



New Zealand Water Polo
Athlete Performance Pathway
Programme: 2022 and Beyond

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Purpose

To improve the performance of the New Zealand National teams on the international stage.

Objective

To provide a chronological pathway for developing athletes from U15 through to Senior level that provides transparency and clarity.

To address domestic performance gaps in order to build depth and produce consistent and repeatable international performances.

Talent Identification

We are identifying athletes who show enthusiasm, interest and enjoy and prosper as people from their water polo experiences; and aspire to represent New Zealand at any of - World Youth (under 18), World Junior (under 20) and World Senior Level events. The aim of an established pathway is to provide a long-term strategy into individual development of athletes and teams, and increase the depth of true High-Performance in New Zealand.

This will include the 6 basic elements of the NZWP Picture of Performance (what success looks like), this identifies components that will lead to structural health for Water Polo in the 2020's and beyond. These key components include physical, technical, tactical, wellbeing, belonging and emotional. It is important to acknowledge that athlete development is fluid at a young age and the selection of an athlete into a squad can happen for them at any time in their water polo journey. This is underpinned with transparent selection criteria and processes and Board appointed selectors ratifications.

The below table provides an overview of the World Championship events and the year of birth of the oldest athletes able to participate

Year of Birth (and younger)	World Championship Category	World Championships Year
2003*	Junior	2023
2004	Youth	2022
2005	Junior	2025
2006*	Youth	2024
2007	Junior	2027
2008	Youth	2026
2009	Junior	2029
2010	Youth	2028

*Further detail provided on born 2003 and 2006 athletes later.

Selection Timelines

Year of Birth – Top age group	Talent ID Year	Competition Identified (observation trials)	World Championship Year (Youth/Junior)
2006*	2022*	Club/coach/self-nominated and/or Under 16 Nationals October 2022	2024
2007	2023**	Under 16 Nationals October 2023	2027
2008	2022	Under 14 Nationals December 2022	2026
2009	2025**	Under 16 Nationals October 2025	2029
2010	2024	Under 14 Nationals December 2024	2028
2011	2027**	Under 16 Nationals October 2027	2031
2012	2026	Under 14 Nationals December 2026	2030

*2006 Selection will be different to other years due to commencing midway through the 4 year program.

From January 2023 we will implement 4-year National Squad Plans as follows:

Program Overview - World Youth Age Group

Year out from World Champs	Overview – Youth (U18) - 4 year programme
<p style="text-align: center;">4 Identified at Under 14 National Championships (n=50+ athletes)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Club training and competition National Team Camps (4-6 per year)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Club training and competition Australian International Experience (2 teams) National Team Camps (5-7 per year)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2 (N=30(+/-) athletes)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Club training and competitions International Experience (Australia, European or USA) National Team Camps (6-8 per year)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP YEAR Official Test Matches vs Australia New Zealand National League Team Entry and U21 entry World Championships</p>

Program Overview – World Junior Age Groups

Year out from World Champs	Overview – Junior (U20) 4 year programme
<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Identified at Under 16 National Championships (n=50+ athletes)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Club training and competitions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">National Team Camps (6-7 per year - with Youth Squad 2007s with 2008s, 2009s with 2010s)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">3</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Athletes who were the older Youth Squad members now move to the Junior squad</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Club training and competitions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Australia International Experience (1 team)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">National Team Camps (6-8 per year with the Youth Age Group)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(N=30(+/-) athletes)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Club training and competitions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">International Experience (Australia, European or USA)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">National Team Camps (8 per year)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">1</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP YEAR</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Official Test Matches vs Australia</p> <p style="text-align: center;">New Zealand National League Team Entry</p> <p style="text-align: center;">World Championships</p>

World Youth Age Group explained

The World Youth 4-year plan is easy to follow and aligns with the established NZWP competition pathway.

Early athlete identification is fraught with issues that relate to physical and emotional development, along with early specialisation. A large squad will be selected to ensure the widest group of players are given an opportunity to develop over the four year period in preparation for championship events. Performance behaviours, skills, game sense and tactics will be developed in players that support the formation of 'good' habits and competitive technical abilities.

World Junior Age Group explained

Due to the World Junior Championships age group being traditionally harder to retain, mainly due to the lack of playing opportunity post school level in New Zealand, we will place importance on a pathway to retain as many of these athletes as possible.

As above, a broad approach to initial athlete selection will take place and will focus on inclusivity, retention and long term development of athletes without promotion of early specialisation.

Example Case Study 1 – Junior Athlete selected into Youth Squad

Stephen is born in 2009. Stephen has been selected into the World Youth Development Squad at the 2022 Under 14 Nationals targeting the 2026 World Youth Championships. Stephen follows the 4-year plan associated to the Born 2008 World Youth Squad. Stephen is selected to attend the World Youth Championships in 2026. After the World Youth Championships have finished Stephen is not selected as part of the World Junior Born 2007 team (who have their World Championships in 2027) so Stephen becomes a Junior Development athlete. Stephen will train alongside the Born 2008 World Youth Squad until post their World Championships (2028). Post the World Championships a Born 2009 World Junior Squad is selected and enters their final year of preparation before their World Junior Championships in 2029.

Example Case Study 2 – Junior Athlete not selected into the Youth Squad at Under 14 level

Nicole is born in 2009. Nicole wasn't identified for the World Youth Development Squad at the 2022 Under 14 Nationals targeting the 2026 Born 2008 World Youth Championships. Nicole is identified as a Junior Development athlete at the National Under 16 Championships in 2025. Nicole joins the Born 2010 National Youth Squad at camps. The Born 2009 National Junior Squad is selected upon the completion of the Born 2010 National Youth World Championships in 2028

Principles

- Open door policy and revolving door policy with selections
- Attraction and retention
- Inclusive
- Transparency,
- Set criteria
- Robust selection processes
- Purposeful and meaningful training
- Structured and planned programming
- Alignment with the NZWP Picture of Performance (what success looks like)
- Team coaching
- Athletes as people

When Squads enter teams in domestic competitions (all ages), there will be a rotation of players so this does not significantly impact on Club teams (the athlete can play for their Squad team and Club team in one league/competition). The purpose is to allow the Squad members to play together thus giving travelling teams a better chance to perform overseas. NZ is challenged in producing world class teams, mainly due to geographic location, but other factors as well, therefore it makes sense to provide what we can as a community to help. We cannot consider any half measures if we are aiming for true high performance.