

Pooling Talent in the Tauranga family

by Michael Romanos

TAURANGA-IKA is loosely translated by some as "drying out the fish". But even though they swim like fish, there's nothing dry about the Tauranga-Ika family of Hamilton.

Though they have long since dropped the "Ika" from their name it hasn't stopped this six-strong family, in particular 16 year old Marama and 15 year old Whakaronga from reaching the top bracket in pool swimming competition in New Zealand with international Games competition only a touch away.

The talent that is Marama, Whakaronga (Rongo for short), and 12 year old Arthur Tai with one foreseeing five year old David Piripi soon launching his career, filters through from their father, Whanawhana Totorewa Tairawhiti or Rana for short.

The Parihaka (Taranaki)-born Rana came to Hamilton to serve out his apprenticeship as a motor mechanic. He was a competitive swimmer at the Oponake High School, holding school swimming records in all the strokes.

Rana said it seems certain the interest he had in swimming encouraged his children with their natural ability taking over where initial encouragement has left off.

Marama is in her seventh form year (1987) at Hamilton Girls High School. She was the trailblazer at national

level, being the oldest. Marama started swimming competitively at seven and over the last nine years she has won national age-grade titles in the medley and backstroke.

"Hopefully I haven't reached anywhere near my potential," Marama confided to me.

"Last year was tough for me academically, so I devoted more time to schoolwork. Eventually I want to go to University and study physiology."

Marama has accumulated 15 medals from age-grade national championship. Her best performance was when she was 13 when she won two national gold medals and swam the 100 metres freestyle in 1m 0.23s.

Marama said both she and her coach Dick Treloar aren't sure what stroke she is going to specialise with in the future, but she would love to be in the New Zealand team for the 1990 Commonwealth Games at Auckland.

"That's when I should be at my best if I follow the accepted pattern. I peaked at 13 and I should therefore peak again five years on."

Rongo is a 1987 fifth former at Ham-

ilton Girls High. She travelled to Tasmania last October with a New Zealand development squad for eight days of training and competition. She said that trip was the biggest achievement she has had so far.

"I represented New Zealand at the Australian Open Champs and I was pretty proud about it," said Rongo.

"I was quite pleased with myself. It was a whole different experience for me. The races were held one after the other and I was a little overawed in its presentation. I was the only female butterfly swimmer among the 15 Kiwis and it made me nervous being out there on my own."

Despite this, Rongo completed her best 50 metre butterfly, clocking 30 seconds flat. Coach Treloar is seriously looking to Rongo to compete at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul.

Currently she is the 100m and 200m national under 15 butterfly champion. She has collected 12 national championship medals to date. The tallest in the family at 5ft 8in which her father considers is an advantage in that she has a longer stroke and greater length of drive.

With personal best performances of 1m6.3s for the 100m butterfly and 2m 24.5s for 200m fly, Rongo said the butterfly is not hard to perfect technically.

"It's more demanding physically than the other strokes – but I like it. It's got a lot of rhythm to it."

Rana said his children have all got good swimming technique.

"They've picked it up from a variety of coaches," he said. "But they have got a natural aptitude for sport. I think they could apply themselves to any sport and excell. But I'm happy they decided to concentrate on swimming."

Mrs Tauranga (Margaret) stepped into the conversation saying that any sport is great.

"It teaches people discipline," she said. "It keeps them occupied and away from trouble. I also think parents need to get behind their children more and support them in their sport and in other activities. I'm sure a lot of our children's success has been due to our support."

Twice daily, Rana accompanies his swimming children to the Centennial Pool for training and that means getting up at 4.30am five days a week.

Arthur started competitive swimming at five which was only a year after he had learnt to swim. Perhaps his early



A winning smile, no matter the opposition. Marama after winning the 100 m butterfly event at the 1986 Hamilton Girls High School swimming champs.