

During the second week of September, over 6000 athletes from 121 schools throughout New Zealand and Australia will compete in 16 different codes in the annual AIMS Games in Tauranga. AIMS stands for Association of Middle and Intermediate Schools and the sporting tournament has grown from very small beginnings since its inception in 2004. It has evolved into a truly iconic sporting event.

The sporting tournament was first played 8 years ago when a group of 4 local Intermediate schools, Mount Maunganui Intermediate, Otumoetai Intermediate, Te Puke Intermediate & Tauranga Intermediate, formed the AIMS Games trust. The first event attracted 760 competitors across four different sporting codes. The idea was incredibly successful as it provided a platform for 11, 12 and 13 year olds to compete in a national Sporting tournament.

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A number of successful years later and the tournament as now grown to attracting over 6000 Year 7 and 8 students for the week long sporting contest. That's more than half the number of competitors at the recent London Olympics. In 2012, 121 schools will be involved bringing with them 1200 coaches, managers and supporters. 16 different sports are represented in the competition with Rugby League and Indoor Bowls being added in recent years.

The obvious benefit is to the competitors. They get to participate in a well organised national sporting competition at only 11 and 12 years old. They will form friendships that may last a life time. They will get to experience the highs of winning and the character building that comes from losing. There will be a huge amount of team training and fitness training that takes place leading up to this week long competition. This will have huge benefit for this many young pre-adolescent children throughout New Zealand to develop their individual fitness. With the majority of sports being team sports the emphasis will be on aerobic fitness. This is going to install good fitness habits into a large proportion of New Zealand youth. You could assume that because of the benefits that see at this age from exercise, team sports and fitness there will be some flow on effects to when they are older.

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The sport is now recognized as the National champs for each individual code with schools gaining a lot of mana and kudos from having winning teams. Winning at AIMS will give a school a tremendous lift in their profile. The medal table that lists the number of gold, silver and bronze medals each school has won is displayed in the same way as the Olympic medal table is displayed. Schools will try hard to have their name at the top. In the current climate where schools are competing against each other for students, having a winning AIMS team is another feather in the cap. It can be used in marketing through school newsletters, prospectuses and other promotional material.

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The other obvious benefit is to the city of Tauranga, its economy and the indirect spending in local retailers. Of the 121 schools that are competing, 90% of them are from out of town. This means accommodation is heavily booked out for the week and certain boom for local Motels, Backpackers, and camping grounds. There is also the indirect spending that is associated with a team spending a week at a sporting tournament. Supermarkets, movie theatres, hot pools and shopping malls will all see a huge influx in spending over the course of the week.

However, it can be a huge drain on the financial resources of families. Also with such a young age group involved it often means that Mum and Dad are also attending the tournament to support their son or daughter. Costs can be in excess of \$500 on average to send a child to a week-long tournament, double this if mum or dad go for the week. There will be pressure placed on parents to find the money necessary so they don't let teams down. This can mean financial cut backs to other family activities. Is this financial outlay worth it?

With the AIMS tournament being for elite teams and individuals will there be some dissension when these students get back to school and amongst the rest of their peers? There is also the situation of missed school work. There is one group of students who will miss a week of school. But this is not the only problem with many school programmes unable to run back at school because so many students are away involved in the tournament. Aquinas College, an intermediate school in Tauranga has close to 100 students involved in the tournament leaving 110 students back at school effectively marking time during alternative programmes that put them out of routine with their normal teachers and their normal subjects.