

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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PETER SNELL INSTITUTE OF SPORT ESTABLISHED IN NEW ZEALAND TO NURTURE YOUNG ATHLETES

DALLAS – Sept. 13, 2000 – Helping to discover latent athletic talent and groom young athletes to perform at their maximum level has been a dream of three-time Olympic gold medal runner Dr. Peter Snell, assistant professor of internal medicine at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

Snell's long-awaited dream recently became a reality with the opening of the Peter Snell Institute of Sport in his native New Zealand.

Formerly named the Auckland Regional Institute of Sport, board members announced the new name for the institute this summer.

"It's a nice honor," said Snell. "As a teen-ager I had no idea that I had the potential to win an Olympic gold medal and my athletic career developed only by lucky circumstances," he said, alluding to his "late" start in serious training for track. "In middle and distance running a well-trained average runner will always beat a genetically gifted but untrained athlete.

Consequently many athletes with promise never know their capabilities."

After capturing his first gold medal in Rome in 1960 with a record-setting victory in the 800-meter race, Snell went on to the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo seizing the gold in the 800-meter race, once again, and the 1,500-meter race.

(MORE)

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Recently named New Zealand's Sport Champion of the Century, Snell said the institute will afford young athletes the opportunity to train with a team of expert coaches and compete on national and international levels as he did.

"Ultimately the institute wants to help rediscover the 'glory' years of the 1960s and 1970s, when New Zealand's runners were world-class at distances from 800 meters to the marathon."

The institute will focus mainly on development of high school students in track and field. However, Snell said, training in other sports will be added later next year.

Staff members from the institute will use a sophisticated process of talent scouting. Along with high-school event results, they will consider amount of time spent in training and the psychological makeup of the athletes. Laboratory testing will further narrow candidates by identifying athletes with superior cardiovascular systems. Those selected will be brought into the program and paired with coaches.

Evaluation of potential participants will begin in the spring of 2001. Snell serves on the institute's board and will assist in the selection process.

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