

Iconic events are by definition 'very famous and well known'¹ and the Association of Middle and Intermediate Schools (AIMS) sporting tournament, hosted in Tauranga each year, is just that. It regularly has over 6000 participants each year who contest other school throughout New Zealand in 16 different sports. Its popularity has grown so large that it is now considered as the Intermediate aged National champs (Diver 2012) for each contested sport that is at the games. It is also become known to schools across the Tasman where in 2012 for the first year the competition can claim international status as Australian schools for the first time in its 9 year history will send teams to the games.

The strands of Health and Physical Education in The New Zealand Curriculum emphasise 'personal growth and development, regular physical activity, personal identity, movement skills, positive attitudes, physiology, relationships, sensitivity and respect, winning and losing with humility and dignity, accessing community facilities, and care and safety of others in tournament conditions, school, and the wider community'². The AIMS games can tick each and every one of these boxes. Participants will have to be involved in regular fitness in the months leading up to the tournament. Movement skills are definitely improved as a result of the week long competition. Sensitivity and respect, winning and losing with humility and dignity are the corner stones to the competition. Their website states the all participants must abide by their fair play charter that is summarised by 'Good sport is about positive attitude. Play your part - play fair'.³ It is clearly evident that the AIMS games mirrors the objectives of the New Zealand Curriculum and has a result is held in such high regard.

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With 6000 participants learning the about the joys of winning, the camaraderie of meeting and playing against similar aged students from throughout the country, and experiencing the lows that go with loosing, all within a positive environment. These participates are going to come away from the tournament with personal skills and experience that is going to allow them to cope with other demands of life. As Diver (2012) said "Emerging adolescent participants come away from the AIMS GAMES feeling a true sense of self-worth and increased confidence." This has to be a positive result and have positive impact on the wider New Zealand society.

Another obvious benefit of this tournament is the economic windfall to Tauranga. Over 1200 supporters, coaches and managers are going to accompany the 6000 participants. With 90% of these numbers coming from out of Tauranga this is going to mean a full house for almost every hotel, motel, backpackers and camping ground in the area. There is also the additional spending that an event like this has. The supermarkets, shopping malls and tourist activities such as movies and hot pools will notice a substantial increase in numbers during this week.

An associate drive to this year's event is on sustainability. Recycling has become a huge issue for the event organisers. A huge number of empty drink cans and water bottles will accumulate over the course of the week. This year the 6000 competitors will be asked to reduce and recycle their waste. Tournament director Vicky Semple says, 'You can imagine, at an event of this size, how many cans and food wrappers could potentially wind up in the could potentially wind up in landfills and this year we're just not prepared to let that happen.'⁴ This year, dozens of recycling bins and more than 30 food scrap buckets will be available at all 16 venues. Twenty-five uniformed student volunteers from four Tauranga schools will encourage competitors, spectators and coaches to reduce waste and use specially-labelled recycling bins. Food waste will be collected separately and fed to the 200,000 worms that inhabit Tauranga City Council's downtown worm farm.

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¹ Oxford English dictionary (UK)

² NZC

³ NZAIMS Website

⁴ Interview with Tournament director – Vicky Semple

There are some groups that will not see the huge social, personal and economic benefit of the AIMS Games. Some may have grounds for their frustrations and concerns. The local men's senior and social hockey competition is unable to be played during this week because of the demands for the hockey turf. This comes after the preceding week where play was suspended for the secondary school winter tournament week. Adult players have now had two weeks of no hockey and it is easy to see their concerns. Why should their season be effected when they may not see any direct benefits of the tournament week. Cost to parents is also high. The average fee of sending a child to a week long tournament within the North Island is \$500. There will be some families where this cost is prohibitive and cause stress for children and parents when the difficulty of finding the money is realised.

There is unfortunately an ugly side to sport. Parents, supporters coaches and managers can, at times, demonstrate some undesirable behaviour from the side-lines and the dug outs. Being over competitive, abuse of officials, putting far too much pressure on players and even sending out key players on to the field who are carrying injuries are all examples from past tournaments where the winning gets in the way of the essence of the competition. We often see the coaches and managers displaying behaviour that gets sport such a bad name.

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Will this happen at AIMS in 2012? I believe no. The tournament has grown because of its reputation for its emphasis on competitive sport within the confines of a supportive atmosphere and positive behaviour. A tournament that can grow from having 760 competitors in 2004 and experiencing almost 800% growth must be addressing the issues of side-line behaviour and ensuring people are entering into the spirit of the competition. There is an old adage about sport that says '*sport will be the winner on the day*' I believe the 2012 AIMS games will also be a winner for the life lessons that are learnt over the course of the week.