

High jumper Te Puni, at the Crossroads

By Michael Romanos

Has athlete Roger Te Puni stagnated, reached his peak or will he achieve greater heights and goals in the future?

The 22-year-old Te Puni has been New Zealand's top high jumper since he was 18, winning five national senior titles from 1982 to 1986. He has a New Zealand record clearance of 2.18 metres (7ft 2in) which he achieved last June at the Pacific Conference Games in California.

Te Puni first cleared 2 metres (6ft 7in) way back in 1980 and he arched over the bar at 2.14 metres early in 1983 to become only the second Kiwi and first as a junior to break the seven foot barrier. But while he improved 14cm in three years, he has only managed to add another 4cm to his best competition jump over the last three years.

The 6ft 4in Wellington-born and Tawa College educated Te Puni admitted he has been in a lull over the past few years but he's adamant he hasn't reached his peak yet and he's sure

went to Australia and won the Aussie national junior title, jumping 2.15m and came second on the count-back for the Australian senior title.

"So I was riding high," he says. "During the winter of 1983 I had my first real good build-up under my coach Mike Beable. My weights, bounding and speed were great and consequently I started the 1983-84 season in great shape.

"In the first jump of the season I cleared 2.16m at the new Waitemata Indoor Centre and then travelled to Taiwan in a New Zealand team of four

Olympics."

In November 1983 at Auckland's Mt Smart Stadium, Te Puni cleared a national record 2.17m to supercede his arch rival, Terry Lomax of Christchurch.

Chasing a decent surface and competition, Te Puni shifted to Christchurch to train and compete at the QE2 Park. Things then started to sour. Though Te Puni cleared ten 7ft competition jumps in Christchurch, without his mentor and coach Beable for motivation and advice, Te Puni wasn't able to click.

"It was a good move for facilities and competition but a bad move in that I was lacking a person of Mike's ability to support me. It was make or break and I broke because I didn't qualify for the Olympics."

Te Puni shifted back to Wellington for the 1984-85 season but further set-



better things are still to come where he can realise the potential he showed in particular back in 1983.

In explaining and analysing his career to date, Te Puni told me that after he had cleared 2.14m at Newtown Stadium (on that shocking surface that was the Newtown track at the time) he

athletes and beat two American Olympians Ben Fields and Milton Goode. I came third in pouring rain and cleared 2.15m.

"Things were looking good for me. I had immediate visions of clearing 2.22m which was the NZ qualifying standard for the 1984 Los Angeles

backs persisted. Beable had retired from coaching, leaving a host of top quality and young Wellington athletes to squander their potential. The Newtown Park track was still substandard.

Te Puni said the Newtown Park bitumen track and high jump apron was an absolute disaster.