

Gardens resurfacing under way

Level of use proves value of Cooks Gardens to city

ATHLETICS

Alec McNab

There is good news for Whanganui Athletics with resurfacing work at Cooks Gardens starting right on schedule on Monday.

Grinding work on the track has begun in preparation for the pouring of the new synthetic surface.

A prompt start bodes well for quick completion with the first scheduled international meeting looming. The Pak'nSave Cooks Classic will be held on January 25.

It has enhanced status with five World Athletics Bronze events on the exciting evening programme.

They include the men's high jump, women's hammer and 100m, and the return of both the New Zealand men and women's championships to the Home of the Mile.

The resurfacing was vital for recertification to hold such major events.

The track is, however, more important for the local community than just a venue for major national and international track and field events.

So many other community events are held at the track.

The timely resurfacing will save money later as delays would have increased the cost with the inevitable further deterioration of the surface.

The old surface has been given a busy November farewell with the popular Tough Kid events at the end of the first week attracting nearly 2000 children to the venue.

Last Monday saw the St Georges Championships in the morning and the junior club in the afternoon.

The weekly club night was on Tuesday evening and the Intermediate Schools Championships were on Wednesday, the primary schools event on Friday.

In between on the Thursday there was a larger than normal number of athletes from three different groups getting final workouts before the closure for resurfacing.

The 3000 or more active participants were all from the community, highlighting the value of the facility.

The final primary event on Friday was conducted in the rain, highlighting the benefits of a good all-weather facility.

In other years a back-up date may have been used but with the resurfacing this was not possible this year.



The resurfacing of the Cooks Gardens track began this week.

The ability to attract outside events at an improved and certificated facility will be a bonus.

In the meantime, both the children's club on Mondays and senior club have been run on the small eight lane grass track at Whanganui Collegiate School on the golf course area behind the boarding houses.

The club is grateful to the school for making the venue available.

The first of these was held in glorious conditions on Monday for children.

On Tuesday, again there was a glorious evening for the senior club.

The C programme included children's events.

Tuesday evening started with a one-mile Tour de Campus, replacing our popular 2km road race at Cooks

The track is, however, more important for the local community than just a venue for major national and international track and field events.

Gardens. The small Whanganui Collegiate track gave athletes a chance to experience an indoor-sized track although without banked bends it did make controlled sprinting far from easy.

The third round of the Regional League in Wellington at the weekend gives an opportunity for leading athletes to return to competition on a synthetic surface.

The Whanganui team will be strengthened with the return of the injured Jonathan Maples, who is back training well after a hamstring nigggle.

Maples will run in the 400m and 4x400m relay in a measured return to competitive running.

Another returning athlete is race walker and club captain Lucas Martin, back for the summer from Canter-

bury University.

Toby O'Rorke (Taranaki) will be especially pleased to see Martin back in action following O'Rorke's personal best in the 3000m walk in Palmerston North 10 days earlier.

O'Rorke won by a huge margin and in the process edged ahead of Martin in the year's rankings.

The Wellington meet will be a final important competition for the 25 local athletes who will be competing at the New Zealand Secondary Schools Championships in Timaru a fortnight later.

Organisers of the championships are pleased that despite a shortage of accommodation and travel costs entries have now exceeded 1000 athletes from throughout the country.

Photo / Peter Jones