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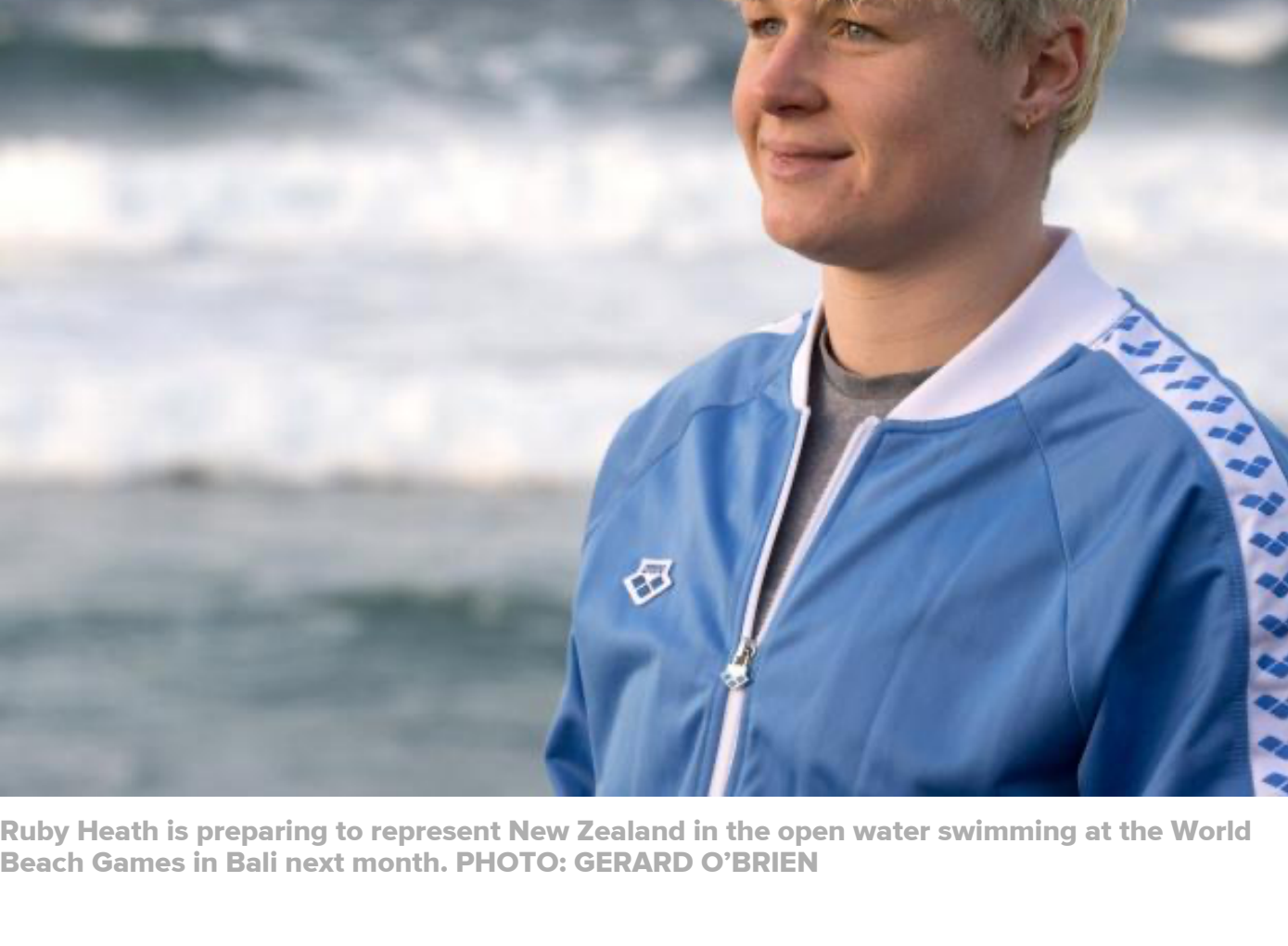
Friday, 30 June 2023

Life on the ocean waves suits 'water baby' Heath

By Kayla Hodge

1760

Sport > Swimming



Ruby Heath is preparing to represent New Zealand in the open water swimming at the World Beach Games in Bali next month. PHOTO: GERARD O'BRIEN

Ruby Heath has always been a "water baby". After starting swimming lessons when she was just 5 months old, Heath has been "addicted" to the pool and the water ever since.

But when the first lockdown struck in 2020, and all the swimming pools back home in Wellington shut, the competitive swimmer turned to the open water to get her fix.

"That's where I truly felt I could succeed and see myself building a swimming career in the open water discipline of swimming," Heath said.

"Basically, after that lockdown was when I decided that I would specialise more in the open water discipline and focus on targeting that 10km at the nationals that following year."

Heath moved to Dunedin in 2021 to train under coach Lars Humer and the strong group of swimmers starting to make waves nationally.

"I could see that's where I needed to be in order for me to make the next step in my swimming career."

"I've been down here ever since and I've loved it just as much as I did on the first day."

The double Aquablack has since won two national open water titles, and was runner-up this year, competed in Queensland, New South Wales and Australian nationals, and was the sole New Zealand open water swimmer at the World Championships last year.

She was also named Swimming New Zealand open water swimmer of the year this season — and the accolades keep on coming.

The 23-year-old has been selected for 5km open water swim at the World Beach Games in Bali in August.

"It's really exciting and an honour to be able to represent my country again doing something that I love to do," she said.

"I've never been to Bali before, so that will be an exciting journey and experience there, and I've never attended the Beach Games before, so being a part of the event will also be an experience as well."

Traditionally, Heath specialised in the 10km and while the international 5km event — about an hour of non-stop swimming — was on the shorter side of her repertoire, it did not deter her from the high standards she set herself.

"I approach every race as I'm there to win. I'm not there to be the fastest loser, I guess you could say."

"So that's my mindset for Bali, to kind of go out there and really give it a crack and see what I can do."

"But then also enjoying and taking in the experience of being in a different country, being a part of a different event with different athletes that I've never met before, and just being involved with all the different support personnel that will be there."

There was another support person alongside her that meant more than most — her father, Mike.

"Having my Dad there as part of my support team is amazing and a dream come true as he, and my family, are my biggest support."

"To be able to share this experience with him is something I'll cherish for a long time."

Heath completed all her training at Moana Pool with 10 sessions a week, swimming up to 9km at some, as well as two gym sessions per week.

And while she still competed nationally and internationally in the pool, the open water called to her.

"It's just like a completely different sense of feeling."

"I just love the challenge that is [poses] every time you go out to race, because you can't control the environments and the conditions, you really have to trust your processes and your training."

"It's definitely one of the harder disciplines of swimming as a whole, but I just love the challenge that it sets me and the challenge that it sets me in training of having to be fit enough to last two hours worth of high intensity racing, because we're not allowed to really stop during a race or touch the bottom or we don't have a wall to do a tumble turn off or anything like that."

"We're solely swimming for the whole time. It's the challenge that excites me every time when I race and train for it."

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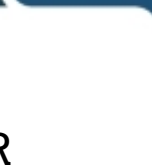
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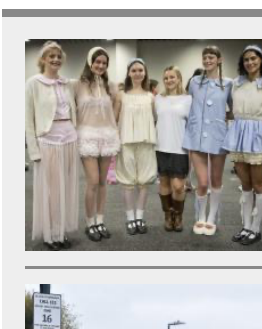
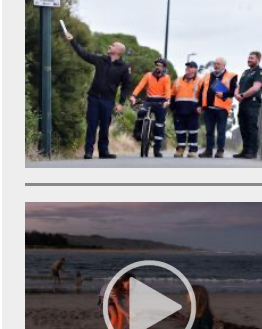
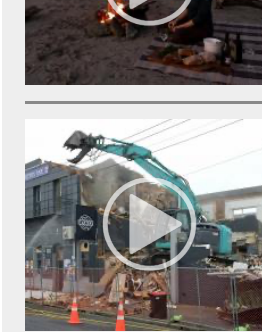

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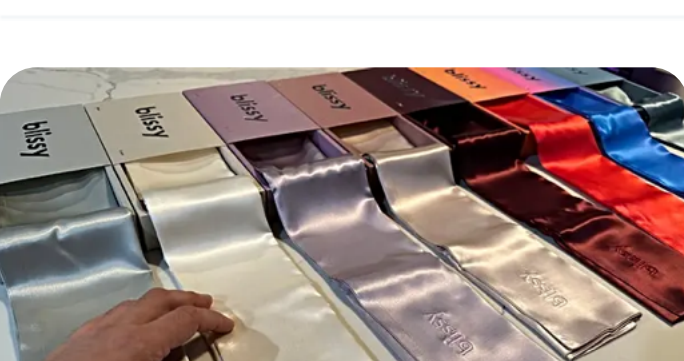


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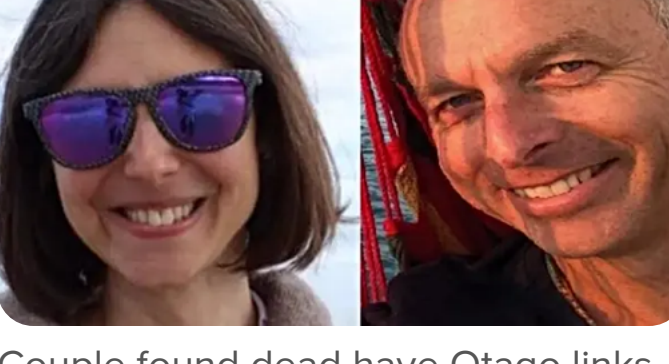
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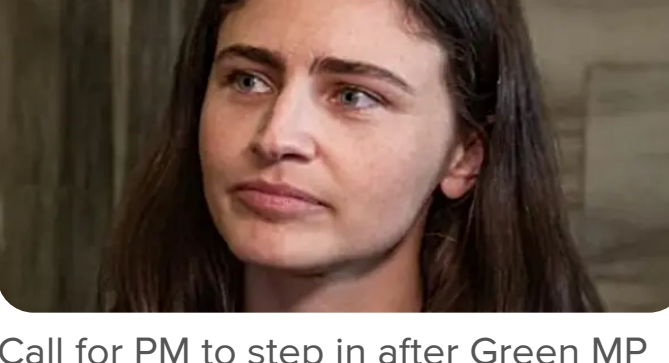
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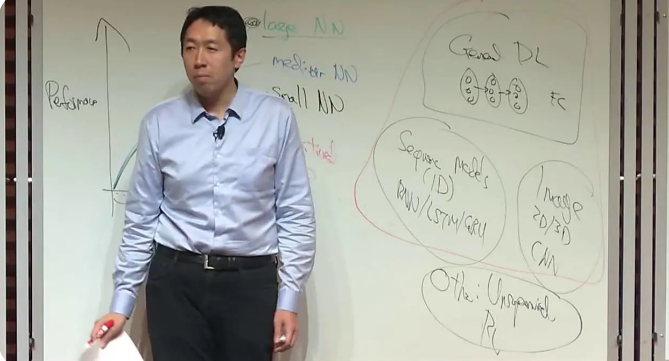
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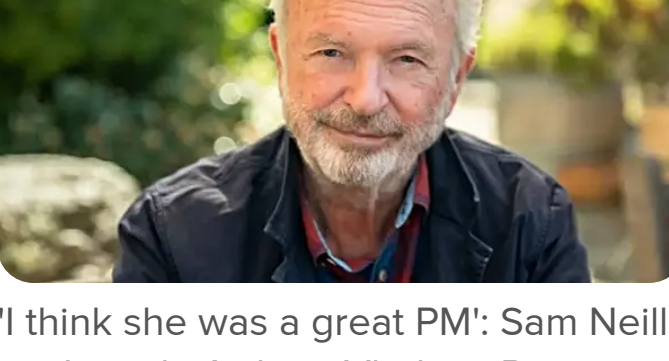
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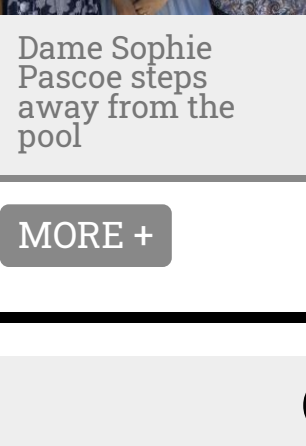
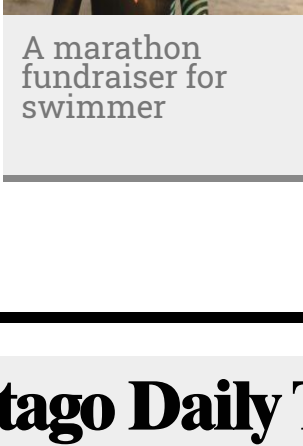
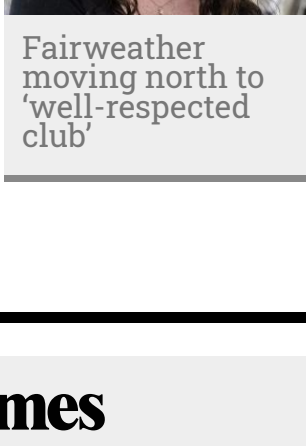
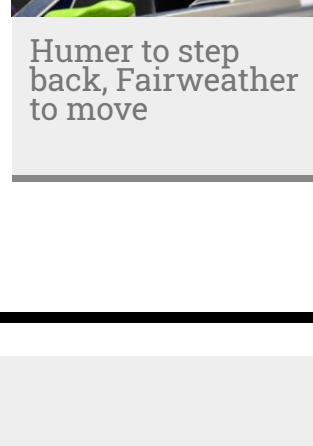
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