

Wednesday, 25 October 2023

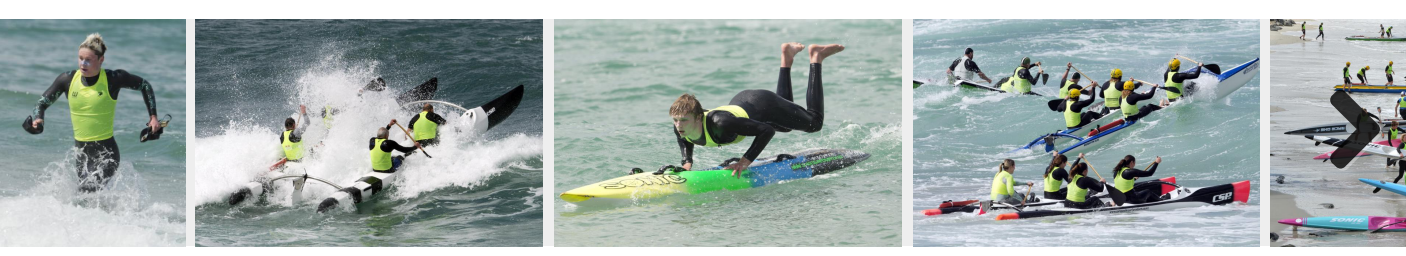
White Island Race competitor proves age no barrier

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Canterbury > Sport



Competitive open-water swimmer Ruby Heath sprints through the surf to be the first swimmer home. PHOTOS: GERARD O'BRIEN



Proving age is just a number, a 71-year-old competed in Dunedin's White Island Race for the 50th time on Saturday.

Graeme Newton said the 5km race from St Clair Beach, around White Island and back was simply a part of his yearly calendar.

"I do it just because I can.

"I like keeping fit and I just keep paddling, so it's part of the routine."

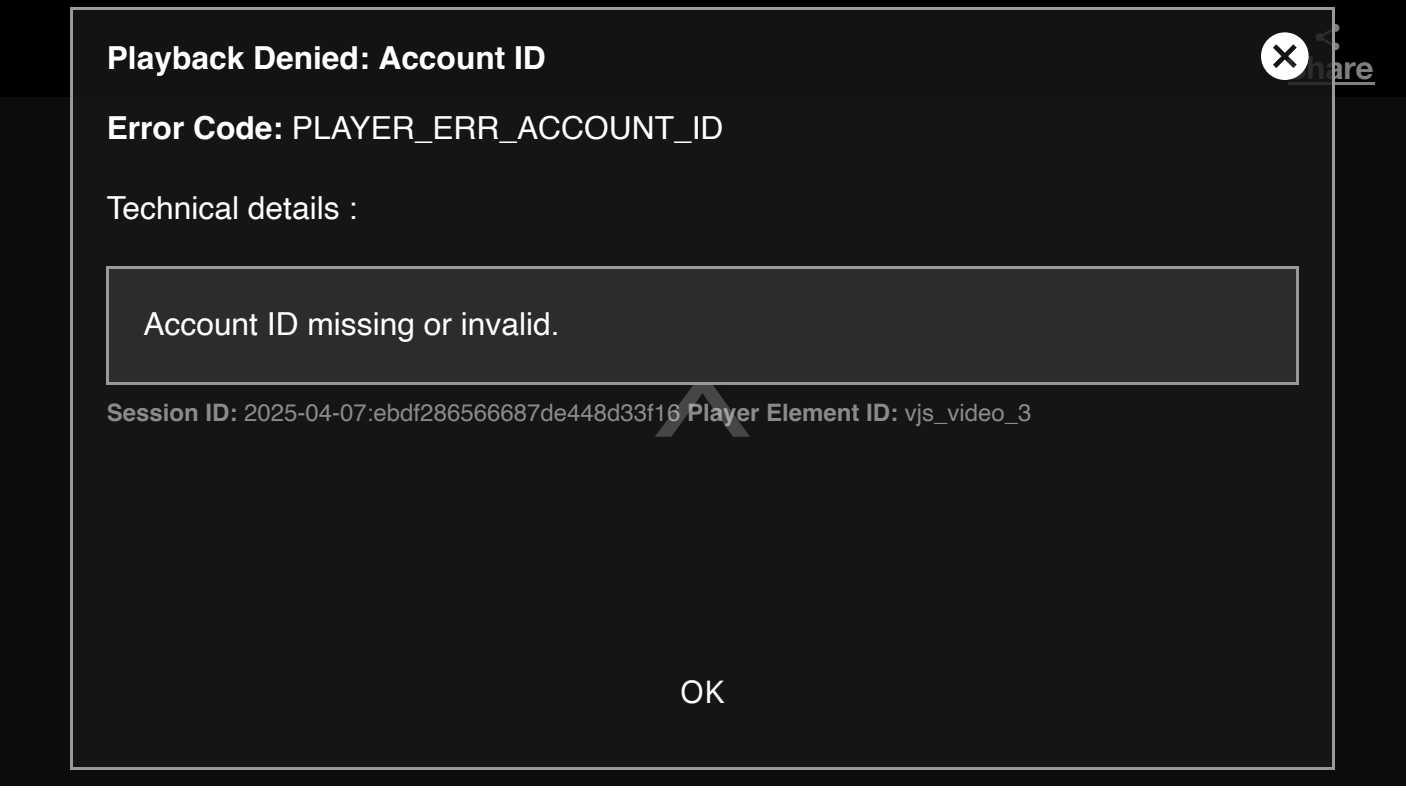
The race had three categories, swimming, boards, and boats, which included single, double ski and canoe.

Mr Newton and his team, The Salty Dogs, which included three other members, Brent Wolf, 63, Toni Iaseto, 57, and Murray Haig, 66, competed in a twin-hull canoe.

Mr Newton said the race was still much the same as it was 50 years ago and "it doesn't seem to get any harder".

Local knowledge and good paddle techniques were the secret to doing well in the race, he said.

"It's choppy out the back and it's a 5km battle return, so it's not all beer and skittles," Mr Newton said.



Competitive open-water swimmer Ruby Heath got to know the conditions pretty well when she won the swimming race.

"It's cold and pretty rough. Like going out it seemed like it just took forever.

"But then coming back in, it was all right because you kind of knew what to expect and then obviously catching the waves made it a lot easier coming in than going out."

Ms Heath had woken up at 4.15am that day to go to swimming training for two hours at 5am, watched the All Blacks win the Rugby World Cup semifinal and then competed in the race.

She said winning the race was pretty special and it did not get any better for her than competing in it.

"New Zealand's pretty special for its surf and its surf culture — so to be a part of it, it's pretty special."

The first competitor home on a surf ski was Claudia Kelly in a time of 29min 39 sec.

Jake Owen was first on a paddling board, recording a time of 40min 12 sec.

The Warrington canoe won the title, beating last year's winner, Waimairi.

By Mark John

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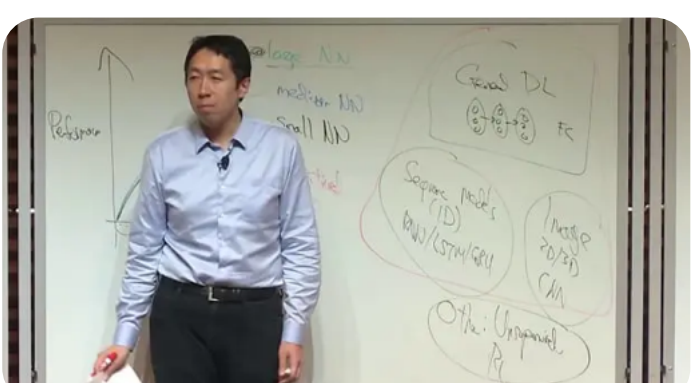
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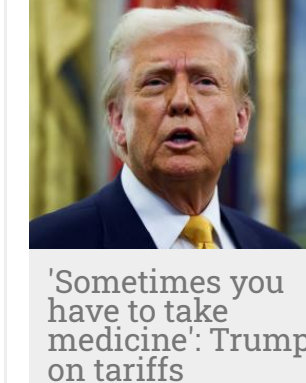
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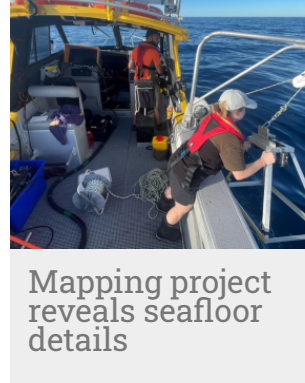
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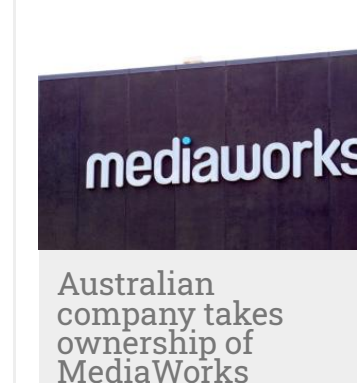
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