



SOLONAIMA MARIA TUTAIA

At Mount Albert Grammar School 2004

Solonaima Maria Tutaia came to us from Lynfield College in 2004 as a shy Samoan girl with a love of the game of netball, although she also played volleyball and basketball.

MAGS Netball was in its early stage of development and 18 girls turned up to trial that year. Many were from other sports, such as soccer and basketball. Maria was challenged to make a difference at MAGS, a school that was known more for the achievements of its rugby and football boys.

2004 was only the fifth year that girls had attended MAGS after the school became co-ed in 2000. Maria captained MAGS' first Premier Netball team in 2004; the team finished runners-up in the Auckland Premier grade, fourth at the Upper North Island Secondary Schools' tournament, and fourth at the New Zealand Secondary Schools' Championships. When in trouble on court, the team members were told to "just throw it in the air above Maria's head" and sure enough she would get it. She showed that she was destined for a professional career even then.

As a 15-year-old in 2003 she was named in the New Zealand Under 21 squad and in 2005 was selected for the New Zealand Under 21 World Youth Cup team. Later that year the team won the World Youth Cup in Miami, Florida.

At 1.88cm tall she always stood out in a crowd, and in her first year out of school in 2005 she was picked for the Auckland Diamonds, where she played until 2007 in the National League.

Also in 2005 she was selected for the Silver Ferns for their tour of Jamaica, and earned her first start in a Test. Her name was duly added to MAGS' Sporting Honours Board in the FW Gamble Hall as a student selected to represent New Zealand - the first girl to achieve this honour at MAGS.

The following year Maria was a member of the team that won the Gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. In 2007 she was in the team that won the Silver medal at the Netball World Championships in Auckland.

When a new trans-Tasman competition began in 2008 Maria signed with the Waikato Bay of Plenty Magic, where she stayed for two years.

The Fast Net World Netball Series was played in Manchester in 2009 and 2010 - Maria and the Silver Ferns won back to back Gold medals.

In 2010 Maria returned to Auckland to be close to her family and to play for the Northern Mystics. In that year the Commonwealth Games were held in New Delhi and the final of the Netball against Australia was a nail-biter. Maria displayed her classic long shots, and with ice-cold calm she scored the winning goal in double extra time – it was one of New Zealand's great sporting moments.

The Fast Net was replaced in 2012 by the FAST5 tournament. In both 2012 and 2013 the World Series was held in Auckland, with New Zealand winning both tournaments. Maria featured in the Silver Fern teams both years. This year, at the Glasgow Commonwealth Games, New Zealand won the silver medal.

Maria has been at the top of the game for 10 years, has accumulated 89 test caps with the Silver Ferns, and although injury is currently keeping her from the game she loves, she is not finished yet.

Solonaima Maria Tutaia, Netballer, Albertian, Member of the Mount Albert Grammar School Hall of Distinction.