

Maori excel not just in team sports

By Michael Romanos

With an estimated 380,000 players, tennis is by far the biggest participant sport in New Zealand. Next in order comes outdoor cricket with 281,000 active players and golf with 260,000 exponents.

Ian Wells, the executive president of the New Zealand Lawn Tennis Association said tennis is a mixture of competitive sport and pure recreation and it can be played at anytime, by anyone, with an absolute minimum number.

"Therefore I'm not surprised tennis comes out as the number one participant sport in New Zealand," said Wells. And is tennis receiving the recognition it deserves?

"On the competitive side, I think it does reasonably well, but the media as a whole gives tennis only adequate coverage — not nearly as much as we would wish," Wells said.

"Tennis will continue to increase its adherents because of its social benefits but with such a big base already established, it can't be expected to grow, particularly at a registered player level, like some emerging sports are doing."

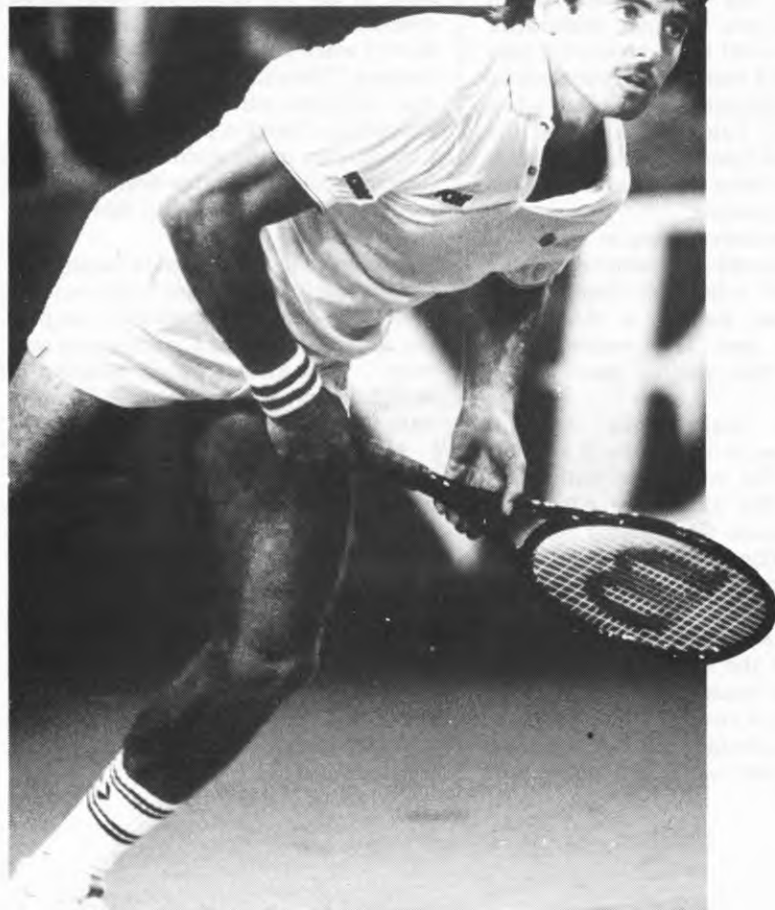
Wells believes there is a considerable interest among Maori and Polynesian circles to playing tennis.

"There is evidence now that Maori and Polynesian players are coming through to the top levels. This is so particularly in the junior women's grade — players such as Claudine Toleafoa, Danielle and Edith Tatana and others. On a ratio basis, our top junior women are almost one for one Maori or Pacific Island.

"In the past we have had a great Maori player in Ruia Morrison who ranks as one of our very best players of either sex."

The current national men's singles champion and number one Davis Cup player, Kelly Evernden has some Maori parentage and Kelly was involved at an organisational level with the national Maori tennis championships this season which produced a large turn-out of players.

NZ tennis champion and Davis Cup player, Kelly Evernden typically intensive and alert on the court.



Tennis is the largest sport in New Zealand but at the same time it is difficult to produce world quality players simply because of the depth of standard throughout the world.

Many people will be surprised by the sport participant statistics which were published recently in the "Sport On The Move" report. The stats represent the most comprehensive and up-to-date figures available.

Who would have thought there are over 235,000 roller skaters or rugby union, our so called national sport/religion, is so far down the list with 188,000 players, or bowls holds only 15th position with 120,000 players.

Roller skaters who occupy fourth position, have probably city and borough councils to thank. Roller skating is one sport here which seems adequately catered for in regard to facilities.

Rugby holds only seventh posy, 19,000 participants behind outdoor soccer, its traditional winter team sport rival. But one must take into account that these figures don't necessarily reflect the overall interest of rugby in this country.

There is still a massive, if dwindling, volume of spectator and armchair support for rugby and not the least from people involved in other sports.

While table number one has been compiled by market research, hard-core support for rugby surfaces in the table of registered membership of national sporting associations. This shows rugby with 200,000 registered members. The next sports on the registered list, bowls, is 66,000 behind rugby and rugby is 86,000 ahead of golf and netball. Tennis has only 61,500 registered members and cricket 78,000.

Another surprising fact to emerge is that netball which holds ninth spot with 170,000 participants, is not the most popular participant women's sport — tennis has 182,000.

Apart from netball (which is only recently starting to organise men's grades), females exceed males in participants in roller skating by 53,000, horse riding by 31,000, softball by 7000 and badminton by 4000 while in basketball the proportion of male and female is evenly divided.

The smallest able-bodied organised sport which has a registered national body is fencing. At 351 registered members fencing is the lowest of all listed registered sports in New Zealand. Next comes rodeo with 487, weightlifting with 537, life saving with 700, axeman with 860 and archery with 915.

It is interesting to note that New Zea-