

Silky Skills Alive In Margharet Matenga

by Michael Romanos

The drab and stuffy New Zealand Railways fourth floor accounts section in Wellington needed a miracle to brighten it up. And miracles do not come any brighter than Margharet Matenga (nee Kamana) — perhaps New Zealand's finest ever goal shoot/goal attack netballer, certainly the world's best over the last several years.

Radiating an air of gaiety and always willing to produce a beaming smile, Margie's presence made the NZR office feel and look a lot more acceptable as I settled into a discussion with Matenga on her brilliant netball career which began in the little village of Tupapa in Rarotonga.

A Cook Island Maori, Margharet (a celtic derivative of Margaret) was born 29 years ago and arrived in New Zealand as a 17 year old in 1973. The 5ft 9in, athletically-built and graceful moving netball superstar left Rarotonga initially to further a budding tennis career in NZ.

She arrived in Auckland but arrangements flopped. Still she decided to stay on with some family ties here. She shifted to Wellington in 1974 in time for the netball season and that year she made the Pacific Island Church (PIC) Club's senior second team and the Wellington under 20 representatives. Netball had taken over as the major sport for the former Rarotonga Island netball rep.

Margie's rise in netball was meteoric. She first played for the Wellington senior reps in 1974 and from 1978 she has been a member of every New Zealand senior rep side.

Her daughter, Luciana was born in July 1982 but Margie only missed domestic netball, turning out for New Zealand in November, 1982 for the tour to Britain.

"I'm better off at goal shoot than goal attack although I feel guilty that the other players are busting their guts to get the ball to me and the position's restrictions means I can't move around to help them out," said Matenga. "But I'm more needed as a goal shoot because of my abilities to jump and shoot well from within the goal circle."

Margie has been described by various experts as a "brilliant goal shooter. Remarkably cool under pressure. Incredible balance. Having real star qualities with silky skills. Lightning quick reflexes. A great player. A deadly accurate eye. Having sticky fingers. Able to confuse the opposition. Always ready with a quick smile." Margie did smile at hearing all these plaudits.

"Where did you pick those up from?" she wanted to know. But she finally admitted she felt those kind of comments

Balancing the ball on her fingertips, Margharet shoots for goal.

