in the medley race at the Debrecen World Youth Championships in 2001.

Career highlights

- 2012** London Olympic Games: Heptathlon (Twenty-fifth)

- 2011** Shenzhen World Universiade: Heptathlon (Eighteenth)

- 2009** Belgrade World Universiade: Heptathlon, long jump

- 2007** Bangkok World Universiade: Heptathlon, long jump

- 2006** Melbourne Commonwealth Games: Heptathlon (Tenth)

- 2005** Izmir World Universiade: Long jump (Twelfth)

- 2001** Debrecen World Youth Championships: Medley relay (Fifth)

- 2000** Santiago World Junior Championships: 4x100m relay (Ninth)



**New Zealand
Olympic Education**

A talented all-rounder, Sarah was inspired to become a heptathlete after sharing a room with one at the 2005 World Universiade (World University Games) in Izmir, Turkey. Sarah was there to compete in the long jump. The heptathlon is the ultimate test for a track and field athlete and Sarah thought it looked like a fun challenge. Less than one year later, she made her senior international debut, coming twelfth in the heptathlon at the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games. She also represented New Zealand in heptathlon at the 2007, 2009 and 2011 World Universiades.

When she was at school, Sarah had watched the Barcelona 1992 Olympic Games. She was amazed at the speed, power and strength of the track and field athletes and dreamed of being at the Olympic Games. Twenty years later, Sarah's dream came true, when she competed in the heptathlon at the London 2012 Olympic Games. Sarah finished 25th at the Games, a promising result for a first-time Olympic heptathlete.

Following the London Games, Sarah decided to change her focus. After seven years competing in the heptathlon, she found various aches and pains in her body were making it hard to commit to the intense training required. While she had enjoyed the variety of the heptathlon, Sarah was keen to focus on one of her original passions, high jump.

I am really excited about specialising and being able to be passionately obsessed at another level about raising the bar and jumping over it!

(Sarah Cowley, 29 December 2012,
http://www.sarahcowley.com/2012_12_01_archive.html)

Sarah also appreciates the lighter kit-bag that comes with focusing on just one discipline – as a heptathlete, Sarah had to carry twelve pairs of shoes! Now, all she needs is one or two pairs of spikes.

However, training for one event wasn't quite enough for Sarah, who is always looking for new challenges. In 2012, she decided to give netball another go alongside high jump, even though she hadn't played a serious game in twelve years! She wasn't as rusty as she thought – she made the extended squad for the Northern Mystics in the Trans-Tasman Netball Championships.

Quick facts

Favourite food:

Salmon, feijoas and pineapple (not all together!)

Favourite movie: *Forrest Gump*

Favourite music: Six60, Fat Freddy's Drop and Hollie Smith

Childhood hero: Bernice Mene and Larry Bird

Current favourite athlete:

Carolina Klüft (2004 Olympic Heptathlon Champion)

Most rewarding moment in sport: Qualifying for the 2012 Olympic Games and lining up on the start lines

Talents other than sport:

I love baking for family and friends

Biggest injury:

Bilateral stress fractures in both of my feet

Biggest sacrifice: I believe it's about choices to put your ultimate mission first as opposed to sacrifices, but missing out on some important family occasions is difficult at times.

Job outside sport: I train full time as a high jumper but have a few roles with my sponsors. I am doing some part-time study and have a role as a sports presenter with Sky TV.

Other fun facts: I love tea (herbal tea fiend!)... when my doctor told me he wanted me to drink at least six cups of green tea a day for my tendon health I was stoked.



However, Sarah withdrew from the Mystics squad because she was overcommitted. With her heart set on winning Gold at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, all of her energy is going into jumping high.

Sarah is one of New Zealand's most successful track and field athletes. With a personal best (PB) of 1.91m, she is New Zealand's second best high jumper of all time. She is also one of New Zealand's top two heptathletes, with a PB of 6135 points (the Olympic standard is 6050).

Sarah is a qualified physiotherapist but currently spends her days as a full-time athlete, dividing her time between Auckland, Switzerland, Belgium and the Czech Republic. She is also studying extramurally towards a Bachelor of Communications at Massey University. When she's not busy training, competing and studying, Sarah likes to spend time with her family and friends, preferably in the outdoors. She also loves reading and a good cup of tea.

In 2013, Sarah was named a New Zealand Olympic Ambassador by the New Zealand Olympic Committee.

Links

Sarah Cowley's Olympic Museum profile:
<http://imuseum.olympic.org.nz/museum/athlete/profile/28068>

Sarah Cowley's website:
<http://www.sarahcowley.com>

Follow the NZ Olympic Team here:



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Official Olympic Sport

High Jump (Athletics)

High jump is an athletics discipline in which athletes jump over a horizontal bar. High jump has been a men's Olympic event since the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. Women were allowed to start competing in athletics events, including high jump, at the 1928 Amsterdam games.

The basics

In high jump, the competitors run and jump over a 4m-long horizontal bar then land on a soft foam bed. The height of the bar is increased throughout the competition. At each height, the athletes try to jump over, or clear, the bar without knocking it to the ground.

Each competitor gets three attempts to clear the bar at each height, but they are allowed to 'pass' (move on to the next height) without clearing the one they are on. If they fail to clear the bar three times in a row, they are eliminated.

The winner is the athlete who clears the bar at the greatest height. If competitors are tied for first place, the winner is the one with the fewest failed attempts at the final height. If they are still tied, the winner is the one with the fewest failed attempts throughout the competition. If it is still not settled, a jump-off decides a winner.

Important points

- High jumpers must take off from one foot only.
- Throughout history, athletes have used a range of high jump methods: the scissors technique, the Eastern Cut-Off, Western Roll, the straddle technique and the Fosbury Flop.
- The most popular method is the Fosbury Flop, which involves jumping head first and twisting in the air to go over the bar face up, with your back to the bar, and flopping down on the landing bed. This method was introduced in 1968 by Olympic champion Dick Fosbury, after foam landing beds replaced the sand pits that had previously been used for landing.

The course

High jump takes place inside the main Olympic stadium, in the field area set up for jumping.

Olympic events

- Men's high jump
- Women's high jump



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