

Barbara Kendall

Boardsailing

It was Christmas Eve 1974, and Barbara, her brother Bruce and her sister Wendy were snuggled down in their bunks on their old yacht *Sunlight*. While Wendy and Bruce drifted off to sleep, relaxed by the motion of the boat, 7-year-old Barbara waited, listening to the water lapping on the side of the boat and the murmur of her parents' voices.

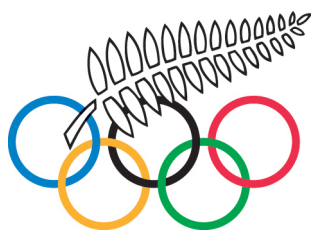
"Where is he? When will he come?" wondered Barbara, still wide awake. From her bunk, she could only just see the outline of the boat's mast, where Santa and his reindeer would come at midnight. She was determined to stay awake, but eventually the motion of the boat won and she drifted off to sleep. This kind of determination would drive Barbara all her life.

Early years – dancing, sailing and windsurfing

Barbara Kendall was born on August 30th 1967, the youngest of three children. Barbara and Bruce were fiercely competitive, while Wendy was the peace-maker. All three siblings loved the sea, and their boating holidays on board *Sunlight* were the highlight of each summer. Fit and full of energy, they spent their days sailing or mooring in a bay to surf and swim. They picnicked, went on bushwalks, and searched out isolated beaches and sand dunes. One summer, they even discovered a shipwreck.



Barbara, Bruce and Wendy at Mercury Islands on a paddle board their father had made for them.



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Barbara achieved well at school, particularly as an athlete. She represented her school in swimming and athletics, but her real love was dancing. Both Barbara and Wendy were enrolled in the Julie Cotter Dance School, where Barbara excelled, gaining skills in performance, balance, and composure. She showed agility and exuberance, and her bubbly personality made her a natural on the stage. By 14, Barbara was teaching her own dance class.

In the weekends, Barbara and Wendy learned to sail. Girls were a minority in the sailing world, but they both raced successfully at many regattas in a variety of classes. Barbara was good enough to win the Auckland Championships three years in a row. Barbara and Wendy went to coaching camps run by Russell Coutts and Chris Dickson. They learnt tactics and rules with the encouragement of their father, who helped them analyse their races and taught them to 'read' the weather and the tidal currents.



Chris Dickson

Chris Dickson was the skipper of New Zealand's first America's Cup challenge in 1987. To date, he has won more than 20 international regattas, won the world match racing competition three times and won twelve world championships. In 1978, he won the first of his three ISAF Youth Sailing World Championships. He competed at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000.

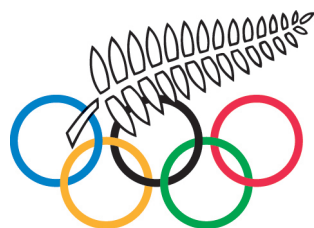


Barbara sailing a P Class yacht



Russell Coutts

Russell Coutts is perhaps best known as an America's Cup skipper for Team New Zealand, then Alinghi. Before that, however, Coutts was an accomplished solo sailor – winning a youth single-handed world title in 1981. He followed this with an Olympic gold medal in Finn class sailing at Los Angeles in 1984.



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Barbara's first National Championship was in 1983. She expected great things of herself and couldn't believe it when she didn't win. She tried to pull herself together for the rest of her races, and she realised that the best thing she could do was keep a positive attitude. She relaxed and became determined to go fast, but enjoy her next race. The importance of this lesson would be repeated as she competed at top level.

Barbara's mum bought the family their first windsurfing board in the early 1980s, when windsurfing was a brand new sport. It was a heavy board, slippery and difficult to manage, but Bruce quickly mastered the new craft and taught his sisters. Barbara and Wendy spent many frustrating hours practising until they became good enough to compete in the local regattas.

Barbara was at school when she heard the news that Bruce had won a bronze medal – New Zealand's first windsurfing medal – at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. Excited and inspired by her brother's success, Barbara vowed she too would win an Olympic windsurfing medal.

International experience

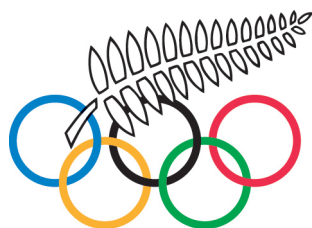
After only six months of riding a windsurfing board, 17-year-old Barbara was selected for the boardsailing World Championship in Scotland. Still learning to stay on the board in the icy waters of Scotland, Barbara placed 25th in a field of 27. If her first World Championship was a grey and homesick experience, her return to New Zealand was not any better. After being away from school for ten days, she was very upset to find that the school had given her ten days of after-school detention to catch up on her missed lessons!

As for windsurfing, she knew she had a long way to go.



Windsurfing is also known as boardsailing and sailboarding, because it combines the sails used in sailing with the board from surfing. Participants in the sport are known as sailors.





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After finishing school, Barbara taught dance for several years. She went windsurfing whenever she could, competing in races every Wednesday evening and at the weekends. The intense racing honed her tactical expertise. Her sailing skills and knowledge of the wind developed, and she made skimming across the waves look easy.

In 1987, Barbara decided to commit to windsurfing full-time. She faced a huge problem – raising funds to get to international races. Her parents helped with funding and she worked hard to find sponsors. She gained support from the New Zealand Sport Institute, who provided a programme of exercises specially designed for the physical demands of windsurfing. Barbara began competing in the Professional Boardsailing Association (PBA) Tour. By staying in the top five competitors on the tour, she was just able to earn a living from sailing.

Transporting 300 kilograms of heavy boards and sails around the world and struggling to find accommodation proved to be a lonely and hard life for Barbara. There were battles to find venues and food, with Barbara having to hang around when the wind wasn't right for sailing. She never had any spare cash, and she drove herself hard until illness forced her to rest. During this time, Barbara learned that she needed to give her body the recovery periods it was crying out for.

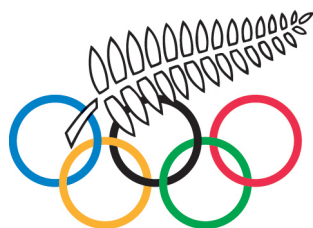
Build-up to Barcelona

In 1988, it was announced that there would be a women's division in windsurfing in the 1992 Olympic Games. After her brother Bruce had won a gold medal in Seoul in 1988, Barbara was determined to win a gold medal too.

The Olympic class of boardsailing was a different type of sailing to the PBA Tour competition. Barbara had to learn to sail on the Lechner board that was used in the Olympic competition. She trained hard, working with her brother, and racing against men. In 1990, she was ranked second top female in the world. She returned to New Zealand to compete in the Olympic trials over the summer of 1991–1992. Things were going well.

Then tragedy struck. In early 1992, a freak wave tipped over a boat she was in. Though she was not badly injured, Barbara broke her wrist. This meant she would be in plaster for eight weeks, so there was no chance she would be able to compete in the Olympic trials in February 1992.

It was incredibly fortunate that the New Zealand Yachting Federation delayed the trials. This gave Barbara four months to heal and strengthen her wrist muscles. Intensive coaching from Bruce and dogged determination from Barbara saw her win the trials and a place in the New Zealand Olympic team.



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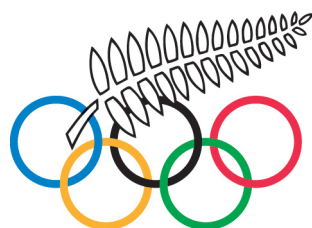
Barcelona 1992

Barbara was exhilarated by the Olympic experience. She knew that she needed everything going for her to win – psyche, fitness, speed and luck. For her focus and preparation, she was rewarded with several impressive results in her first nine races. She had gained two first places, two second places and two third places. After discarding her worst result (tenth), she only needed to finish sixth or better in the final race to win the gold medal.

On the second circuit of the last race, Barbara touched a marker and had to do two 360 degree penalty turns, but she was still up with the leaders. New Zealanders on shore held their breath, watching as a sailor from the USA crossed the line. A sailor from Poland was second and Barbara recovered to finish a brilliant third – the gold medal was hers.



Barbara (right) competing in Barcelona, 1992



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It was one of the most special moments in New Zealand sport when her brother Bruce rushed into the water to be first to congratulate her. They were New Zealand's first brother and sister combination to win gold medals.

Barbara's sailing colleagues carried her, on her board, to the victory dais. Smiling broadly, Barbara dipped her head as the gold medal was awarded to her. She was only the second New Zealand woman to win an Olympic gold medal. The first was Yvette Williams at Helsinki in 1952, forty years before.

Olympic success

In total, Barbara competed at five Olympic Games. She won a silver medal in Atlanta in 1996 and a bronze medal in Sydney in 2000.

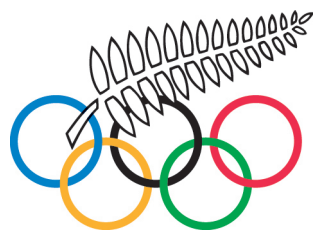


Bruce Kendall was also competing in the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992. As the gold medallist at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, Bruce was expected to do well in Barcelona, but his gear failed. Despite his frustration at not winning a medal, Bruce celebrated with his youngest sister.



Barbara carefully balances her professional life with her family life as the mother of two girls.





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She competed in both Athens 2004, and Beijing 2008, gaining fifth and sixth placings respectively. She officially retired from competition in 2010 after 24 years.

In her twenty-year career, she has received numerous awards for her achievements, including the Halberg Sportswoman of the Year award (1996, 1998–2000, 2002) and an MBE for services to windsurfing.

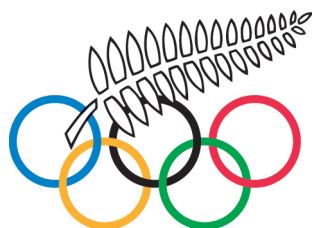


Halberg Sportswoman of the year, 1999



Barbara carrying the flag at the closing ceremony of the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games

Barbara is an International Olympic Committee (IOC) member appointed to the Athletes Commission, Woman and Sport Commission, Sport and the Environment Commission and the World anti-doping agency Athletes Commission. She is also the Chair of the Oceania Athletes Commission, a member of the New Zealand Olympic Committee (NZOC) Athletes Commission and a member of the NZOC Board. The Athletes Commission represents athletes within the Olympic Movement and also upholds the rights and obligations of the athletes.



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Original text written by Cheryl Maister.

Photos courtesy of Getty Images, NZOC Olympic Museum Collection and Barbara Kendall personal collection.