

GEORGE THOMAS – Waka Ama paddler - To represent New Zealand at the International Canoe Federation Championships – Poznan, Poland!

On Sunday 15th August George Thomas will depart Auckland Airport, bound for Poznan, Poland. He will be traveling 34 hours (67 hour round trip!) via Los Angeles, Frankfurt and Bangkok to represent New Zealand in the ICF Canoe Sprint World Championships www.kayak2010.com. George will be taking part in the V1 Para-canoeing event. The first time this event has been included into the Canoe world championships.

In 2005, 2 days before the Waka Ama Sprint Nationals, George was on his way home from training when his car was hit by a drunk driver. George was lucky to escape the accident alive and his permanent injuries have been debilitating. As a result of the accident his legs were broken in over 200 places, his ankles had to be permanently fused, his pelvis plated and screwed and his legs have \$25,000 worth of metal holding them together. He went through much pain but never gave up the sport of Waka Ama that he loves and is deeply passionate about.

In March 2006, (only a year after his accident) George won the first Adaptive (Para) V1 500m race at the International Va'a Federation World Sprint Championships, held here in New Zealand (Lake Karapiro) and then defended that title 2 years later in Sacramento.

Earlier this year George competed at the IVF World Championships in the Para (adaptive) V1 500m event and again won the gold medal.

George is also an accomplished coach and has coached many junior teams from Rotorua and surrounding regions to National Secondary School title championships, National club championships and gold medals at World Sprint Championships.

All of George's family are heavily involved in Waka Ama, his son (Tyrin) is the National open mens' champion and his daughter (Dale) recently competed in Tahiti against some of the best paddlers Tahiti has to offer.

Over the past 2 years the International Va'a Federation and the International Canoe Federation have been working closely together to try to include V1 into the Para-canoe programme. The V1 ('V' short for Va'a – the Tahitian term for single person Waka Ama or Outrigger canoe) is a Polynesian watercraft that is 1000's of years old. It has an ama or outrigger attached to the left hand side of the hull, making the vessel very stable and the ideal craft for adaptive or Paralympic paddlers.

There are many countries who now compete in Waka Ama on the world stage and Paralympic numbers are growing too, Italy, Hawaii, England, Canada, California, Australia all have sent paddlers to compete in Para (adaptive) races since 2004.

Nga Kaihoe o Aotearoa fully support George in his journey. We would love to be able to send someone with him on this epic trip from Rotorua to Poland however the cost (around \$5000) prevents us from being able to send anyone with him this time.

The New Zealand Canoe Federation and the International Canoe Federation have been very supportive and the NZ Waka Ama community are appreciative of the efforts they have gone to, to assist George to get to Poland.



George Thomas (Ngati Pikiāo) at the recent International Va'a Federation Sprint Championships in Noumea

For further details or information please contact

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