

With her easy-going attitude, her versatility and her quick-thinking, Fatialofa is a natural. A coach's dream.

Last year when the New Zealand netball team toured Britain, Fatialofa was one of the star players. Against Northern Ireland which New Zealand won 62-10, she succeeded with 22 of her 30 shots at goal as a goal attack and delighted the crowd with her snappy intercepts.

Fatialofa and Margharet Matenga (see Tu Tangata issue Feb-March 1986) were the key to Wellington retaining the New Zealand provincial netball title last season.

Twice during the champs, Fatialofa turned around games in which Wellington were struggling. During the champs she played wing attack, goal attack and goal shoot. Against Canterbury, Fatialofa netted 26 goals from 32 attempts as she and Matenga ravaged their strong opposition with powerful and relentless team-work.

Bam Bam has also played for New Zealand at centre. In fact she captained the New Zealand under 21 team in 1984 from this position. Her adaptability is unquestioned. New Zealand netball coach, Lois Muir says Rita is very relaxed.

"She'll play anywhere and never let you down," said Muir.

Wellington netball coach Dale O'Neill said Fatialofa's shooting talent makes a big difference to Wellington.

"People sometimes forget what a great shooter Rita is. Having Rita and Marghie Matenga gives us a really strong pair of shooters and that is one of our biggest assets," said O'Neill.

As a goal attack – perhaps her most valued position – Fatialofa is an uncompromising player, equally reliable under the circle, a strong rebounder and a speedy reader of play.

Fatialofa started playing softball and netball seriously at Westley Intermediate which were the two dominant sports at that Auckland school.

"I learnt most of my basic skills there – we had organised separate male and female games every lunch hour."

Fatialofa also played soccer, tennis, athletics, volleyball and basketball at senior school level, representing Lynfield College in Auckland at all of them. But softball and netball were her main sports.

"I'm a person who takes things as they come. For example last October I wasn't playing softball because I felt I needed a break from sport after three netball tours in 1985. But then I got back the itch to play softball because I had missed the season before. So I returned to the Broadway team and was fortunate enough to go up the levels again from there. It's not easy to get back into the New Zealand team with lack of playing top level softball. But I was lucky to be playing well. It must have been my natural ability at work."

Fatialofa played in the 1982 world series in Taiwan where New Zealand won its first unshared world softball title, male or female.

"It was disappointing losing the world title this year especially in getting beaten by such a large margin by China, but those are the breaks of the game. We still came third and there's no shame in that.

"I have had lots of personal disappointments in sport. I've made all the teams, but from game to game especially

at club and provincial levels, there are always matches one would like to win.

"My two biggest highlights were winning the world softball series in 1982 and beating the world champs netball team, Australia in 1985 during the world games in England. Making both the New Zealand netball and softball teams in 1982 was certainly a thrill.

"I'd like to keep on playing both sports at international level until I stop performing. I know that any marriage plans wouldn't upset my sporting ambitions."



Bam Bam just tagged out going for second base in New Zealand's 1986 world series softball match against Italy.

– Pix Dominion and New Zealand Times.